

Whaddon Annual Report 2021 – County Councillor Susan van de Ven

It has been an amazing year to see our communities working together for the benefit of all.

Local issues

A1198 safety – progress: As with many things, Whaddon PC has demonstrated that with vision, patience and persistence, results are possible. I've learned a lot from being involved in a small way.

East West Rail preferred route to Cambridge: EWR Co has at last announced detailed routes for the new railway line from Bedford to Cambridge. This is a moment to thank all those who worked so hard to avoid the ill-thought-out Bassingbourn route. Instead, EWR will serve Cambourne – a significant population area currently without rail links. This would then loop down to Toft, the Eversdens, Haslingfield, Harston and Shelford, to come up to a new Cambridge South Station, the conduit to the Cambridge Biomedical Campus. The proposal includes a 7km long, 10m high embankment through the countryside - already nicknamed The Wall. Please, have a look at and respond to the consultation, which concludes on June 9th: <https://eastwestrail.co.uk/consultation>

Trains and buses: In a year of dramatic loss of public transport patronage, it seems we are on a good footing for the next era. Thanks to all in the Cam Vale Bus User Group for helping to forge good relations with the bus operator: we now have a new commercial bus service, the number 17, serving the village and with links to Royston, including a new stop at Royston Gateway. Meanwhile, Govia Thameslink Railway timetable planners have been working closely with the Meldreth, Shepreth and Foxton Rail User Group to ensure that any temporary losses are not permanent. To that end, it is good to report that the half-hourly service for the small stations including Meldreth – only first achieved in 2018 – will be restored in May. That helps to facilitate next year's peak timetable and the student discount we have negotiated that is unique to Cambridgeshire station users.

Thakeham and 'South West Cambridgeshire' new town: A speculative developer, Thakeham, is proposing a new town of 25K homes in and around nine villages stretching from Bassingbourn to Melbourn and Foxton. The proposal sits outside the district's careful planning hierarchy and new town planning and appears to have its roots in the now dismissed East West Rail Bassingbourn route. Thakeham has missed the Call for Sites deadline but proposes to make a late submission, which the Planning Authority is legally obliged to consider. It openly states its preference for a national channel, over-riding local authority decision-making powers. I have helped set up the South West Cambridge Action Group working to prevent these ill-suited proposals from coming to fruition. A great deal of information is available to download from our website, www.swcag.org.uk.

Council meetings: in-person again? It's not yet clear where County Council decision-making meetings will take place. Virtual meetings have seen far greater public participation, have been less polluting to the environment and less costly to the public purse. Meanwhile, Shire Hall in Cambridge, the long-time home of Cambridgeshire County Council, has now been closed and emptied and will be redeveloped for other purposes. A new building at Alconbury, up the A1, is under construction. It will be more economical to run but has no viable public transport links & will necessitate a great deal of driving – cycling is not permitted on the A1.

It has been an honour to serve as your County Councillor these past four years. I'll be standing for re-election on May 6th, but regardless of the outcome I'd like to thank all those I've worked with and met during the course of this time.

Cambridgeshire County Council responsibilities and future direction

Council officers and Council offices

- The Chief Executive, Gillian Beasley, is shared with Peterborough as part of the policy of reducing back-office costs. All senior posts are now shared with Peterborough. The overall trend is to reduce council staff, often to unsustainable levels.

Combined Authority

Since May 2017 there has been a 'Combined Authority' for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough under a Mayor, comprising:

- Peterborough City Council (a unitary authority)
- District councils of Huntingdonshire, Fenland, East Cambs, South Cambs and Cambridge City
- Cambridgeshire County Council

The Mayor has a Cabinet comprising the Council Leaders from all the constituent councils. The Mayor has also been offered greater scope by central government in order to 'level up' to the Metro Mayors. This means adding adult education and the development of a university in Peterborough as well as oversight of strategic housing development.

What the Council provides

- Social services to children and young people, older people, people with mental health problems, physical and learning disabilities
- Planning of school places and some support for schools (although the funding for day-to-day running comes from central government); Coordinated Early Years provision, nurseries etc.
- Libraries
- Road maintenance; road safety measures
- Growth and wider development issues
- Trading standards
- Waste disposal and recycling centres
- *Transport strategy is gradually being taken over by the Combined Authority*

Key issues faced: reduced funding, increasing costs, increasing demand, Covid

The general pattern is for the cost of providing services to rise above general levels of inflation.

The reduction in general grants from central government has continued except that some extra money has been made available for Covid measures. The Local Government Association, a cross-party organisation, has been ringing alarm bells about the greater financial burden placed on local councils and several have become insolvent. The demand for services is increasing as the proportion of the population needing adult social care support increases. Although the total number of under-fives is not increasing at the moment, the severity of need of an increasing proportion is placing greater demands on a hard-pressed service.

Budget Headlines 2021

- For 2021-22, Cambridgeshire is set to receive £645m of funding, excluding grants retained by its schools. But its total expected spending 2021-22 - despite finding savings and additional income of £4m, will be £655m - leaving a £9.6m gap.

- The costs of running the Council have risen by £42m (6.9%) compared to the last financial year. In particular, the impact of COVID-19 has led to increased challenges across all services areas but especially in Adult and Children’s Social care which have seen increases in both the amount and complexity of need.
- Increasing the rate at which the Adult Social Care Precept is set: The council’s current Business Plan is currently based on the council being able to set an Adult Social Care precept of 2% in each of the five years that the plan covers to 2025 – 26.
- The key sources of Cambridgeshire County Council’s funding are council tax (£323m), business rates (£64m), central Government grants (£136m) and fees and charges income (£122m).
- 2021/22 Budget
 - £20 million extra for footpath maintenance
 - £2.73 million extra for flood attenuation and improving our biodiversity.
 - £6.97 million in improvements to the B1050, however
 - A cut of £7.5m to the roads programme (central govt grant)

Council Tax

The government has again capped the levels by which local councils can increase tax for 2021-22:

- 3% over two years towards Adult Social Care and 1.99% towards other services.

Cambridgeshire CC has decided to limit the social care increase to 1%, followed by 2% next year and 1.99% for other services. So, for the coming year 2021-22, the total 2.99% increase will cost a Band D household an extra £54.22 per year. Over 60% of households in Cambridgeshire are in the lower bands A-C. In round figures, every 1% brings in about £3 million to the Council.

Since capping was introduced in 2014, the Council has not made use of the full flexibility allowed by central government. As a result of the compounding effect of those decisions, the Council’s income is much less than it would have been.

The future for local government services and the implication for communities

Central government has been decreasing its grants to local councils with the expectation is that services will be ‘transformed’ and local groups - parish councils and voluntary groups – will have a bigger role in supporting those people in the early stage of needing help. The County Council has continued to make savings in its procedures and in increasing income, for example through setting itself up as a property company and trying to sell off some of its land holdings for housing.