

South Cambridgeshire District Council – Harston & Comberton Ward

Report to Barton Annual Parish Meeting 2019

In May it will have been a year since we were elected to South Cambridgeshire District Council to represent the Harston & Comberton ward. In this report we have picked out some of the bigger stories and key issues that have come up in our first year. In this report we have picked out some of the bigger stories and key issues that have come up in our first year, firstly looking at those that may be of particular interest in Barton, followed by some of the district wide highlights.

Barton highlights

Barton Greenway

The Greater Cambridge Partnership proposed and consulted on a ‘Greenway’ for Barton, and this generated a lot of views from the Parish in the middle of 2018. The proposal for improving the cycle route that connects Barton to the city through Newnham, was broadly welcomed and officers also identified improvements on the route connecting to Comberton as part of the quick wins scheme (going on now). Since the consultation has closed, the project team have collated and analysed the contributions and will use that to inform revised proposals that will come before the Greater Cambridge Partnership Joint Assembly and Executive Board, likely sometime later this year. As a member of the Joint Assembly, Ian will be paying particularly close attention in scrutinising any future proposals – particularly the safety of the motorway junction – to make sure they are right for Barton.

Cambourne to Cambridge: the Coton Busway

The Greater Cambridge Partnership continues to push for a busway connecting Cambourne to Cambridge – or at least as far as Grange Road! This project was paused for a time in the middle of last year while Mayor James Palmer and his consultants reviewed the project. In a disappointing U-turn the Mayor decided to back the off-road route as part of his scheme for a rubber wheeled metro. We are continuing to question the basis for this decision and how it works with other strategic transport projects. A consultation on Phase 2 of the project (Cambourne to Madingley Mulch roundabout), including, a revised option for a Park & Ride at the waterworks site, recently concluded. The earlier consultation on the P&R location showed a clear preference for Scotland Farm where it is better able to intercept traffic, and we hope to see that preference clearly expressed again. Greater Cambridge Partnership officers are hoping to bring the complete Cambourne to Cambridge project, including the P&R, to the Executive Board for a decision in autumn.

East West Rail

We think one key factor in the Cambourne to Cambridge decision will be the route chosen by East West Rail for a new rail line connecting Cambridge to Bedford (and then on to Oxford using existing track). East West rail consulted on 6 route options in total, though there were effectively 2 options for the South Cambs portion: a southern route via a new station at Bassingbourn, and a northern route via a new station at Cambourne. The district council felt a new station at Cambourne has a lot to recommend it, connecting Cambourne and the surrounding area up to the national rail network, as opposed to Bassingbourn which is already a relatively short distance to a station at Royston. However, the proposed route via Cambourne would cut through Harston & Comberton ward somewhere south of Comberton and Barton and if this route is chosen, we will be looking closely at the specific route alignment and what mitigation measures can be taken. East West Rail are due to announce the choice of route sometime in the middle of 2019.

District wide highlights

Governance

The Liberal Democrats won control of the Council in May 2018 and is now a 30-strong group (previously 14). There are 11 Conservatives, 2 Independents, 2 Labour. In a spirit of co-operation, an Independent Councillor was appointed as Council Chairman, and for good governance, a Conservative as Chairman of the important Scrutiny and Overview Committee. A 7-strong cabinet is made up of 4 women and 3 men.

New Business Plan

Following a public consultation, a new Business Plan covering the period 2019 to 2024 has been published, which changes the direction of the Council. We have committed to providing homes that are truly affordable for everyone to live in; to help local businesses to grow; to be green to our core and to put customers at the centre of everything we do as a modern and caring council. You can find the new Business Plan at: www.scambs.gov.uk/businessplan

Medium Term Financial Strategy

For most of the first year in control of the council, we have had to work with the budget set by the previous administration. The council has recently approved the budget for 2019-20, which sets the priorities for the Lib Dem administration. The council no longer receives central government grants and the amount by which the amount of Council Tax the council can raise is also capped by the government.

The five-year financial plan has been altered to deliver more income from investments and commercialisation with the aim of having 25% of £20 million income coming from these sources by 2024. The previous administration's plans were to reduce general reserves to less

than £3 million by 2023 while we are aiming for reserves of £4.5 million by then. An inherited budget shortfall of £0.5 million has already been turned into a £1 million surplus which has gone into the General Reserve to help prepare for future uncertainties.

Housing

One of the administrations priorities is the provision of more council houses and a resolve to meet agreed targets for affordable housing in new developments. We are aiming to build 70 new council houses per year, and even more where possible. So far in 2019, we've completed 28 new homes, adding those plus 6 purchased council houses to our stock. We also completed 13 shared ownership houses for sale in the last year and have another 61 plus 24 shared ownership currently being built on site.

A new strategy for Housing in South Cambridgeshire has been adopted to deliver homes that are affordable, not just to buy but to live in. In addition to delivering new homes, in the right place and at the right price, we will strive to keep utility bills low by ensuring that they are as energy efficient and water efficient as they can be. We also strive to build close to places of employment to encourage walking and cycling to work as well as using public transport.

New Investment Strategy

The new investment strategy is now in place to ensure council taxpayers are getting the best return for the council's financial reserves. The previous administration did not have an investment strategy against which to judge commercial opportunities to ensure they are sound but one is now in place. One investment; Cambridge Ice Rink is now close to being completed. Located off Newmarket Road on the edge of Cambridge but in South Cambs district, last autumn the council approved an additional loan to ensure the delivery of this high-quality community sporting venue that will benefit the health and wellbeing of residents. The ice pad will meet the requirements of the International Ice Hockey Federation, allowing visiting teams from around the world to play ice hockey there. South Cambs Council Tax payers will benefit from returns on the investment.

The council has moved to put PV solar panels on the roof of the Waterbeach refuse depot to obtain the Government's feed-in tariff and also purchased the lease of an office block strategically placed in the Cambridge Science Park which is delivering nearly a 6% net yield on a £13 million investment.

Customer Service

The council has set a target of improving complaint-handling by 10% and it is hoped that this will be exceeded. The 'mysouthcambs' customer portal is being rolled out, offering customers the means to access Council services 24 hours a day and 365 days of the year.

<https://tinyurl.com/yxscn8rf>

Although digitising council services such as 'mysouthcambs' will lead to a lower footfall at the Council offices, we have not forgotten customers who do not have access to, or cannot

use, the internet and who prefer to speak to our officers. The visitor experience at the Cambourne offices is therefore to be improved and, at the same time, measures also taken to address issues that staff have raised about their personal security.

Green to our core

The council has pledged to become a zero-carbon district by 2050. A working group of members and officers is preparing a high-level business case for a set of energy conservation measures (such as EV charging points, solar panels over our car park and on our waste depot). We intend that our Cambourne offices will be a showcase for a Zero Carbon Council and an exemplar to our residents.

A council with a heart

The council is determined to find homes in our district for 5 refugee families fleeing warfare in the middle east. The Home Office previously asked the council to help with the rehoming of refugees and two year ago, the then minority Lib Dem Group, put a motion to Council proposing this, but this was voted down by the majority Conservative Group. The current Home Office scheme runs until December 2019, and we hope to be able to provide homes for these 5 families by then.

Council grants

The committee that administers council grants has been refocussed to make it more responsive to a range of needs and interests across the district. More money has been put into the mobile warden scheme this year and another increase is promised next year. We have initiated a piece of work to look at extending the scheme across the whole district and commissioned a similar piece of work on community transport.

Ian Sollom cllr.sollom@scambs.gov.uk

Philip Allen cllr.allen@scambs.gov.uk

Tony Mason cllr.mason@scambs.gov.uk