

Cambridgeshire County Councillor's Report - July 2017

The County Council will meet on 18 July. The agenda is available at: <http://bit.ly/2tZY54I> I will be able to answer any questions relating to this at your own meetings by which time the County Council meeting will have taken place.

This month the Greater Cambridge Partnership [GCP] [previously the Greater Cambridge City Deal] announced a refreshed vision for how the GCP will accelerate the provision of thousands of new homes and jobs and create a fit-for-the-future transport network. The change of name is accompanied by the strap line 'Growing & Sharing Prosperity' to reflect a strong collaboration and partnership approach. The refreshed vision and its ambitions include: working together to grow and share prosperity and improve quality of life, both now and in the future; creating better and greener transport networks, connecting people to homes, jobs, study and opportunity; accelerating housing delivery and homes for all; inspiring and developing our future workforce so that businesses can grow; inventing and developing smart technology to support transport, housing and skills. The GCP has a very good new website: www.greatercambridge.org.uk providing details of all its projects. Agenda for the next meeting of the GCP Assembly: <http://bit.ly/2uA18Ph> and GCP Board: <http://bit.ly/2v8Lyum>

The GCP's "smart" work stream is a forward looking area trying to investigate and then harness modern and even not-yet-invented technology. Since the middle of June Google Transit has been using real-time data from the intelligent City Platform funded by the GCP. Almost all buses in Cambridge carry GPS sensors which beam their location to a central hub where, through the algorithms that have been devised, analysis of the location and bus speed data can be compared to known trends and predicted arrival times for buses at each stop can be calculated. The objective is to 'help users get around the real world' and 'help passengers avoid waiting for buses that are never coming'. Regrettably this is all happening at a time when the County Council has been advised of further bus de-registrations from 03 September which include routes that will impact our villages [1A, 2 and 8]. I am following up with County Council Officers their statement that they are considering options for providing alternative services.

The agenda for the meeting of the Commercial & Investment Committee included consideration of an outline disposal process for selling land and property to the Council's wholly owned development company, the Cambridgeshire Housing and Investment Company [CHIC]. County Council core policy is that all surplus property should be disposed of and that disposals should be at 'best consideration' [to meet the requirements of s.123 of the Local Government Act 1972] unless Members approve otherwise. Best consideration is commonly accepted to be the best price which is normally determined by an open marketing process or a certified, formal valuation by a Chartered Surveyor. Best consideration could though be represented by the equivalent financial value of a service or other value 'in kind' and there are instances where the Council might want to consider a disposal at less than best consideration, eg a sale or lease to a community group. Previously such disposals generally required the consent of the Secretary of State [SoS]. However a General Disposal Consent granted by the SoS gives the Council the ability to forego up to £2m of value, if it can be demonstrated that the disposals meet certain economic, social or environmental objectives. The County's policy has been that all sites will be offered at market value to District and Parish Councils in advance of marketing [with some exceptions]. Members were advised that this may no longer be appropriate although all freehold disposals will take account of the Community Right to Bid process where the asset has been appropriately registered with the responsible Local Authority. Members resolved to agree to declare surplus land and property on a case by case basis to achieve best consideration and not to offer land and property to District and Parish Councils in advance of offering them to CHIC. Agenda pack: <http://bit.ly/2vt3dwl>

Commercial & Investment is one of two new committees to be given full service committee status this year. The second is **Communities and Partnerships** [C&P]. At its first meeting its Terms of Reference were agreed and it considered too a report on recent Town and Parish Council Surveys and development of an Improvement Plan. The report acknowledged the importance of meaningful and successful working with Parish Councils as they have some of the closest relationships with local communities. The County Council realises that these relationships are key to supporting efforts particularly to helping people stay independent and healthy for longer. The Localism Act 2011 and the Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016 give Town and Parish Councils new opportunities. The first countywide Parish Council Conference, led by Cambridgeshire Acre, was held in November 2016 to explore how all tiers of government and the voluntary sector could work better together for the good of Cambridgeshire residents. The event was seen to establish the concept of a Stakeholder Partnership. Nine projects were showcased by Parish Councils in the workshops and eighty-five ideas were shared between participants. The conference was well attended and most said they would attend future events. Subsequent surveys of both Parish Clerks and Councillors were carried out, the full results of which, along with district-based reports, are available on the Cambridgeshire Town and Parish Council website:

<http://www.cambsparishes.wordpress.com> In order to address the findings from the surveys, the Stakeholder Partnership is drafting an improvement plan, the first of its kind in Cambridgeshire that sets out collective aspirations for Cambridgeshire's Town and Parish Council Sector. C&P committee members resolved key actions for the improvement plan to include: improving training for parish councillors in respect of their powers and duties; reviewing job descriptions of parish clerks to ensure their relevance with current requirements/expectations of the role and improving training provided for them in this respect; considering how support can be provided to younger parish councillors to retain their enthusiasm and commitment; encouraging parishes to become involved with volunteer and service provider locality networks. Agenda pack: <http://bit.ly/2v9ePFj>

Locally we have the good news that the first new residents are moving into the North West Cambridge Development [NWCD]. The first building being made available comprises 73 x one and two bed apartments and the first occupants are University key workers. These key workers will be eligible for an affordable rent capped on average at a third of their income. Whilst I am still disappointed that this £350m investment by the University of Cambridge includes no general needs affordable housing, I am impressed by the concept of an organisation funding such provision for its own key workers. I think that this is something that we should seek to learn from and I have suggested to the County Council that it considers a similar approach when considering its own investment plans. As the Cabinet member for Housing at South Cambridgeshire District Council, I am also discussing with officers how similar schemes might be funded by other organisations to the benefit of local people within their employment.

School funding continues to be a huge challenge and once more I am working with Girton Glebe to address their unique challenge of a drastic reduction in the number of pupils choosing the school. Despite all its hard work both academically to achieve an Ofsted 'Good' rating and to promote itself, forecasts indicate that the situation is not going to improve in the short/medium term. However, the school benefits from both an excellent Headteacher and an ambitious and hardworking Chair of Governors both of whom are committed, as am I, to establishing greater financial security for Girton Glebe.

I have again been enjoying the pleasure of summer events in our villages. Thank you to all those who work so hard to ensure their continuing success and the community benefits that they provide. The diversity of events on offer never fails to amaze me. I hope the good weather will continue and that you will all have an opportunity to enjoy some R&R over the coming weeks.

Lynda

lyndaharford@icloud.com;
01954 251775/07889 131022;
Follow me on Twitter: @2whit2whoo