

Cambridgeshire County Councillor's Report May/June 2019

May's meeting of full **Council** was enlivened by the protest mounted both outside the building and inside the chamber [although confined to the upstairs and enclosed public accommodation] by Extinction Rebellion. Appropriately the prayers that precede Council meetings were led by a Quaker who took stewardship of the earth as the theme of her sermon. The activists' slogan was "Declare a Climate Ecological Emergency Act". They unfurled a banner stating "This Land, Our Land" and during the debate on a motion proposed by the Leader of the Council that an Environment & Climate Strategy should be developed, two more banners from the public gallery pleaded "We need to panic, then we need to make the government act" and "Tell the truth: we are in climate emergency". A motion was also proposed by the Chairman of Health Committee on the subject of air quality. Acknowledging that the Council is already undertaking work to tackle poor air quality around schools including developing a pilot for a 'no car zone' around one Cambridge school, he emphasised the need for a more coordinated response across all Council departments and partner organisations, schools being the most logical place to start identifying how the greatest impact can be achieved. An action plan will be drawn up and submitted to Health Committee for approval to pursue this ambition.

Press and public were excluded from the final item on the agenda which related to the disposal of Shire Hall and which explored in detail one particular offer for lease of the site. Before leaving the public gallery a protester sang a version of the Woody Guthrie song 'This Land, Our Land' modified to lay claim to the ancient rights of access to Castle Mound. Her rendition was intently listened to by many, although not all, members and she was rewarded with a well deserved round of applause.

The quality of debate was not good; the national air of ill tempered division seems to be reflected everywhere and, when we finally escaped at five o'clock I was amused by a colleague's comment that his general view is that meetings are merely a conspiracy to prevent people from getting on with something more useful.

Meeting agenda pack: <http://bit.ly/2MOHRHi>

Highways & Infrastructure

I am really pleased that all the villages in Bar Hill Division submitted bids to the A14 Legacy Fund. They are all very different but all have the potential to bring benefits to local communities. I look forward to hearing in the near future which ones have been successful - hopefully all! Well done to all those who worked on preparing the bids.

That piece of work finished, it is time for me to let you know that the County Council is now accepting Local Highway Improvement [LHI] applications. The submission deadline for these applications is Sunday 04 August after which Officers will make contact with you to develop a feasibility study. This will ensure that your project scope and budget are accurate and achievable prior to it being presented to the LHI Member Advisory Panel in January 2020. When you are working on your proposal please also nominate a representative to attend the panel to support your application. Supporting LHI guidance is available on the Council's website for your reference when making an application: <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/travel-roads-and-parking/roads-and-pathways/improving-your-local-highway/local-highway-improvement-funding/> Please complete the electronic application form, save it and submit it to: local.projects@cambridgeshire.gov.uk The same email address can be used if you have any queries or questions. The maximum funding has been raised this year to £15,000 but is still subject to a minimum of 10% applicant contribution.

That increase in funding and other refinements to the LHI scheme were approved by members of the **Highways & Infrastructure** committee at its meeting in May. The panels that assess the applications operate on a district basis and are comprised of county councillors representing that district. It had previously been noted that not all operate in quite the same way although the criteria set for all panels are consistent. The differences were mainly noted in Cambridge City which, not having parishes, operates some processes differently to suit its structure. It was agreed that the City panels would accommodate wider attendance in recognition of this. This year for the first time I sat on a SCambs panel and was impressed by the diligence of both councillors and the supporting Officers in assessing the applications. Chaired by a senior Project Officer the panel was able to benefit from his knowledge of the technicalities of each application. Councillors are also able to ask questions of the applicants to clarify the background to and community benefit of each application.

The committee also debated at length a proposal to introduce a van and trailer e-permit scheme at Cambridgeshire's nine Household Recycling Centres [HRC]. Cambridgeshire's HRC policies were last reviewed in 2007. Since then many other local authorities including our neighbours have introduced changes to their policies such as reducing opening hours, closing sites for part of the week, charging for construction and demolition [C&D] waste and restricting access for large vehicles and trailers. These have helped them to tackle increases in waste growth and reduce abuse of their services as well as delivering quite significant savings. However, there is evidence that this action by our neighbours has had an adverse impact on Cambridgeshire as people drive across the county border in many cases to use its sites where no charges or restrictions currently apply. There was much discussion about the size of trailer that should be permitted; some members had done their own research with trailer suppliers to establish the most popular sizes in order that an appropriate exemption level could be set so as not to disadvantage local residents. Committee agenda pack and minutes: <http://bit.ly/2XOssrd>

Economy & Environment Committee considered an item on the Network Rail Cambridgeshire Corridor Study. This study explores requirements for additional track, platforms, rolling stock and stabling arrangements for services that will meet expected growth in demand to 2043. It makes various assumptions including delivery of Cambridge South station and that the capacity constraint at Ely North junction will have been unblocked. There is some scepticism about the basis upon which growth has been calculated and that it is not consistent with other reviews that have been undertaken in relation to the Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford Arc.

Agenda pack: <http://bit.ly/2XNurMH>

Children & Young People Committee considered a report on the review of Housing Related Support services. You may recall this review raised concerns about the withdrawal of funding for specialist facilities such as Whitworth House in the City. The review aims to ensure that the Council is supporting the right people with the appropriate support to help them achieve the best quality of life. It is considered that, although some of the services that it provides are well used, they are not always the most effective for ensuring this on a long term basis. Alternative support services are being considered and to allow time for this it was agreed to extend current contracts for 18 months. A further report will come to committee in the autumn. Agenda pack: <http://bit.ly/2XelwH0>

The **A14 Cambridge to Huntingdon** improvement scheme is progressing well. I never fail to marvel at the fortitude, resilience, [mostly] constructive feedback and general good humour of residents in my County division who are being particularly affected by the work. This is acknowledged by the A14 team with whom over the duration of the project I have formed a very good working relationship and with whom I meet regularly. Following last year's installation of the two new bridges, the weekend of 22/23 June was scheduled for the demolition of the old bridge and a total closure of the eastbound carriageway from Friday night to Monday morning. In advance of this we were told that the necessary change in road layout would necessitate the use of temporary traffic lights. Locally past experience of temporary traffic lights has not been good and I shared residents' trepidation about the installation and its impact on Monday's peak time traffic. At a meeting with the team beforehand I stressed the need for clear communication, close attention to

detailed and accurate signage and monitoring of the lights. The first day was not good but, as requested, the A14 team had someone on site monitoring the situation so that adjustments could be made and they also listened to suggestions from local residents. Whatever did we do before social media?

The day of the demolition of the old bridge dawned and I was up with the birds to see it, meeting the Project Director at Swavesey at 4.30am. After my health and safety induction we drove to a point very close to the bridge from which we watched as eight massive machines with long extensions and cutters closely resembling the heads of dinosaurs started to 'nibble' through the concrete until the reinforcing steel was cut and the span fell. When we left work was starting to demolish the supports and crush the concrete on site. It was an amazing experience to watch the precision with which everything was planned and choreographed and, as we all know, the whole operation was completed well ahead of schedule and the A14 opened again 24 hours early.



Photo taken at about 5am just before the demolition started.

lyndaharford@icloud.com;
01954 251775 or 07889 131022
Follow me on Twitter: @2Whit2Whoo