

County Councillor's Annual Report 2022/23 – Councillor Anna Bradnam

National

I think we will all remember 2022 as being the year in which HM Queen Elizabeth II died and in which the accession of HM King Charles III was proclaimed in Cambridge and Ely, and elsewhere in the county.

County Council

The composition of the County Council has changed, following the death of Independent Chair of the Council, Derek Giles and a Liberal Democrat being elected to that seat and a Conservative Councillor switching parties. The Council make up is currently

Conservatives 27

Liberal Democrats 22

Labour 9

Independents 3

The Joint Administration of Lib Dem, Labour and Independent councillors continues to run the council. The Agreement signed in May 2021 will be reviewed after elections in May.

I continue as a member of the County (Minerals and Waste) Planning Committee, Environment and Green Investment Committee and the Member Steering Group for Waste. I joined the Children and Young People Committee during the year and I continue to chair the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee. I am the County's nominee to the Police and Crime Panel and on the Conservators of the River Cam, of which I am Vice Chair.

The council's Chief Executive, Stephen Moir has been re-organising the senior staff structure, making senior appointments and gradually separating out the previous joint arrangements with Peterborough City Council.

In July 2022 the council's offices were formally opened at Alconbury Weald. It is a pleasant building to work in, although the Red Kite Room (council chamber) feels very cramped with 65 members at full council. On days when a large number of the public wish to attend some must be accommodated in a room on the ground floor with a live stream.

There is no direct public transport link from Cambridge to Alconbury Weald

Council Finances

The high rates of inflation and the confusion caused by the Truss/Kwarteng mini-budget increased the cost of providing council services and the costs of capital projects, which increased the budget gap.

The Council increased its portion of the Council Tax in February by 4.99% (2.99% for general services and 2% for adult social care). This was to ensure we could continue to provide services for adults and children, roads, infrastructure and environmental projects

Adults and Health

Nationwide changes were made during the year, creating local Integrated Care Systems which are responsible for decision making across health and social care. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough created a joint Health and Wellbeing Board.

It has become apparent how stretched and vulnerable our NHS services are, in particular, dental provision. A recent investigation by the BBC found that no dental practice in Cambridgeshire was accepting new adult patients. Residents are having to travel long distances and pay for private treatment. One resident of Ely travelled to Ukraine for dental treatment which was quicker and cheaper than that available in the UK.

Children and Young People

The council has continued to fund vouchers for those eligible for free school meals over the school holidays, along with the Holiday Activity and Food programme. This is in recognition of the impact of the Cost of Living Crisis on families.

The Council was praised by Ofsted for the work of senior leaders in Children's Services in responding to the challenge of Covid, and for maintaining continuity during structural change. Most children in need and those with a child protection plan were supported well. Looking at local Primary Schools: Milton Church of England Primary School, after an Ofsted rating of Inadequate in Sept 2021, a monitoring visit in March 2022, reported in May 2022, found that "Leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation. The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose."

Waterbeach Community Primary School was last inspected in 2020 and was rated as Good.

In April 2022 Fen Ditton Primary School continued to be rated as Good.

The council is still seeking residents who would like to make a real difference to the life of a child by becoming a foster carer.

Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND)

In a piece of good news for Cambridgeshire, the council and the Government reached agreement on the 'safety valve' process to resolve the escalating deficit in the cost of SEND education. The deficit had been expected to grow to over £90M by 2025/26 if left unchecked, and the council was not permitted to divert funding from other sources to fill the gap. Thankfully, Cambridgeshire has been awarded £49M which will be used to create 463 new special school places, with a further £11.3M in capital funding to support new SEND provision on mainstream school sites. Cambridgeshire has historically received less funding per child for education than other areas, whilst having a high proportion of SEND.

Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee (COSMIC) oversees the Household Support Fund, which supports people experiencing immediate financial hardship, to pay for food, household energy or other essential items. An increasing number of families are struggling financially at the moment. COSMIC agreed to use some of the money from the fund to give a 'payment holiday' to pensioners in arrears with their water bills.

A Warm Hubs programme over the winter was funded by the Integrated Care System and administered by Cambridgeshire ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England), with fantastic support from volunteers in local parishes including Milton and Landbeach.

Libraries - A review of the mobile library service resulted in a number of improvements, including more stops, more fuel-efficient routes, and local storage of vehicles.

Cambridgeshire's Library@home volunteers were one of three voluntary organisations in the county to be given the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service. Waterbeach Independent Lending Library continued to offer children books and incentives to read through the Summer Reading Challenge, which keeps children reading over the summer holiday.

Photographic ID - The Government is introducing a requirement for voters to provide photographic ID at elections. This starts with the elections in East Cambridgeshire and parts of Cambridge May 2023, and will cost up to £180M over ten years, despite cases of voter identity fraud at polling stations being almost non-existent. Around two million voters in the UK do not have the right form of ID to enable them to vote—they can apply for free Voter Authority Certificates, but the application process for these is extremely slow and many people are likely to find themselves deprived of their right to vote on 4 May.

Environment

Council awarded the first spending from its Just Transition fund, including £2.175M to provide a business case for the first phase of the Council's plan for Cambridgeshire to reach Net Zero carbon by 2045. £1.75M was also awarded for flood work and nature restoration.

The County Council is working with district councils on energy retrofits in homes with poor energy efficiency.

Waste The waste disposal contract with Thalia (formerly Amey) at Waterbeach has taken a considerable amount of council time. Firstly the Environment Agency has required works to comply with new odour emission standards and secondly, in the new year, the EA enforced rules on persistent organic pollutants in waste upholstered domestic seating (POPs in WUDS). This led to a week in which the council was unable to accept unwanted furniture, which must now be incinerated not landfilled. In addition to this, discussions are also ongoing with Defra regarding proposals to introduce weekly food waste collections. South Cambs District Council has been doing a separate food waste collection trial in Milton and other locations, although this ends 31 March.

Renewable energy - The first households in Swaffham Prior are now receiving renewable energy from the new energy centre. Interest in this project has been considerable. Other energy projects (solar panels on Park & Ride sites, North Angle solar farm, and replacement of gas and oil boilers in schools and in the Council's own premises around the county) are continuing to progress. In conjunction with iChoosr the council ran another round of Solar Together, the group buying scheme for homeowners wanting to invest in solar panels and battery storage.

The Examination into the planning application by Sunnica for the large solar farm between Burwell and Red Lodge began in autumn 2022.

Water resources Anglian Water and Cambridge Water announced in autumn 2022 their preferred location for a new reservoir in the Fens, north of Chatteris, to come on stream in the late 2030s. A planning application will come in due course and progress through a number of stages. It will be a decision for the Secretary of State through the Planning Inspectorate, as with other major infrastructure schemes.

We received details of the County Council's **carbon emissions** for the year. There was a significant reduction in the early stages of the pandemic, due to construction work ceasing, but this is likely to increase again in future years.

Trees The council has published an interim Tree Strategy, which it will revise once it has baseline information about what trees the council has, where they are, and how the council can expand and improve its tree assets. The Council persuaded National Highways to review the success of its tree-planting scheme along the new A14 route. They felled 400,000, replanted 800,000 but some 600,000 have died. Around 125,000 will be replanted.

Highways and Transport

The condition of Cambridgeshire's roads and pavements remains a serious challenge. This situation has developing for many years during which the council's approach was admitted to be one of 'managed decline'. However, recent extremely hot and extremely cold weather has speeded up that decline very significantly. The soil under roads and the tarmac itself has shrunk in hot dry weather, and expanded in wet weather causing it to crater and split.

The severity of the problem is far beyond our maintenance budget, so the council has been actively engaging with the Department for Transport to seek their support and funding.

Flooding - The council used a data interpretation and modelling tool to identify a 'Safe and Dry' programme of 115 locations where work was needed to improve flood resilience, and work began on the first fifty of these locations in 2022.

The council is also undertaking a two-year programme to clean and plot all gullies and surface drainage features to improve highways drainage management into the future.

Street Lighting The council plans to fit street lighting with energy-efficient LEDs. The council spends £3.3M a year on energy for street lights, and this sum will pay back within six years.
20 mph schemes - The new funding pot has attracted numerous applications.

Greater Cambridge Partnership

Making Connections - In autumn 2022 the Greater Cambridge Partnership (GCP) consulted on its proposals for improved bus provision and active travel in the Cambridge area, which in due course would be funded by a charge for driving in a 'Sustainable Travel Zone' between 7:00am and 7:00pm on weekdays. Requests for a referendum on the charge have been declined at both District and County Council, since it is not until the consultation responses have been analysed and responded to, that final proposals will be drawn up. What is clear is that action is needed to address the decades of decline in public transport inflicted by successive governments.

Waterbeach to Cambridge Busway the public consultation closed on 24 March. Feedback from this consultation will support their recommendations to the GCP Executive Board "later on in the year" for a preferred route option for the busway and a preferred location for a new P&R.

Waterbeach Greenway - we await clear plans for a preferred alignment for the route.

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA)

The Combined Authority has had a somewhat turbulent year, including an attempt to depose the elected Mayor which was unsuccessful. Most significantly, the auditors (EY) wrote to the Authority in June expressing concerns about the functioning of the Combined Authority, and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities has become involved, setting some clear requirements for improvement. The Combined Authority has agreed an Improvement programme with a package of external support, and an Independent Improvement Board has been established.

Buses In September 2022 the main bus operator Stagecoach gave six weeks' notice of its intention to withdraw from a large number of bus routes. The CPCA pulled together a tender process at very short notice, and was able to find new providers for most of those routes, though there have been changes in frequency and extent of several of them. Additional funding was diverted to support these routes, and the Mayor decided to levy a precept which will be added to the council tax to ensure the stability of these services for a further year. The Service 9 route between Milton and Waterbeach was not part of that rescue package and despite my direct requests, Stagecoach refused to re-instate that part of the route. I continue to seek restoration of this vital village link.

The Combined Authority needs to move ahead with a system of franchising of local bus services, which would give democratic control of routes, timetables, and fares, but it needs large amounts of income, and it would take around five years to implement. Meanwhile the Combined Authority is finalising a Bus Strategy for submission to Government.

The CP Combined Authority remains starved of resources by the Government compared to other Combined Authorities. It received no money for its Bus Service Improvement Plan and very little active travel funding. The Government also decided there would be no more money for affordable housing for any Combined Authorities.

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