

District Councillors' Report to Parish Councils – January 2025

Summary

This month's report primarily focuses on organisational changes in local government, environmental initiatives, and practical information about flooding management.

Major Policy Updates:

A new devolution white paper proposes creating unitary authorities with populations over 500,000 to replace current two-tier council systems.

South Cambridgeshire District Council has endorsed the Climate and Nature Bill, which would establish legally binding climate and biodiversity targets.

Support Programs and Services:

The [Digital Poverty Alliance](#) is offering digital access support for young carers.

Detailed flooding response information is provided in this report, including:

- A flowchart (at the end of the report) clarifying which organizations handle different types of flooding issues
- Information about riparian owner responsibilities
- District Council's Awarded Watercourse team
- Direction to contact Anglian Water for sewer drainage issues

Transportation:

The Voi e-scooter scheme in Cambridge is being expanded, with a phased approach to including new areas (Waterbeach and Landbeach scheduled for Phase 3) Parishes can opt out if they have concerns.

Cowley Rd update – the scheme is progressing but has been taking longer than anticipated due to work around the many utilities laid within Cowley Road to ensure they remain undamaged by construction works.

DC Councillors' Report

Local Government Organisation - Devolution White Paper

The government published the devolution white paper on 16 December.

There are many proposals for Combined Authorities and Mayors. One of the most significant proposals is the creation of unitary authorities where there are currently two tier council such as in our region. It is expected that newly created unitary authorities would have populations exceeding 500,000 but there may be exceptions.

The rationale for creating unitary authorities is expected efficiency savings and service improvements. The paper cites a PWC County Councils Network commissioned report. It emphasises maintaining community-level engagement despite the larger size of unitary authorities compared with our local district and city councils. A phased implementation approach is proposed.

The paper also discusses changes to the way that councils are funded including a review of the business rates retention system.

Campaign – Support for Young Carers

The Digital Poverty Alliance wants to make more people aware of the support on offer to equip young carers with digital access and skills. The Alliance is not reaching everyone who could benefit so we are sharing this information and asking parish councillors to reach out to people you're your communities who you think could be supported. More information is available on the [Digital Poverty Alliance website](#).

Useful information - Flooding

SCDC's Scrutiny and Overview Committee recently discussed local drainage, flooding and mitigation of water pollution (Paul, Judith and Anna are all members of this committee). One of the tasks to come out of that meeting was to provide South Cambridgeshire's parish and town councils with some helpful information and tools to support them – particularly when it comes to flooding. This information has been provided to all parish and town councils in South Cambs via the clerks' e-bulletin. Given the importance of the topic we are also highlighting it to you directly here.

Who is responsible for what and who should I contact?

It can be confusing and time-consuming to work out who is responsible for what when it comes to investigating and regulating flooding. A handy flowchart (at the end of this report), produced by Cambridgeshire County Council as the Lead Local Flood Authority, shows a clearly defined list of responsibilities and contact details. The idea of this flowchart is to help you identify an issue relating to flooding and make contact with the appropriate organisation. We hope it will help with more isolated or local emergencies related to sewerage or surface water issues, which can present challenges for residents who don't know who to contact to find help.

Watercourse rights and responsibilities

If there is a watercourse on, next to or under a property you own, then you could be a Riparian Owner. The deeds for your property or land may tell you if this is the case. However, even if your deeds do not say you are responsible for an adjacent watercourse, the law will assume you are. Waiver of responsibility only applies where a title deed states specifically that you are not

responsible. This means you are responsible for its maintenance to ensure it flows freely without obstruction, pollution or diversion, and you should also maintain your side of the riverbank. If you are a tenant, responsibilities usually sit with the owner; but it is worth checking your tenancy agreement.

A [map of all watercourses in Cambridgeshire](#) is available on the County Council website. You can also read more about rights and responsibilities as a riparian owner.

South Cambridgeshire District Council's Awarded Watercourse team

The District Council's Awarded Watercourses team is responsible for carrying out mechanical / machinery based, and hand works tasks, on approximately 275 km of open watercourses, culverts, pipes and associated structures within South Cambridgeshire.

The District Council often works with Cambridgeshire County Council (who are the Lead Local Flood Authority) on riparian interventions. It can often be the case that the County Council will take action on riparian owners and ask the District Council to carry out work, with costs recovered through the County Council's enforcement actions.

The District Council's Awarded Watercourse team also works collaboratively with Cambridgeshire County Council's Highways teams to provide support to resolve issues quickly - using District Council equipment and local technical network knowledge. Often issues are not the responsibility of the District Council, but it is able to address an issue which would otherwise take a lot longer to resolve.

The District Council's Awarded Watercourse team also support parish groups, councillors and representatives by taking a view on drainage matters generally and providing advice on the cause and resolution process. This includes enhancement and support for nature and ecology projects where the service can assist with resources.

Sewer Drainage

Any parishes that are experiencing any sewer drainage issues should email Anglian Water at their Public Affairs mailbox on public.affairs@anglianwater.co.uk

Campaign – Climate and Nature Bill

South Cambridgeshire District Council has signalled its support for the Climate and Nature bill which is soon to be debated in Parliament.

A motion passed at last week's Full Council meeting agreed that the Council would endorse the bill, which is being introduced by MP for South Cotswolds, Dr Roz Savage. The bill also has support from all three MPs covering South Cambridgeshire.

If agreed by the House of Commons and House of Lords, the new bill would lead to several climate and nature goals being enshrined in law, including:

- Requiring the United Kingdom to achieve climate and nature targets.
- Giving the Secretary of State a duty to implement a strategy to achieve those targets.
- The establishment of a Climate and Nature Assembly to advise the Secretary of State in creating that strategy.
- Giving duties to the Committee on Climate Change and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee regarding the strategy and targets.

The motion agreed by South Cambridgeshire District Councillors means the authority joins a list of councils from across the country who have agreed to support the bill as part of the Zero Hour campaign.

The motion was put forward by Cllr Paul Bearpark. It was seconded by the Council's Deputy Leader and Lead Cabinet Member for Environment, Cllr Brian Milnes. The Council unanimously - with two Councillors abstaining from voting - agreed the motion.

Cllr Bearpark said: "I am pleased we have sent a clear message that we support the aspirations of this hugely important bill, and we look forward to seeing it progress into law. As a Council we have an important role to play in combating the climate and ecological emergencies that we face – and this is exactly what we are doing through our Zero Carbon Communities programme, along with our Zero Carbon and Doubling Nature strategies. However, it is the responsibility of Government to establish more rigorous support and frameworks to help transition communities towards a zero-carbon future.

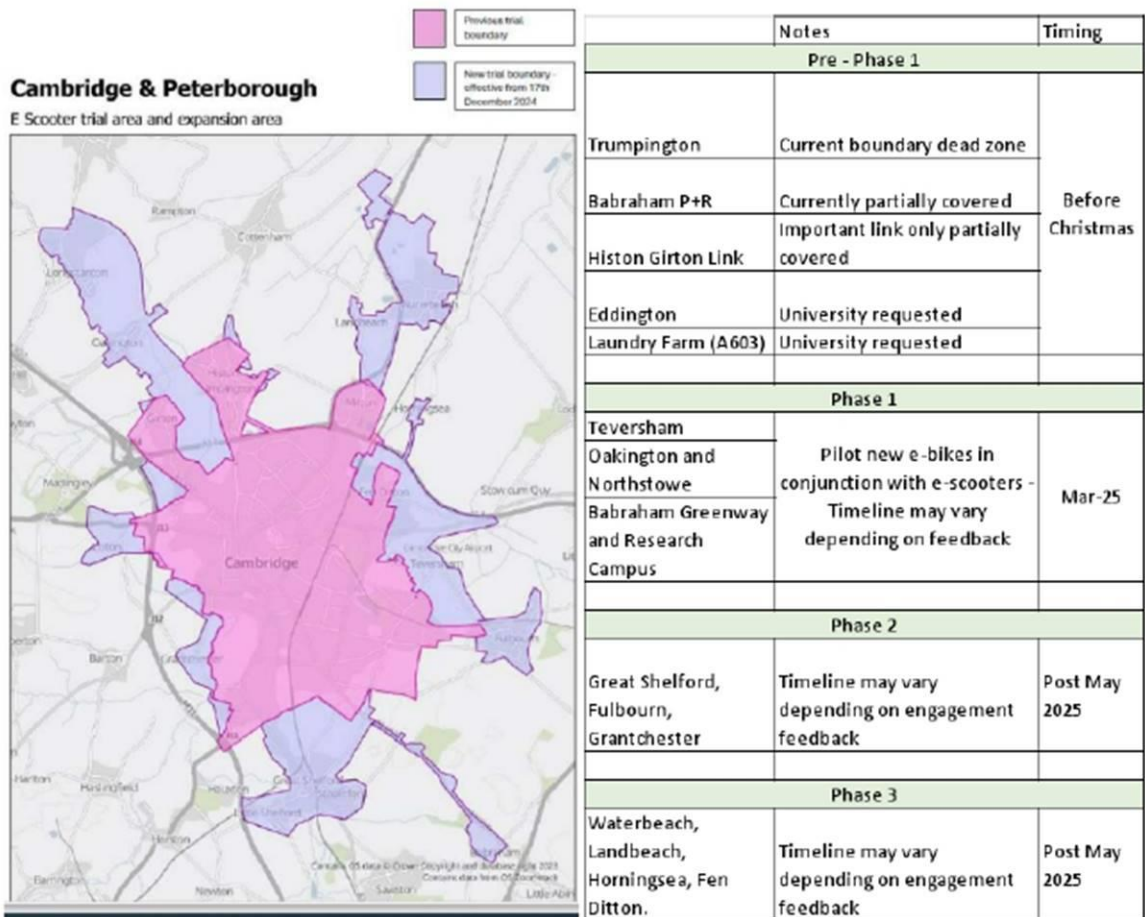
"This new bill is an important step towards that new framework and through citizens' assemblies it makes sure that everyday people are driving the progress we need to make. It also recognises the inter-connectedness of climate and nature. Nature is the best asset that we have when it comes to mitigating the effects of climate change, so we need to not just be protecting nature in the UK - we need to be restoring it. This is a comprehensive bill and demonstrates a commitment to a sustainable, just and resilient future. It has legally enforceable biodiversity restoration goals and it protects and restores 30% of the UK's land and marine environments. It is incredible that this is the first time such targets have been proposed for the UK – so it has mandatory targets to halt nature's decline by 2030."

Transport - Cowley Rd update

The works currently undertaken on Cowley Rd are the much needed works to improve the conditions and safety for cyclists and pedestrians along this busy route south of the bridge over the A14. The scheme is progressing but has taken longer than anticipated due to the complexity of the work around the many utilities laid within Cowley Road to ensure they remain undamaged and do not affect the many businesses in the vicinity that rely on them.

The construction team are installing street lighting along the western verge from St John's Innovation Park to the A14 Walking and Cycling Bridge, which will continue into early January. Once connected, the area will be restored to its original appearance.

In addition, improvements to key junctions are underway and cycleway and swale construction has advanced steadily, with drainage improvements carried out to ensure the route remains usable year-round. Finally, work has begun on enhancing safety at Anglian Water's entrance near the A14 footbridge.

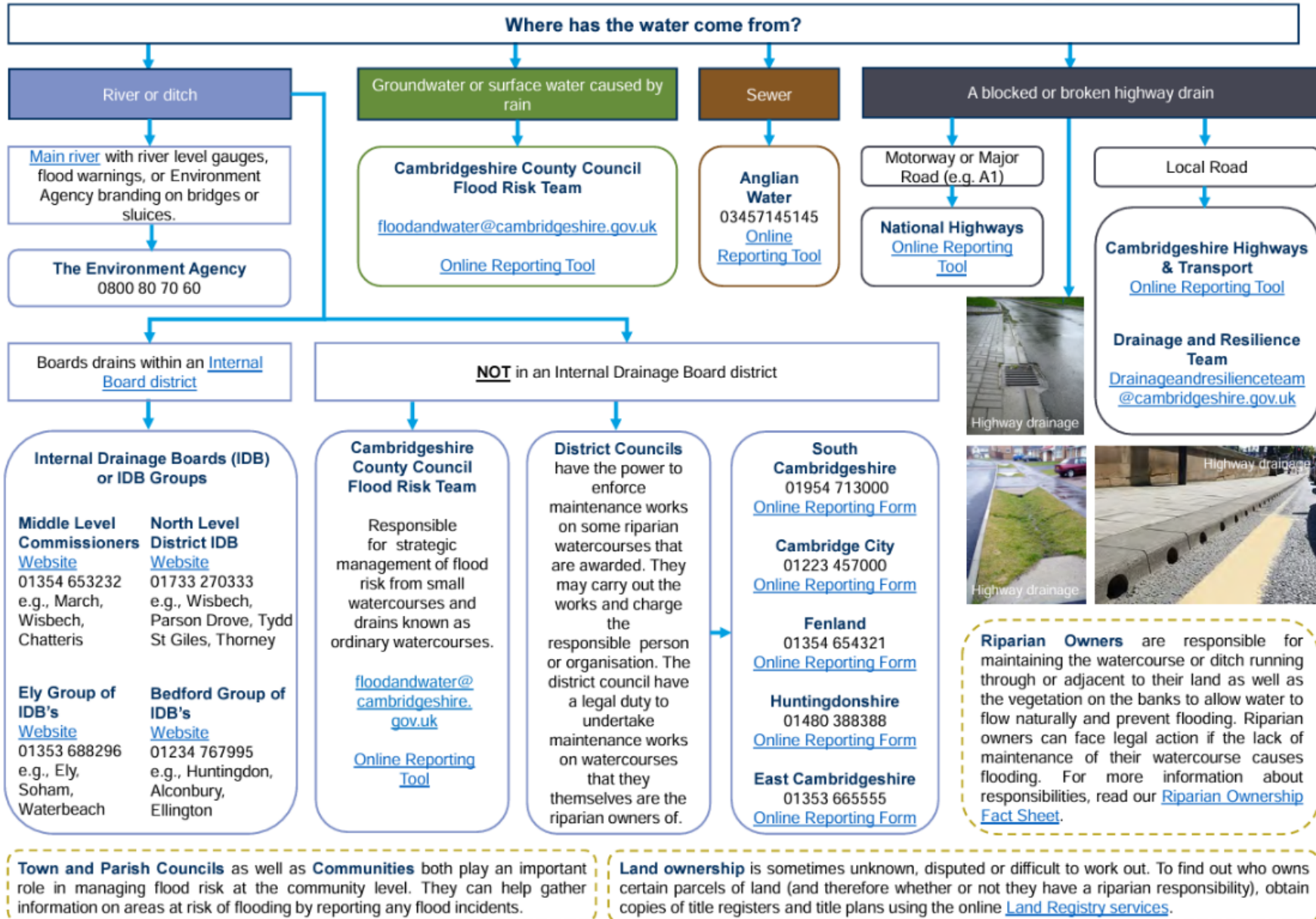


Transport – Expansion of Voi Scooter Scheme

Earlier this year Combined Authority’s Transport and Infrastructure Committee put an application to the Department for Transport (DfT) to expand the trial area of e-scooters, which currently operate in Cambridge. DfT has approved the proposal for the boundary changes to the existing e-scooter trial area as well as an increase in the fleet size. The Combined Authority’s Transport and Infrastructure Committee advised that this will be a phased approach, the table below shows the proposed phasing order. Waterbeach and Landbeach are scheduled for Phase 3. Parishes will still have the option not to participate within the scheme if they have reservations.

Cllrs Paul Bearpark, Judith Rippeth and Anna Bradnam

Investigating and Regulating Flooding: Who manages what?



Town and Parish Councils as well as **Communities** both play an important role in managing flood risk at the community level. They can help gather information on areas at risk of flooding by reporting any flood incidents.

Land ownership is sometimes unknown, disputed or difficult to work out. To find out who owns certain parcels of land (and therefore whether or not they have a riparian responsibility), obtain copies of title registers and title plans using the online [Land Registry services](#).

