

Cllr Lorna Dupré

MONTHLY REPORT FEBRUARY 2021

COVID-19

The NHS remains under pressure as the COVID wave continues, with CUH (Addenbrookes) reporting 98 per cent overall occupancy, and staffing stretched.

Numbers of laboratory-confirmed cases are showing a consistent fall of 14-22 per cent in most parts of the county with the exception of Fenland and Peterborough where the drop is much smaller. The fall in numbers among the over 60s is much smaller than elsewhere in England or the East of England.

Vaccinations

The COVID vaccination programme started later in the Fenland Group Practice area than elsewhere, but has now picked up speed and was offering appointments to residents aged 70+ before the end of January. Across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough 80 per cent of over 80s had had their first vaccination before the end of last month. The programme is on track to offer vaccinations to the top four priority cohorts by the middle of February.

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough now have 23 primary care vaccination sites, four hospital hubs, and two large scale centres, with more locations still due to open. A mass vaccination centre has been opened at the Grafton Centre for those within a forty-five minute drive of Cambridge, as an alternative not a replacement for existing centres. Some work is going on by Cambridgeshire & Peterborough NHS Foundation Trust and some Primary Care Networks to deliver vaccinations to housebound residents while maximising use of phials.

Cambridgeshire County Council's COVID hub (phone 0345 045 5219) is coordinating transport to vaccination appointments for anyone who cannot get there by other means.

Rapid COVID testing centres

A new rapid 'lateral flow' testing programme has been launched across Cambridgeshire for asymptomatic key workers and people who cannot work from home. Each district has a centre, and pop-up centres may be opened if needed. The centres are:

- The Hub, Cambourne (from 3 February)
- Queen Mary Centre, Wisbech (from 4 February)
- Soham Town Rangers Football Club, Soham (from 5 February)
- The Coneygear Centre, Huntingdon (from 11 February)
- The Meadows Community Centre, Cambridge (from 12 February)
- St Mark's Church, Peterborough (already open)

Breakthrough in Littleport

A Littleport company has repurposed an air monitor originally used to detect diseases on chicken farms so that it can screen classrooms for coronavirus, potentially making it safer to return to face-to-face teaching. Roboscientific expects to start production in the spring.

Schools

Attendance in Cambridgeshire schools has been higher than the national average: 16.9 per cent on Wednesday 27 January compared to a national average of 15.1 per cent.

Council officers have been working hard on schemes for IT devices for pupils and for half term food vouchers. The Government has confirmed that schools will not be required to open in half term: officers are concerned about childcare for health and social care workers, and have developed a form for parents to identify their childcare needs, so the council can try to broker support for them.

Current issues in education:

- A consultation on how GCSE, AS and A Level grades should be awarded this summer ran until 29 January, and the Council has made a response to the proposal which includes standardised testing alongside teacher assessments.
- COVID 'lateral flow' testing kits for staff are now in all schools. There have been challenges, with government guidance changing several times during the week. Working with the Council's public health team education officers have produced guidance for schools [Primary Testing Guide](#) / [Secondary Testing Guide](#).
- OFSTED has released operational guidance on its remote monitoring inspection programme to run from 25 January to half term. These will last over two days and involve two inspectors, with up to 48 hours' notice given. OFSTED will still visit schools. Inspections will focus on what is being done to provide education in the current circumstances, and the judgement will be whether schools are taking effective action or not. The outcome will not change a school's current grade.

The Government has suggested that schools will not reopen after half term until 8 March at the earliest, and will issue plans for this towards the end of February.

COVID help

In the meantime, help is at hand. Details of local COVID support groups are at <https://www.eastcambbs.gov.uk/content/coronavirus-community-support>
Residents can also call

- Cambridgeshire Covid-19 Coordination Hub on 0345 045 5219
- East Cambridgeshire District Council hub on 01353 665555

COVID-19, lockdowns and restrictions have seen an increase in domestic abuse, and in mental health difficulties particularly among young people.

- Anyone experiencing domestic abuse can call the National Domestic Abuse Helpline on 0808 2000 247. Cambridge Women's Aid [Cambridge Women's Aid](#) (01223 361214) offers support to those living in Cambridge, South Cambridgeshire, and East Cambridgeshire.
 - Information about sources of support with children and young people's mental health can be found at www.keep-your-head.com/cyp/CP-MHS
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Budget

The County Council will set its budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy on Tuesday 9 February. All three political groups have submitted their differing proposals to fill the budget gap and reallocate spending. Details of the various options will be published at

https://cambridgeshire.cmis.uk.com/ccc_live/Meetings/tabid/70/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/397/Meeting/1355/Committee/20/SelectedTab/Documents/Default.aspx

The Conservative Group proposals, which will be the ones voted through on 9 February, will require a Council Tax increase of the maximum 1.99 per cent for general services, and 1.00 per cent of the 3.00 per cent over two years allowed for Adult Social Care (this means they will be able to implement the remaining 2.00 per cent increase next year). They propose to spend an extra £4M each year for the next five years on footpaths, £6.97M over two years on the B1050, and £2.7M over five years on flood attenuation and biodiversity.

The Liberal Democrat Group proposals would require a Council Tax increase of the maximum 1.99 per cent for general services, and 1.50 per cent of the 3.00 per cent over two years allowed for Adult Social Care (this means they would be able to implement the remaining 1.50 per cent increase next year). They propose to spend £7.8M over five years in providing support to communities to rebuild from the pandemic, £1.8M over five years on business support and green apprenticeships, £11.3M over five years on highways including gully maintenance, and £5.4M over five years on renewable energy and biodiversity.

The Labour Group proposals would require a Council Tax increase of 1.00 per cent for general services, and 2.00 per cent of the 3.00 per cent over two years allowed for Adult Social Care (this means they would be able to implement the remaining 1.00 per cent increase next year). They would establish a one-year £4.393M Covid Recovery Fund, a one-year £1.0M 'Return To School Contingency', a one-year increase of £0.700M in the Innovate & Cultivate fund, £0.9M over three years in Adult Social Care, and £7,000 each year to top up staff salaries to the 'Real Living Wage'.

Flooding

The County Council is seeking to build a more complete picture of the flooding events of Christmas and New Year, so that it can work with the Environment Agency, Internal Drainage Boards, police, fire and district councils, to create 'heat maps' of the incidents, share understanding, and learn lessons. To assist in this process it would be helpful if residents could report flood incidents at <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/business/planning-and-development/flood-and-water/report-a-flood>

Since these flooding events, I have worked with district council officers over surface water flooding at Westway Place Witcham, caused by the root of a farmer's tree causing an obstruction to the watercourse. The root cannot be removed as this would destabilise the tree. I have asked, and officers have agreed, that a check be made of this location whenever particularly heavy rain is forecast to ensure that the watercourse and culvert are unimpeded and that water can flow freely.

A flooded footway on Ely Road Little Downham in late January was caused by gullies not having been cleared and flushed. An order had been raised by the Local Highways Officer in late December to do this work but teams had been too busy dealing with flooding issues around the county. Reductions by the council to the gully clearing programme have now come home to roost.

In the last few days of January further instances of flooding took place in St Andrews Close and The Orchards in Sutton. Linden Homes have visited the site and say that the water runoff is caused by the disrepair of the ditch in the field to the west of their site, and the County Council Flood & Water team has received a map of the watercourses in the area so that they can write to landowners to remind them of their riparian responsibilities.

Barrier banks works

An application has been made for diversion of footpaths between the Jolly Bankers and Welches Dam from June to October this year for works to resume on the Middle Level Barrier Bank and South Level Barrier Bank. The works will involve the raising of low spots of the embankment to achieve the required design level.

Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan

The council will shortly launch a public consultation on its proposed Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan. This derives from the Infrastructure Act 2015 which placed a duty on the Secretary of State to set Walking and Cycling Investment Strategies.

In particular, views will be welcomed on the routes identified and whether people think the priorities are right. The draft document will also be presented to the Combined Authority's Transport and Infrastructure Committee in March. The intention is to undertake the consultation in the spring, and to present a further report with the results of the consultation and an updated document to the County Council's Highways & Transport Committee.

Skanska refund

The County Council has been reviewing the first two and a half years of its highways contract with Skanska, which has been set up on an open book basis. Skanska and the council's auditors have identified £456,000 so far in over-payments from the council to Skanska, representing some 0.4-0.5 per cent of the contract value for the period. This sum is being refunded and allocated in part to works on the dangerous Wheatsheaf crossroads on the B1040 between St Ives and Somersham, and to additional gully cleansing (see above).

HGV working group

The council's new working group on HGVs has met for the first time, and started to consider what evidence we will be seeking in reviewing the council's policy on this. We have requested and received information and documents from a number of other nearby authorities on how they manage heavy vehicles, and will be meeting the police and others to discuss possible solutions.

Lancaster Way roundabout

The Project Board for this scheme received further representations from the Ely Cycling Campaign, British Horse Society, Witchford Parish Council, and me over its intention to proceed with a toucan crossing to the Ely side of the roundabout, rather than the Pegasus crossing to the Witchford side as wished.

The Board intends to proceed nonetheless. After an inordinately protracted pursuit, officers have at last conceded to a potential online meeting with objectors to discuss the many remaining and new issues this scheme throws up, but it would be unrealistic to believe that this will change official minds.

Carbon footprint

The council has published its annual carbon footprint report for 2019/20. This is not (yet) a compulsory exercise but is good practice. The carbon emissions for which the council is responsible are divided into the standard three 'scopes'.

- Scope 1 is carbon emissions occurring directly from sites or assets owned or controlled by the council (such as gas boilers on council premises, or the council's fleet vehicles).
- Scope 2 is indirect emissions from purchased energy (such as electricity for the council's street lights).
- Scope 3 is other indirect emissions (such as staff travel to work, or purchased goods and services), and is the most difficult to measure.

The council's Scopes 1 and 2 emissions amounted to 7,623 tonnes CO₂e (gross) for the year. The largest share of this was for purchased electricity. This was an overall reduction of 1 per cent on the previous year, due to more electricity from the National Grid being generated from renewable sources. However Scope 1 emissions were higher than the previous year, due partly to having more accurate and more complete data than the previous year, and partly to increased gas usage in 2019-20 because of colder weather.

Peatland emissions are not currently counted in the emissions inventory, but could significantly affect Cambridgeshire's reported emissions, increasing them by as much as 90 per cent. More research is needed on this issue.

Swaffham Prior heat scheme

The council's Environment & Sustainability Committee has given the go-ahead to officers to make further progress on the Swaffham Prior community energy scheme, to move the village from oil to renewable ground source heating.

Grafham, Perry and Great Staughton

A similar scheme is beginning in Grafham, Perry and Great Staughton, which has just been awarded a £38,603 grant from the Rural Community Energy Fund. This has enabled the appointment of an expert engineering and heat network consultancy and a community engagement consultant to work with the Parish Councils to produce a feasibility study for the project.

Cambridgeshire Decarbonisation Fund

A recent research report by Cambridge University Science & Policy Exchange (CUSPE) has identified an opportunity for the council to help build a green recovery and deliver carbon reductions through the establishment of a Cambridgeshire Decarbonisation Fund in collaboration with local businesses.

More detailed development work is needed to understand how such a Fund could attract investment; develop criteria and a credible pipeline of projects; and to build a robust business case. The council's Environment & Sustainability Committee has agreed to support further work on this opportunity.

Local roadworks

- The delayed resurfacing at Downham Common between Black Bank and Main Drove is due to take place between 8 and 19 February—the road will be closed for these works (<https://one.network/?120359593>)
- Work is planned to begin in Witchford on 8 February on the building of the access road from the Sutton Road and Main Street junction down to the new Skylarks development (<https://one.network/?120380007>).
- A temporary closure is planned for 15-17 February on Mepal Road Witcham for works between The Coach House and Witcham Road Mepal.
- Works are set to take place on Gravel Head bridge at Downham Common, starting on 3 March and lasting until 12 September. The works involve repairs and waterproofing to the bridge deck and some work to repair scour damage in the watercourse to the bridge supports. The road will be closed between Second Drove and O Furlong Drove. Cyclists, horse riders (dismounted) and pedestrians can be escorted through the bridge site by the contractor as work permits during their working hours, but outside this time the bridge will be closed off.

Local elections

The Government currently seems intent on pressing ahead with local elections (here for Cambridgeshire County Council, the Police & Crime Commissioner, and the Mayor of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough) on Thursday 6 May.

This is despite a survey of local government returning officers and elections departments by the Local Government Information Unit (LGIU) which reveals that the overwhelming majority of council officials are concerned about their ability to hold local elections in May. More than two thirds (68 per cent) suggest that an autumn timetable is more achievable.

Meanwhile on the Combined Authority

As at the time of writing the Government is still holding back £45M of the £100M for affordable housing. Nor is it any clearer whether the deadline for the scheme is March 2021 or March 2022. The Mayor and his Combined Authority are coming up with different explanations for this, and expressing varying levels of confidence in an early resolution. But the flagship £100M scheme is now coloured Red in the Combined Authority's project register.

The Combined Authority has agreed more spending for each of the market town Masterplans in the county, including £240,000 for eighteen city wide digital displays in Ely, 'to signpost the latest information, highlight educational and cultural events, and act as information points such as local business directories'; and £400,000 for Soham 'to support the acquire [sic] and repurpose substantial building into a Soham town centre based commercial business hub and linking with E-Space Centres in Littleport and Ely'.

Meet Your Councillor

Sutton ward district councillor Mark Inskip and I will be holding our virtual surgery via Zoom from 6:30 to 7:30PM on

- Tuesday 9 February 2021
- Tuesday 9 March 2021

Please contact Mark at mark@markinskip.org.uk to book your timeslot.

Cllr Lorna Dupré

County Councillor for the Sutton division