

Cllr Lorna Dupré

MONTHLY REPORT NOVEMBER 2021

COVID-19

Overview

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough is now an Enhanced Response Area for tackling the Covid pandemic. Local leaders have welcomed the Government announcement, which follows an approach from both Councils and the Director of Public Health. Infections across the area are rising, especially in the 60+ age group. Rates are currently higher in most areas than in January's peak.

The new status took effect from Monday 1 November, and will last for at least five weeks. It allows the Council to push for additional support to:

- Accelerate and target 12-15 vaccination roll out to key areas and schools where infections are highest.
- Accelerate booster vaccinations for eligible groups who have had their second vaccination more than six months ago.
- Increase vaccination rate in areas with the lowest uptake.

The Councils will also enter into further discussions with the Department for Education about additional measures it can use in schools. In the meantime they will continue to:

- Encourage secondary school teachers or pupils who are household contacts of positive cases to take daily lateral flow tests.
- Advise schools that face coverings should be worn in secondary school communal areas, and that meetings should happen virtually where possible.
- Encourage anyone who is a household contact of a positive case to take daily rapid tests, until a negative PCR test is received.

For the general public government funded additional communications will also begin from next week. These will:

- Recommend wearing face coverings in crowded and enclosed areas where you come into contact with people you do not usually meet.
- Remind people to get their vaccinations, test regularly and particularly before attending events, meet with others outside their households in well ventilated spaces and wash hands regularly and well.

More information at <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/news/enhanced-response-area-status-vital-to-protect-nhs-and-vital-services>

The pandemic is nowhere near over. Rates in Cambridgeshire are well above the national average. Our National Health Service is already stretched. We are now in a very serious situation, and this move by the Council and the Director of Public Health is both necessary and welcome.

Case rates in Cambridgeshire

For the week 17-23 October:

- The case rate per 100,000 for Cambridgeshire was 508.4 per 100,000 (compared to 499.5 per 100,000 in the previous week).
- Cambridge, East Cambridgeshire, and Fenland reported an increase in case rates per 100,000 compared to the previous week; South Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire rates decreased.

Vaccinations

Booster vaccinations are now being offered to those who had their second jab more than six months ago.

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/coronavirus-vaccine>

Testing

Mobile rapid testing vehicles continue to visit sites across the county, offering on-the-spot lateral flow tests as well as test kits to take away and complete at home. You can also order kits to use at home. More information at www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/rapidtesting

General Covid information

- <https://twitter.com/CambsCC>
- <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/coronavirus/coronavirus-covid-19-overview>

County Council budget preparation

County Council committees are now considering options to address the Council's budget shortfall. The financial situation the new Joint Administration inherited included a gap of £22.2M between spending plans for 2022/23 and the resources available. We have already reduced this gap to £19.5M, and are developing proposals to enable a balanced budget to be presented to the Full Council in February.

The overarching themes for the Council's Business Plan are

- Economic recovery
- Prevention and Early Intervention
- Decentralisation

- Environment & climate emergency
 - Social Value
 - Efficiency and effectiveness of Council services
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Land Use Framework for Cambridgeshire

I have put forward the following motion for discussion at the County Council's full council meeting on Tuesday 9 November.

This Council welcomes the work being undertaken by the Food, Farming & Countryside Commission to develop a Land Use Framework for the UK, and locally to spearhead this approach here in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

Low input farming can simultaneously improve profit margins, increase productivity, and provide environmental benefits. Forestry and agroforestry can support sustainable food and timber production, nature restoration and carbon sequestration.

Current approaches to land use policy inhibit the potential for land to deliver multiple benefits. Governance of land is highly fragmented; and siloed systems encourage tensions between initiatives, with differing governing bodies, schemes and targets often directly clashing in their policy goals. Failure to capitalise on synergies in land usage has resulted in land not fully delivering on its potential to offer a range of public needs. A more strategic approach to land use would enable it to play a better role in delivering key social, economic and environmental objectives and aligning resources for public value.

Like the rest of the UK, Cambridgeshire is faced with burgeoning climate, nature and health crises. Land is our most valuable asset. From farming for healthy food and enabling carbon sequestration to supporting habitat creation, a large part of the solution to these crises is to be found on and in the land.

This Council shares the goals of the Food, Farming & Countryside Commission in wanting to see a common vision for land shaped through the introduction of a land use framework. This framework would

- Support government goals of transformational change in sectors such as housing, farming and climate change;
- Alleviate pressures and tensions currently experienced within land disputes; and
- Facilitate multifunctionality to use land to its full potential.

This Council therefore formally registers its support for the work beginning to be undertaken by partners in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough to

- Convene senior civil servants, policy makers, planners, landowners, environmentalists, and leaders from farming and other rural organisations to progress this work;
- Consolidate the broad principles of such a framework, including its vision, operation and implementation;
- Pilot a land use framework here in our county; and
- Develop detailed policy recommendations for implementation of a framework.

Furthermore, this Council undertakes to

- i. Engage with partners bringing together a county-wide group with the necessary skills and approaches who will design, advise and lead this process;
- ii. Share information about relevant initiatives that are already happening in Cambridgeshire, especially at local level;
- iii. Consider where it might lend support and in-house expertise to processes for gathering and mapping data to enable this project to progress; and
- iv. Work with partners in an engagement and listening process, particularly to ensure that marginalised and less-heard voices are included.

Full Council

Other items for the full Council meeting on Tuesday 9 November are:

- Appointment of the Council's new Chief Executive
- Various changes to the Council's constitution
- The parental leave policy for councillors I reported on last month
- The Pension Fund Committee annual report
- Motions on surface water flooding, resettlement of Afghan citizens, the Government's social care plan, and cuts to Universal Credit
- Questions to Combined Authority and Fire Authority representatives, and to the Council leader and committee chairs.

Hundred Foot de-silting

Environment Agency de-silting works on the Hundred Foot have been cut short for the season, after local residents expressed concern that material dug from the river included clay and peat. Worries were expressed that this might mean damage to the channel and ultimately the barrier banks—something the Environment Agency denies.

The District and County Councils have both written to the Environment Agency seeking more information. The Environment Agency has held a site visit, and the IDB called a special meeting and agreed a letter to the Environment Agency with a list of questions. I chair Cambridgeshire's Flood & Water Partnership, where the matter was also raised.

The Environment Agency has engaged an independent consultant to review what has happened. Local residents and the IDB are gathering as much information as possible about the construction of the Hundred Foot, and I have liaised with the Archives Manager to expedite access to the Cambridgeshire Archives for this purpose.

Swaffham Prior heating scheme

An electric bicycle ride took place last month to mark the works currently ongoing to install the flagship heat network in Swaffham Prior to get the community off oil and onto renewable energy. The event included a tour of the site where the energy centre is being built for the project. The media took interviews which reached as far as Japan. I was also interviewed for BBC Two's *Newsnight* about the project.

Sunnica planning application

Last month I was taken on a tour round part of the area proposed by Sunnica for their colossal (and controversial) commercial solar farm and battery storage stretching for miles across the East Cambridgeshire and West Suffolk countryside east of Burwell.

Cambridgeshire County Council has already expressed its concern to the Secretary of State about the scale of what is proposed. Our tour began at The Ark Church in Isleham, then took in Freckenham, Red Lodge, Kennett, La Hogue, and Chippenham—and that was just part of this massive proposal.

We saw some of the fantastic views, working farms, stud farms and other parts of this wonderful area which will be hugely affected if the Planning Inspectorate approves the plans.

Council officers are expecting that Sunnica will submit their planning application to the Secretary of State on Friday 12 November. The application will be determined by the Planning Inspectorate, not by the District or County Council.

Many thanks to Catherine Judkins and fellow local campaigners, and David Carford from the County Council, for giving up their time to talk through the scheme on site.

Ely Area Capacity Enhancements

The latest round of consultation on improving rail capacity in the Ely area opened for six weeks from Monday 18 October.

The Ely Area Capacity Enhancement (EACE) programme aims to allow more trains to run through Ely by improving rail capacity and reliability for passenger services between key destinations, and allowing more freight to operate between Felixstowe and the West Midlands.

Proposals and options have been put forward for

- Remodelling the track layout at Ely North junction
- Level crossings at Queen Adelaide
- Level crossings at Stonea, Burgess Drove (Waterbeach) and Well Engine foot crossing
- Upgrading of another fifteen level crossings across the wider area.

The feedback from this consultation will help to progress the designs. Network Rail will then decide preferred options and, subject to further funding, submit a Transport and Works Act Order in winter 2022/23. The results of this consultation, together with the results from the Ely South consultation, are expected to be published as part of the Round 3 consultation, currently planned for summer 2022 (subject to funding).

Consultation documents are available to view and download via the consultation area of the project webpage, along with an online survey form (link below). Hard copies of a consultation booklet are available on request: call Network Rail on 03457 114141 or email elyareacapacityenhancements@networkrail.co.uk

<https://www.networkrail.co.uk/running-the-railway/our-routes/anglia/improving-the-railway-in-anglia/ely-area-capacity-enhancement/>

Active travel

Early in the pandemic the County Council used a Government grant to implement the first tranche of experimental active travel schemes to increase walking and cycling. The Highways & Transport Committee on Thursday 4 November is being asked to make these permanent, including the removal of a length of parking along Station Road in Ely, and the installation of a segregated cycle lane.

Healthwatch

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a huge impact on care home residents and on their friends and families and staff, says Cambridgeshire & Peterborough

Healthwatch. Their new survey records residents' experiences and challenges over the last 12-18 months, and asks what life is like now.

The survey aims to capture the experiences of residents and their families. Whether it's a good or bad experience, Healthwatch says it can use feedback to improve services for everyone.

Responses will be anonymised and shared with NHS and local authority care teams in our area. Hearing residents' experiences helps them learn from the challenges and prepare better for the future.

<https://www.healthwatchcambridgeshire.co.uk/news/2021-10-12/tell-us-your-care-home-experiences>

Meanwhile on the Combined Authority

The Combined Authority has submitted its Bus Service Improvement Plan to the Government as required. As Chair of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee I have expressed my concerns to the Combined Authority that the Plan was not published before the Board agreed to submit it, giving no opportunity to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee or the public to read the document or ask questions before it was approved.

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee formally met the Mayor for the first time last month, to ask questions about transport matters including bus services, electric vehicles, and the ending of the CAM project and what this means for public transport in Cambridgeshire.

Monday 22 November sees the first Mayoral Question Time—this will be a regular opportunity for the Overview & Scrutiny Committee to hold the new Mayor to account, and will focus on affordable housing and the new Mayor's priorities.

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 November 2021
- Tuesday 7 December 2021

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

Cllr Lorna Dupré

County Councillor for the Sutton division