

# Cllr Lorna Dupré

## MONTHLY REPORT NOVEMBER 2022

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### BUSES

#### Combined Authority

The Combined Authority's bus procurement concluded last month, with all eighteen routes which had been cut by Stagecoach, along with all of the five reduced services, seeing some level of service reinstated. The 39 which serves Sutton and Witchford, has been covered apart from the section between Chatteris and March, and rebranded the Zipper 2.

The Combined Authority had set aside £1.7M for subsidies to operators to keep them running. Currently, the total cost is expected to be about £1.25M because bus operators were limited in what services they were prepared to provide. The Combined Authority will be monitoring how the new services are working.

As well as ensuring vital bus services continue between October and the end of March 2023, the Combined Authority is working to put in place a sustainable and affordable bus network from April 2023 onwards.

All this is a sharp reminder of the reality of the current deregulated bus system, and the problems caused by sixty per cent of bidding authorities in England, including Cambridgeshire & Peterborough, receiving no Government funding for their Bus Service Improvement Plans (BSIPs).

The Combined Authority's Overview & Scrutiny Committee was told in a report from its lead member for buses that two reasons had been given for the failure of the Department for Transport to fund Cambridgeshire's Bus Service Improvement Plan:

1. in DfT's view we had insufficient commitment to road charging, active travel and bus priority schemes in our area; and
2. the DfT subsequently applied a deprivation index score to each BSIP submitted and given our high overall growth, this meant that the money tended to be allocated in the north of England rather than to us.

A refreshed Bus Strategy for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough is due to be presented to the Combined Authority's Transport & Infrastructure Committee in November, alongside a refreshed Bus Service Improvement Plan and a case for Government investment.

Work is also continuing to further develop the business case for a franchised bus network in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, but this will need money for the necessary investment in the service.

Passengers with questions about bus services can email [passenger.transport@cambridgeshirepeterborough-ca.gov.uk](mailto:passenger.transport@cambridgeshirepeterborough-ca.gov.uk)

## Greater Cambridge Partnership

The Greater Cambridge Partnership has now opened its public consultation on its proposals for a significant expansion of bus services in Cambridge and the city's travel to work area, including East Cambridgeshire, to be paid for by the introduction of a congestion charge in Cambridge in 2027/28.

It is very important indeed that local residents here in East Cambridgeshire read the proposals, complete the survey, and let the Greater Cambridge Partnership know what the proposals would mean for them.

The survey closes at midday on Friday 23 December. The consultation website, including the survey, brochure, map book, frequently asked questions, and contact details, can be found at <https://consultcambs.uk.engagementhq.com/making-connections-2022>

## Mayoral precept

The Mayor of Cambridgeshire & Peterborough meets regularly and informally with leaders of the member councils of the Combined Authority. One idea he raised in one such meeting was whether there might be a case for setting a Mayoral precept to be added to the Council Tax, to fund bus services beyond March 2023. This suggestion was then leaked to the media, with some council leaders then taking the opportunity to oppose the idea from the outset.

I understand Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Council would both have a veto over such a proposal.

A bus network covering more than just a few key urban routes will need public subsidy, and the money for this will need to come from somewhere—either central government, or local government.

The Government has already refused to fund Cambridgeshire's Bus Service Improvement Plan once. Will we be more fortunate this time? The Chancellor of the Exchequer is also known to be looking for billions of pounds in spending cuts. How likely are we to see the kind of Government investment we need?

Locally, some politicians have opposed the Greater Cambridge Partnership congestion charge proposals, and also opposed the idea of a Mayoral precept. If we continue to receive no money from central government, and if all sources of local government funding for improved buses are opposed, how else will the necessary investment in bus services be raised to move Cambridgeshire to a more sustainable franchised model of bus transport?



## COMMUNITIES, SOCIAL MOBILITY & INCLUSION (COSMIC)

### Household Support Fund

The Committee meets on Tuesday 1 November and is being asked to agree eligibility criteria for the third round of the Household Support Fund (October 2022 to March 2023). The amount available for the third round of funding is £3,581,424. This is proposed to be spent once again on school meal vouchers for the school holidays, and on direct one-off grants to eligible households. It is proposed that such grants should be raised from £100 to £110 to reflect increasing inflation.

### Cost of Living Day

I attended the Cost of Living Event at Ely Library at the end of October. Exhibitors included Age UK, Cambridgeshire County Council's early years service, the district council's Home Improvement Agency, the Warm Hubs scheme, Cambridgeshire Skills, Ely Foodbank, and P3 charity.

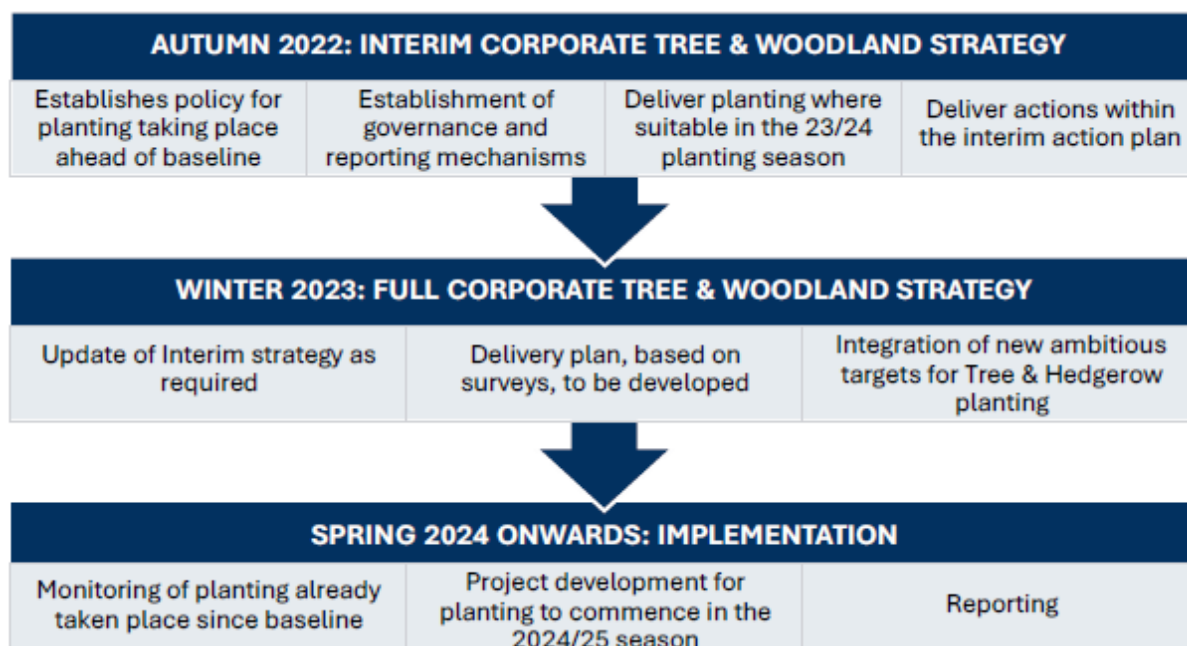
Exhibitors told me not only that the exhibition enabled them to give information to residents in need, but also that it was an opportunity for the different services to meet each other and discuss how they could work better together.

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## ENVIRONMENT & GREEN INVESTMENT

### Interim Tree & Woodland Strategy

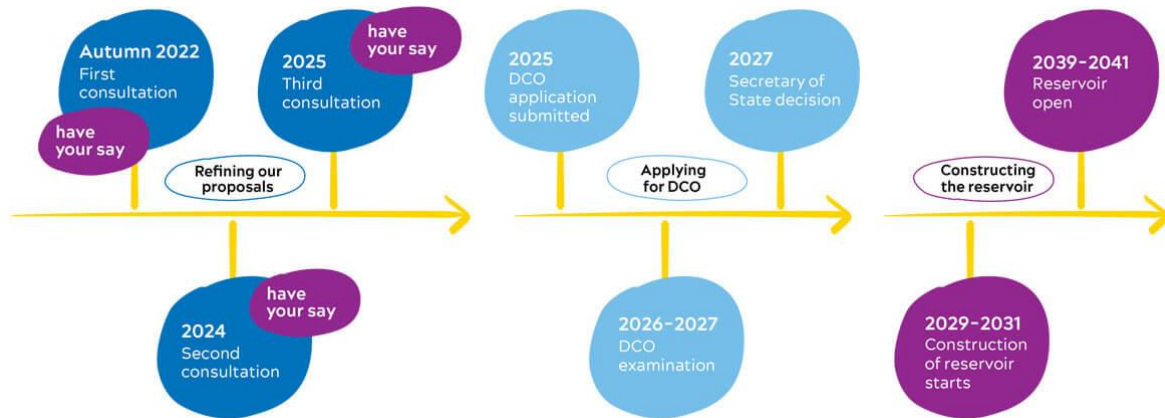
The Environment & Green Investment Committee approved an Interim Tree Strategy last month. The interim strategy will serve while the Council gathers information about what trees the Council has, where they are, and how the Council can improve and expand its tree assets. Once the Council has this baseline information it can start to plan for the future.



## Fens Reservoir

Anglian Water and Cambridge Water have now announced their preferred location for a new Fens reservoir north of Chatteris.

The timeline for such a big project is a long one, with multiple consultations, an application to the Secretary of State, construction expected to start in 2029-31 and the reservoir to open in 2039-41. The indicative timeline is as follows.



The water companies' initial survey on the design of the reservoir, and what people would like to see as part of the project, will be open for public comment until Wednesday 21 December at <https://www.fensreservoir.co.uk/>

Details of public events in Fenland and community webinars are available at <https://www.fensreservoir.co.uk/our-proposals/consultation-overview/>

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## HIGHWAYS & TRANSPORT

### Local Highways Improvements

The improvements I reported in October to the Local Highways Improvement process have now been agreed, and the new timetable is as follows.

- Application window opens **Monday 31 October 2022**
- Application window closes at 5:00PM on **Friday 6 January 2023**
- Feasibility studies undertaken **February to April 2023**
- Panel meetings **May 2023**
- Report to committee including prioritised list for approval **June 2023**
- Programming, design, consultation **July 2023 to March 2024**
- Pricing and construction **March to August 2024**

### 20MPH scheme

Proposals for the process to award funding for applications for 20MPH schemes will be reported to the December meeting of the Highways & Transport Committee. I have been pressing for this to be put in place as soon as possible.

## HGV policy

The draft HGV policy I reported last month has now been approved with a couple of minor additions about length and width restriction applications. <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/travel-roads-and-parking/roads-and-pathways/heavy-or-abnormal-loads-on-the-highway/heavy-goods-vehicle-hgv-policy>

## Local road issues

### Drought damage

A number of the fen roads in the Sutton division have been adversely affected in the last few months by yet another dry summer. These include

- Chain Causeway, Sutton
- Black Bank, Little Downham
- California, Little Downham
- Main Drove, Little Downham
- Adventurers Drove, Pymoor
- Head Fen Drove, Pymoor
- Hundred Foot Bank, Pymoor
- Straight Furlong, Pymoor
- Westmoor Common B1411, Pymoor

Huge lengths of these roads are sinking and cracking, and the edges are failing. I have been in regular liaison with our Local Highways Officer about these, and we both met with local resident Clair Marie Mackness on site at Hundred Foot Bank, where some remedial patching has since been carried out. However, the amount of work required for a permanent solution to these roads is far beyond anything that could be reasonably classed as maintenance or repair, and will only get worse with climate change. I am making representations about this at local and national level.

### Road damage at The America Sutton

I have received regular and justified complaints about the state of the road at the bottom of The America. A request was submitted by the Local Highways Officer for a road closure in mid-January to do this work and also some patching at Chain Causeway—such requests must be submitted at least twelve weeks in advance. However, we both agree that this cannot wait, so he has requested a date from the Council's contractor to carry out this work as an emergency.

### Road markings at Windmill Walk Sutton

Following a complaint from a resident about the refreshed Keep Clear road marking in Windmill Walk, the Local Highways Officer has agreed to remove the box round the marking, which loses an additional parking space, as soon as his budget is topped up in the next financial year.

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## FIRE AUTHORITY

### Budget

The Chief Fire Officer for Cambridgeshire has warned that there will have to be reductions to the service unless the way in which it is funded changes.

As part of national negotiations a revised cost of living pay award of five per cent was offered for firefighters. Combining this with the offer already on the table for support staff, Cambridgeshire's fire service will be in budget deficit of at least £1.1m at the start of April 2023. CFO Chris Strickland said the service wanted its employees to be given a pay increase that reflected the current rate of inflation, but also had a responsibility to deliver a balanced budget, and these were currently at odds.

At the moment, fire and rescue services can only ask for a maximum of two per cent increase in council tax, which is around an additional £1.50 per year for Cambridgeshire council taxpayers (based on a Band D property).

The Chair of the Fire Authority, Cllr Edna Murphy, said: "This year's increase in fires, as a result of the prolonged hot, dry weather, has shown us that we will need the fire service more in the future, not less."

### Meanwhile on the Combined Authority

The Combined Authority will consider its bus strategy this month, at the Transport & Infrastructure Committee, and again at its Board meeting.

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee last month held a Mayoral Question Time at which Mayor Nik Johnson received questions from members of the Committee. Many of these were about bus services, as this has been such a serious issue for many residents, but others were more general in nature about climate change, active travel, the Combined Authority's Improvement Plan, affordable housing, skills, and the overall priorities and direction of travel of the Combined Authority.

## MEET YOUR COUNCILLOR

- **Sutton:** Cllr Mark Inskip and I will be holding our surgery in the Community Room at the school on Monday 7 November from 6:30 to 7:30PM.
- **Little Downham:** I hope to be at the Book Café in the Village Hall on Friday 25 November from 10:00 to 11:00AM.
- **Witchford:** my next surgery will be on Monday 28 November, 6:30 to 7:30PM, in St Andrew's Hall in Main Street.

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**Cllr Lorna Dupré**

County Councillor for the Sutton division