

Cllr Lorna Dupré

MONTHLY REPORT AUGUST 2023

GOVERNMENT PLANS HUGE EXPANSION OF CAMBRIDGE

Plans by the Government for a major expansion of dwellings, along with scientific research space, in and around Cambridge were leaked to the national press in mid-July. None of the local authorities affected had been informed or consulted about these plans.

A formal announcement was made by Michael Gove MP on the morning of Monday 24 July. This said:

Proposals will see Cambridge supercharged as Europe's science capital, addressing constraints that have left the city with some of the most expensive property markets outside London, and companies fighting over extremely limited lab space and commercial property with prices that rival London, Paris and Amsterdam.

These ambitious plans to support Cambridge include a vision for a new quarter of well-designed, sustainable and beautiful neighbourhoods for people to live in, work and study. A quarter with space for cutting-edge laboratories, commercial developments fully adapted to climate change and that is green, with life science facilities encircled by country parkland and woodland accessible to all who live in Cambridge.

Any development of this scale will have substantial infrastructure requirements. The government will deliver as much of the infrastructure and affordable housing as possible using land value capture – with the local area benefiting from the significant increase in land values that can occur when agricultural land is permitted for residential and commercial development. Land values will reflect the substantial contributions required to unlock the development.

A Cambridge Delivery Group, chaired by Peter Freeman and backed by £5 million, will be established to begin driving forward this project. The Group will work to turn this vision into a reality, taking a lead on identifying the housing, infrastructure, services and green space required. It will also consider options for an appropriate delivery mechanism that will be needed to lead the long-term work on planning, land acquisition and engagement with developers, starting in this Parliament but running through the next few years as development takes shape.

In the meantime, the Delivery Group will take forward immediate action to address barriers such as water scarcity across the city, including:

- Convening a Water Scarcity Working Group with the Environment Agency, Ofwat, central and local government and innovators across industries to identify and accelerate plans to address water constraints. The Group will include all relevant partners to understand what it would take to accelerate building the proposed new Fens Reservoir and enabling Cambridge to reach its economic potential.
- Supporting the council in efforts to make sure new developments proposed as part of the local plan can be as sustainable as possible, including whether new houses in planned developments such as Waterbeach and Hartree can be made more water efficient. To support this, the government is announcing today a £3 million funding pot to help support measures to improve the water efficiency of existing homes and commercial property across Cambridge, to help offset demands created by new developments in the local plan.
- The government will also take definitive action to unblock development where it has stalled, providing £500,000 of funding to assist with planning capacity. Cambridge City Council, Anglian Water, Land Securities PLC and Homes England will work together to accelerate the relocation of water treatment works in Northeast Cambridge (subject to planning permission), unlocking an entire new City quarter – delivering approaching 6,000 sustainable well-designed homes in thriving neighbourhoods – as well as schools, parks and over 1 million square feet of much needed commercial life science research space.

This is obviously extremely significant news for our area, already struggling with water stress and huge transport deficits, as well as an acute shortage of affordable housing.

The original leak referred to 250,000 additional homes in Cambridge. The announcement by Michael Gove neither repeats these numbers, nor offers any others. It is not specific about the geographical extent of the plans, though it adds Waterbeach in South Cambridgeshire to its reference to Hartree, the new name of the water treatment works area of North East Cambridge which is earmarked for redevelopment.

To our already five tiers of local government (parish, district, Greater Cambridge Partnership, county, Mayoral combined authority) the announcement adds a sixth layer, to which it is unclear how the others will relate.

Large amounts of work have already gone into development planning for Greater Cambridge (Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire) by the respective local councils, with a robust evidence base and following local consultation. These top-down Government plans appear to ride roughshod over local community voices and environmental concerns.

FULL COUNCIL

Infrastructure Levy

I successfully proposed a motion opposing Government proposals to change how developer contributions to community infrastructure are calculated and apportioned. The current system needs reform, but the Government's plans risk achieving fewer affordable homes and less infrastructure like schools and transport. County and district councils, housebuilders, Shelter and other organisations have all written to the Government asking for the proposals to be withdrawn and discussions to be held about a better alternative.

School uniform

The cost of some school uniforms can be a problem for many families, especially if they require a lot of branded items. So I was delighted to vote for a successful motion from my colleague Cllr Michael Atkins (Hardwick) asking the council to work with and support Cambridgeshire schools in developing fair and effective uniform policies, and to highlight existing best practice.

Farming

I also backed a motion on farming, committing the council to seek to procure local food for council events where possible, support the NFU Back British Farming campaign, promote opportunities for young people in farming, consider 'rural-proofing' county council policies against disproportionate impact on rural communities, and write to the Government to call for protection of UK food standards and agricultural workers' rights. The motion also expressed concern about labour shortages and called for a more flexible seasonal worker scheme.

Early years

A final motion to the Full Council last month expressed concerns that in times of austerity the implementation of new child care entitlements (see below) will mean cuts in funding per hour, will not allow sufficiently for training and supervision time in an already stretched workforce, and will disadvantage children needing additional special needs support. It also noted the national recruitment and retention crisis in early years provision. The motion committed the council to doing what it can to mitigate all this.

Constitution

The council agreed a number of constitutional changes, notably the addition of performance and strategic partnerships to the remit of the Strategy & Resources Committee, and the creation of a new Assets & Procurement Committee.

STRATEGY & RESOURCES

This Land

This Land, the County Council's wholly owned property development company, presented its annual business plan to the Strategy & Resources Committee last

month. This Land currently has £119.702M in funding advanced from the County Council. The council is receiving revenue interest on the loans of £113.851M within that amount, and has received over £75M from This Land for the sale of property at market value. The loans are currently scheduled for repayment to the council between August 2026 and February 2029.

The key headlines from the 2023 plan submitted by This Land include

- Delivering approximately 863 new homes in total (490 supplied by This Land directly, with the remainder as “master-developer”) with 78 completed to date.
- 387 of these homes will be affordable representing 45% of the portfolio
- Ambitions to extend the commitment to affordable housing, including acquisition of further land from the Council to enable this
- Securing additional land under option to ensure the continuation of the business in to the medium and long term
- Disposal of assets which do not meet the company’s commercial appraisal criteria (based on size and profit)
- Commitment to deliver Environment, Social & Governance policies and to work closely with the housebuilding supply chain to reduce carbon footprint to net zero

Compared to last year’s plan, the loans will be fully repaid two years earlier, the total interest repaid to the council reduced by £3M, 62 fewer homes delivered, the total expected profit reduced by £11.5M, and the residual cash balance in 2029 £0.7M rather than £16,3M.

In East Cambridgeshire, This Land now expects to sell Burwell Phase 3A rather than develop it directly, and to accelerate the land sale at Soham Eastern Gateway by eighteen months and reduce by 40 the number of homes planned.

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion

The council’s new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy, previously considered by COSMIC committee, was agreed and recommended to the Full Council where it was approved. It focuses on the council’s workforce, communities and services, with three guiding principles—taking evidence-based action, listening to the voices of everyone, and having a transparent and robust approach that delivers meaningful change.

ADULTS & HEALTH

Primary care

The Adults & Health Committee scrutiny of primary care, which I requested following the events of February and March at Priors Field, took place at the end of June.

The committee was told that 427,534 primary care appointments took place in April this year—the equivalent of 4 in 10 residents of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough visiting their GP practice in one month. 290,979 of those appointments were face to face, and 195,982 appointments happened on the day on which contact was made. 68 per cent of appointments are still delivered face to face (figures from April 2023).

Funding for primary care is vital, and much more economic than hospital appointments. A single hospital visit costs the same as the amount a GP receives to treat a patient for the whole year. Multi-disciplinary teams in primary care settings work well; some non-GP practitioners are trained up to and beyond the level of a GP in certain cases.

The vulnerability of the entire NHS system was very evident, mostly due to workforce constraints including shortages and emigration. The *Washington Post* had recently led with the headline *How the UK became a terrible place to be a doctor*. Of the 88 practices in Cambridgeshire, thirteen were rated red in terms of vulnerability, and only fifteen or sixteen rated green. It was observed that this left a large number of practices in the amber category.

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

Holiday voucher scheme

The County Council continues to provide its holiday voucher scheme using the government household support fund and funding agreed at the council’s annual budget meeting. For the summer holidays the council will be providing £75 per eligible child spread across two vouchers. The first voucher for £37.50 was sent on Saturday 22 July and the second voucher will be sent on Saturday 12 August. Parents can choose from 10 different supermarkets. Details of the scheme at www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/children-and-families/schools-learning/help-with-school-learning-costs/cambridgeshire-holiday-voucher-scheme

Early years

Meanwhile the County Council has started work on increasing capacity in the early years sector as the government will be providing more free child care at a younger age. The changes are as follows.

Date	Eligibility	Can access
April 2024	All working parents of two-year-olds	15 hours per week
September 2024	All working parents of children aged nine months up to three years	15 hours per week
September 2024	Primary aged child	8:00AM – 6:00PM childcare
September 2025	All working parents of children aged nine months up to three years	30 hours free childcare per week

The Department for Education (DfE) have published an updated version of the Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework which will come into effect from Monday 4 September. The main changes are

- a change to the current statutory minimum staff-to-child ratios in England for two-year-olds from 1:4 to 1:5
- clarifying that childminders can care for more than the currently specified maximum of three young children, when caring for siblings of children they already care for, or when caring for their own child
- clarifying that 'adequate supervision' while children are eating means that children must be within sight *and* hearing of an adult (rather than the current wording of 'sight *or* hearing').

School funding

The government announced its agreement for a 6.5 per cent increase in teacher and leadership pay scales in mid-July. The government will fund three per cent, with the remaining 3.5 per cent coming from school budgets.

Free school meals

Take-up of free school meals in Cambridgeshire has increased by 52 per cent in the last three years as living standards in the UK continue to fall. 21 per cent of all children in Cambridgeshire now qualify for the 'pupil premium' schools receive for children from low income households. Details and criteria at www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/children-and-families/schools-learning/help-with-school-learning-costs/free-school-meals

COMMUNITIES, SOCIAL MOBILITY & INCLUSION (COSMIC) Cambridgeshire Priorities Capital Fund

A reminder that this fund is until 24 September, for bids of up to £40,000 for capital projects to improve or upgrade community buildings and assets. www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/council/communities/cambridgeshire-priorities-capital-fund

Community energy pilot project

I am delighted to have persuaded the council that East Cambridgeshire should be a pilot area for decentralised decisions about community energy. I am currently in discussion with council officers about the detail of this.

ENVIRONMENT & GREEN INVESTMENT

Low carbon heating programme for council buildings

Design work is still in progress for the six projects in the third phase of the County Council's programme to decarbonise its buildings. An application to the Low Carbon Skills Fund was unfortunately unsuccessful as the scheme was

heavily over-subscribed. However, the council intends to apply for the next round of Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme grant expected in October.

Friday Bridge 'heat pump ready' project

Councillors have agreed to progress a trial project in Friday Bridge in Fenland, to provide a 'one stop shop' approach to make it easier for people with gas heating to install air source heat pumps as a more environmentally friendly option.

Local Area Energy Planning

A partnership group led by the County Council is developing 'local area energy planning' across Cambridgeshire. This is a data-driven, 'whole system' approach that considers how to decarbonise the entire energy system across electricity, gas, heat, cooling, and transport systems. A plan will set out the change required to enable Cambridgeshire's energy system to meet our net zero ambition and put communities in Cambridgeshire at the heart of the energy transition, providing opportunities to engage and benefit from this change.

Outcomes will include a dynamic digital platform for mapping, grid-scale planning for UK Power Networks to feed into their business plans with Ofgem, a high-level business case, five-year programme, and proposals for community energy (see news about the East Cambs pilot above). Officers are also hard at work putting together a strategy for community energy following the adoption of a community energy policy for Cambridgeshire in March. This work will inform future plans, strategies, funding bids and Government and private sector investment.

Anglian Waste Water Treatment Plant Relocation

The council is being consulted on the various stages of Anglian Water's application to move its waste water treatment plant from north east Cambridge to Horningsea, to make way for new housing in Cambridge. The decision will be made by planning inspectors with reference to the Secretary of State.

Biodiversity and green spaces

The council is continuing to work with its partners to develop its Local Nature Recovery Strategy but is still waiting for the Government to carry out its national launch so that we organise our own local launch. Survey work is ongoing for the council's Biodiversity Strategy.

National Highways is developing a strategy to replant the many trees that died after planting along the A14. 162,000 plants have been ordered, and replanting is on course to start in October.

Flood and water

The Local Resilience Forum has awarded £4,000 to the County Council for Flood Kit storage for communities across Cambridgeshire. This complements a

previous round of funding to provide flood kit equipment to communities, and will provide weatherproof, secure storage.

The second annual Flood Group Conference for Cambridgeshire will take place on Thursday 21 September at the Burgess Hall in St Ives.

HIGHWAYS & TRANSPORT

New transport model

The County Council is leading the development of a new Regional Transport Model for Cambridgeshire & Peterborough. Work on this has included highways surveys at 523 locations across the county, with bus passenger surveys at 23 bus stops and rail surveys at eleven railway stations.

Post Covid passenger numbers

Use of Park & Rides is now up to 93 per cent of pre-Covid levels. The council is also working with partners to trial parcel drop boxes at three of the Park & Ride sites. Passenger numbers on the guided busway are now around 63 per cent of pre-Covid levels—some of this reduction may be due to more employer flexibility around working from home.

Road safety education

73 schools in Cambridgeshire are now engaged with Modeshift STARS, a national award scheme which offers support and rewards to schools for taking steps to promote safer, greener, healthier travel. 30 primary schools in the county now have Junior Travel Ambassadors who promote walking to school. Five senior schools are also engaged with a similar Youth Travel Ambassador scheme.

A10/A142 BP roundabout

Options are continuing to be developed over the summer, concluding in early autumn with an options report for safe crossing. Meanwhile the Strategic Outline Business Case for the A10 Ely to the A14 is being reviewed, before progressing to an Outline Business Case.

Verge cutting

I have passed on to the council a number of complaints from residents about overgrown hedges obscuring sight lines at junctions and entrances / exits.

Witchford Village College

I reported recently that officers had agreed to confer with the owner of Cathedral View mobile home park before confirming the proposed build-out between Cathedral View and Witchford Village College. They have now identified a 'swing wand bollard' all are happy with, and which will not obstruct the movement of mobile homes to and from Cathedral View.

Roadworks and repairs

The Brook Sutton will be closed except for access to properties in the closure zone between 24 July and 31 August for the installation of the two new crossings—one just north of the High Street to allow crossing east-west, and the other near the school. The closure area will be between the High Street and the mini roundabout leading to Stirling Way and St Andrew's Close.

Pavements at Eagles Lane, Orchard Estate and Kiln Close are due for work in November and December. The timetable is weather-dependent so may vary.

ENGAGEMENTS

- On Wednesday 5 July, I attended the Congregation at the Senate House in Cambridge for the inauguration of the new Vice Chancellor of the University of Cambridge, Professor Deborah Prentice.
- One Sunday 16 July, I was one of the studio guests on BBC Politics East. We discussed the auctioning of fish in Brixham, the Government lack of commitment to rejoining the EU Horizon science programme, and the wait for Nadine Dorries to resign as MP for Mid Bedfordshire.
- On Wednesday 19 July, I was part of a County Council deputation welcoming HRH the Duke of Gloucester on a tour of Lower Valley Farm in Fulbourn, the County Council's biodiversity offsetting site.

Meanwhile on the Combined Authority

The Combined Authority continues its Improvement focus, and is working to put more of the basics in place including new human resources policies and recognising three trade unions (Unison, GMB and Unite).

The Board is being asked to agree a budget to refresh the evidence base of the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Independent Economic Review. The original Review was published five years ago and is in need of an update.

The Board is also being asked to decide whether or not to discontinue support and further grant funding to community homes groups. The Combined Authority's Environment & Sustainable Communities Committee (on which I sit) was unable to agree a recommendation on this. East Cambridgeshire District Council objected to the proposal, but is not affected by it as it declined to take part in the Combined Authority's support system and makes its own arrangements.

The Local Transport & Connectivity Plan, due to be considered in June—but withdrawn as the Leader of Peterborough was threatening to veto it—will now not be brought back to the Board until September at the earliest.

MEET YOUR COUNCILLORS

- **Sutton:** Cllr Mark Inskip and I will hold our surgery in the school Community Room on Monday 4 September and Monday 2 October, 6:30 to 7:30PM. There will be no Sutton surgery in August.
- **Witchford:** Cllr Dr Caroline Shepherd and I will hold our surgery in St Andrew's Hall in Main Street on Monday 21 August and Monday 18 September, 6:30 to 7:30PM. There will be no Witchford surgery in July.
- **Little Downham:** I hope to be at the Book Café in the Village Hall in Little Downham on Friday 25 August and Friday 29 September from 10:00 to 11:00AM.

Meanwhile I can also be contacted

- by email at lorna@lornadupre.org.uk
- on Facebook
- by phone on 07930 337596

Cllr Lorna Dupré

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