

Cllrs Lorna Dupré and Mark Inskip

MONTHLY REPORT NOVEMBER 2023

East Cambridgeshire Growth and Infrastructure Fund

The East Cambridgeshire Growth and Infrastructure Fund has reopened for applications.

The scheme will provide capital funding towards the delivery of local infrastructure (including but not limited to transport, health care, social, cultural, education and recreational facilities) to assist, promote, encourage, develop and secure sustainable growth and enable people to live and/or work in East Cambridgeshire. Examples could include cycle and footpath improvements, or new community facilities such as village halls and public open spaces.

The deadline for applications is 5:00PM on Friday 8 December 2023.

More information about the scheme and the application form can be found at <https://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/business/east-cambridgeshire-growth-and-infrastructure-fund>

If you have any queries please telephone 01353 665555 or email gandifund@eastcambs.gov.uk

Crematorium at Mepal

We have now been told that a business case for the administration's crematorium at Mepal will be presented to the council's Finance & Assets Committee on Thursday 25 January, and then to Full Council at the Budget meeting on Tuesday 20 February.

Empty homes

At the October meeting of Full Council, Cllr Christine Whelan (Ely West) noted the growing number of properties let by Sanctuary housing that are empty and have been so for over a year.

The Council's leadership rejected a request from Cllr Whelan to ask Sanctuary Housing to attend a meeting of the Council's Operational Services Committee to answer questions from members about its empty properties. They propose to organise a behind-closed-doors seminar instead, which is disappointing given the high level of public interest in the shortage of social housing in the district.

East Cambs Street Scene

Following the damning report from the Council's Chief Executive into the Council's own in-house company East Cambs Street Scene, changes have been made to the composition of the company Board to address the most obvious failures of governance at the company.

The changes also include a requirement to put in place another formal escalation process to oblige ECSS to report in-year overspends or underspends of at least £50,000 to the Council's Operational Services Committee within an agreed parameter; and revised Key Performance Indicators.

Cllr Charlotte Cane (Bottisham) proposed an amendment to these proposals, on the grounds that

1. The proposed escalation process contradicts—and indeed weakens—the Shareholder Agreement, which requires that the Company will maintain effective and appropriate control systems in relation to the financial, accounting and record-keeping functions of the Company, and provide to the Shareholder full details of any actual or prospective material change in the Business or the financial position or affairs of the Company, as soon as such details are available.
2. The revised Key Performance Indicators should be reviewed by the council's Operational Services Committee.
3. The revised Risk Register is a cause for concern, with a high risk of ECSS failing to deliver on its business plan or to deliver a cost effective, sustainable and high quality domestic waste collection and street cleansing service.
4. The Chief Executive should be instructed to commission a fully independent review of the governance of ECSS.

This amendment, which we supported, was defeated; and no explanation was given of why the requirement in the existing Shareholder Agreement to advise the council of the overspend was not followed. We are concerned by the apparent complacency of the council's leadership in the light of these serious issues.

Local Plan single issue review

At its Full Council meeting in October, the district council approved the 'single issue review of its local plan. The review was commissioned three years ago, and has now completed its examination by a Planning Inspector. It is a very limited review, with a number of 'take it or leave it' recommendations.

This Council's Local Plan is now eight and a half years old. If it were a human being it would be in junior school by now. We have consistently argued that this Council should have embarked on a more significant update of the Plan a long

time ago. The current Plan has failed to protect residents from inappropriate development in several locations across the district, and it is now hopelessly out of date in the face of the threat of climate change.

The introduction of a standard national method to determine a local housing need gives a housing requirement of 5,398 for the nine years from 2022 to 2031. Added to the approximately 3,600 dwellings completed in the eleven years from 2011 to 2022, this will mean a total figure of around 9,000 new dwellings in East Cambridgeshire between 2011 and 2031.

In order to achieve this, the rate of house building completions will need to increase very significantly indeed, from an average 419 a year over the past twenty years, to 600 a year for the next nine years. The Planning Inspector said:

“There is under delivery of 2,688 dwellings in the plan period to date against the adopted housing requirement. Despite the Council identifying a potential housing land supply (untested in this examination) of 7,371 dwellings to 2031, the delivery of the housing requirement in full for the plan period as a whole, including the under provision, would require a significant increase in the annual delivery of dwellings from historic levels, and over a prolonged period.”

At least as important as the number of homes is their affordability. The Inspector says: “The evidence suggests that there would have to be a significant uplift in housing provision for the identified affordable housing need to be met in full.”

As the cost of living crisis continues to squeeze thousands of local households, the news from this limited review is that East Cambridgeshire residents should prepare for an increase of around fifty per cent in the rate of house building, which will fail to meet the needs of our area for affordable homes. That is a challenge the council needs to face up to in the remaining years of the Plan.

Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme

Once again, the District Council leadership voted down a proposal from Cllr Alison Whelan (Ely North), seconded by Cllr Mark Inskip, to reduce to zero the level of council tax paid by the very worst-off households in the district.

While the cost of living crisis continues to push more and more families into poverty, a temporary respite from council tax bills would have been a welcome help, and a sign of support from the council in difficult times. Furthermore, the cost to the Council of £24,345.76 to adopt a minimum contribution of zero could be less than the cost of pursuing irrecoverable debts for council tax.

Meet your councillors

Our next surgeries will take place on

- Monday 4 December, 6:30-7:30PM
- Monday 8 January, 6:30-7:30PM

in the Community Room at Sutton School. Between surgeries, residents can continue to contact us by email, Facebook, or phone.

Cllr Lorna Dupré

Cllr Mark Inskip

District Councillors for the Sutton ward