

Cllrs Lorna Dupré and Mark Inskip

MONTHLY REPORT MARCH 2024

Full Council meeting

Crematorium at Mepal

The council's ruling Conservative administration pushed through their plans at February's Full Council meeting to build their crematorium at Mepal, as they did in committee. We made the same arguments as at committee, but to no avail.

Budget

The Conservative budget was approved by a majority, with votes cast predictably on group lines.

The Liberal Democrat group proposed an amendment which would have

- Removed all budget lines relating to the crematorium, returning millions of pounds to be spent on projects in local communities
- Added the costs to establish Civil Parking Enforcement in the district, paid for mostly from reserves
- Doubled the council's Environment fund to increase the council's activity on decarbonisation and biodiversity
- Added an officer to support local communities making grant applications, and a sum for matched funding for bids.

This would have been funded from savings in staff costs from posts that are left vacant during the year. Once again, the votes were cast predictably.

Both groups proposed a council tax freeze.

Council allowances

There was unanimity on proposals to accept changes in councillor allowances put forward by the independent remuneration panel.

These included an increase in costs claimable by councillors to cover their caring responsibilities when attending council duties. This should help make councillors more representative of the residents of the district. The proposals also include an increase in allowances for Planning Committee members, who meet more frequently and for longer than other councillors.

ECSS management fee

In-house council company East Cambs Street Scene requested—and was granted—an increase of £200,000 in its management fee from the council.

A Liberal Democrat amendment, which was predictably defeated, said:

Council notes with grave concern that having requested an additional fee of up to £500,000 in February 2023 and having brought a forecast full year overspend of £80,000 to members' attention in November 2023 ECSS is now requesting an additional fee of up to £200,000 for 2023/24 and:

- approves ECSS carrying forward the overspend into 2024/25;
- requires the Directors of ECSS to provide 18 month rolling management accounts to the ECDC S151 Officer by the 10th working day after each month end;
- instructs the external auditors for ECSS to review the governance and controls in the company and report to shareholders, detailing any weaknesses and recommendations for improvements to ensure delivery of agreed service levels on waste collection and street cleaning and sound financial management; and
- requires that a report be provided to Full Council on 25 July reporting on the results of the above so that Council can decide whether to increase the fee for 2024/25 to cover the 2023/24 overspend brought forward.

Constitutional changes

The council also, and again with a majority rather than unanimously, agreed changes to its constitution. We opposed these on the grounds that while there were some sensible and welcome changes, some of the proposals were not acceptable.

In particular, we wanted to establish an Audit Committee capable of functioning effectively and doing its job, which the agreed changes do not; and we wanted to establish an additional policy committee to tackle the weighty planning and environmental challenges facing East Cambridgeshire. These will instead be moved into the council's Finance & Assets Committee, which has enough significant business already.

Garden Close planning application (23/00870/RMM)

The latest planning application for the details of the development at Garden Close Sutton will be determined by the Planning Committee on Wednesday 6 March. The officers are recommending approval, but the same issues remain and both Mark and Lorna have registered to speak against the application.

At the same time, the appeal lodged by Abbey Homes against the council's refusal of their previous application is still awaiting determination by the Planning Inspectorate. Even if the council were to refuse the more recent application on 6 March, Abbey could still win their appeal.

(Exactly the same thing happened with the outline application, with an appeal and an additional application twin-tracking through the planning system.)

Food bank vouchers

The council has asked us to remind residents that its Housing & Community Advice team can issue food bank vouchers to all residents in East Cambridgeshire. Residents do not need to come into the offices in Ely—they can contact the team on 01353 665555 and the team can issue the code by phone, text or email.

Business grants now available

Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority has provided East Cambridgeshire District Council with over £300,000 from two Government funding streams. The money can be used to create or safeguard jobs, or bring new products to market. Businesses can also use it to invest in new technologies, processes or measures to improve productivity.

The programme is open to any existing SMEs located within the district with an annual turnover of under £10M. Applicant businesses should have in place a strong business plan that: demonstrates

- plans to grow the business
- how funding will be used to support this growth
- where applicable how funding will support job creation including apprenticeships
- how the funding will support the business to respond to market changes
- a clear delivery plan for the project that funding is supporting
- how the funding will be of benefit to the wider local economy, for example supply chains.

Businesses can apply between Monday 1 April 2024 and Friday 27 September 2024 and if successful grants will be awarded within six weeks of a full application being received. Interested businesses can submit an expression of interest form from 1 April.

The minimum award available to any successful applicant is £5000 and the maximum award is £30,000, up to a maximum of 80 per cent of the total project cost.

<https://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/business/rural-prosperity-funding>

Enquiries to kieran.carr@eastcambs.gov.uk

Meet your councillors

Our next surgeries will take place on

- Monday 4 March, 6:30-7:30PM
- Monday 8 April, 6:30-7:30PM (not 5 February previously advertised)

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