

MEPAL PARISH COUNCIL

Clerk: Mrs Karen Peck, email: clerk@mepalparish.org
Chairman: Mrs Lorna Williams

Annual Parish Meeting

TIME: 18.30
DATE: 6th May 2026
VENUE: Mepal Community Pavilion
Witcham Road
Mepal

Minutes

Present: Councillor Williams LW (Chair), Coe (JS) and Hunter AH. County Councillor Dupre and two members of the public.

01 TO RECORD APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.

Councillors Bradney and Gould
District Councillor Inskip

02 TO SIGN AND APPROVE MINUTES OF: a) 9th April 2025

The minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 9th April 2025 were agreed to be a true account the meeting and were duly signed by the Chair of the Parish Council.

03 TO RECEIVE COUNTY AND DISTRICT ANNUAL REPORTS

A full report from both County Councillor Dupre and Inskip was given and the full reports are attached to the minutes and also available on the Parish Council Website.

03 TO RECEIVE CHAIR'S ANNUAL REPORT

Full report attached

04 OPEN FORUM TO INCLUDE PRESENTATIONS FROM THE FOLLOWING LOCAL ORGANISATIONS, CLUBS AND SOCIETIES SUPPORTED BY THE PARISH COUNCIL:

- a) **MEPAL YOUTH CLUB**
No report was received
- b) **MEPAL EVENTS**
Full report attached
- c) **MEPAL FRIENDSHIP CLUB**
Full Report attached
- d) **SUTTON AND MEPAL FOOTBALL CLUB**
Full Report attached

A member of the public raised concerns about falling leaves from the tree in Laurel Close in front of her property and also the same in her back garden from the tree in the allotment (large tree on the verge in front of 13-17). The Council advised the tree survey had been conducted that week and as soon as the full report was received they would advise if any works had been raised.

Meeting closed at 19.01

EVERYONE WELCOME

.....
Chair of the Council

Lorna Williams

Dated: To be signed at the Annual Parish Meeting 2027

Chair's Annual Report 2024/25

It has been another busy and productive year for Mepal Parish Council, and I am pleased to reflect on the progress we have made together for the benefit of our village. As ever, our focus remains on maintaining and improving the spaces and facilities that matter most to residents, while continuing to plan responsibly for the future.

Pride of Place Grant and the new Glade at the bottom of the Recreation Field

The projects that resulted from the decision to apply for Pride of Place grants continue to make a visible difference for the village. The continued development of the Glade remains our focus, and over the past year we have worked to enhance it further so that it can be enjoyed by all ages. The installation of additional benches will provide more opportunities for residents to sit, meet and appreciate the surroundings. These improvements are about more than appearance; they are about creating welcoming, well-cared-for spaces that bring people together.

The areas around the snowdrops and tulips are being carefully managed (they started poking their heads out in February), and this adds colour and character to what used to be a barren area in Mepal. Thanks go to the volunteers who help keep these looking their best throughout the season, and Fiona in particular for her drive and enthusiasm. Their efforts are very much appreciated and make a real difference to how our village is perceived by both residents and visitors. The number of bird, bat and hedgehog boxes have all been increased with the remaining grant money and we have a mini project to install information signs around the field for a nature trail that is nearing completion.

Play Park Improvements

The Play Park has seen significant enhancement this year, building on previous improvements and responding to feedback from families and young people. The addition of a basketball hoop and ping pong table next to the play area has broadened the appeal of the space, encouraging more active use by older children and teenagers as well as younger ones. We have also installed a new swing set, further strengthening the play offer for younger families.

We are grateful for the support received from Mick George Ltd, whose contribution through their grant award has helped make these improvements possible. Investment in our recreational spaces is an investment in the wellbeing of our community, and it is encouraging to see the park being used regularly and positively.

In addition, a new bench for the park is scheduled to be installed shortly. This will provide additional seating for parents, grandparents and carers, and will complement the other enhancements made over the past year. We are confident this will further improve the comfort and accessibility of the space.

Village Infrastructure Improvements

Small changes can often have a meaningful impact. This year we have supported the installation of a new litter bin on Witcham Road to address concerns about waste in that area. Keeping our village clean and tidy remains a shared responsibility, and we hope this addition will encourage responsible disposal and help maintain the pleasant environment we all value.

On the Village Green, tree works have been undertaken to maintain the health of the trees and ensure there are no safety concerns and to maintain the Green as a welcoming, usable space. Sensible management of these natural assets is essential if we are to preserve them for future generations. The Village Green continues to host events and informal gatherings, and we are pleased to see it being used as a central hub for village life.

Pavilion and Community Use

The Council remains committed to exploring opportunities to increase the use of the Pavilion, located on the Recreation Field. We continue to promote it as a venue available for hire, whether for community groups, private events or recreational activities. Increasing its use not only brings people together but also helps ensure the sustainability of the facility through hire income.

We welcome ideas from residents about how the pavilion can best serve the community. The aim is to ensure it remains a valuable and well-used asset for Mepal.

Addressing Speeding – LHI Application

Concerns about speeding remain a consistent topic of discussion, and the Council continues to take this matter seriously, however one or two voices and opinions are not sufficient and is why we have asked residents to fill in a survey to judge the actual interest level. This year we have submitted a Local Highways Improvement (LHI) application for two additional MVAS (Mobile Vehicle Activated Signs). These signs are proven to raise driver awareness and encourage compliance with speed limits.

If successful, the additional MVAS units will allow us to rotate signs across more locations within the village, helping to address areas of particular concern. While enforcement sits outside the direct control of the Parish Council, we remain committed to using the tools available to us to promote safer driving conditions for all road users. To take action we need data and we also need community support.

New Councillors

We are pleased to welcome our three new Councillors to the Parish Council this year. Their willingness to step forward and contribute their time and energy to village matters is greatly appreciated. A healthy council relies on a range of perspectives and skills, and we look forward to working together in the year ahead. We still have vacancies for two councillors that we are keen to fill. Having a full council means a lighter workload for all councillors and also results in a wider view on any issues. This is a healthier position for any Parish Council.

I would like to thank all existing Councillors for their continued commitment, as well as our Clerk for her professionalism and support and our Maintenance Manager for his efforts to keep Mepal in good shape. The effective running of the Council depends on teamwork and dedication behind the scenes.

Looking Ahead

As we move into the coming year, our priorities remain clear: maintaining and improving village facilities, supporting community activities, addressing residents' concerns, and managing public funds responsibly. Progress may sometimes be incremental, but each improvement – whether a bench, a bin, a play feature or a safety initiative – contributes to the overall quality of life in Mepal.

Finally, I would like to thank residents for their ongoing engagement, feedback and support. A Parish Council works best when it listens and when it reflects the needs and aspirations of its community. Together, we will continue to ensure that Mepal remains a village we are proud to call home.

Lorna

Lorna Williams
Chairman of Mepal Parish Council
1st April 2026

DRAFT

FRIENDSHIP CLUB ANNUAL REPORT

Over the last year the Friendship club has held bring and buy sales, raffles cake sales some at the events that are held in the village to bring in some extra revenue to our club.

We have done craft mornings, games morning, this year we acquired some sports equipment from the council which is suitable for our members which gets them motivated at meetings, quiz's, bingo which every 3 months we have a bigger cash win for the club

We also have meals at the hall, afternoon tea, chocolate tasting, wine tasting at our club which is free for our members. We also have speakers; one spoke about Life on the ice in the Fens.

We also go out for meals once a month. At Christmas we treat our members to a free Christmas lunch and cheese and wine at the hall. We like to try and give as much as we can back to our members as we can and the grant from the Parish Council ensures we can give our members even more

Pam White

Club Secretary

DRAFT

Report from Mepal Events 2026

The aim of the Mepal Events group has always been to put on varied events of interest to all generations and, once again, we believe we have succeeded in doing this over the past year.

The Murder Mystery was very successful and the Summer Fete incorporating the Flowerpot Character Designs was of interest to young and old and was also well supported.

As time has passed and we have organized different kinds of events we have come to learn what does and does not work well. Good weather is always helpful; a strong wind meant that we couldn't use the Hall's outside gazebos for the Christmas Lights Evening and the atmosphere didn't seem quite so good this year and numbers were down, we believe because of the weather but other factors too. These are things we will think about when organizing for the future. The group members and the volunteers who come forward to help us all have other commitments so we are only anticipating organizing 2 or 3 events per year.

The Mepal Events summer event this year will be a Village Picnic and Games Afternoon at the Recreation Field on Sunday 5 July. But Mepal Events is acting as co-ordinator for a bigger community occasion – Mepal's Festival Fortnight. This will open on 20 June with The Friends of Mepal & Witcham School Fete and finish with the Village Picnic, but, within the fortnight, there's an opportunity for residents to display Scarecrow Characters, attend the Church Flower Festival Weekend and support any other events that village groups may wish to put on. Would the Parish Council like to take part in some way?

We do hope that villagers appreciate our efforts in providing opportunities for people to enjoy time together and are grateful for the support we receive from them and the Parish Council.

Mepal & Sutton Football Club Annual Report 2026

Mepal & Sutton FC are now in their third season back playing football at Mepal, with 3 adult's teams and 5 youth teams playing their home games at the venue.

The start of the season was a difficult, following the severe weather over the summer and some internal challenges, with the support of the Parish Council we were able to get the pitches ready for the start of the season.

With a clear schedule now provided to the parish council, for ongoing maintenance of the pitches, we are looking forward to ensuring the pitches are maintained over the summer to be in the best condition they can for the new season.

We still have several games to play between now and our end of season event on the 6th June, so lots more football to enjoy.

Next season we will operate our 5v5 pitches alongside the 9v9 and 11v11 at Mepal, providing an opportunity for our current U8s to enjoy the Mepal facilities too.

We look forward to our fourth season playing at Mepal.

Annual Report 2026



CLLR LORNA DUPRE

CLLR MARK INSKIP

**District councillors for the Sutton ward
(including Sutton, Mepal, Witcham, and Wentworth)**

1 The council

1.1 The composition of the council has varied over the last twelve months, but is currently 14 Conservatives, 12 Liberal Democrats and two Independents. The Conservatives are in a group with one Independent, and the Liberal Democrats in a group with the other.

John Hill retired as Chief Executive in December 2025 after a quarter of a century in post, and was replaced by Emma Grima in an internal-only process. We argued for a better process, but this was rejected.

2 Full council

2.1 The budget in February 2026 once again saw a council tax freeze proposed by both groups on the council. We proposed an alternative budget which would have supported the arts, tourism and the environment, re-established an independent Citizens Advice presence in Ely, and implemented civil parking enforcement, but this was defeated.

2.2 The cost of the Conservatives' unpopular, unwanted crematorium at Mepal continues to balloon. Councillors were told this would be a £13M fixed price contract, but from an original estimate of £9M, the price is now £14M. With the construction only half complete, the council has used up all its contingency funding, and in February it came back for an additional £300,000. The decision to approve the extra contingency funding was made on the casting vote of the Chair of the Council.

The money for the scheme has come from developer Community Infrastructure Levy contributions

which were intended to improve community amenities, at a huge cost to towns and villages across East Cambridgeshire in lost opportunities.

The purpose of the scheme was to use profits to subsidise council tax. Not only does it seem highly unlikely to us that there will be any profits to speak of, but with the end of East Cambridgeshire as a council under Local Government Reorganisation it is unlikely that the Leader's council tax subsidy ambition will be relevant either.

The plan is for the crematorium to open in the summer.

2.3 Mark successfully proposed a motion to improve the council's response to empty homes. As a result the council has resolved to develop a new Empty Homes Strategy by July 2026, with ambitious and realistic targets to reduce long-term empty homes and return them to use; and a business case and options to implement it, including investigation into a revolving loans fund, expanded enforcement capacity, an Empty Homes Partnership and officer, and an online 'Report an Empty' portal to connect buyers and renovators.

A second motion from us proposed that the council should require its Trading Company to join the scheme which gives people moving into new build homes the right to take complaints to the New Homes Ombudsman. This was defeated.

We successfully proposed that the council should continue to press the Government to invest in upgrades to the rail network north of Ely.

3 Audit

3.1 The council's external audit report, received in January, was damning. The council's arrangements for supporting the audit were graded Ineffective for quality and completeness of the draft financial statements, delivery of working papers in accordance with agreed schedules, quality of working papers and supporting evidence, and volume and value of identified misstatements and disclosure amendments. No assurance could be given by the auditors for short-term debtors, short term creditors, grants received in advance, reserves, other income and expenditure, cash flow statement, collection fund, other disclosures, or leases.

The auditors made eight specific recommendations, including within Recommendation 1 that "the finance team must develop a strong understanding of Local Government accounting requirements". The auditors warned: "if we are not satisfied with the pace and substance of improvements in addressing our Recommendation 1 (Page 39) as part of the 2025/26 audit, we would be minded to issue Statutory Recommendations at that point, given the recurring inability to prepare robust financial statements and support the audit process".

Despite multiple significant issues in the council's draft statement of accounts for 2024/25, the Chair of the committee used his casting vote to ensure that sign-off of these accounts was delegated to himself, along with the council's director of finance, without further committee scrutiny.

Following this embarrassment, the council has appointed an interim Technical Accountant and a Principal Accountant.

4 Planning

4.1 The developers of the scheme behind Garden Close Sutton have now applied to vary their planning permission to remove all the affordable housing originally required for the site.

4.2 Witcham's Neighbourhood Plan received the support of ninety per cent of those who voted in a referendum in February. The district council agreed at its meeting on 24 February that the plan should be adopted, and we both spoke in support of this.

The Government no longer offers grants for making or reviewing a Neighbourhood Plan, but the council set aside a fund of £50,000 for parishes to bid for, on a first come first served basis until 31 March 2028 or until the fund is exhausted. A matching contribution is required.

4.3 We are continuing to engage with the developer, the county council's flood and water team, and affected residents over water management on and around the Phase 2 site of the Vistry development at the top of Mepal Road Sutton.

4.4 Data from the council's annual monitoring report states that 635 net house-building completions took place in the district in 2024/25, mostly in Ely, Soham and Littleport. The Sutton ward contributed six net completions to this total.

The council reported that it has a 6.1 year land supply, above the five year minimum requirement.

- 4.5** The Government has recently consulted on the growing issue of unadopted amenities on privately managed estates, with the aim of reducing reliance on private estate management and increasing adoption of amenities by public authorities. As this affects a growing number of new build areas in East Cambridgeshire, we persuaded the council that it should make a response, and encouraged individual residents to do so too.

The Government has also been consulting on major changes to the planning system, including reducing levels of community engagement on larger schemes and get them through the planning system faster.

5 Finance and assets

- 5.1** The council has been transferring assets to parish councils in advance of Local Government Reorganisation. This includes a package of assets including public toilets and a car park being transferred to Littleport Town Council for £1 each. City of Ely Council has been offered Oliver Cromwell House, The Maltings and Maltings Cottage, also for £1 each.
- 5.2** The council is using Community Infrastructure Levy funding for two grant funding schemes—one for local infrastructure such as community centres, village halls and sports centres, and the other for inclusive play and open spaces. A minimum of ten per cent match funding will be required from applicants.

The council also opened a Community Fund to applications in the final months of 2025. Community groups were encouraged to apply for grants of up to £1,000 to spend on new or existing projects designed to improve the quality of life for residents. The next funding window will be open from 11 May to 22 June 2026.

- 5.3** The council's Finance and Assets Committee unanimously agreed to grant a licence to Mepal Pantry for use of the allotment land next to 10 River Close Mepal to grow produce to directly support the local community the Pantry currently serves. (We were amused at the council's admission in the committee report on this item that it had been collecting rent from the previous tenant while apparently not being aware that it was the owner of the land.)

6 Operational services

- 6.1** As part of national changes in legislation, the council is currently delivering black wheeled bins and food caddies to households across East Cambridgeshire. The black bins will replace our black sacks, and will be collected fortnightly. We will also have a smaller food caddy for use in our kitchens, and a larger caddy for food waste which will be collected weekly. The 'go live' date for the new arrangements is 1 June.

From that date, soft plastics including bubble wrap, food packaging and carrier bags can also be put in with household recycling. Free garden waste collections will continue, but food waste should go in the food caddy, not our green bins. Residents who live in properties that cannot accommodate the bins will be

provided with purple bags for anything that cannot be recycled.

Some areas will have a new bin day from 1 June. Mepal—whose collection day will be Tuesday—is the only part of the Sutton ward that this will affect.

6.2 We strongly supported a proposal for a Public Spaces Protection Order to clamp down on anti-social driving across East Cambridgeshire, such as has been happening at the Elean Business Park for years. A consultation with the public showed huge support for the new Order, which was approved by the Operational Services Committee and which it is hoped will take effect from the summer.

6.3 The council has awarded GLL a five-year extension to its contract to manage The Hive leisure centre on the A10 near Ely. The contract will now end in 2035. 228 solar panels have been installed at The Hive, using £69,510 from Sport England's Swimming Pool Support Fund.

6.4 The council is still refusing to join the rest of the country in taking responsibility for on-street parking enforcement. It is now five years since the Leader of the Council promised a unique system of police volunteers to enforce parking, but there is still nothing to show for it.

6.5 Mark took up issues relating to street sweeping in High Street Witcham. Under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, local authorities have a statutory duty to provide clean streets, footways and open spaces that are in public ownership. All towns and villages are divided up into

“zones” with the busiest being cleaned more regularly.

6.6 Mark attended the meeting of the EPR straw plant liaison group in October. The annual maintenance outage took place in July, and two apprentices had recently been taken on.

7 Local Government Reorganisation

7.1 The ruling group on the district council has proposed to the Government that East Cambridgeshire should be joined in a new authority with Huntingdonshire, Peterborough, and Fenland. We have strongly opposed this, on the grounds that our connections for work, study, health care, leisure, and retail are predominantly with Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire, and that it would be wrong to deny East Cambridgeshire residents any influence over decisions affecting the places and amenities that play such a key part in most residents' lives.

The Government will make its decision in the summer.

8 Finally

8.1 We continue to offer in-person councillor surgeries every month, at Joy Bistro at 65 High Street Sutton, from 6:30 to 7:30PM on the first Monday of every month except for bank holiday Mondays. Our monthly councillor reports are at www.tinyurl.com/lornasreports

It is a privilege to serve the residents of our parishes, and we thank them, the parish councils, and their clerks, for the experience of the last year.

Annual Report 2026



CLLR LORNA DUPRE

County councillor for the Sutton division

(including Sutton, Mepal, Witcham, Wentworth, Coveney, Wardy Hill, Way Head, Little Downham, Pymoor, and Witchford)

Introduction

Local elections took place for all 61 seats on Cambridgeshire County Council on Thursday 1 May 2025. The table below shows the current composition of the Council compared to the election results in May 2021, and to this time last year.

	2021	2025	Now
Conservatives	28	10	10
Liberal Democrats	20	31	31
Labour	9	5	5
Independents	4	2	2
Reform UK	0	10	9
Non-aligned	0	0	1

Since the election, the Liberal Democrats and Independents have formed a Liberal Democrat and Independent Group.

The election for Mayor of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough also took place on Thursday 1 May 2025, with Paul Bristow (Conservative) elected.

1 The Council

1.1 The Liberal Democrat and Independent Group now runs the Council. Our vision is to create a healthy, fair and sustainable Cambridgeshire.

I am now Deputy Leader of the Council, and Vice Chair of the Strategy Resources and Performance Committee. I remain a member of the Highways and Transport Committee, and of the Constitution and Ethics Committee and working group.

I am a member of the council's Consents Working Group, reviewing the large-scale infrastructure projects on which the council is consulted but is not the decision-maker. These include major road, rail and energy projects. I am also a part of the Waste

Steering Group considering the council's arrangements for the disposal of recyclable and non-recyclable waste.

1.2 I am the nominated substitute for the Leader of the Council on the Board of the Combined Authority, which means I am no longer eligible to sit on any of the Combined Authority's thematic committees. However, I am now the County Council's representative to the Board of the Greater Cambridge Partnership.

1.3 The Council has considered a number of issues put forward by councillors for debate. These include opposing any plans to merge our local police force into a larger and more remote body; the need for support for people in mental health crisis or at suicide risk; GP services for growing communities; and the importance of flood prevention in the Fens.

2 Strategy Resources & Performance

2.1 The Council set its budget in February 2026, including record spending on roads, thousands of extra school places, and support for vulnerable residents.

The budget included an additional £20 million for highway maintenance, delivery of the council's climate change and environment strategy, and £11 million to upgrade household recycling centres at Milton and March.

£14.7 million of additional funding was allocated for adult social care providers to help them manage rising costs and ensure care workers are paid the Real Living Wage, improving

stability and quality for those who depend on care workers for their support.

Provision of holiday meal vouchers will continue until the end of summer 2026 for those children most in need, despite the Government replacing the Household Support Fund which used to pay for this. The Government's replacement Crisis and Resilience Fund is less generous than its predecessor, and is intended to provide a wide range of anti-poverty measures in addition to feeding children in struggling families.

There will be 3,500 new primary school places, and £72 million over five years to increase secondary school places. There will also be continued funding for the Families First early intervention programme that helps keep more families together. And more than £1.2 million will be invested in libraries and archives over the next two years.

2.2 The council ran its third annual Quality of Life survey in 2025, which provides valuable insights into residents' perspectives and priorities. 5,500 residents (1,100 in each district) were directly polled for their views, and the survey was open in the summer for any other resident who wished to complete it.

2.3 Like almost every county and unitary council, the Council increased its portion of council tax by 4.99 per cent in total— two per cent for adult social care, and 2.99 per cent for general spending.

3 Adults and Health

3.1 The Adults and Health Committee has a significant role in ensuring that

health inequalities are reduced, and that people enjoy healthy, safe, and independent lives through timely support suited to their needs.

One of the first decisions of the new 2025 Liberal Democrat administration was to split the committee into two committees—one for its public health, adult social care and procurement responsibilities, and the other dedicated to the council's role in scrutinising local NHS services.

3.2 The council's adult social care services were rated as Good by the Care Quality Commission in summer last year.

3.3 This has been a turbulent time for the Integrated Care Boards (ICBs). ICBs are statutory NHS organisations in England responsible for planning and buying healthcare services for local populations. They replaced Clinical Commissioning Groups in 2022.

Last year the Government required enormous in-year and ongoing savings to be made by ICBs. This has resulted in mergers of many ICBs as a way of cutting jobs. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, instead of having its own ICB, is now part of NHS Central East, covering Cambridgeshire, Peterborough, Bedfordshire, Luton, Milton Keynes and Hertfordshire.

3.4 Priors Field in Sutton is now well established under St Mary's GP practice. Primary care provision across Cambridgeshire remains very fragile however, with most residents relying on private dental provision, and many GP practices hanging on by a thread.

3.5 The new Health Scrutiny Committee has held a number of meetings where we have heard from various health providers and had the opportunity to ask searching questions. Subjects considered by the Committee have included dentistry, primary care and GP services, and services for children and young people with autism.

3.6 The future of the Arthur Rank Hospice in Cambridge remains uncertain, after the NHS Trust withdrew over £800,000 of support. A private donation has enabled it to continue for a further year.

4 Assets and Procurement

4.1 The County Council's Assets and Procurement Committee has agreed a partnership with developer Prologis to support the future expansion of Cambridge Biomedical Campus.

4.2 The council's Shareholder Sub-Committee approved an updated business plan from the council's wholly-owned company This Land. The current council administration has worked extremely hard to stabilise the company, transforming it from the way it had been set up ten years ago under Conservative control. The updated business plan enables the company to repay interest, reduce the amounts owed to the council, and limit the council's exposure to risk from the company.

5 Children and Young People

5.1 Like most county councils, Cambridgeshire continues to experience huge financial pressures associated with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, and with the costs of home to school transport.

The number of children in Cambridgeshire with an Education Health and Care Plan has grown by 71 per cent between 2020 and 2025. The council invested an additional £780,000 in the autumn to increase capacity to process these plans.

The Government will be delivering two new special schools in the county, in Gamlingay and March, with 270 new special school places.

5.2 Cambridgeshire County Council's services for care leavers have improved since 2024, according to an Ofsted visit in July 2025. They also listed four areas for further improvement.

5.3 In July I was delighted to be join Cllrs Jonny Edge and Anna Bradnam at the council's Children in Care Celebration and Awards at Inflationbounce in Wyton.

5.4 A new Community outreach service from the council aims to support and develop the skills of parents and children from birth to five years, and of those leading community groups for families with children from nought to five.

6 COSMIC

6.1 COSMIC (Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee) has continued to oversee support for people experiencing immediate financial hardship. An increasing number of families are struggling financially at the moment.

6.2 One urgent issue is the sudden spike in the price of domestic heating oil as a result of President Trump's war in Iran. The council has received

£708,000 from the Government which is ring-fenced to support households struggling with this. The money has been added to the council's Crisis & Resilience Fund, and applications (for up to £400 per household) are being administered by the Cambridgeshire Community Foundation. Eligibility for this fund is currently restricted to those on specific means-tested benefits. If the Government's grant were to be shared equally among every household in the county reliant on oil heating, each household would receive less than £27.50—the council is having to make difficult decisions about priorities.

- 6.3** The committee has procured an IT system which will enable more systematic and earlier identification of low income households which would benefit from support. South Cambridgeshire District Council has been using this system for a couple of years now, with remarkable results.
- 6.4** Work is under way to implement the recommendations of Cambridgeshire's Poverty Strategy Commission. These are grouped into six themes: income maximisation, digital inclusion, rural poverty, housing and homelessness, children and families, and mental health.
- 6.5** Adult learning services in Cambridgeshire were given a Good rating by Ofsted in spring 2025, with the behaviour and attitude of learners judged to be Outstanding.
- 6.6** I was pleased to attend a 'Civic and Church Gathering' hosted by St Mary's Church in Ely in September, bringing churches, civic and community leaders together to explore joint

working for the good and flourishing of the places we live and serve.

7 Environment

- 7.1** Water scarcity and water management is a key issue for Cambridgeshire. Water Resources East is responsible for producing a regional water resources plan for Eastern England, with a combination of infrastructure investment and demand management.

Meanwhile, the Fens2100+ project, which brings together a number of agencies to develop a long-term plan to manage future flood risk in the Fens, has published a suite of reports including a Case for Change, Partnership Action Plan, and summary baseline report.

The move of Anglian Water's waste water treatment plant from north-east Cambridge to Horningsea was thwarted after the Government removed the necessary funding.

- 7.2** Community watercourse grants are available from the council to support communities where the condition of local watercourses is increasing the risk of flooding. These can be used for clearance and maintenance, equipment hire, contractor support, or training and safety equipment.
- 7.3** Cambridgeshire County Council is calling on residents to play an active role in restoring local nature as part of the 'Nature Recovery - From the Ground Up' project—a new initiative supporting parishes and community groups to design their own Community Nature Recovery Plans. The first phase of the project runs from July 2025 to March 2027,

focusing on Cambridge and twenty parishes across East Cambridgeshire, Fenland, Huntingdonshire, and South Cambridgeshire. Other parishes are invited to use the project resources and mapping software, and to register interest for future phases of the project.

7.4 Cambridgeshire County Council has been ranked by Climate Emergency UK as one of the top performing councils in the country for the action it has taken towards Net Zero.

7.5 Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Waste Partnership (RECAP) is urging residents to recycle batteries and battery-powered electricals safely, following an increase in fires caused by incorrectly disposed-of lithium-ion batteries. Across the UK, over 1,200 waste-related fires were recorded last year—a 71 per cent rise since 2022.

I have been following up a number of issues with the Grunty Fen landfill site, operated by FCC Environment under a permit which lasts until the end of 2026. These include fires, littering, and the effect on the road of the numbers of heavy vehicles.

7.6 The Cambridgeshire Digital Inclusion Directory is a practical guide to help residents get online, access devices, and build essential digital skills. It features trusted local organisations offering free support with digital access, equipment and training. Printed copies are available at libraries and community hubs, or it can be downloaded.

8 Highways and Transport

8.1 The condition of our roads and pavements deteriorated rapidly over

the winter. Highways and Transport Committee chair Cllr Alex Beckett has written a very informative explainer article at notesfromalex.substack.com/p/why-are-the-roads-so-bad-right-now

8.2 The council continues to add more funding to its road maintenance budget, as the funding from Government via the Combined Authority is completely insufficient. Around 35,000 permits are being issued annually in Cambridgeshire for work on the highway, and in addition works are undertaken that do not require a permit.

Our peat soil roads are a major problem, taking four or five times as much money to repair as regular roads. St Neots and Mid Cambridgeshire MP Ian Sollom asked a question about this in parliament.

In 2025/26 the council reconstructed a number of stretches of peat soil road, including part of Hundred Foot Bank and Straight Furlong in Pymoor. For 2026/27 the priority locally will be part of Hillrow Causeway between Earith Bridge and the approach to Haddenham. Earith Road Willingham (between Roseberry holiday park and the orchard) was resurfaced.

Mepal Bridge was closed for several weekends over the summer for maintenance; and the footpath from Gravel End to Downham Hythe was finally reopened after its bridge was replaced at last.

The road network is being reassessed in April and May this year, to produce an updated list of capital maintenance priorities for 2027/28.

8.3 The footway at Station Road Sutton has been resurfaced and widened. The junction at Witcham Toll will be widened this year to accommodate more waiting traffic on the A1421. A 50MPH speed limit is being implemented on the A1101 Bates Drove between the top of Black Bank Little Downham and the top of Hundred Foot Bank Pymoor, following a series of injury collisions, a serious motorcycle collision, and a motorcycle fatality.

8.4 I have continued to work with Witchford Parish Council, the District Council and the County Council on the proposed cycle link between the east end of the village and Lancaster Way business park. Highways engineers have completed the design ready for review and a safety audit.

8.5 I managed to get the serious overgrowth down the western side of Red Lion Lane Sutton cleared back in late February before the start of the nesting season.

8.6 There was yet another review of highways staffing and our new Highways Maintenance Officer is Tom Hutchins. Many thanks to Sutton Parish Council for hosting a meeting earlier this year for parish council chairs and clerks with a range of highways officers to discuss issues across the division.

A new highways Asset Management System, Aurora, went live in September, enabling better report handling, workflow handling, and performance oversight.

8.7 New LED street lights are being installed across the county at a rate of about 2,000 per month. Over

47,000 lights will see the new components fitted, with the aim of reducing the council's energy use by one-third.

8.8 Sutton was successful in its bid for new 20MPH zones on The Row and Mepal Road, and for the first two phases of a three-phase programme working towards a weight limit for the village. Witchford was successful in its bid for road warning signs and bollards, signs or posts to warn drivers of the existence of public paths and byways crossing the A142.

8.9 One of the unexpected parts of my role as Deputy Leader of the County Council is to receive a report every time there is a fatality on a Cambridgeshire road. There are far too many of these, particularly involving young motorcyclists.

8.10 The council is getting tough on utilities and developers who overstay their permits to work on the highway or fail to abide by the conditions of their permits. In 2024/25 the council issued fines totalling £483,000.

8.11 In summer I took a trip on the pilot autonomous bus service from Madingley Park and Ride to West Cambridge. Great to see this huge technological step forward.

8.11 More information about the council's highways work can be found at www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/transparency

9 Combined Authority

9.1 Work is ongoing on options for bus franchising, with an update due in June. Meanwhile, thirty-five bus routes in Cambridgeshire and

Peterborough—including the T12 from Sutton to Longstanton Park and Ride, which opened in May after I had been campaigning for it for eight years!—are hanging by a thread as the Mayor seeks to cut half a million pounds from local bus services. The County Council had to contribute funding to keep the young people's Tiger Pass going until March 2027.

The former 125 bus from Little Downham to Ely has been replaced by the 10 service, which is more frequent, and extends further into the evening, but does not serve Tesco or the railway station. The Thursday bus from Wardy Hill and Coveney has been preserved by creating a weekly booking of the Tiger on Demand rural bus service; I am still trying to get it to serve Sutton for the GP practice, pharmacy and shop.

9.2 The Combined Authority produced a Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Cambridgeshire during the year. It is now working on projects including an employment strategy for young people not in education, employment or training; accreditation as a Local Visitor Economy Partnership; and a small trial to install channels in pavements to carry cables for on-street charging of electric vehicles.

9.3 The new Mayor says he wants to dual the A10 between Ely and the A14 at Milton. However, there is currently no funding for this, from either the Government or the Combined Authority, which would have to find fifteen per cent of the cost.

9.4 My council leadership colleagues successfully pressed the Combined Authority to fund the next steps in planning a safe crossing at the A10 /

A142 BP roundabout. It's still a long way off, however.

10. Council reorganisation

10.1 Far too much time this year has been taken up with the Government's plan to abolish district and county councils and replace them with all-purpose unitary authorities.

Four options for different ways of carving up our area have been submitted by local councils, and we expect to hear this summer which one the Government has chosen. The County Council submitted 'Option A' which would join East Cambridgeshire, Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire in one council, and Peterborough, Fenland and Huntingdonshire in another. I strongly support this option as it most closely matches the Government's criteria as well as how East Cambridgeshire residents live.

11 Finally

11.1 I continue to hold regular surgeries in Sutton, and attend Little Downham Book Café once a month, and coffee mornings in Coveney, Sutton and Witchford when I can. Meanwhile, residents can continue to contact me by email, Facebook, or phone.

11.2 My monthly county councillor reports are at www.tinyurl.com/lornasreports

11.3 My thanks to the clerks and parish councillors of the seven parishes in the Sutton division, and the many community organisations, whose hard work helps keep our communities together.