

South Cambridgeshire District Council – Harston & Comberton Ward

Report to Hauxton Parish Council July 2018

District Council Changes

With no Full Council Meeting in June, the focus at Cambourne was on finalising a new governance structure to fit with the pre-scrutiny decision model mentioned in last month's report. The only thing worth noting in the changes is that Portfolio Holder meetings have been dropped, reflecting the commitment to a more collaborative approach and collective decision making. Policies and projects will be recommended or referred back up the food chain by the pre-scrutiny process and those which travel onwards will be signed off by the whole Cabinet. Portfolio holders may exceptionally have delegated power to make decisions within their remit on certain minor or urgent decisions, but their main focus will be on delivery.

We're aware that cultural change is urgently needed at the district council with an unhealthy blame culture running from the top to the bottom – we're all too familiar with the tales of very poor customer service and unresponsiveness. The governance changes are a start on that.

Public Questions at Full Council

Another change in approach was discussed at the first meeting of the new Civic affairs committee last week: how to make Full Council more open for the public to ask questions. There was a suggestion to allow any member of the public to ask verbal questions in the meeting but, there were some legal concerns so the proposal is for written questions 15 mins before the meeting. Currently questions need to be submitted by midday 7 days before the date of the meeting.

Strange goings on at the Combined Authority Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Troubling events last month as the decision on the Mayor's interim transport policy statement, endorsed by the Combined Authority (CA) Board, was called in by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Or at least it should have been. Somewhat mysteriously, not enough members of the committee (or their substitutes) turned up in order for the meeting to be quorate (to their credit, both South Cambs District Council members were there). There was some suggestion from the Mayor that this mass absence – it has to be said mainly of Conservative councillors from the north of the Combined Authority region – may have been purposefully co-ordinated, which is extremely disappointing to say the least. The meeting was scheduled, in order to fit the Mayor's commitments, on the last day possible for call-in, so it was not possible for the meeting to be re-arranged.

Secretary of State keeping an eye on developments

As mentioned in last month's report, the interim transport statement called for a pause on major Greater Cambridge Partnership (GCP) projects (busways, P&Rs). The GCP is co-operating with the pause, though expressed some concerns about the delay in decision making by doing so. James Brokenshire, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, has

written to all relevant parties expressing some concern about how well they are working together and highlighting that that next tranche of GCP funding is not guaranteed.

You may recall the Mayor has recently taken over responsibility for the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) which was responsible for the Economic Development Strategy for a very large area including all Cambridgeshire. It seems increasingly apparent that the Mayor and the CA would like to subsume the GCP much as they did the LEP. We have been vocal critics of the GCP, but the root cause of many of the problems has been the lack of accountability in decision making, built into the structure of the partnership itself. Unfortunately, based on the events at the overview and scrutiny committee last month, it appears there may be even less accountability of the Mayor's decisions, should he ultimately prove successful in absorbing the GCP.

Harston Bypass

We are working with the Mayor on a possible by-pass for Harston, an issue we campaigned on in the recent election. A well-attended public meeting for the residents of Harston and Hauxton was held last month with the Mayor to discuss the possibility. No doubt Jane who was on the panel, and others who were present can give you their impressions! It seemed to us that a majority of those attending were in favour in principle, though there were many valid points made on both sides of the argument. The overall conclusion was that the scope of any initial feasibility study should be set broadly enough that more problems aren't created. The Mayor has committed to delivering a feasibility study within the next 6 months and Tony and Niall (Chair of Harston PC) discussed getting the scope right in a follow up meeting with the Mayor last week.

Greenways

The Greenways consultations for Barton and Haslingfield routes are now live, as previously advertised, and are open until 20 August. Possibly of interest to some Hauxton residents is the cross country route from Haslingfield to the A10 just across from Hauxton. The Greenways team are holding a consultation events at Cambridge Rugby Club (5th July), Barton Primary School on 11th July, Grantchester Village Hall (17th July) – see the GCP website for details. (There was an event in Haslingfield as well – on 4th July!)

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