

South Cambridgeshire District Council – Harston & Comberton Ward

Report to Hauxton Parish Council January 2021

Covid 19

Rates in our area have gone up: in the East overall the rate is 523 per 100,000; in Scambs it is 221 per 100,000. In Addenbrooke's hospital on 31 December there were almost 100 patients on Covid wards. Fenland, where up to now rates were very low, is at 183 per 100,000. On the effect of the new variant, numbers are coming through slowly, but it is clear that the variant is more transmissible and has been leading to a marked increase in hospital admissions.

On the vaccines, whilst this is generally good news, there are a number of difficulties. One is supply: some supplies of both are coming in from Europe and are delayed (not all the AstraZeneca vaccine is manufactured here); the other is the availability of suitable sites for the vaccination. The NHS is centralising the roll out and it is not clear where the South Cambs sites will be; nor do we yet know what vaccines we will be getting or when. Whilst the BioNtech vaccine requires special refrigeration, the AstraZeneca vaccine also has special instruction and training. It cannot survive long outside a fridge and it cannot be shaken. With concern over the security of sites chosen, the police are also involved in site selection.

The availability of testing in schools is also a cause for concern: how this will be organised; how follow-up of those testing positive and their circle of contact will be carried out, are just two issues. Schools will be looking for local volunteers to help with the testing schemes. Secondary schools will need local volunteers to help them carry out the vaccination programme.

Help for School children

Digitally-excluded children in South Cambs are to be given a helping hand to get online with funding from a package of grants. The District Council is using its £30,000 share of the grant pot allocated to the County to support local charities and community organisations, including Cambridge Online. The digital charity will help provide data packages or devices to children in families in the District who currently have no internet access, enabling them to get online to learn and keep up-to-date with school work and to socialise this winter. For more details, see www.cambridgeonline.org.uk, email to help@cambridgeonline.org.uk or call the Cambridge Online helpline on 01223 300407, quoting 'South Cambs Winter Support Grant'.

Cambridgeshire's District and City Councils, along with the County Council, received a total of £2.2 million in Government Winter Support Grant payments and are working in partnership to ensure the money reaches those most in need. Amongst other areas of help, it will pay for vouchers for all children in the county who receive free school meals to cover additional food costs during the Christmas holidays and February half term, with extra support offered to other families not receiving free school meals but identified by schools as potentially needing extra help.

South Cambridgeshire District Council is also using its allocation to help fund other schemes in the District, such as the provision of Christmas meals for disadvantaged families and elderly and vulnerable residents in many of its communities.

Grants to Community Groups

The District Council is also supporting Cambridge Council for Voluntary Service (CCVS) with a £5,000 grant and from Wednesday, January 6, South Cambs parishes and community groups will be able to apply to the charity for sums of up to £500 for local projects which provide food, fuel and essential supplies. More information can be found at <http://www.cambridgecvs.org.uk/home>

Shop Local Directory

The Council has launched a 'Shop local' directory to help local residents find alternative ways to get their shopping while also supporting local jobs and businesses. With a boom in online sales and takeaways during 2020, the new 'Shop local' directory will help residents who would prefer to spend their money supporting local businesses – rather than international retailers and chains – to do so more easily. The directory lists local shops, restaurants, cafés and pubs, and for each business sets out what safety measures are being taking during the pandemic. This might include new covered outdoor seating areas for people to meet up outside, or takeaway hatches or deliveries which are now available from eateries that previously only offered food on site. Or it could include an independent shop offering orders via Facebook for home delivery, or online gift ordering to collect at an allotted time.

The directory is live at www.scambs.gov.uk/local-business-directory and businesses can sign up via the same link.

South West Cambridge

Disappointing news in December that Thakeham, the property developer, have announced proposals for a large new settlement they are calling South West Cambridge - but outside of the local plan process (it was not in the call for sites and hasn't been made as a late submission). It seems they have been engaging directly with central government on this, though it has been reported that this is not the vehicle for the Cambridge Development Company announced in the Budget last year. The proposal for 25,000 homes covers a huge area: the parishes of Shepreth, Melbourn, Meldreth, Whaddon, Bassingbourn, Wimpole, Orwell, Barrington and Foxton are directly affected, but much more of South Cambs will obviously be impacted. With poor transport links, the town will fail to meet the government's own climate change targets. It will also be impossible to mitigate the ecological damage to the Cam valley and its chalk streams. It's really not the solution to housing in South Cambs.

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