

Chairman's Report – 25th April 2024

Welcome to Sutton's Annual Meeting of the Electorate. It's been a year of change for the Parish Council. The election in May 2023 saw Brett Collard, Brian Watson and Beth Skelham stand down from the parish council at the end of their terms. We have eight parish councillors who are now completing the first year of their four year term but that means we have seven vacancies. If you want to become involved or know of others who might be persuaded, do get in touch with the Clerk. The time demands aren't huge and you can really make a difference.

The bigger change has come on the staff side with Rosie Hughes retiring after 26 years as Parish Clerk while Melissa Wolland, our deputy clerk, took up a new role in Cambridge. We were able to successfully recruit successors with Phil Harty joining as our new Parish Clerk and Melaine Gilbert joining as our Deputy Clerk.

Next month will be the fifth anniversary of the making of the Sutton Neighbourhood Plan. Over the last three years the Parish Council has been working on a review of the Neighbourhood Plan. This new plan builds on the existing plan, adding a Design Code, Housing Needs Assessment together with new and revised policies for example to better address biodiversity and climate change. It is currently completing the Independent Examination stage. We are expecting to have to make some small adjustments advised by the examiner before going to a new referendum which is expected to be in July this year.

Our Traffic and Transport working party is continuing to address traffic issues. Our previous LHI (Local Highways Improvements) bid to the county council for a safer way to cross the Brook just north of the junction with the High Street was installed last summer along with the installation of a pedestrian crossing on The Brook by the school. Following the new policy from the County Council on HGVs, we submitted a Local Highways Initiative bid for a weight restriction through the parish along the B1381 from the junction with the A142 to Earith Bridge for the first time last year. We weren't successful at that point because the decision criteria and required supporting evidence wasn't clear. Following discussions in the autumn we came away with a long list of actions to build a robust justification and we have been working through those actions.

There are always limited funds for the LHI bids and usually significantly more bids than there is funding available, so even with a strong justification we don't

know if we will be successful but this is something we will continue pursue given that 96% of residents in the recent consultation supported the proposals.

We are continuing to maintain parish facilities. One example of that is the resurfacing of the Brooklands Centre car park. Another is the replacement of two benches with King's Coronation benches, one at the Bellairs entrance to the primary school and the other on the corner of Churchill Close and Ely Road.

Finally we are now in our fourth year of Sutton Timebank and that continues to go from strength to strength.

Mark Inskip
Chairman
Sutton Parish Council

SUTTON POORS

Meeting of the Electorate - Notes

Founded in 1870 by a group of local landowners namely Messers Oates, Vipau, Warth, Broker, Ibberson & Haddock, who bequeathed approximately 100 acres of land between them, and formed the Charity, which is funded by the rent income from that land, and is the Charity's prime source of income.

This income gives the Charity the wherewithal to offer help to the people of Sutton, and, in certain circumstances, surrounding areas.

'HELP' is defined as people or groups being in
NEED, HARSHIP or DISTRESS.

The Charity can make grants, and in some cases, signpost people to additional sources of support.

Examples of help given;

- Purchasing medical equipment not available from the NHS
- Funding treatments and therapies not available on the NHS
- Helping with energy costs & arrears
- Replacing or repairing domestic equipment
- Supplying the needs of people going into Further Education
- Funding training
- Assisting with transport costs
- Membership fees and uniforms for Sutton Scouts
- Etc etc

Several Trustees of the Charity are DBS checked so that we can offer 'Face to Face' meetings with applicants to better understand their needs.

If we have one problem, it is getting people to come forward and ask for help. So if you, or anyone you know, is experiencing difficulties where the Charity may be able to help, please, please, contact our Clerk, Mrs Barbara Fuller by emailing suttonpoorsland@gmail.com

Thank You

Any questions?

(No subject)

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Thu 25/04/2024 16:12

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Parish Council Meeting

1st Sutton Brownies

The Brownie stage of Girl Guiding runs from the age of 7 yrs and continue to 10 yrs. We have, at the moment ,13 members, which is a reduction of our usual number of 24 + in the previous years.

During Covid we delivered weekly activity pack plus email communication when we received our Zoom licence, we then had weekly meetings until we commenced face to face meetings in September '21

Started to try to catch up on badge work.

Visited - Welney Swan Feeding.

Had a demonstration of an Ukranian craft bead work hanging ornament for a Mothering Sunday Gift by Lydia.

Jubilee party

Attended the East Cambridgeshire weekend event at Duxford Imperial Museum 'Sleeping under the Wings'

Attended a District day at Ely Collage 'Survive and thrive'.

We have attended the Cinema to see the new films 'Matilda' and Ariel the Little Mermaid.

Participated in the Remembrance day service.

1st Sutton Brownies celebrated their 60th Anniversary during 2023. To celebrate we discussion with girls they decided to have a fund-raising evening for 'Children in Need' The girls made posters which were displayed in the village shops and houses as well as posting on Facebook. They collected items to sell and served on the mixture of items to buy, decorating biscuits, pick a lolly, hunt the Gruffalo as well as serving drinks and cakes. Our customers were mainly the parents of the Brownies and a few ex-Brownies and leaders. We were pleased that we raised just over £212.50 for 'Children in Need' in the hour and half of our meeting time.

We participated in the Christmas Tree festival at St Andrew's church making festive Mrs Tiggy Winkles using teazels and sewing.

We made Gingerbread houses with varying levels of success but a thoroughly enjoyable activity.

Some of our Brownies demonstrated the skill of of signing using Makaton whilst singing 'Little Donkey' at our end of year party.

The beginning of this year we joined with Haddenham Brownies to attend the Haddenham pantomime.

In February we attended a District day to celebrate 'Thinking Day' with a programme of events based on 'The world on your doorstep'. During our spring term we have celebrated Easter with an Easter egg hunt in the dark, decorating biscuit and card making.

We have continued with working for our Skills builders stage 2 badges and the girls have obtained the following Network, Reflect, Feel Good, Explore, Communicate and Innovate. Together with obtaining interest badges which they work on their own.

Last July, 11 received the Bronze award and this year they are on task to receive the Silver award.

For the future I hope that 1st Sutton Brownies can continue to offer the girls of Sutton and surrounding areas many more years of the Girl Guiding experience despite the economic climate.

We thank Sutton Parish Council for the grant they have awarded us which will be used to enable us to have a Pack holiday at the Jarman Centre at Newmarket in September.

Sutton Open Spaces group
Report to PCC meeting Thursday April 25th 2024

Sutton Open Spaces group was set up in 2019 with the proceeds of the village open gardens event. The aim was to make the open spaces of the village more attractive - modelled on the very successful such group in Witchford and working alongside the Conservation society and its efforts on the wilder bits of the village.

We felt that there were far too many areas of frankly rather scruffy grass which did not enhance the look of the village and certainly didn't contribute to its biodiversity.

Progress has been slower than we would like – and of course Covid didn't help – but we have had some successes. The magnificent display of daffodils at the corner of the Brook is the most obvious and has been popular with residents.

Lots more bulbs were planted last autumn including around the school with the help of the pupils.

We don't just do bulbs – we also do trees. We planted new trees on the land behind the daffodils – and watered them through their first very dry summer. They are growing away well and are now surrounded by spring bulbs. New trees have also been planted at the end of Churchill Close including a very pretty flowering cherry planted by a local resident in memory of her brother. And last autumn the district council kindly allowed us to select the site and the species of the ten new trees they planted in the village – particularly around the Orchards. We also planted some shrubs around the open space at the bottom of Windmill Walk.

We do litter picking in the village and are planning to do this on a more structured and regular basis working with the village Timebank

And we try to keep the village footpaths passable during the winter by spreading woodchips.

We are hoping that over the next year we can make progress on a couple of projects which are currently struggling but which we think would have a real impact on the village. The first is to improve the area around the new Co-op. With the help of the County Council we planted a swathe of wild flowers around the car park fence, the Parish council provided a planter last autumn and our group planted a couple of trees and some bulbs. Unfortunately these efforts were obscured by rampant weeds as it remained unclear who owns the land or who should be responsible for cutting it. We hope this problem will be resolved this summer as the Co-op plan to ask their contractor to do the necessary cutting and we in turn will plant and look after a couple of the Co-op's planters.

The other high impact site in my view is "The Green" outside the doctor's surgery. The renovation of the telephone box was a great improvement and the garden club have worked very hard on the area in front of the surgery and around the car park. The main problem is that the focal point of the area – right in the middle of the street frontage – is a dog waste bin immediately upwind of the otherwise welcoming bench seat. We think that rearranging the furniture and installing another planter would make a huge difference to the area. We could also then look to replace the bulbs we planted in the grass around the tree pre-covid. Most of these failed to survive premature cutting and a couple of very dry summers but with care the area could be a really attractive centre to the village.

Like all groups we are keen to recruit more volunteers and we welcome suggestions for areas to work on in the future.

Janet Porter
Open Spaces Group chairman

Sutton Bowls Club

Hello,

Jan and I are here tonight representing Sutton Bowls Club and we'd like to tell you a bit about our history, where we are located and what we have to offer.

Sutton Bowls Club was founded 27 years ago in 1997 and is situated off the Brook behind the Brooklands Centre and the Pavilion. I'm sure there may be some people in the village who are still unaware that we are there!

We have an all-weather green that can be played on in all conditions and at any time of year.

We have a regular roll up on a Tuesday morning from April to October as well as having monthly target bowls competitions on a Saturday afternoon. We also have an in-house pairs league that runs throughout the Summer. This last winter we put a team in an indoor league in Ely and we hope to do something similar to that next Winter. We played two friendly fixtures against other local teams last summer and we hope to increase the number of these fixtures this coming summer.

Socially, we have several barbeques at the bowls green through the summer as well as organising monthly outings to the Indian restaurant in the village.

We are always looking for new members and we can provide training for beginners, so if anyone is interested and wants to know more, please speak to Jan or me afterwards. Contact details can also be found in the Sutton Pepperpot magazine.

Thank you.

Sutton WI report to Sutton Parish Council April 2024

A WI membership offers the opportunity to meet women in your local area in-person and virtually, to make friends and make a difference in your community. The WI campaign nationally on a wide range of issues and provide life-long learning and self-development opportunities for women in England and Wales.

Sutton WI is celebrating its centenary this year. Formed in 1924 as far as we are aware there has been a WI operating in Sutton continuously ever since. Even during the pandemic we kept members informed and entertained with a monthly newsletter and zoom meetings.

Unfortunately we do not know where the first meeting took place; we currently meet in The Pavilion on the 2nd Thursday evening of each month. The committee has put together a fun and interesting programme of events which include our annual bowls evening kindly hosted by Sutton Bowls Club; a Garden Party at the Glebe, and outing to Bressingham Gardens, a look at the archives and a buffet dinner at our Annual Meeting in November, plus a variety of speakers. We hosted a singing workshop one Saturday afternoon in March which was open to everyone and several villagers attended as well as members from other WI's.

Sutton WI continues to maintain the War Memorial at the entrance to Elean Business Park and support community events such as The Dog Show, Colour Run and Party in the Park. This involves working with other community groups such as the Feast Committee and the Church. Two of our members are part of a small group who yarn bomb the pillar box outside One Stop from time to time and hopefully bring a bit of colour and cheer to the village, we have had very positive feedback and fortunately not suffered any vandalism.

During the pandemic the WI's national training venue Denman in Oxfordshire sadly closed. Members now have the opportunity to access courses and one off workshops on line through the WI Learning Hub, most of these are free and cover areas such as craft, cooking, exercise, travel and current affairs. We encourage members to access this service. Although it is not the same as a residential course it is a more accessible and mostly free learning forum. Sutton is part of the Isle of Ely Federation which is the smallest WI Federation in England and Wales. Our Federation offers more opportunities to acquire new skills and enjoy group leisure activities such as ten pin bowling, petanque and attending bi-annual meetings with interesting speakers.

Since the end of the pandemic we have steadily increased our membership and now have 32 members, we always welcome new prospective members and you can attend as a visitor for free 3 times before joining. Currently the annual fee is £48. As we celebrate our centenary we remember the many women who have contributed to Sutton WI over the years and look forward to the next 100 years.

Anna Wilson, Secretary WI

Sutton Feast Annual Report.

2023 was another active year for Sutton Feast.

As always we try to bring events and activities to the village, for the village, by the village, so wherever possible we use local people.

In May, we started off with the Street Party, to celebrate the Coronation of King Charles III, and thanks to the appearance of our greatest allie, "Mother Nature" who supplied us with glorious weather, (something that we really were not expecting, the day before when a number of us were setting out a space for the lorry to be parked, and the rain was beating down at 45 degree, and splashing up off the road 6 inches) we were not a happy bunch.

However, come the morning, and the weather was definitely on our side, we had overcome all the hurdles or organising that were put before us, we had got authority to close the road, we had sent someone on a course to know how to create a road closure properly, and everything started to come together.

Other groups in the village pulled together, Nellies, The Church and WI doing the teas and cakes, The Scouts with their superb BBQ, the music on, and off stage, Sutton Masque, and selection of vintage cars, and the street was full of people all out in the sun, enjoying the event.

July saw the Colour Blast run, a new event, and a diversion from the normal Feast Beast, (I wasn't there, so only got to see photo's and hear about it all) but, from what I did see and hear, the event went very well, and lots of people got covered in lots of colour, had a great time, and raised some much needed funds for charity.

In August, we helped Swig (Sutton Wine Interest Group) wine a wine tasting evening, well, when I say we helped, they did all the work, we just helped with a bit of advertising. A great night of fun, and wine was had by all, and this is now likely to become an annual event.

September, and our flagship event, Picnic in the Park, again the weather was perfect, unlike the year before when it was just too damn hot, and dry! This year, we had near perfect conditions, and a great line up of music on stage, and as usual the event was finished off with the traditional Firework Finale, although, this finale was reduced in length, as we wanted people to also come to our dedicated Firework Display in November.

The Battle of Britain Proms concert in the Church was a slight diversion from the normal Proms concert, as it fell 80 years since the Battle of Britain, and the Waterbeach brass Band, again did us proud with some stirring music.

The Firework Display, in November, was a joint venture, with the Sutton Scouts, no one group could organise this event alone, and was well attended, even though the ground was less than perfect. One of the benefits we feel of having an organised Firework event, is, and has been evidenced, that there are less what we can call "personal" fireworks, so, although there is a lot of noise and bangs during our display, there were less from individual people, so the impact on wildlife and pets has been reduced, we feel.

None of our events could take place if it were not for the continued support from our Parish Council, who, through our grant, thankfully pay our Annual Insurance Premium, and without that Insurance we could not run any event.

Thanks also must go to the growing number of volunteers, who give up their free time to come and help, in whatever way, whether it be helping put up gazebo's, fencing, being a marshall or litter picking, no task is less important than any other task.

We continue to build links and working relationships with other groups in the village, especially the Scouts, The Church, Nellies and the W.I. but also Foss. We have a quantity of equipment that can be used by these groups if needed, and we are often asked to help out at events that are not being run by Feast.

So, 2024, we are bringing back the Fun Dog Show, in May, the Colour Blast Run in July, wine tasting in August, and Picnic in the Park, there will be some sort of Proms concert in September, and Fireworks in November.

Next year, 2025, will in fact be our own Jubilee, we will be 25 years old, back in the last century, when former Parish Clerk Rosie, rounded up the troops and instigated a celebration of the New Mellenium, that was the rebirth of Sutton Feast, and we are still here.

So, if anyone has any ideas as to what we can do to celebrate 25 years of "doing Stuff" in Sutton, come and have a chat with us.

Annual Report 2024



CLLR LORNA DUPRE

CLLR MARK INSKIP

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

1 The council

- 1.1** Elections to the District Council took place in May 2023. Mark and Lorna were both re-elected—thank you very much indeed to the residents of Sutton ward.
- 1.2** The elections made no change to the composition of the district council, which remains 15 Conservatives and 13 Liberal Democrats. This time however the Liberal Democrats secured more votes across the district than the Conservatives, who retained their majority on the council by just twenty-five votes in one ward.
- 1.3** On 18 April 2024 a district council by-election was held in Ely West ward. Again there was no change in the composition of the council, with the Liberal Democrats holding the seat.

2 Full council

- 2.1** The council leadership pushed through its Corporate Plan—its intentions for the next four years—at its July meeting.

We supported some of the aims in the plan, and were pleased to see the inclusion of funding for a new Local Plan—something we proposed in February 2023 and which was then opposed by the ruling group.

There were other elements we could not support—the continuing lack of an independent advice service following the council's forced closure of Citizens Advice in Ely; the reliance on Community Land Trusts to deliver affordable housing when there is no effective regulation of them; the emphasis on so-called '£100K homes'; the determination to press ahead with a crematorium at Mepal; and the

refusal to consider moving to council enforcement of on-street parking which almost every other council in England has done.

We also queried how the council's two Trading Companies were 'commercial' if one was losing money and the other had to come to the council mid-year for an enormous bail-out.

- 2.2** The budget in February 2024 once again saw a council tax freeze. We proposed to reduce to zero the level of council tax paid by the very worst-off households in the district, but this was rejected despite the escalating effects of the ongoing cost of living crisis.
- 2.3** The administration's proposed crematorium at Mepal was rubber-stamped by the Full Council. £9 million of developer contributions which were meant to improve local amenities will instead be used to build a council-run facility which the council's ruling political group believe will generate a profit to subsidise council tax.

The plans will only stack up financially if the council starts and wins a full-on price war with its nearest rival, the commercial crematorium run by Dignity at March. We are not convinced this is a war the council can win.

Moreover, the council has indicated it would try to collaborate with the other nearby crematorium in Huntingdon, to avoid unnecessary competition. We have pointed out that this is the definition of a cartel, which is punishable by up to five years in prison for its directors.

2.4 Both Mark and Lorna asked questions at Full Council meetings during the year. Mark asked about the numbers of people denied their right to vote through the introduction of photo ID for voting in May 2023. 41 voters across the district arrived at the polling station without ID, of whom 27 returned with an acceptable form of ID. He also asked what discussions the Leader of the Council had had with Government ministers about their plans for a quarter of a million additional houses around Cambridge.

2.5 The district council underspent by £1,746,865 in 2022/23 on its revenue budget, and by £1,984,154 on its capital budget.

2.6 The council rejected a request from one of our colleagues to ask Sanctuary Housing to attend a meeting of the council's Operational Services Committee to answer questions from councillors about its empty properties. Instead the council leadership organised a behind-closed-doors seminar for councillors only. This is disappointing given the large number of empty homes, and of occupied homes in poor condition, and the high level of public interest in the shortage of social housing in the district.

3 Planning

3.1 The Planning Committee voted at the end of April 2023 to refuse the application by Abbey Homes for the detail of its plans for development at Garden Close Sutton. Three reasons were given for refusal, including non-compliance with the Sutton Neighbourhood Plan's policies on housing mix.

Abbey then appealed against the refusal, but at the same time submitted a slightly revised application. The Planning Committee approved this revision. At the time of writing the outcome of the appeal is still unknown, but if Abbey are successful they will have two versions of their plans to choose between.

3.2 Sutton Parish Council is refreshing its Neighbourhood Plan, Mepal is well on the way with its Plan, and Witcham is also working on one. We expect the public referendums on the Mepal and Sutton Plans this summer.

3.3 The council went ahead with a 'single-issue review' of its Local Plan, concentrating purely on the housing numbers. The Local Plan is now nine years old—if it were a human being it would be in junior school. It has failed to protect residents across the district from inappropriate development, and is now hopelessly out of date in the face of the threat of climate change.

To achieve the total 9,000 new dwellings required in East Cambridgeshire between 2011 and 2031, the rate of house building will need to increase very significantly, from an average 419 a year over the past twenty years to 600 a year for the next nine years.

The council also agreed to start work on a new 'environment chapter' for its next Local Plan, and to consult on a special Supplementary Planning Document for hedgehogs.

3.4 The council's planning department has written to the applicants for the controversial Camp's Field development in Wilburton advising that as they have not submitted the

required documentation in the requested time, it proposes to dispose of the application, which was submitted four years ago.

4 Finance and assets

4.1 The council's Finance & Assets

Committee once again ran a number of grant programmes, including a Growth & Infrastructure Fund, a Community Fund, a 'Pride of Place' grant scheme, a Safer Community Fund, and business grants. The council also gave away 75 English oak trees to communities to mark the coronation of King Charles III and his seventy-fifth birthday.

4.2 Following changes to the council's constitution, the Finance & Assets Committee will now be responsible for strategic planning, climate change, and the environment, which previously sat with the Operational Services Committee. We opposed this change on the grounds that these are important enough matters to deserve their own committee.

4.3 The council's Trading Company, ECTC, is delivering no more than thirty per cent affordable housing, which is the expectation of any commercial developer, and is not delivering a surplus for the council.

5 Operational services

5.1 The service offered by the district council's community advice bus has been drastically scaled back to just Soham and Littleport, and events in Ely. The council says more staff will be available at the council offices in Ely to advise residents. First they closed the CAB, now they have withdrawn the Community Bus service from local villages, making it increasingly difficult

for East Cambridgeshire residents to access advice and support.

5.2 Services overseen by the committee overspent by £742,047 in 2022/23, mostly due to reduced income from the Leisure Centre management fee, increased costs in the planning service and of dealing with environmental crime, and an increase in the management fee payable to East Cambs Street Scene (ECSS) due to what the council described as the 'so called' cost of living crisis.

In 2022/23 East Cambs District Council paid ECSS an annual fee of £3 million. Two years later the council has signed off on a fee of £4.6 million to deliver exactly the same service—an increase of fifty-three per cent.

5.3 The council's performance in waste collection and street cleaning continued to lag. Much publicity was given to the idea of running waste vehicles on hydro-treated vegetable oil, but debate rumbled on during the year about whether or not this was affordable. In November it was noted that ECSS had underspent by £33,000 on fuel, but a proposal by Mark to use this to run the fleet on vegetable oil for the rest of the year was defeated.

5.4 Mark has been a member of a group of councillors carrying out a strategic review of the council's waste and recycling service.

5.5 A damning report on East Cambs Street Scene was published following a 'wide-ranging review undertaken by the Chief Executive'—himself a member of the ECSS Board. The report listed a range of failures, and considerable challenges and risks. We were not surprised by the findings,

but were shocked at the extent of the issues and at how long it had taken to force the truth from the council.

Following this report, changes were made to the composition of the company Board, and a formal requirement put in place that overspends or underspends of over £50,000 should be reported to the Operational Services Committee within an agreed timeframe.

- 5.6** Negotiations took place during the year about whether or not Cambridgeshire's district councils and the county council could come to an agreement on whether to move to weekly food waste collections starting in 2026 as expected by Government.

Not doing so would have meant being 'named in legislation' as continuing with fortnightly collections until the end of the county council's Private Finance Initiative contract with waste company Thalia at Waterbeach in 2036. Fortunately the negotiations concluded positively and we can expect weekly food waste collections (and black wheelie bins) in two years' time.

- 5.7** The district council adopted its fourth annual Environment Plan, as a result of which a draft Supplementary Planning Document for hedgehogs was produced, and will be consulted on this spring.

- 5.8** A template Nature Recovery Plan for use by parish councils or other groups was made available online, and can be used to prepare a local action plan to help boost the natural environment locally.

- 5.9** The council is still refusing to join the rest of the country in taking responsibility for on-street parking enforcement from the police. We are receiving more and more (justified) complaints from members of the public about unlawful and dangerous parking.

6 Local issues

- 6.1** We were overjoyed that the proposal to close Priors Field GP surgery in Sutton and disperse the list did not happen, and were hugely proud of the determined community effort to retain this vital service in the village. NHS Cambridgeshire has been negotiating to buy the building and grounds, and is already investing in improvements to the exterior and interior.

Unfortunately, this was followed by announcements that One Stop no longer wished to host a post office, and that the Fire Authority was going to consult on closing Sutton's fire station. Attempts to encourage residents to step forward as on-call firefighters have not succeeded for a variety of reasons. A decision on the future of the fire station at Sutton, along with those at Manea and Kimbolton, is expected to be made this summer.

- 6.2** We attended the biannual Community Liaison meeting organised by the Elean power station on 6 May last year. The company operating the plant has been rebranded Melton, and is owned by Octopus Energy.

- 6.3** The anti-social driving gatherings at Elean Business Park have continued, with neither the police nor the district council nor the county council's

highways department nor the landowners able to find a permanent solution. The landowners have not implemented the planning permission they have been given for a data centre and small business unit on the site, which might have deterred anti-social drivers from gathering there in the night-time.

- 6.4** Mark has been a regular attender of meetings organised by East Cambs Climate Action Network.

7 Finally

- 7.1** We continue to offer in-person councillor surgeries in the Community Room at Sutton School, advertised on Facebook. 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 2024



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

The composition of the County Council has changed significantly since my last report.

Three councillors have left the Conservative Group and now sit as 'unaligned' members. Another has left and joined the Independent group that is part of the Joint Administration running the Council. And a recent County Council by-election in Yaxley saw the seat change from Conservative to Liberal Democrat.

The table below shows the current composition of the Council compared to the latest election results in May 2021. The Conservatives are not the largest group on the Council—for the first time ever.

	2021	2024
Conservatives	28	22
Liberal Democrats	20	23
Labour	9	9
Independents	4	4
Unaligned	0	3

1 The Council

- 1.1 The Joint Administration of Liberal Democrat, Labour and Independent councillors continues to run the Council. I remain in the same roles as last year, concentrating on Environment & Green Investment, Strategy Resources & Performance, Highways & Transport and Constitution & Ethics.

I still chair the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Flood & Water Partnership, and remain a member of the County Farms working group, Green Investment & Utilities Advisory Group, and Tree Strategy Working Group, and now co-chair a working group on the many very large infrastructure developments that organisations like Anglian Water,

Network Rail and large energy companies are planning countywide.

- 1.2 I ceased to chair the Combined Authority's Overview & Scrutiny Committee this year, because I was asked by the Leader of the Council to represent the Council on the Combined Authority Environment & Sustainable Communities Committee.

2 Strategy Resources & Performance

- 2.1 The Council set a balanced budget in February 2024, though this is becoming increasingly difficult for councils of all political colours across the country. An increasing number of local authorities are issuing 'Section 114' notices—the nearest council equivalent to bankruptcy. A 2023 poll of English councillors for the *New Statesman* found that a quarter of them believed that their council would soon go bankrupt, with 6 per cent saying this was 'very likely'.

The Council increased its portion of council tax by 4.99 per cent in total—2.99 per cent for general services, and two per cent for adult social care. The increase in need for social care, and children's social care in particular, is causing pressure on council budgets.

- 2.2 Following a request from three of its committees, Full Council agreed an increase in funding for Emergency Planning, in view of the frequency and severity of extreme weather leading to flooding. The budget also includes record levels of highways funding to strengthen and improve the standard of roads and pavements, including tackling potholes, weeds and gullies, in response to residents' concerns.

But without the long-promised, but not delivered, fair funding settlement from Government, future budgets will continue to be a struggle.

3 Adults & Health

- 3.1 In recent years the availability of NHS dental care has shrivelled to almost zero. Dentists say that under the current contract, it is no longer financially viable to offer NHS procedures because of a lack of Government investment. One in five people have resorted to 'DIY dentistry' and 4.4 million children in England have not seen an NHS dentist in at least a year, leading to a seventeen per cent increase in tooth decay-related extractions in children.

East Cambridgeshire remains one of the worst 'dental deserts' in the country. A national 'Dental Recovery Plan' has been published, including mobile 'dental vans' in rural and coastal areas, with at least one of these combine to Cambridgeshire. Cambridgeshire NHS has put in place a local Dental Improvement Plan, and identified the areas of the county most in need as being Fenland, Littleport, Ely, and Peterborough.

- 3.2 At Priors Field GP practice in Sutton, Malling Health has agreed a twelve-month extension to their contract, to spring 2025. The NHS is in negotiations to buy the premises and improvement works are taking place to the building. Updates on primary care in Sutton are available at www.cpics.org.uk/sutton

After Sutton's experience of the surrender of the Priors Field contract last year, I asked the Adults & Health Committee to review how

communication is managed in the event of a decision by the NHS to close a practice, and press the NHS on how it can identify and monitor 'at risk' practices more effectively. The Committee discussed these issues in June. NHS Cambridgeshire also carried out a post-action review.

The vulnerability of the entire NHS system was very evident, mostly due to workforce constraints including shortages and emigration. The *Washington Post* had recently led with the headline *How the UK became a terrible place to be a doctor*. Of the 88 GP practices in Cambridgeshire, thirteen were rated red in terms of vulnerability, and only fifteen or sixteen rated green. It was observed that this left a large number of practices in the amber category.

4 Assets & Procurement

- 4.1 Shire Hall in Cambridge is to be re-marketed after original preferred bidder Brookgate pulled out.
- 4.2 The committee has approved a new Land & Property Strategy to guide the management of its diverse portfolio.

5 Children & Young People

- 5.1 A new initiative aimed at nurturing and developing social care skills in Cambridgeshire has been launched by the County Council.

Cambridgeshire Academy for Reaching Excellence (CARE) is a new Social Care Academy which aims to improve outcomes for children and young people through support and training being offered for social work students and apprentices, international practitioners, experienced social workers and those

in leadership positions. It comes at a time when across the country local authorities are facing a shortage of social workers. More information at www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/care

- 5.2 The Holiday Activities & Food programme has continued over each of the school holidays.
www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/council/communities/support-with-the-cost-of-living/holiday-activities-and-food-programme

- 5.3 The county council is developing a scheme to expand Rackham primary school in Witchford to 420 places, and to increase the number of early years places. The council is in the process of appointing consultants for the scheme, with the aim of completing the project for September 2026.

6 COSMIC

- 6.1 COSMIC (Communities, Social Mobility & Inclusion Committee) has continued to oversee the Household Support Fund, which supports people experiencing immediate financial hardship to pay for essential items. An increasing number of families are struggling financially at the moment. The Government announced after councils had set their budgets that it would continue to fund the Household Support Fund for six more months, so the council will continue to issue supermarket vouchers to eligible families at the current rate for the next six months.

- 6.2 The Council ran a quality of life survey in August 2023, with a sample of 5,500 people asked about their views on a range of issues. While most Cambridgeshire residents felt happy and safe, over half of 18-24s felt

lonely with 61 per cent of them struggling with their mental health.

- 6.3 The committee has been overseeing a Cambridgeshire Priorities Capital Fund. This consists of £1M left over from the previous administration's £5M Communities Capital Fund. The fund was opened to a single round of one-off applications, and was heavily over-subscribed.

- 6.4 The mobile library service to a number of villages including Sutton and Witchford has been reorganised for a trial two month period, to be monthly rather than fortnightly. This trial took place in February and March so I am awaiting the outcome.

- 6.5 The committee is running a number of pilot decentralisation projects. I pressed for a community energy pilot in East Cambridgeshire, and am delighted that this is kicking off with a stakeholder conference in Ely.

7 Environment

- 7.1 An exceptionally wet winter left the ground saturated from mid-December onwards. Storms Babet through Henk compounded the problem, leaving many areas with flooding issues.
- 7.2 The Council continues to decarbonise its own buildings, winning grant funding for installation at a further nine council premises. Cambridgeshire was ranked fifth out of all county councils by Climate Action UK for our climate change work, including a gold star for decarbonising buildings and heating.
- 7.3 The council is in the process of installing solar car ports at Babraham

and St Ives Park & Rides. Energy from these will power EV chargers, including some specially designed for people with disabilities, as well as providing energy to commercial customers by private wire.

- 7.4** The application for an incinerator at Wisbech was granted by the Government minister, despite local opposition, but is now held up by another minister's review of licensing of incinerators nationally. Fenland District Council is seeking a judicial review of the decision.

The council's planning committee refused an application by Envar at Woodhurst for new incineration facilities. Envar have appealed, and an inquiry has concluded with a decision expected before summer.

- 7.5** Local Nature Recovery Strategies are now being prepared across the country. The Combined Authority is responsible for the one for Cambridgeshire, and has contracted this to the County Council together with Natural Cambridgeshire.

- 7.6** Cambridgeshire will join most other councils in introducing weekly food waste collections by 2026.

- 7.7** Swaffham Prior community heat project won the prestigious national Edie Net Zero Award for Renewable Energy Project of the Year and is currently in the running for an international award. By November, 65 homes in Swaffham Prior, including 23 Sanctuary properties, were fully connected to the new energy centre. I joined residents, council officers, contractors and others at an event to celebrate the anniversary of the first connections. Work is now under way

on the connection to the council's solar farm at North Angle in Soham.

- 7.8** The Government's decision on the application by Sunnica for a large solar farm between Burwell and Red Lodge has been delayed several times—most recently until early April. As Chair of the County Council's Environment & Green Investment Committee, I wrote to Michael Gove to draw to his attention the poor level of engagement by the applicant with local communities.

- 7.9** The Council once again hosted a Solar Together programme in Cambridgeshire. Organised and run by independent company iChoosr, this has previously worked well. However, in this round there were problems with one of the suppliers operating in Huntingdonshire. Cambridgeshire and other councils have been working with iChoosr to seek to address the causes of this before deciding whether to run further rounds of the programme.

- 7.10** Cambridgeshire has been awarded £11.5M over two years to improve energy in homes which are not on mains gas, including offers being made to some residents in Little Downham. More information at actiononenergycambs.org/funding

- 7.11** The annual carbon footprint report showed the County Council's own carbon emissions at 46 per cent lower in 2022/23 compared to four years earlier. Sixty per cent of these emissions is from waste. Total greenhouse gas emissions for Cambridgeshire as a whole in 2021 were 6.8 million tonnes CO₂e, with transport being the highest emitting

sector. There has been a twenty-five per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions in Cambridgeshire between 2005 and 2021. East Cambridgeshire produced the highest volume of greenhouse gas emissions per person in the county, mostly from land use and agriculture, unsurprising in an important food-growing area.

- 7.12** Fens 2100+ is a new programme launched in 2023 to enable the Fens to adapt to the challenges of climate change now and into the future. It is a partnership project between the Environment Agency, Association of Drainage Authorities, Internal Drainage Boards, National Farmers Union, and Anglian Northern and Great Ouse Regional Flood & Coastal Committees.

Its aim is to develop a Fens-wide flood resilience investment strategy, and develop a strategic case for continued investment in flood risk management across the Fens. The project will set out the investment choices needed so that Flood Risk Management Authorities can plan for the next twenty-five years and the Fens can flourish and adapt to climate change.

Over the next 100 years, an additional £4.5 billion will be needed to manage flood risk in the Fens—based on today's costs and not accounting for climate change. Under current flood risk management funding rules half of that investment would be funded, the rest is not. The Fens 2100+ programme has been developed to address that gap.

- 7.13** The Council's second Community Flood Group conference took place in September in St Ives, and was well

attended. The keynote speaker was flooding expert Mary Long-Dhonau.

The council has also updated its policy and protocol for enforcement under the Land Drainage Act 1991.

- 7.14** An estimated 10,000 public EV charge points will be needed across Cambridgeshire by 2030. With fewer than 500 currently installed, this is a huge challenge. A small-scale pilot project to trial on-street connections is due to begin shortly.

- 7.15** Gigabit-capable broadband coverage in Cambridgeshire & Peterborough has hit 85 per cent a year early, meaning we are above the national average and ahead of Government targets. Connecting Cambridgeshire attended the Timebank coffee morning in Sutton at the end of February to talk about the upcoming national Digital Switchover.

8 Highways & Transport

- 8.1** The condition of our roads and pavements is still a huge challenge, in Cambridgeshire as it is nationwide—a mixture of inadequate Government funding, decades of neglect, extreme weather, and in some cases poor standards of repair. The Council has received additional funding for pothole repairs which it has been using on new technology, and more crews on the ground.

- 8.2** 156 roads in Cambridgeshire have been identified as failing because of their soil base, and the effects of more and heavier vehicles, historic neglect, and extreme weather. Many of these are in the Sutton division, and Little Downham and Pymoor in particular. A plan for short and

medium term actions has been agreed, but longer term the focus needs to be on lobbying for the substantial investment needed.

- 8.3 The Committee reviewed its policy on weed removal, following residents' and councillors' concerns, and will resume cyclical spraying except where residents agree to manage weeds manually.

- 8.4 Sutton Parish Council's application last year for an HGV weight limit through the village was refused. A repeat application has been submitted for this year's round.

- 8.5 Highways officers agreed to put in place the waiting restrictions requested by Witchford Parish Council at the junction of Field End and Common Road, and at the junctions of Field End with Granary End, Quinton Road, and Victoria Green, on which I was consulted.

- 8.6 Options for a safe crossing at the BP A10/A142 roundabout have been narrowed down to three—two bridge options, and one 'at grade' (on the road surface) crossing option. These are now being further evaluated before a final option is chosen—and not before time.

- 8.7 The new 20MPH zone across most of Ely, requested unanimously by City of Ely Council and paid for by Government from the Transforming Cities Fund, went live at the end of March 2024. Applications closed in March for a further round of 20MPH projects across Cambridgeshire.

- 8.8 The pedestrian crossing on The Brook in Sutton near the school was installed during the year, as was the

pedestrian refuge on The Brook near the junction with the High Street.

- 8.9 Council officers consulted me on the proposal for a raised table and build-out on Manor Road in Witchford, which they approved after I had asked them to ensure it would not restrict access to deliver mobile homes to Cathedral View.

- 8.10 Anti-social driving at Elean Business Park in Sutton remains a problem, but the data centre at the Business Park which was granted permission last year and might have helped deter this shows no sign of being built.

- 8.11 Our excellent local highways officer Phil Harty has now moved on to become Clerk of Sutton Parish Council. The vacant local highways officer post is one of several which have been advertised, with an appointment to be made soon.

- 8.12 The Greater Cambridge Partnership (GCP) proposals for a 'Sustainable Travel Zone' with a congestion charge were abandoned as they clearly had insufficient public or political support. My view, expressed in my Annual Report to parishes a year ago, was that the proposals were inequitable and should not be implemented. I was one of six signatories to a letter in September which said that the GCP should stop the proposals.

- 8.13 Meanwhile however the Government is progressing its plans for what it is calling Cambridge 2040, a huge intensification of development in and around Cambridge run by yet another layer of local government—an unelected organisation called the Cambridge Delivery Group.

There are existing challenges to the carefully-thought out development proposals already put in place by the local councils in Greater Cambridge. The Environment Agency is objecting to some key developments on grounds of lack of water. The Government is proposing to get around this by introducing a system of 'water credits' and water offsetting. I remain very sceptical about this.

The Government's proposals for 150,000+ more houses in and around Cambridge will certainly need sustainable transport solutions if the city is not to become congested beyond capacity. Whether we will see the funding needed for rail, trams and light rail remains to be seen.

9 Combined Authority

9.1 Last year I reported on the attempt of the 'Fenpowder Plotters' to unseat the Mayor. A year later, influence on the Combined Authority has moved in the opposite direction, with changes in the leadership of Peterborough City Council removing one of the more divisive figures on the Combined Authority Board.

9.2 The Combined Authority has been implementing an improvement programme following the issuing of a Best Value Notice in January 2023. The Notice has been revised and recognises the significant progress made since then, but also that some elements need further work.

9.3 The Mayor increased his precept on the Council Tax, from £1 a month at Band D to £3 a month, specifically for new or improved bus services. In the Sutton division the proposals include an additional Ely Zipper from Ely to

Sutton and possibly Mepal; a new service between Ely and Longstanton Park & Ride via Witchford, Sutton, Earith and Willingham (something I have been lobbying for for a long time); and potentially a demand responsive transport service for Little Downham and wider communities.

However, no sooner had these proposals been agreed than Stagecoach announced huge cuts to the No9 service which runs from Littleport through Ely and Stretham to Cambridge. The Combined Authority tender for a service to replace as much of this as possible, and awarded a contract to A2B to fill many of the gaps, although there is a three-hour gap in service at the morning and evening peaks. All this shows the failure of the market-led bus system that has been in place since the mid-1980s, and the importance of reinstating local democratic control of routes, timetables and fares.

10 Finally

10.1 I have continued to hold regular surgeries in Sutton, and attend the Book Café in Little Downham once a month, and coffee mornings in Coveney, Sutton and Witchford where possible. Meanwhile, residents can continue to contact me by email, on Facebook or Twitter, or by phone.

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

10.3 My thanks to the clerks and parish councillors of the seven parishes in the Sutton division whose hard work keeps our communities together.

Promoted by and on behalf of Lorna Dupré (Liberal Democrats)
119 High Street Sutton Ely CB6 2NW

NEXT YR:- Send Minutes to Attendees.
NICK, MARK, LORNA, ANDREW, Lucy.
20 electorate.