

Cllrs Lorna Dupré and Mark Inskip

MONTHLY REPORT AUGUST 2024

FULL COUNCIL

The Full Council meeting took place on Thursday 25 July.

Corporate Plan action plan

We joined the rest of our political group on the Council in abstaining on the administration's proposed Corporate Plan action plan. There were some elements we supported, such as the work on inclusive play, which we had initiated. But some elements did not go far enough, some were unevidenced, and some such as the Mepal crematorium we continue to oppose.

We know from experience that the present administration's corporate plan cannot be trusted, after they deliberately hid a massively unpopular and unwanted multi-million pound crematorium from their Corporate Plan so that it could spend money on it in secret.

- The Plan said the council would be 'engaging' with the Combined Authority's ongoing bus reform work—just days after the Leader of the Council had abstained on it at a Combined Authority Board meeting.
- The promised 'improvements' to the BP roundabout to make it safe for pedestrians and cyclists are necessary only as a result of the utter refusal of some senior councillors to implement those vital safety measures at the same time as encouraging more cars more quickly round that dangerous junction.
- And the 'Road Safety Volunteer Scheme' that Conservative councillors have pressed the police into taking on was mooted in the autumn of 2021 and three years later there is nothing to show for it.

It was not clear what the Action Plan would do to address the challenges the report identified such as the cost of living, and recruitment and retention of staff. Meanwhile it fretted about priority and capacity concerns at the Combined Authority, but not those at East Cambridgeshire District Council for which it was directly responsible.

Neighbourhood Plans

We both spoke to welcome the two Neighbourhood Plans presented to the Council to be 'made'—Mepal and Sutton. Both were supported at referendum by a substantial majority of their respective communities.

Neighbourhood Plans play a vital role in the planning process, giving local communities genuine opportunities to shape their place. In Sutton this was

nowhere more obvious than the long-running planning battle over development at Garden Close. The half-hearted defence put up by the council of its refusal of the reserved matters application for Garden Close in April 2023 means that the developers now have a choice of two unsatisfactory schemes to implement. But at least the Neighbourhood Plan came to the fore in reducing to some extent the level of over-development first proposed by the developer.

Neighbourhood Plans are not just means to forestall inappropriate development though. They give an opportunity for local people to consider and discuss what makes their community work, what is needed to meet the challenges of the future, what most needs protecting and enhancing, and where appropriate development can provide the right sort of housing and amenities for current and future residents.

We both thanked and congratulated the respective parish councils of Mepal and Sutton, and the members of both communities who engaged with the process of these two plans during their respective stages.

ECSS extension

The Council has agreed to extend its Memorandum of Agreement with its wholly owned company East Cambs Street Scene for a further year from 31 March 2025 to 31 March 2026. This is to ensure there will be no break in service between now and the implementation of the new waste collection services—including weekly food waste collection—which will take effect in April 2026.

CHANGES TO NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK

The Government has launched a consultation on plans to amend the National Planning Policy Framework and other planning reforms ([link below](#)).

Many of the changes will primarily affect district councils as local planning authorities in their local plan and development management functions.

Some of the main changes proposed are as follows.

1. Housing targets will be mandatory using a new Standard Method which better reflects the urgency of supply in individual local authority areas.
2. The new method will include a stronger affordability ratio driver and the removal of the clause about previous oversupply in an area – meaning a combined target of 370,000 new homes per year.
3. There will be a requirement placed on councils to review their green belts when insufficient brownfield land for homes is available, with ‘grey belt’ land coming first.
4. Green and grey belt sites coming forward will require 50 per cent affordable housing and infrastructure.

5. A definition of what constitutes grey belt land will be published.
6. The need for councils, housing associations and other providers to deliver genuinely affordable homes—changes will be delivered through increased Government investment, changes to borrowing rules and rent stability.
7. Homes England's funding will be made more flexible to support housing delivery.
8. All authorities will need to have a Local Plan in place—there will be an end to changes to planning policy which have stalled Plan making and a commitment to the Government stepping in where authorities fail to deliver.
9. Transitional arrangements will be consulted on but will reflect the point each authority has reached in the Local Plan process.
10. Easier means to deliver major infrastructure.
11. 13-week Ministerial decision-making target to be measured.

This will have obvious implications for East Cambridgeshire, whose Local Plan is now nine years old, and where the building of affordable homes has been below what is needed for many years. (4,548 dwellings have been completed in the last twelve years, of which fewer than eighteen per cent have been affordable.)

Background information:

[Written statements - Written questions, answers and statements - UK Parliament](#)

[Proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework and other changes to the planning system - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

SUTTON FIRE STATION

An update to councillors from the Assistant Chief Fire Officer on proposals for the fire stations at Manea, Kimbolton and Sutton.

“Since initially opening the discussions at the end of last year, we have met to talk through our ideas and listened to your concerns. We have taken a lot of learning from these discussions, in particular the concerns around understanding the vital role of an on-call firefighter and how we can recruit more people from the community. We have taken this on board and will be implementing a plan to try and further educate communities about the role of an on-call firefighter and how we rely on local people to crew the fire engine, which will hopefully inspire more people to join.

We are currently working on how we can provide data, including the local crew's availability, the number of 999 calls in a particular area, where the fire engines come from if the local crew is not available, and how many firefighters are at a station on a monthly basis on our website for you and others to access. We are hoping we can get the web pages up and running

with current data very soon. I will let you know when this has been done and where to find it. We are hoping to set it up as something you can subscribe to, so it automatically emails you when it has been updated each month.

Last month we started a trial to have two additional fire engines available at weekends using on-call firefighters, so we can prove the concept of our initial proposal. We will evaluate the trial at stages along the way, but we would like to run this trial for a year before making any concrete decisions about relocating resources.

Therefore, we are unlikely to make any final decision about the future until at least the summer of 2025.

In the interim, we will continue our recruitment drives to try and boost numbers further, we will communicate wider across the county the challenges we are facing with the on-call duty system so people have a greater understanding of how we operate, and we will hold public drop in surgery events locally at the three fire stations we have been looking at so local residents can have a greater understanding of the issues and impact. We hope to run these in the new year once we have six months of data from the trial we have just started.”

MEET YOUR COUNCILLORS

Our next surgeries will take place on

- Monday 2 September, 6:30-7:30PM
- Monday 7 October, 6:30-7:30PM

in the Community Room at Sutton School. Between surgeries, residents can continue to contact us by email, Facebook, or phone.

Lorna also hopes to be at the Sutton Timebank coffee morning on Tuesday 20 August 10:00-11:00 and Nellie's on Friday 30 August 12:30-1:30PM.

Cllr Lorna Dupré

Cllr Mark Inskip

District Councillors for the Sutton ward