

# Cllr Lorna Dupré

## MONTHLY REPORT FEBRUARY 2025

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### GROWTH ANNOUNCEMENT

The end of January saw a high-profile announcement from the Chancellor, Rachel Reeves, about the Government's ambitions for growth.

Much of the announcement focused on Cambridgeshire, and in particular the decision to revive the Oxford-Cambridge corridor or 'OxCam arc' dumped by Boris Johnson three years ago. This plan, touted as 'Europe's Silicon Valley', will now be overseen by science minister Sir Patrick Vallance, whom many will remember appearing on our screens as one of the health professionals advising us daily during the early phase of the Covid pandemic.

Details included confirmation of

- East West Rail, with a new station at Tempsford
- The new Cambridge Cancer Research Hospital
- A University of Cambridge Innovation Hub in central Cambridge
- Development at the Beehive Centre site in Cambridge, and at Waterbeach
- The new Fens and Lincolnshire reservoirs
- Upgrading of the A428 Milton Keynes to Cambridge.

There will be a new delivery body for development around Oxford, to mirror the growth company for Cambridge already established by the Government, headed by Peter Freeman, the former chair of Homes England.

This announcement is a recognition of Cambridgeshire's significance to the UK economy. But it's also an urgent attempt to revive flagging economic growth, and much of what has been announced by way of infrastructure to support intensified development around Cambridge consists of schemes already planned or under way.

It's not clear whether the money is there for the whole route of East West Rail to Cambridge, and residents and businesses need certainty about this so that they can plan for the future.

House-building plans in and around Cambridge are already ambitious, developed through the local planning process. The infrastructure in the Chancellor's announcement is needed to meet these existing plans, not additional ones. For example the proposed Fens Reservoir—still in the early stages of consultation—will not be supplying water until the late 2030s, and is intended to enable the existing housing targets. Additional development will require further investment to ensure communities have access to sufficient

water, health services, and transport. Anglian Water is continuing to object to a number of development proposals on the basis of the insufficient sewage systems.

Commitment to the Cambridge Cancer Hospital is welcome, but our health services, from GP surgeries and access to dentists, to accident and emergency facilities in our hospitals, are already struggling.

And the establishment of further unaccountable delivery bodies to progress the Government's plans does not bode well for genuine public engagement and democratic input. This is particularly concerning as the Chancellor's announcement comes just at the point at which the Government is tearing up the fifty-year-old map of local government [see below] and reorganising local councils which will take several years to set up and start work.

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## LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

An announcement by the Government in December on the future shape of local government is being followed through at breakneck speed.

The Government wants elected Mayors, everywhere. And no two-tier (county and district) councils anywhere. Areas without Mayors are being prioritised to get them, and two-tier council areas are being invited to submit proposals for moving to single-tier 'unitary' councils in the coming months. Those council areas that want to move really quickly on this have been given the opportunity to request cancellation of their upcoming county council elections this May.

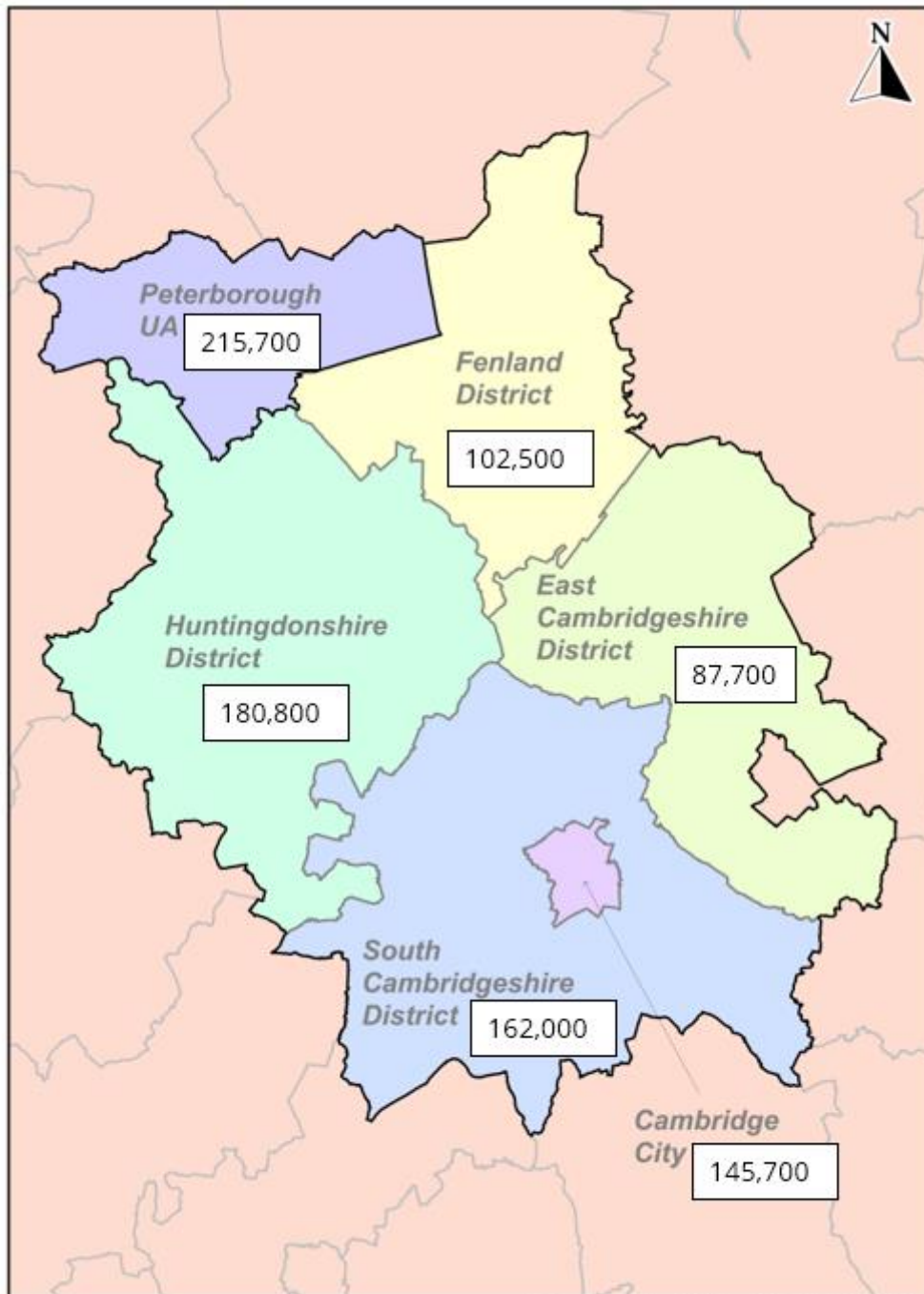
In Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, the elections for the County Council and the Mayor on Thursday 1 May will go ahead.

### Unitary councils

The Government's specification for new unitary councils continues to emerge. Broadly, new Mayoral authorities should have a population of around 1.5 million (ours has about 900,000 so is a little on the small side). Each Mayoral authority should have at least two unitary councils under it. Each of these councils should have a population of at least 500,000.

This means that unless there's a lot of special pleading, we should expect two unitary councils for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. It may be possible to cut up existing district councils and reallocate the pieces, but this would slow up the process and make it more complex, and the Government doesn't seem to be in that sort of mood.

The populations of the local authorities in the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority area from the most recent (2021) census are as follows.



The Leader of East Cambridgeshire District Council, the smallest council in our Combined Authority area, has written to the leaders and chief executives of the other councils in our area, saying that East Cambs “will not be resorting to redrawing maps and producing our own proposals”. However, she has set out criteria on which she is prepared to hold discussions with neighbouring councils, including her administration’s current policies on council tax freezes, controversial approach to Community Land Trusts (CLTs), and support for its trading companies.

She also says she wants to hear “proposals which respect our current boundaries and seek an equitable partnership between the constituent parts of any new Council”. This all does rather seem to miss the point that this process is about creating a new council (not a new partnership of councils—that is what the Combined Authority is), which will be substantially bigger than East Cambs.

Furthermore, councils do change political colour from time to time, and the policies of the current administration of the smallest council in Cambridgeshire cannot be set in stone or bind its much larger successor for ever.

The county council's Insight team is producing data to help council officers advise councillors and to help councillors come to conclusions about sensible, workable proposals. While I wait to see the data, my initial view is that residents across East Cambridgeshire tend to look to Cambridge rather than Peterborough—even more so for those in places like Cheveley, Stetchworth, Bottisham and Burwell. We use hospital facilities at Addenbrookes, FE and sixth form facilities at Hills Road, Long Road, and Cambridge Regional College. We commute to jobs at the Science Park, Biomedical Campus and with other employers. Even from Littleport, at the northernmost end of the district, there are direct trains to Cambridge, and the A10 down to the Milton interchange. We don't all do all those things, but a large enough proportion of us do to mean that these should be really important criteria.

And of course, ultimately, drawing lines on maps will be exactly what the Government's exercise is all about. If councils don't agree collectively what we think is the best solution, the Government will just pick one of its own choosing. Its policies and priorities will be up to local residents in the elections that follow.

### More powers for Mayors

At the same time as all this, the Government also wants elected Mayors to have more powers.

- All areas will have to produce a Spatial Development Strategy, to be adopted with support from a majority of constituents.
  - Mayors will be given new development management powers 'similar to those those exercised by the Mayor of London'—including the ability to call in planning applications.
  - Mayors will be able to charge developers a 'Mayoral Levy' to 'ensure that new developments come with the necessary associated infrastructure'. Such a levy was used to help fund London's Elizabeth Line in 2012.
  - Homes England will have a stronger partnership with established Mayoral Strategic Authorities and increased accountability to mayors to help them deliver on their plans. As part of this, the government says it will move Homes England to a more 'regionalised model' over time, 'so that the agency is even more responsive to the economic plan of an area'.
  - Mayors will be given 'the funding they need to deliver on their housing ambitions, with control of grant funding for regeneration and housing delivery'.
  - Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities will be given the power to set out the strategic direction of any future affordable housing programme.
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## STRATEGY RESOURCES & PERFORMANCE

### Council budget

Cambridgeshire County Council Strategy Resources & Performance Committee met on Tuesday 28 January and considered its budget proposals to the Full Council, which will meet on Tuesday 11 February.

Plans for the coming year include an investment of more than £56M in highways maintenance to tackle the significant backlog of repairs. This includes £14.5M for day-to-day management of the highway and an additional £20M in planned maintenance including roads, pavements, drainage, bridges, safety barriers, traffic signals, public rights of way, and cycleways.

The proposals include £3M to cover inflation for local care providers and an extra £8M for the five per cent increase in the Real Living Wage. The draft budget also invests an additional £9M for children who become 'looked after' by the care system, and £4.7M to support home to school transport services.

In addition, an estimated £6M of Household Support Fund will support those most in need, alongside further improvements in libraries through £1.3M already committed to the Libraries Plus programme.

Nationally, the financial picture for councils is not good. Four in five county councils are saying that they will be worse off than before the Government's autumn budget and financial settlement. 93 per cent of county and unitary councils will have to raise council tax by the maximum permitted, which is 4.99 per cent in all but exceptional circumstances.

County councils face huge challenges meeting the need for adult social care, provision for special educational needs, and school transport. 93 per cent of Cambridgeshire County Council's spending is on things it must do by law, and 86 per cent of the council's income comes from council tax and business rates. It really doesn't leave much room for manoeuvre.

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## ADULTS & HEALTH

### Frequent users of A&E

A new specialist team is helping to reduce avoidable visits to Accident and Emergency (A&E) departments across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

Known as the High Impact Use team (HIU), the service is a partnership between NHS Cambridgeshire & Peterborough and the County Council (who host the service) on behalf of the Integrated Care System (ICS). This service helps those who often attend A&E for reasons that extend beyond medical interventions and for needs which would be better met by other professionals.

Since its launch in October 2024, the team found that many of the frequent visitors to A&E at local hospitals were experiencing issues such as loneliness, financial problems, and poor physical and mental health, rather than medical emergencies requiring urgent hospital care.

The HIU team works alongside partners to build a trusted relationship with each person identified as requiring non-clinical support through their frequent attendances at A&E, and help meet their needs. This can include arranging and attending appointments with the patient, enrolling them in community groups or charity services, and assisting them to access other support such as counselling services, housing advice and employment guidance.

The service is provided to people aged eighteen or over who are registered with a GP in Cambridgeshire, Peterborough or Royston.

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## **CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE**

Sutton C of E Primary school is opening a specialist autism resource centre at Easter. There are several such facilities at secondary schools in Cambridgeshire, but just one other such facility in a primary school in the county. The new ten-place Enhanced Resource Base was approved last May (2024).

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## **COMMUNITIES, SOCIAL MOBILITY & INCLUSION (COSMIC)**

### **Little Downham library**

The Book Café at the Village Hall in Little Downham has had to scale back operations, restricting opening to Wednesday afternoons only. Denice Maxey and a team of volunteers are coordinating these, supported by Assistant Parish Clerk Kendle Hanslip, but they are still looking for a volunteer manager. Meanwhile I've liaised with the County Council's libraries manager to ensure their support for retaining this Community Managed Library in the village.

### **Falls prevention**

Cold homes can affect mobility and put older people at greater risk of falling. It's important to be extra careful to avoid falls during winter months. There's an online interactive risk checking tool to help identify your risks, or those of older family, friends, or neighbours.

**[www.steadyonyourfeet.org/cambridgeshire](http://www.steadyonyourfeet.org/cambridgeshire)**

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## **ENVIRONMENT & GREEN INVESTMENT**

### **Contract for collection of recyclable waste**

There has been much discussion recently of a new contract for disposal of recyclable waste which involves transport for processing in Northern Ireland.



This contract is for the contents of our blue bins. Recyclable materials dropped off at Household Recycling Centres are dealt with under different contracts.

The contract for blue bin waste is let by RECAP, the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Waste Partnership ([www.recap.co.uk](http://www.recap.co.uk)). The County Council's procurement team assisted RECAP with the procurement process because the council hosts the RECAP Manager role, but the contract award decision was made by the waste collection authorities (the district councils). The waste collection authorities have managed this contract for the last ten years.

The current contractor, Thalia at Waterbeach, did not submit a compliant bid, so was disqualified. The contract was awarded to two successful contractors:

- Biffa (London) for material from East Cambridgeshire, Huntingdonshire and Fenland
- RE-GEN (Northern Ireland) for material from Cambridge, South Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

Bids were awarded on quality as well as on price, and transport considerations were part of the criteria.

It has been suggested that the new contract with RE-GEN will mean thousands of miles of additional HGV journeys, compared to the current contract. However, RE-GEN already has contracts with sixteen other authorities and distributes sorted recycling back to the UK before making the return journey to Northern Ireland. The company intends to build a new processing facility in the Midlands during the lifetime of this contract.

RE-GEN can recover up to 99 per cent of material through their plant, compared to 80 per cent under the current contract. This will mean capturing an estimated 400 tonnes more material a month. This is not only important in its own right environmentally, but also in light of the forthcoming national 'extended producer responsibility' scheme. Under this scheme the original producers of waste are required to fund the lifetime costs of its recycling and disposal—and councils will be required to demonstrate as efficient and effective recovery of packaging as possible.

In short, goods and packaging are manufactured around the UK, and indeed the world. Recycling and recovery of these materials is also carried out nationwide and worldwide.

### **Cradge bank at Sutton Gault**

The erosion of the Cradge bank at Sutton Gault was reported to the Environment Agency in September by a local resident. When he posted further evidence in early December, I took this up with the Environment Agency, and

was promised action as soon as the water levels had subsided soon enough to permit access for people, plant, and materials.

(I have since been told that because a breach would not increase flood risk to people or property, this was not treated as a high priority; that earlier access was prohibited by the water levels in the flood plain, which had fallen but then rose again; and that operational staff were busy managing issues associated with flooding across the area.)

Just before Christmas, vehicles arrived on site, and the increasing gaps in the bank were plugged with sandbags as a temporary measure. The Environment Agency's next step is to carry out an investigation to determine options for a more permanent repair—they hope to have the funding for the investigation this year. A preferred option will then need to be costed, then bid for.

All of this is taking place in the context of funding cuts, under-staffing and low morale at the Environment Agency across the country. Funding for the regulator is nearly a third lower in real terms than it was in 2010.

The Environment Agency incident hotline number is 0800 80 70 60, or email **[enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk)**. Do specifically request to be kept informed if you make a report; if you don't, the Environment Agency will just assume you are providing some local intelligence, and not contact you back.

### **New strategies to come to committee in March**

Two new environmental strategies are to be presented to the County Council's Environment & Green Investment Committee in March—a Tree & Woodland Strategy for management of trees and hedgerows on the council's own land (including road verges), and a Biodiversity Strategy.

### **Waste water treatment decision delay**

A decision by Government on the move of the waste water treatment plant from North East Cambridge to Honey Hill has been delayed until April.



## **HIGHWAYS & TRANSPORT**

### **A10 BP roundabout crossing consultation**

A public consultation on a proposed new crossing of the A10 BP roundabout is now open, closing at 11:59PM on Wednesday 5 March 2025.

The proposals include two bridge options and one signal crossing option, each with different design features, benefits and costs. As an active travel route, the new crossing would be designed for walking, cycling and travelling by wheelchair or mobility aids.



Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority is funding the project and Cambridgeshire County Council is responsible for delivering the scheme. To find out more, residents are invited to attend a drop-in event or webinar:

- Tuesday 4 February, 7:00-8:15PM (online webinar)
- Tuesday 11 February, 3:00-7:00PM, Witchford Village College (drop-in)
- Wednesday 26 February, 1:00–2:15PM (online webinar)
- Thursday 27 February, 10:30AM-2:30PM Ely Library (drop-in)

Throughout the consultation, residents can also visit an unstaffed exhibition at Ely Library during library opening hours to find out more about the proposals. Library staff will not be able to answer questions but there will be information banners and printed copies of the consultation brochure for residents to read.

The consultation findings will help inform a future decision to be made by Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority and Cambridgeshire County Council regarding the preferred option to be taken forward.

For further information, including to complete the survey and register for a webinar, visit [\*\*www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/ely-witchford-crossing\*\*](http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/ely-witchford-crossing)

### **Street light LED replacements**

The programme to replace fluorescent street lights with more environmentally friendly LED ones has started, with replacements in the Sutton division happening in Little Downham (but not Pymoor, yet) and Mepal.

A number of complaints have been received, locally and across the county, which are being investigated. The new fittings intentionally shine the light more directly down, and this is an issue in areas where a lot of street lights were removed when management of the lighting was contracted to Balfour Beatty, leaving pools of darkness between street lights. Councillors are also asking officers to review some of the lights against the agreed specification.

### **Chain Causeway Sutton**

This got off to a slightly rocky start, with several days of unpredictable on-off road closures until the road was fully shut on Thursday 9 January, and some rather suboptimal signage for the first day or two. But work is now progressing well and according to programme, despite several wet and windy days.

### **A142 Witcham Toll to Lancaster Way**

Works are expected on the A142 to retexture the carriageway at various points between Witcham Toll and Lancaster Way. These are currently scheduled to take place between 11 and 17 February, and to involve occasional closures of the A142 between 8:00PM and 6:00AM. See **one.network** for information on locations and dates of works.

## Footpath 3 Gravel End to Downham Hythe

The long-awaited work to reinstate this footpath is now planned to start on 10 March, completing on 13 May. I am continuing to press council officers on this timetable as I know how valued this pedestrian link between the two villages is.

## Speed sign on The America

Cllr Mark Inskip and I managed to intercept county council officers before they removed one of the speed signs on The America in Sutton, which they wrongly claimed was no longer working.

## Meanwhile on the Combined Authority

The new Tiger On Demand bus service is now available in East Cambridgeshire. Tiger On Demand is a flexible transport service for residents in rural and under-served areas. The service allows passengers to book journeys between designated virtual stops, offering a reliable and convenient alternative to traditional fixed-route bus services. Residents can book their journeys

- On the Tiger On Demand app
- By calling the dedicated booking line 01480 595 440
- Via the website at [www.tigerondemand.co.uk](http://www.tigerondemand.co.uk)

Operating times are Monday to Saturday, 6:30AM to 7:00PM. Fares are £2 per journey for adults, £1 for children aged 5 to 16 or Tiger pass holders, free for under-5s or concessionary and disability bus pass holders. Pay by debit or credit card when booking over the phone, or via the app. Unfortunately drivers are not able to accept cash or card payments.

For full details please visit: <https://transport.cambridgeshirepeterborough-ca.gov.uk/buses/tiger-on-demand/>

The Transport & Infrastructure Committee unanimously recommended to the Mayor that he agree to introduce franchising of bus services in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. This would put control of routes, fares and timetables into democratic hands, and enable profit-making routes to subsidise socially needed but less used ones.

## MEET YOUR COUNCILLORS

### Surgery: new venue!

Cllr Mark Inskip and I are moving our monthly councillor surgery to Joy Bistro at 65 High Street Sutton—thank you to the Bistro for being so welcoming! Dates and times remain the same, 6:30-7:30PM on the first Monday of each month unless otherwise advised. Forthcoming dates are Monday 3 February and Monday 3 March.

### Or catch me at ...

- Wednesday 12 February, 10:30-11:30, Nellie's Scott Court Sutton
- Wednesday 12 February, 12:00-12:45, Soup lunch Coveney Village Hall
- Tuesday 18 February, 10:00-11:00, Timebank coffee morning The Glebe Sutton
- Friday 28 February, 10:00-11:00, Nellie's Scott Court Sutton

The above may change at short notice subject to late changes to my diary.

I can also be contacted

- by email at [lorna@lornadupre.org.uk](mailto:lorna@lornadupre.org.uk)
- on Facebook
- by phone on 07930 337596

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### **Cllr Lorna Dupré**

County Councillor for the Sutton division