

Cllrs Lorna Dupré and Mark Inskip

MONTHLY REPORT MARCH 2025

BUDGET

The District Council set its budget on Tuesday 25 February. Both groups (Conservative, and Lib Dem & Independent) proposed a council tax freeze.

The Lib Dem & Independent budget amendment would have

- Freed up funding to support tourism and the arts in East Cambridgeshire. These are good things to have in their own right, but also important contributors to the local economy. (The response of the council's leadership in past years has been to hand over responsibility for these matters to City of Ely Council. We were surprised to hear, the day before the budget, that the council has offered to sell the Maltings, Maltings Cottage, and Oliver Cromwell House to the City Council for one pound.)
- Invested further sums into ensuring East Cambridgeshire plays its part in our local climate and environmental ambitions.
- Funded these two items by the implementation of a £200,000 saving on the staff vacancy factor. We are already aware that a number of posts with this council are hard to recruit to—and we believe this can only increase with the reorganisation of local government looming. There is usually a significant underspend on staffing.

The decision, agreed unanimously, to cease spending on the Local Plan (see below) presented an opportunity to spend some of the money set aside for this on preparations for civil parking enforcement. This would have brought the council into line with almost every other council in the country.

And finally, we proposed to remove all references in the budget to the development of the unwanted and unneeded crematorium at Mepal.

All the above was voted down by 14 votes to 13.

COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY

The council has broadly just under £12 million of contributions from developers to meet just under £18 million of commitments for its use. And most of that is committed to the council leadership's crematorium plans at Mepal, for which the leadership plans to provide over £8 million of the £12 million it has to hand.

In order to do this, money for Littleport schools and the council's Leisure Centre has been significantly reduced, and funding for the expansion of Ely Country

Park and health facilities for North Ely has been removed entirely—leaving these commitments to rely on the promise of future income.

Our group wanted to delete the millions of pounds to be squandered on a crematorium. This would have enabled us to fund the council's other commitments in full, and also free up £1.8 million of future income to increase the amounts available for district wide community facilities, and inclusive play and open spaces; and set aside funding to improve footpaths and cycleways and £2.2 million to ensure Staploe Medical Centre in Soham can go ahead with its desperately needed expansion plans.

However, the Conservative group voted to prevent these alternatives from even being proposed and debated.

It is now clear how much the council leadership's crematorium is costing the people of East Cambridgeshire, not only for the crematorium itself, but also in terms of lost funding and opportunities for important projects across the whole of the district.

The crematorium plans will come back to the council for rubber-stamping in May when tenders have been received and evaluated.

LOCAL PLAN REVIEW SHELVED

The council agreed unanimously not to proceed with a review of the Local Plan as had previously been agreed. The Government's proposals for local government reorganisation, and for new powers for elected Mayors, are throwing everything up in the air, and we agreed reluctantly with the proposal not to progress with revising the Local Plan until we know what the new council boundaries will be.

It is to say the least unfortunate, given that the current Plan will be ten years old in April, and fell indeed over within months of having been adopted in April 2015. A previous rewrite was pulled from under the council by the leadership several years ago, after it had gone through all its stages. Subsequent proposals by the Liberal Democrat group in the last few years to recommence work could have seen a new plan almost complete by this stage.

But as it is, years of dither and delay mean that there will be more years of delay before we have a new Local Plan, which may now be as late as the early 2030s.

COUNCIL PAY POLICY

The council agreed its pay policy statement at the full council meeting on 25 February.

Although the council meets or exceeds the national living wage, a number of its staff are currently paid less than the real living wage. The lowest paid employee currently receives £12.26 per hour, while the real living wage is currently £12.60. This is a high cost area of the country so the Liberal Democrat & Independent Group suggested the council should be aiming to be a real living wage employer.

TRADING COMPANY LOAN EXTENDED

The council's loan to its wholly-owned Trading Company, due in 2027, is to be extended in case it wishes to take up the opportunity of a project currently being consulted on by Haddenham Community Land Trust.

One can only speculate to what extent this is about keeping the Trading Company afloat beyond 2027, when of course decisions about its future will be made by whatever council replaces East Cambridgeshire District.

COMMUNITY POLICING MEETINGS

A reminder of the next Community Policing Team meeting for East Cambridgeshire at 7:00PM on Wednesday 9 April. Book by email (subject 'EAST CAMBS') to communitymeeting@cambs.police.uk

COUNCIL MEETINGS IN MARCH AND APRIL

March

- Planning Committee, Wednesday 5 March
- Licensing Committee, Wednesday 12 March
- Audit Committee. Tuesday 18 March
- Special Council meeting, Thursday 20 March
- Operational Services, Monday 24 March
- Finance & Assets, Thursday 27 March

April

- Planning Committee, Wednesday 2 April

The special meeting on Thursday 20 March will be for the council to determine its response to the Government on Local Government Reorganisation.

The council's leadership has published a residents' survey at <https://eastcambs.gov.uk/press-releases/2025/have-your-say-east-cambs>

It's not clear what most of the questions have to do with local government reorganisation, or how the responses will inform the leadership's response.

MEET YOUR COUNCILLORS

We will be at Joy Bistro, 65 High Street, Sutton on Monday 7 April and Monday 12 May at 6:30-7:30PM.

Between surgeries, residents can continue to contact us by email, Facebook, or phone.

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District Councillors for the Sutton ward
(Mepal, Sutton, Wentworth, and Witcham)