

Annual Report 2025



CLLR LORNA DUPRE

CLLR MARK INSKIP

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

1 The council

1.1 In autumn 2024, the composition of the council changed when a Conservative councillor resigned from his party and became an Independent. A couple of months later he and the Liberal Democrat group joined forces to form the Liberal Democrat & Independent Group. The Group had fourteen members, the same as the Conservative Group, but the Conservatives retained the chairs of council committees and of the council itself, so held the casting vote on all decisions.

1.2 In March 2025, however, a vacancy was caused by the resignation through ill-health of a Liberal Democrat councillor in Stretham. The vacancy is due to be filled by election on Thursday 1 May. Until then, the composition of the council is 14 Conservative, 12 Liberal Democrats plus one Independent, and one vacancy.

2 Full council

2.1 The budget in February 2025 once again saw a council tax freeze proposed by both groups on the council. We supported an alternative budget proposal which would have provided a lifeline to Babylon Arts which has now announced its closure this year, and implemented civil parking enforcement, but this was defeated. We also once again proposed a 100 per cent council tax discount for those on the lowest incomes, but this was once again defeated.

The council has also agreed its pay policy. The council meets or exceeds the national living wage, but a

number of its staff are paid less than the real living wage. The lowest paid employee receives £12.26 per hour, while the real living wage is currently £12.60. We suggested that the council should aim to become a real living wage employer.

2.2 The Conservative administration is still determined to proceed with its crematorium plan for Mepal. It is proposing to pay for this using over £9M of developer Community Infrastructure Levy contributions which were intended to improve community amenities. As it has over £17M of commitments for these contributions, but only £11M such funding available, it has decided to delay these commitments for years to come in order to pay for its crematorium now. It is now clear how much this vanity project is costing communities across East Cambridgeshire in lost opportunities and delayed facilities.

We have continued to put the strong case against the crematorium; and in September Lorna and Ely councillor Alison Whelan proposed that the escalating costs should be referred by the Finance & Assets Committee to the full council. This was refused. The final decision is due to be taken in May 2025 when the tenders have been received.

2.3 We successfully supported two Liberal Democrat council motions this year. The first raised the issue of accessible playgrounds, and has resulted in a commitment from the council to audit its playgrounds and offer parish councils the opportunity to include their playgrounds in the audit. A sum of money from

developers will also be set aside for accessible equipment.

The second drew the council's attention to the practice of emptying sea toilets from boats into the River Great Ouse. The council has been in communication with the Environment Agency asking them to introduce a by-law to prevent this.

- 2.4** A special meeting of the full council was held in March to agree the holding response to Government on its plans for taking forward local government reorganisation. A final response is required in November.

3 Planning

- 3.1** Planning permission was granted to Abbey Homes for development at Garden Close Sutton.
- 3.2** Sutton's refreshed Neighbourhood Plan has now been approved by the District Council, as has Mepal's Neighbourhood Plan. Witcham's Plan is still in progress with hopes to complete in 2025.
- 3.3** The details of Vistry's Phase 2 application for development at the top of Mepal Road Sutton were approved by the Planning Committee in December. We made further written representations about our concerns over flood and water management in this location, but were unsuccessful. The highways are to be adopted by the County Council, unlike in Phase 1. The foul water and sustainable drainage systems are to be adopted by Anglian Water.
- 3.4** The council decided not to proceed with a new Local Plan, following the Government's proposed changes to

the National Planning Policy Framework. Our local plan is now ten years old, and the building of affordable homes has been below what is needed for many years. It did however publish a Supplementary Planning Document for hedgehogs.

4 Finance and assets

- 4.1** The council's Finance & Assets Committee ran a Net Zero Villages grant using funding from the Combined Authority. Awards have been made to ten projects.

The council also ran a round of Community Fund applications for grants of up to £1,000 for new or existing projects designed to improve the quality of life of residents.

And a round of capital grants of up to £50,000 was also opened to existing local small and medium enterprises or micro-businesses, to create or safeguard jobs, bring new products to market, or improve productivity.

- 4.2** The committee approved a revised whistle-blowing policy. Lorna suggested that the council should engage the services of Protect, an independent charity, to review the draft policy, which came back stronger as a result.
- 4.3** The council has extended its loan to its Trading Company beyond 2027.
- 4.4** The committee agreed to approve the transfers or, where relevant, extend the leases of The Maltings, Maltings Cottage, and Oliver Cromwell House to City of Ely Council. We are told this is with the intention of removing these premises from the district council's assets in advance of local

government reorganisation in Cambridgeshire & Peterborough.

5 Operational services

- 5.1** The council is partnering with Cambridgeshire County Council to jointly fund a full time Housing First project worker dedicated to providing one to one support for homeless people with multiple or complex needs. Mark asked what the council was doing to meet its target for the number of families in bed and breakfast accommodation, and was told that the council is discussing with providers the possibility of providing self-contained accommodation for families with special needs to reduce the number of families in bed and breakfast. There has been a rise in the number of homeless young people with serious mental health conditions since the Covid pandemic.

The council has taken over the management of the district's social housing register. Sanctuary Housing has decided to cease maintaining a front desk presence at the district council offices in Ely, in favour of more community meetings and events. Last year saw a large increase in complaints about empty Sanctuary properties and Sanctuary has begun to take steps to address this.

The council has updated its Housing Adaptations & Repairs Policy, including raising the limit for adaptations from £10,000 to £15,000.

- 5.2** Weekly food waste collections (and fortnightly black wheeled bin collections) are set to be introduced across East Cambridgeshire in June 2026, as part of a national move to increase recycling and reduce black

bag waste. The annual subscription charge for a second green waste bin will be removed, as will the one-off charge for an extra recycling bin.

- 5.3** Just two large fly-tipping incidents in the district last autumn cost approximately £40,000 to clear, about three times the existing budget for this service.
- 5.4** The council's Public Space Protection Order for dog fouling has been extended, and the fixed penalty charge increased to £100.
- 5.5** The committee approved an updated Air Quality Strategy for the coming five years. The council's scientific officer said that levels of nitrogen dioxide had reduced since 2018, and this was likely also the case for fine particulate matter (PM2.5) though there is no requirement to measure this.
- 5.6** The council is still refusing to join the rest of the country in taking responsibility for on-street parking enforcement. It is now over three years since the Leader of the Council promised a unique system of police volunteers to enforce parking, but there is still nothing to show for it.
- 5.7** The council launched a new website in January at eastcambs.gov.uk

6 Local issues

- 6.1** The purchase by the NHS of the Priors Field building in Sutton completed this year, enabling improvements to the premises and providing stability for the future of GP services there. The Patient Participation Group assisted the NHS with evaluating applications to provide health care

from this site, and in excellent news St Mary's practice in Ely is taking on the service.

Post Office services from the One Stop have sadly been downgraded, but proposals to close Sutton's fire station were delayed while a trial takes place of the use of two additional weekend fire engines using on-call firefighters. No decision will be made on the fire station's future until at least this summer.

6.2 The Combined Authority's Overview & Scrutiny Committee received a report on governance of the Combined Authority's housing programme under the previous Mayor. Issues considered include potential whistle-blowing allegations not being investigated in a timely manner, proper records of decisions not being kept, Mayoral decisions not being published, variations to previously agreed conditions not being highlighted, paperwork not being retained, and questions remaining about decisions to remove or vary profit-share agreements.

6.3 The council is paying Eastern Powerhouse £20,000 to scope a project to create a network of reservoirs on agricultural land across East Cambridgeshire. It has also set aside £1M of developer contributions towards the costs of construction. Eastern Powerhouse is chaired by Conservative former Mayor of Cambridgeshire & Peterborough and ECDC council leader James Palmer.

6.4 Lorna and Mark pursued the district council over unpaid Community Infrastructure Levy obligations to Wentworth Parish Council.

6.5 Mark is a member and part of the management team of East Cambs Climate Action Network.

7 Finally

7.1 We continue to offer in-person councillor surgeries every month, but our venue has changed. We are grateful to Joy Bistro at 65 High Street Sutton for hosting us, from 6:30 to 7:30PM on the first Monday of every month except for bank holiday Mondays. 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.

Promoted by L Dupré on behalf of Lorna Dupré and Mark Inskip (East Cambs Liberal Democrats) all at 119 Kings Avenue Ely CB7 4QW and printed by HLP5 119 High Street Sutton Ely CB6 2NW