

Annual Report to Brampton Parish Assembly 2018

A report on Cambridgeshire County Council from Cllr Peter Downes

I report monthly to the Parish Council on developments at County level providing up-dates through the Focus leaflets. This report pulls together the trends over the last year and looks ahead to the future. I am very happy to engage constructively with any residents who would like further details or who wish to challenge the contents of this report.

Full details of the Council structure, committees and meetings with reports can be seen on-line at www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk. Full Council meetings are web-cast.

1. The political balance of the Council

After the elections in May 2017 the political composition of the Council now stands as: **36 Conservatives, 15 Liberal Democrats, 7 Labour, 2 St. Neots Independents, 1 Independent** making 61 councillors in total. The Council has increased its decision-making committees from 5 to 7, each comprising 10 members, with a majority of Conservatives on each committee and every Committee chaired by a Conservative. The committees are: Adults, Children and Young People, Commercial and Investment, Communities and Partnerships, Economy and Environment, Health, Highways and Community Infrastructure.

The overall political and financial direction of the Council is in the hands of the General Purposes Committee comprising 15 members. This is chaired by the Leader of the Council who is also the Leader of the Conservative Group. There are several more smaller committees covering, for example, Planning, Audit and Accounts, Constitution and Ethics, Pensions, Staffing Appeals. All the committees are chaired by Conservatives except Audit and Accounts which is chaired by Cllr Shellens (Lib. Dem.).

2. Councillor allowances

Whenever a new council is elected, an Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) is formed to recommend a remuneration structure. This year the Council voted by a majority to reject the IRP's proposals and implement their own scheme. This increased the cost of the scheme by £185,000. The basic allocation to all councillors was increased to £10,315. Special Responsibility Allowances (SRA) are allocated to those councillors who take on extra responsibilities. Conservative councillors receive 23 of the SRAs amounting to £276,155 per annum; councillors from other parties receive 4 of the SRAs, amounting to £23,856. Full details can be found on the web-site.

3. Council officers

The Chief Executive, Gillian Beasley, is shared with Peterborough; reducing back office costs and several other senior posts are also shared with Peterborough. The trend of recent years i.e. to reduce council staff, has continued.

4. What the Council provides

Social services to children and young people, older people, people with mental health problems, physical and learning disabilities; Planning of school places and some support for schools (although the funding for day-to-day running comes from central government); Coordinated Early Years provision, nurseries etc.; Libraries; road maintenance; road safety measures; Overall transport strategy; Growth and wider development issues; Trading standards; waste disposal and recycling centres.

The full details can be found in the Council Tax booklet delivered to all residents.

5. The key issue faced by Cambridgeshire County Council: reduced funding

This year has seen a continuation and intensification of the debate on how to continue to provide the services in a context of severe financial pressures. Central government has continued to reduce its revenue grant to local authorities; locally that is from £86 million in 2013-14 to nil by 2019-20. Councils have little flexibility to increase tax levels (see below, para. 6). The demand for services is increasing as the elderly population and the under-fives increase and services are costing more

6. Council Tax

For several years the government has capped the levels by which local councils can increase tax. It was usually 2% but last year the government allowed upper tier councils with social care responsibilities to increase council tax by 2% on top of the normal 2% permitted increase. Cambridgeshire CC decided to accept the 2% social care increase but decided on no increase in the basic council tax. For the coming year 2018-19, the Council has voted for the 2% or adult social care plus 2.99% which can be used for other services. So, for a Band D taxpaying household, the rate will go up from £1,190.43 to £1,249.83, an increase of £59.39 a year, or £1.14 a week. The majority of houses are banded at A-C so the actual increase for the majority of households will be less than that figure. The extra 2.99% yields about £7.5 million, of which £4.3 million is to be used to lay off the overspend on the 17-18 year and the remainder is to be put into reserves in anticipation of further overspends in coming years.

7. Services for older people

More and more people are living longer and, in the main, healthier lives. When they do become dependent, the cost to the Council is very considerable. The Council's aim is to enable more people to live longer at home and be supported there rather than going into sheltered accommodation. The policy of 'Transformation' is based on a significant reduction in personnel together with higher expectations on the voluntary sector and an assumption of a willingness on the part of beneficiaries to accept new ways of being supported. While there is obviously merit in trying to find new ways of

providing services, there can be no disguising the fact that provision will get worse for some and this is a matter of great concern, both locally and nationally.

8. Transport and Highways

- a. The bus services continue to cause concern for their frequency and reliability. The Huntingdonshire Association for Community Transport (HACT) provides a valued service.
- b. Road maintenance and footpath repair are an increasing constant source of complaint from residents.

9. Education

All Cambridgeshire secondary schools are now 'academies' which means that the Council has no jurisdiction over them. The proportion of Cambridgeshire secondary school pupils attending schools rated as 'good' or 'outstanding' has increased since last year. National research findings confirm that becoming an academy does not *itself* raise standards. Only a small minority of primaries have become academies. The Ofsted assessment of our primary schools is much more positive and the improvement has been more marked in the maintained primaries than in the academies. Primary schools were under pressure to consider changing to academy status but this seems now to be less important. The County Council retains responsibility for the 'well-being' of children in academies though it has no formal role in intervening when things go wrong.

Central government grant to Cambridgeshire improved in 15-16, was maintained for 16-17 and 17-18. A further small improvement emerged from the 'National Funding Formula' published in September 2017. But, alas, costs in schools are increasing at a higher rate so there is, in real terms, a cut, estimated to be about 7% over the next three years. The government has maintained its provision of free school meals for all infant school pupils irrespective of financial need. The Pupil Premium (allocated to children whose families qualify for free school meals) has been protected at £935 for secondary and £1,300 for primary pupils.

Major reductions in the services for young people, particularly those benefiting from the Children's Centres, are included in the CCC Business Plan.

10. Work in Cambridge undertaken by your County Councillor

Every councillor is expected to develop an area of personal expertise and for me this is Children and Young People (CYP). As the Liberal Democrat Spokesman for CYP, I have regular briefings from the Executive Director, attend the CYP Services Committee and serve on the Schools Forum, as well as on many other working-parties including the Pensions Fund.

11. Brampton specifically

- a. I attend Parish Council meetings where I report on current issues and listen to the reaction of the Parish Council. I liaise with the Parish Clerk between meetings as required.
- b. I supported the parish council's bid for a Local Highway Improvement grant for a 20 mph limit, inner village.
- c. As a Governor of the Primary School, Chair of its Resources Committee and member of the Learning and Inclusion Committee, I am closely involved in school funding, staffing and curriculum. The school is in the process of increasing its capacity from 2 to 3 forms of entry in order to provide places for the new children from Brampton Park. The Governors turned down Hinchingbrooke School of becoming an academy and joining their Multi-Academy Trust.
- d. Most of my local work on a day-to-day basis is in responding to requests for information from residents, their complaints and following up issues raised at the bi-monthly surgery.
- e. I have worked with officers to find ways for the simpler tasks to be done by volunteers; the Tidy Village Group has been washing road signs, cutting back overhanging bushes and re-painting rusty metalwork. Though minor when set against all that needs to be done, this volunteer effort has been much appreciated.
- f. I have been supporting the work of the newly-formed 'Village Hub' which is now making a significant improvement to the quality of life in the village. Its work – the Community Library, IT mentoring, Village Events, Good Neighbour Scheme, Children's Centre – will be reported on elsewhere in this report and at the Annual Assembly. This is an excellent development and I am grateful to those many volunteers who are stepping forward to give their time to help others, alongside the existing village groups like the Befrienders, the Tuesday Lunch Club and many others.

12. Combined Authority

Since May 2017 there has been a 'Combined Authority' for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough with James Palmer (Con.) as Mayor. The combined authority comprises Peterborough City Council (a unitary authority), the district councils of Huntingdonshire, Fenland, East Cambs, South Cambs and Cambridge City, and the County Council. The Mayor has a Cabinet comprising the Council Leaders from all the constituent councils, i.e. six Conservatives and one Labour, and there is also a scrutiny panel. The Mayor has been focusing on getting grants particularly for transport improvement. The government has also allocated the CA money towards housing developments. The original 'Devolution Deal' provides an extra £20 million per year for the next 30 years and this is to be used for a wide range of infrastructure projects across the combined areas. The office of mayor and staff, originally costed at £800k per year, has now risen to over £2 million. The salary of the Mayor has risen to over £80k. Some people are already saying that the introduction of a Combined Authority makes it unnecessary to have County and District Councils as well and perhaps one of the layers of local government could be pruned to save costs.

13. The future for local government services and the implication for communities

It is now becoming increasingly clear that the structure and funding of local government as we have known it for many years is changing. The Local Government Association, a cross-party organisation, is sounding the alarm-bells. Already

we see a neighbouring County on the brink of collapse. The expectation appears to be that services will be transformed and local groups - parish councils, voluntary groups – will come to the rescue of those in the greatest need.

Peter Downes, March 2018

Huntingdonshire DC Councillors Report - April 2018

Huntingdonshire District Council had 52 elected Members and continues to be Conservative controlled: 32 Conservatives, 6 Liberal Democrats, 5 Independent Group; 4 Independent; 3 UKIP; 2 Labour.

On Thursday 3 May 2018, elections will take place in all district council wards and all parish councils. Following a Boundary review the Brampton Ward will now include the parish of Hinchingsbrooke Park from May 2018.

Patricia, John and Peter continue to hold 'Surgeries' on the first Saturday of each alternative month from 10am to 11am in the Scout HQ behind the shops. We also hold surgeries in Grafham, Perry and Huntingdon Market Square.

Patricia was first elected in 2007 and serves as a member of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel for Communities & Environment and Employment Committee. We remain concerned about the impact of budget cuts on front line services along with the ongoing uncertainty regarding the future of Hinchingsbrooke Hospital.

John was first elected in 2013 and was re-elected in May 2016. He continues to serve on the Development Management Committee & Section 106 Advisory Group.

Council Tax & Cuts in Central Government Funding

This year, 2018/19, Hunts DC agreed to increase the council tax by 2%, the same increase as 2017, having frozen the council tax for the previous 3 years.

In 2018/19 the council tax for a band D property will be £138.56 per year. This is an increase of £2.72 per year or less than 1p a day. Net expenditure in 2018/19 is £17.3m. Further savings of £1.0m need to be made by 2022/23 to ensure a balanced budget.

Huntingdon Town Centre

The regeneration of Huntingdon town centre continues with both Next and Marks & Spencer opening in the past year. Sadly Waitrose closed in September 2017. Many shops find it difficult to compete with on-line shopping and a few shops have closed in the past year, but overall footfall in the town centre has increased in 2017.

Empty Homes

We remain concerned about the issue of 400 + long term empty privately owned homes in the district and have urged HDC to consider developing an Empty Homes Strategy and action plan to try to address this issue.

We are also concerned that in addition to these 400 empty homes that have been empty for longer than 6 months, there are more than 50 Ministry of Defence (MOD) homes on Brampton Park that have been standing empty, most of them for more than 2 years and we are urging the MOD to bring them back into occupation as soon as possible.

Local Issues

The new development at Brampton Park will include a community centre, care home, allotments, open space, tennis courts, playing fields and retail space. Brampton Primary School has been extended in anticipation of the growing school population and the GP surgery also has announced plans to provide one more GP consulting room to cope with the growing population of the village.

As part of the planning approval for Brampton Park the developer is contributing £50,000 towards furnishing the community facility, £4,500 to help set up new community groups and £34,000 towards the local library facility. A new shared use footpath / cyclepath from the rear of Brampton Park to Layton Crescent will provide a short cut from the new homes on Brampton Park to Brampton Village Primary School.

Rising House Prices

Last year most property sales in Brampton involved detached properties which sold for on average £405,230. Semi-detached properties sold for an average price of £251,466, while terraced properties fetched £224,636. The overall average selling price was £312,547 in 2017.

During the last year, sold prices in Brampton were 13% up on the previous year and 20% up on 2015 when the average house price was £261,145.

(Source: rightmove.co.uk)

Affordable Housing at Brampton Park

The first 23 affordable homes (13 social rented and 10 shared ownership) are due to be completed in Spring 2018. The social rented properties will be managed by Metropolitan Housing Trust and allocated to households on the HDC Housing Register.

Shared Ownership 3 bedroom houses in phase 1 are valued from £300,000 and a 35% share can be bought from £105,000. The estimated monthly cost of rent and mortgage for a 35% share is £1,030 based on a 25 year mortgage at 5% APR.

In total 40 shared ownership homes will be built over three phases:

Phase 1 - 10 shared ownership - Spring 2018

Phase 2 - 16 shared ownership - March 2019

Phase 3 - 14 shared ownership - December 2019

With house prices and rents still rising, many people are still finding it very difficult to get a foot on the housing ladder and young families especially are still struggling to afford to buy or rent a home of their own. Former MOD two bedroom semi detached houses for rent on Brampton Park are currently on the market for £775 a month.

Healthy / Active Lifestyles

We continue to be active trying to encourage healthy lifestyles and to encourage more people who are able to, to consider walking or cycling for shorter journeys rather than take the car. It is good to see Brampton Primary School continue to provide Bikeability training to help give children confidence to cycle safely on our roads.

Finally, a thank you for all those who continue to volunteer to help the 'Tidy Village Working Party' to make our village look smarter and tidier. If you would like to join a future working party please get in touch.

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