

South Cambridgeshire District Council – Caxton and Papworth Ward

District Councillor's Monthly Report – June 2023

It's been a busy couple of weeks with most of our parishes holding their annual meetings while, at the same time, all our large infrastructure projects provided updates.

A428 Upgrade

The legal challenge to the A428 upgrade between Caxton Gibbet and Black Cat Roundabouts has been dismissed by the High Court and Appeal Court judges. Contractors had already carried out preparatory work, including archaeology investigations, but can now begin construction of the carriageway. The new road will actually be numbered as an extension of the A421.

We've met with the project team and they are sensitive to residents' concerns about construction traffic and other disruption. National Highways will be operating a system of green and red routes to try to restrict heavy vehicles to the main roads. As always, we rely on feedback from residents if this system doesn't work!

East West Rail

The East West Rail (EWR) company and government simultaneously made announcements of the route alignment. It will go from Tempsford roughly parallel with the A428 to a new station north of Cambourne. It then turns south via Harston and the Shelfords to the new Cambridge South station and on to Cambridge Central. The company says it will be providing up to £15 million in economic support for communities along the route, including for those who will lose their homes during its construction.

I haven't had time yet to read through all 1000 pages of information published by EWR, so I'm not sure if it includes detailed route alignment maps. We are aware of concerns about homes and businesses along the "old" A428 in Knapwell and also in the Hardwick/Caldecote area where the route heads south. South Cambs did try to arrange a meeting between the rail minister and affected parish councils to explain local issues. We were rejected but will continue to represent the views of local residents.

It's also important to note the announcement of the route does not mean this section of the line will definitely be built. EWR still has to develop a formal business case to convince government that tax payers money will be well spent. That may not happen until after the next General Election.

Cambridge Sustainable Travel Zone (STZ)

The Greater Cambridge Partnership (GCP) has completed their analysis of the 24,000 responses received to the consultation on a proposed Sustainable Travel Zone (STZ) and Congestion Charge in Cambridge. Their report was published last week and is available on the GCP's web site. It will then be presented to the GCP assembly on Thursday 8th June to discuss the next steps. If they decide to go ahead with a Congestion Charge, the County Council will have the final vote on the proposal at their July meeting. The District Council has some limited influence but no legal authority over such changes.

The STZ is a package of proposals that include an improved bus service across the county, which will be subsidised by the congestion charge in Cambridge. Most respondents were in favour of better public transport but opposed a congestion charge as a means of paying for it. Young people in particular said their education and job choices are badly restricted by poor public transport if they do not have use of a car.

The proposals may go forward unchanged, be modified with a possible re-consultation, or be scrapped. If modified and based on the comments provided, we would want to see:

- Hospitals on the Addenbrookes site excluded from the charging zone.
- Charging restricted to peak hours only. This would allow family visits, care workers and delivery trips to be scheduled to take place without incurring the charge.
- The same charge for trades and delivery vehicles as for private cars.
- Progress made on bus franchising as a route away from poor services.

Proposed Solar Farm

An application has been submitted for the construction of a large solar farm dubbed “North Weald”. The application was submitted by the British subsidiary of a French company called Voltalia, who will both build and operate the facility. The site is either side of the existing A428 west of Croxton and there will also be a storage battery facility next to the new A421, within Yelling parish. When complete, the facility will produce enough electricity to power 15,000 homes.

The site is entirely within the Huntingdonshire District Council area but we will be keeping track of the proposal from a South Cambs perspective (the boundary between the two council district is just a few hundred metres from the site). Voltalia has formed a local residents’ liaison group and we hope they will respond to any concerns raised by that group.

The proposals are out for public consultation until Friday 9th June. You can find more information and response forms online at <https://www.northwealdsolarfarm.com/>

Bins

As I mentioned previously, the Shared Waste Service has reviewed its routes to ensure routes are accommodating new developments in the most efficient way. The review also allows the service to implement its own 4 day week trial. South Cambs’ Cabinet has reviewed the proposed changes and agreed for the trial to begin in the summer, probably in July. Cambridge City, as the other partner in the Waste Service, must also formally agree to the trial.

The most obvious change is that bins will only be collected between Tuesday and Friday, not on Mondays. This will avoid confusion caused by changes to collection days after Bank Holiday Mondays. Bin crews will also work an additional 30 minutes per day. Adequate notice will be given to residents of any changes to their collection day. Note that the collection days printed in the latest South Cambs Magazine are subject to change once the trial starts.

Separately, all households will be provided with a waste food caddy later this year, in addition to the three wheelie bins. This is a central government initiative to reduce food waste and has been piloted in a number of villages including Milton. Cambridgeshire’s waste disposal sites and systems require adaptation before they can handle large quantities of food waste.

Community Chest and Zero Carbon Communities (ZCC) Grants

South Cambs is now in a new financial year, 2023-2024, and the grant pots have been topped up. As in previous years, you can go online for more information and application forms - <https://www.scams.gov.uk/community-safety-and-health/grants/>

Four Day Week Trial

The initial trial of a four day working week for office-based council staff has closed. It has been successful – the KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) are largely unchanged, and staff health and well-being has improved. The Bennett Institute at the University of Cambridge has independently monitored the results to avoid bias. South Cambs' Cabinet has now approved an extension of the trial for another year and long-term trends will continue to be monitored. As mentioned above, a completely separate trial is being implemented for Shared Waste Service employees.

South Cambs Magazine

A copy of the summer edition of the South Cambs magazine should be delivered to every household in the district by Royal Mail or private contractor in the next two weeks. If your village or street doesn't receive a copy, please let me know and I will notify the distribution manager.

New Public Notice Portal

Are you curious about what planning applications and road traffic orders have been submitted in your area? A new online information portal called Public Notice Portal has been set up by Google and local media. You can access it at <https://publicnoticeportal.uk/>.

Mobile Warden Scheme

As part of an ongoing review of the Mobile and Community Warden Schemes in the district, the council has commissioned an independent organisation called 'Rose Regeneration' to undertake a fact-finding exercise. It will evaluate the social and financial return on investment into our local schemes.

The purpose of the evaluation is to provide elected members, funders and other stakeholders with a report that provides a detailed analysis of the benefit that the schemes provide, both to clients and to other bodies, such as health and social care providers. This evaluation will be key in deciding the level of funding South Cambs provides the scheme going forwards.

If you are contacted by Rose Regeneration, please take some time to respond to their questions. If you have any concerns, feel free to contact me.

Changes to Council Roles

The council held its AGM on 25th May when several changes were made to council roles, notably:

- Cllr Martin Cahn will chair the Planning Committee. Martin worked as a planner before retiring and is well qualified for this position.
- Cllr Graham Cone will chair Scrutiny and Overview. It is considered good practice to ask a member of the opposition to chair this committee.
- Cllr Peter Fane will become Chair of the council, after Cllr Anna Bradnam retired by rotation.
- I was elected Vice Chair of the council and have already represented South Cambs at the Memorial Day ceremony at the American Cemetery in Madingley.

Peter Sandford

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Email: cllr.sandford@scambs.gov.uk

Mobile: 07985 425414