

A meeting of Croydon Parish Council was held on Wednesday 20 March 2019 in the Reading Room at 7.30pm.

Apologies: Cllr Williams - relative unwell

Present: Mr Sole, Mr Barnes, Mrs Slator, Mr Wheeler, Mr Wenman, Mr Brown, Ms Newland and the Clerk. Cllr Kindersley attended following another meeting.

Minutes: of the February meeting were agreed and signed.

Declarations of Interest: None received

Matters Arising and Village Issues:

Implementation Group: Mr Ralph was unable to attend but sent a brief report regarding the website:- All of the website edits that are known about are, I think, now up on the website. The Car Show is on the Home Page; the PC list on the PC landing page is up to date; the PC list on page two of the Information Page is also up to date; all the minutes including January 2019 can be found under PC documentation; the agendas are available up to the 2018 AGM but none more recently than that. George is happy to continue to support this existing website for as long as needed.

Next steps, to hear back from Granite 5 about what they might be able to offer, also to approach Mrs Grundy who did the Reading Room website. George would be happy to join any conversation about specifications etc. Once we have this information then possibly a Comms Team meeting to discuss website options plus any other Comms issues.

Housing Needs Survey: ACRE and Mrs Slator's letter will be circulated for discussion and finalised. Mrs Slator will liaise with Mark Deas at ACRE to start the process. The Clerk will send out a mailchimp announcement a few days before the survey is distributed so that the parish is aware of what is happening, and another a week before the closing date as a memory jogger to complete and return the information via the post to ACRE. All information is strictly confidential and Council will only receive a statistical analysis of the data that has been gathered.

Speedwatch: Council has not heard from anyone interested in becoming a Speedwatch volunteer. Clerk to source a supplier for the smiley/sad face and speed indicator speed sign.

Emergency Plan Template: The required information is almost all collected. Mr Brown will hold the main list of phone numbers and copy it to all Councillors for emergency use. It was agreed that the system needs to be as simple as possible.

Electric Vehicle Charging Point: Mr Brown is keen to add one to the Valley Farm complex for use by the companies there. He will look into any grants available for this.

AGM Agenda: Council perused the draft agenda for the meeting. All the usual organisations are to be asked to attend/send a report. Mrs Slator asked that Village Spring Clean be added to the Village Matters section. The date for the 2020 meeting was fixed for 15 April, because of Easter dates.

Church Fabric: To be discussed when Mr Ralph able to attend.

Fete Toilets: Clerk obtained three quotes - Shire toilets, Local Toilet Hire and Latta Hire. Unfortunately the previous company LSK, was fully booked for the weekend so unable to help. Latta Hire gave the most favourable quotation and Council agreed that this is the company they would use this year. Clerk will finalise the details and bring a pro-forma to the next meeting.

High Street subsidence: Nothing further has been received on this.

Defibrillator: Council discussed the best location for a defibrillator in the village. The Reading Room was considered along with a site near the phone box. Clerk to contact the British Heart Foundation asking for a recommendation of the best model to purchase and prices. Clerk will also contact BT regarding possibly siting a pole adjacent to the telephone box, and any power required.

Council Kindersley arrived and gave a verbal report to the meeting:-

75 Bus: The contract is out for tenders at the moment. It is possible that this service might be under threat from cuts, so perhaps Council should have a letter of support for the service ready to send to CCC, just in case.

Rail Road: CCC favours Route A, in direct opposition to all the Councils who were represented at the meeting. East West Rail considered the CamBed route - the National Trust has objected to most of East West Rail's proposed routes. Basically, no-one wants any of the East West Rail's proposals.

Tram System: The Mayor has an idea for a rubberised tram system with underground stations in Cambridge. It would run from St Neots to Haverhill and would cost £4 billion - no indication of where the funding for this would come from. A rubberised tram is a synonym for guided bus!

Homes England: Currently has a plan to take control of all residential developments on all major sites.

Highways: Simeon Carroll has to grants for a lot of the work he has to do on the road network, and has not been able to obtain as much funding as he would like. Further to this, Clerk will contact Mr Carroll, complimenting him on recent repairs to the A1198 and asking for any news of repairs in Croydon High Street.

As there were no questions for Cllr Kindersley, he was thanked by the Chair and left the meeting.

Correspondence:

Maintenance of trees: Our insurer sent a reminder about regular checks on any trees Council owns. As Council does not own any, this was not required.

Trees in the Churchyard: Mrs Slator reported that the lime trees adjacent to Church Lane require pollarding to prevent the roots causing further damage to the church. However, it is now too late to undertake this year so will have to be left until later. To be discussed further when Mr Ralph is able to attend.

A Christmas Carol: A company of two actors is offering to come and perform A Christmas Carol in the village. Apparently they do not require a lot of space, so Clerk was asked to find out the prices and what is involved.

Calor Rural Community Fund: Council does not have any projects at the moment, but thought the Reading Room Trustees might be interested. Mr Sole was passed the information to give to the Trustees.

Electoral register: Alteration circulated for Councillors' information.

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Minerals and Waste Plan: Council had no comments to make.

CamBed Rail Road: Litlington Parish Council is going to spend some money on signs supporting the proposed CamBed route. Prices range from £30-00 to £87-00 and Council wanted to wait and see what is happening before making this expenditure.

Electronic correspondence: All circulated.

Cllr Williams' written report for March:-

South Cambs Budget: The budget for SCDC was put to the council in February. The budget report raised many concerns from my perspective because despite increasing council tax, increased funds from government, the introduction of new charges, increasing over 30 current charges, spending considerable amounts of reserves and identified cuts of £2.5 million pounds over the next five years, £3 million pounds worth of cuts or income needs to be found to make the budget workable.

It has been suggested that the £3 million gap would be solved from an investment strategy that involves borrowing £100 million over the next five years and using the monies to make commercial investments. I appreciate the need to find alternative sources of income to fund local government services and am supportive of the concept of doing this via investments. Initiatives taken previously in Ermine Street has been successful and produces around £2 million per annum worth of income. However, the decision to invest in Ermine Street was taken by full council (this means that all councillors were consulted and voted to make the investment decision) more recently the decision to invest in an Ice Rink in South Cambs was taken by full council and went through a full scrutiny process. The investment strategy presented to us in February enables the investment decisions surrounding the £100 million pounds of money being borrowed to be made by 4 individuals (2 councillors and 2 officers). I personally was uncomfortable with this proposal from a governance perspective, I proposed an amendment that enabled a method of scrutiny to the investment decisions being made, unfortunately this was voted down and the original proposal was successful.

There are many factors that contribute to uncertainty in Local government finance. The Budget indicates over a 60% decrease in the reserves the council holds, leaving a reserve of £3,371,000. However, there is £3 million shortfall in the calculations, which could then result in reserves dropping

even further and below the recommended minimum of £2.5 million. All of this amounts to a high risk and economically frail budget in my view, I therefore did not feel that I could, with a clear conscience, take such risks on behalf of the residents I serve and voted against the budget.

Former Chief Executive of SCDC: There has been much media interest around the departure of Beverly Agass, the former Chief-Executive who was appointed in July 2017. For legal reasons councillors are restricted on what we can say, but I can confirm that a payment of circa £202,500 has been paid into Mrs Agass' Local Government Pension Scheme by the council, in order for her to have early access to her pension and retire. I am also allowed to confirm that I voted against this proposal.

County Cllr Kindersley's written report to the meeting:-

East West Rail - Consultation NOW CLOSED: Thank you to everyone who responded to the consultation; and in particular thanks to those residents who attended the hastily arranged meetings - Parish Councils really stepped up and sorted out Public Meetings for residents - meetings that East West Rail should have arranged themselves. What was clear throughout is that there was little or no appetite for any of the options proposed by East West Rail. Much support was offered to CamBedRailRoad's option running along the A428.

Settled Status: A reminder to EU citizens that - thanks to Brexit - you need to apply for Settled Status. This has to be done online: this can be done via computer rather than smartphone, however required documentation must first be scanned via a Home Office app downloaded onto an Android device with specified features. If you have an iPhone - too bad. Mind you, feedback from Android users is that it is nearly impossible to do anyway.

Ofsted of CCC's Children's Services: Cambridgeshire County Council's Children's Services has recently been assessed by Ofsted. Sadly, Ofsted have downgraded the council's children's services from 'good' (in 2014), to 'requires improvement' less than five years later. This is not a 'vote of confidence' in the quality of Children's Services in Cambridgeshire (as described by the County's own press release) but a clear sign that the quality of children's services has moved in the wrong direction in recent years.

It is not surprising that cuts to early help services across Cambridgeshire, the massive reduction in the number of children's centres by almost half, and the removal of almost all the locality teams who used to provide early help services to families of older children the number of children coming into care in Cambridgeshire has continued to rise. This figure is now significantly above the national average, whereas a few years ago it was significantly below.

Social care services are under huge pressure and the Ofsted report makes clear social worker caseloads are far too high. Quotes from the Ofsted report that did not make it into the County Council press release:

"The quality and the timeliness of services remain less than good for too many children. For these children, the local authority is not making the positive difference it could and should."

"The most significant challenge to the local authority's ability to provide consistently good services to children, young people and their families has been, and continues to be, the size of caseloads. These are too high for most social workers and unsustainable in some teams. The impact of this is that, too often, social workers and frontline managers have had to focus on the most urgent and important work to secure children's immediate safety, without sufficient capacity for the follow-up work needed to sustain change within families or to ensure that children in care have permanent homes as soon as possible."

"The help and protection that children, young people and their families receive in Cambridgeshire requires improvement. A significant minority of children do not get the help and support they need quickly enough. Too many assessments take longer than they should and do not fully explore underlying problems or the wishes and feelings of children. Significant workload pressures in teams across the county mean that there is much variability in who gets what help and support as well as in its effectiveness." Oh dear.

Gamlingay Village Primary & Road Safety: Bridget and Sebastian met with Mrs Desborough and Mr Munday to discuss what further steps could be taken to ensure pupils are safe as they come to and leave school. What is clear is that the school is taking its responsibilities very seriously, with a great deal of focus on getting families to walk, cycle and scoot. The Parish Council funded path at the back of the school is being well used. Various other options were discussed and these are now being taken up by the relevant bodies.

A505 Steeple Morden, Guilden Morden & Litlington - Disappointing News: Cllr Steve Jarvis of Herts County Council reports: "Yesterday I had a meeting with staff from the County Council's highways

department for them to update me on proposals for safety improvements on the A505 between Baldock and Royston.

The small piece of good news is that they have decided that work on banning right turns from the Litlington turning is something that can be funded from the safety budget (this is apparently the junction with the worst record of accidents where somebody has been injured). This means that the changes should be designed next year and the work done the year after.

Changes at any of the other junctions, which could cost up to about £4 million, will just be added to a list of things to be done at some time in the future. The idea seems to be that they might be funded from future developments, which means that nothing will happen for at least ten years, probably longer.

This is clearly not good enough. If it is going to take that long to find the several million pounds that any of the changes will cost we need something done in the meantime. An obvious solution would be to cut the speed limit to 50 mph past the Ashwell station junction at least.

I have told them that they need to do something to improve the safety in the short term while they are looking for the money for the "ultimate" scheme and the engineers have agreed to look into this. They can't tell me when this will be done but have promised that they will tell me within a couple of weeks."

Council CEO: The CEO of South Cambridgeshire District Council has taken early retirement. Mike Hill who was the director responsible for Environmental Services is acting up as interim while a new permanent CEO is recruited. The Council is also undertaking a review of all of its operations to make it more efficient and to greatly improve the services it gives to the residents. This is a big piece of work which will take a long time to implement fully but which you should start to see the benefits of quite quickly.

Business Plan: South Cambs approved its business plan last month which sets an ambitious and clear direction for the council with a focus on business support and protecting the environment. Equally important is the intention to secure new housing to meet the needs of all residents by making new homes as cheap to run as possible. This could involve water recycling, using renewable energy, building homes close to where people work and ensuring that you can get where you need to get without a car. These are big ambitions but only by aiming high will we really make a positive difference to the cost of living and to the environment.

Empty Homes: South Cambs is planning to increase the council tax on houses that have been left empty for a significant amount of time. With the shortage of houses available in this area we should not let people just sit on empty properties for no good reason. The Council offers a lot of help to landlords and owners of empty homes to help them get them back into use, but now has the option to significantly increase council tax where there are no convincing reasons for them to remain empty.

Currently the owners of homes that are left empty and substantially unfurnished for more than two years must pay an extra 50% on top of the regular bill. Following the full Council meeting, the 50% premium will be replaced by the following arrangements:-

* Homes that are empty for two years or more will be charged double their regular Council Tax (i.e. an additional premium of 100%). This will come into effect from 1 April 2019

* Homes that are empty for five years or more will be charged a 200% premium on top of their regular Council Tax. This will come into effect from 1 April 2020

* Homes that are empty for ten years or more will be charged a 300% premium on top of their regular Council Tax. This will come into effect from 1 April 2021

Right now across South Cambridgeshire, there are 100 properties that have been empty for between two years and five years. There are 41 homes that have been empty for between five and ten years. There are 39 properties that have been empty for more than ten years.

Making Money the Green Way: South Cambs has installed a large array of solar photo voltaic panels on the roof of the waste management depot at Waterbeach. The money to do this has come from a fund resulting from the business rates from the large number of solar farms in the district. This initiative will generate income for the council which it can invest in other green enterprises. The Solar panels which will generate around a quarter of all the electricity the building uses.

This is the latest stage in the Council's efforts to be "green to the core" and will deliver clean, renewable energy, reduce costs and cut carbon emissions. It follows on from a recent Council commitment to work towards the ambitious target of making South Cambridgeshire carbon-neutral by 2050, and a purge on single-use plastics at the authority.

Local Plan: You may recall that the current Local Plan (which identifies where development is to go in future years) was finally adopted in October after being in inspection for over 4 years. During this time

about 4000 houses were consented in unplanned-for locations. The government inspector requires us to now embark on a new joint local plan with Cambridge City and this is now getting underway. The first piece of work is to ask landowners to come forward and tell us about any land they are prepared to offer up for future development.

The consultation is to identify potential sites that can be technically assessed for housing and economic development, to meet the needs identified for the District, for inclusion in our next local plan. Anyone can put forward sites, but it is usually landowners, developers, land promoters, businesses, local interest groups, parish councils, local property agents, neighbourhood forums (prepared or preparing neighbourhood plans).

Not all the sites that are submitted will be included in the plan - It will depend on the spatial strategy we decide on, and the assessment of the sites based on several factors including whether they are suitable, available, achievable, and viable. The selected sites will then go through the local plan process and become part of the adopted policy when the plan is found sound and adopted.

Gamlingay Business Hub: Gamlingay Business Hub, run by Bridget and Sarah Groom on behalf of Forward Gamlingay, was delighted to welcome a representative of the Chamber of Commerce to last month's meeting to talk about the offer the Chamber can make to our businesses both big and small. People often think that the Chamber is just for big employers but they cater for all sizes including sole traders. Membership (which is modest for small businesses) gives you access to all sorts of benefits and advice. They also run a huge programme of business support events which are free for anyone to go to. Details will be available on the Business Support section of 'Solution Gamlingay'.

A428 Caxton Gibbet to Black Cat: In stark contrast to East West Rail, Highways England clearly listened to the 83% of respondents to the public consultation who preferred the Northern option and recently announced that option would now be taken forward. A new 10 mile dual carriageway between the Black Cat and Caxton Gibbet junctions will end at a three tier junction at the Black Cat roundabout which will allow traffic to flow freely on the A1, A421 and the new road. New junctions at Cambridge Road and Caxton Gibbet will connect the new dual carriageway to the existing A428 which will be retained for local traffic and public transport. New bridges will cross over the dual carriageway at Roxton Road, Barford Road, the B1046 and Toseland Road and new bridges over the River Great Ouse and East Coast Main Line railway will also be included. Improvements to A428/B1040 Eltisley junction will be widely welcomed as will improved routes for cyclists, walkers and horse riders.

Removal of computer charge in libraries: As predicted by us (because it was such a stupid idea) a report proposing the withdrawal of charges for computer access in libraries will be discussed shortly by the County Council. The £1 charge for computer access, introduced in May last year 2018, was part of a package of measures based on public feedback and trialled to ensure computers are available for those who most need them and to generate more income for the library service to ensure they remain financially sustainable for the future. In September, Members reviewed progress on these measures, including the charge for computer access. The recommendation to withdraw the computer charge comes in response to this review, as well as feedback collected in a customer survey and a detailed analysis of the anticipated income - all of which was entirely predictable.

Manor Farm, Girton: We would not normally write about individuals. However, we have been asked about this matter quite a lot, especially given its recent appearance in Private Eye. The deputy leader of the County Council was granted the tenancy of a County Council owned farm, and currently enjoys a rent abatement on that tenancy. Councillors had recommended an investment of £183,000 in an extension to the property (which the tenant will repay over time), without initially knowing that the tenant was a senior Councillor. That Councillor concerned chaired the Council's former Assets sub-committee that had had responsibility for the farms estate, and was the lead member for the council's 'outcome focused review' of the county farms estate and member champion for the Council's farms estate. So whilst there is no suggestion that anyone has done anything wrong there is a suggestion that it doesn't look good to the person on the street.

'Mysouthcamb's': South Cambs District Council has launched a new way of accessing information, processing claims and applications, and generally engaging with the council: 'mysouthcamb's' is a customer portal on the home page on the Council's website - www.scamb.gov.uk

Registration only takes a few minutes. Once in, you will be able to create a personal account with the Council which shows and tracks all your online transactions with Council services. All existing forms are on the portal, as well as revenue and benefits functions, making it much easier for residents to provide information and complete forms. In due course other services will come online, including the planning service scheduled for summer 2019.

Bus review published ... The Mayor's long-awaited Strategic Bus Review has finally been published. It considered different types of arrangement between bus companies and councils. The report recommends that the Combined Authority should develop a business case comparison of possible models, including enhanced partnership and franchising. However, consultation on this may not be finished until 2021, which is a long time while services continue to deteriorate.

... as journeys sink to record low: Figures from the Department for Transport reveal that 19.9 million journeys were made on local bus services in Cambridgeshire in 2017/18 — 100,000 fewer journeys than the year before, and the lowest number since at least 2009/10, when the figures were first published and when 22.7 million local bus journeys were taken across Cambridgeshire. Average local bus fares across England have increased by 12 per cent since 2009, after allowing for inflation.

Nationally, the number of local bus journeys taken across England has fallen by 85 million in the last year. Ongoing cuts in funding for these services, resulting in fewer services and higher fares, are being blamed. Cambridgeshire CC has been asked to agree to extend funding for subsidised contracted bus services until the end of the 2019/20 financial year. This is a continuation of the arrangement whereby for the last two years the Mayor has delegated his bus powers back to the county council while he decides what to do about buses.

NEW H service: Slightly off location but Stagecoach is starting a new bus service – H – from 1 April 2019 connecting Papworth Everard, Cambourne and the Cambridge Biomedical Campus with journeys at 05:44, 07:09 and 08:41 between Papworth Everard and Cambridge Biomedical Campus and then again 17:20, 19:50 and 20:20 between Cambridge Biomedical Campus and Papworth Everard.

Community RePaint: Community RePaint - a partnership with CCC, Cambridgeshire Community Reuse and Recycling Network (CCORRN) and Amey – has collected and treated over HALF A MILLION LITRES of paint in the last 8 years. The scheme collects used paint from Household Recycling Centres where it is sorted, tested and re-manufactured so that it can be resold or donated into the community.

The scheme has been going from strength to strength and has a range of re-manufactured emulsion paint and chalky furniture paint in a host of great colours for great prices. So if you are thinking of redecorating, upcycling or know of a community or school project that needs paint, why not visit CCORRN (located in March) or follow them on Facebook.

Cllr Kindersley has also forwarded to Councillors a copy of the CamBedRailRoad response to the non-statutory public consultation.

Planning:

Brickyard Farm S/0601/19/FL - Change of use for redundant Building

This is a resubmission of a previous application(which was refused on a technicality), with some tweaks by the agent. Council supported the first application and had no reason not to support this application. All in favour. As the planners had granted an extension to the response date, Clerk will e-mail the decision to the responsible officer at SCDC, when she gets home..

Finance:

Bank Statement: No financial transactions had taken place, so no bank statement was received.

Auditor: With Council's usual auditor abroad for an extended time, Council needs to appoint another auditor for this year, at least. Mrs Slator and Mr Sole to see if accountants known to them would be willing to undertake an audit for Council.

Items for next agenda: Village Spring Clean for the AGM agenda

Date of next meeting: Wednesday 15 May at 7.30pm - Annual Council Meeting

As there was no further business, the meeting closed at 8.58pm.

Signed

Date

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