

Parish Council Update May 2020

East Cambridgeshire District Council Update from Dan Schumann and Ian Bovingdon

Who could have predicted, just a few short weeks ago, what was to come for life in Britain and across the world? It is like nothing else most of us has ever experienced. Life has changed suddenly, dramatically and drastically for us all and these are worrying times for everyone, but we are adjusting and we will get through the COVID 19 pandemic, by pulling together and looking after each other.

The rate of transformation at both the District and County Councils has been unprecedented. But change we have, and I am proud of the way staff have risen to the challenge with a sense of determination, pragmatism and quiet resilience.

All services at the District Council are operational with some changes. The Recycling and Waste service has been operating normally throughout and we have a resilience plan in place to do our very best to keep it that way. Our focus and actions are aligned with Government guidance and new legislation. It is a rapidly changing situation and all the latest information can be found on the home page of the East Cambs website: www.eastcambs.gov.uk. Staff who can are working from home (the vast majority) and the Council has already held two successful Planning Committee meetings online. The Annual Meeting of the Council will also be going ahead online on the scheduled date of 21st May. Meetings are broadcast on YouTube – the second Planning Committee had 168 viewers.

Beyond its normal services, the District Council is focussed on two key areas: getting Government financial support out to businesses; and ensuring support is in place for everyone that is self-isolating.

Finances

The Government is providing financial support to Local Authorities and has announced two rounds of c.£1.6bn nationally. ECDC is allocated £43.4k in round 1 and £895k in round 2. Many District Authorities are reporting huge costs and losses arising from increased costs for rough sleepers and loss of car parking income. ECDC is relatively shielded from both of these as it has only a small income from car parking charges (the majority of its car parks being free of charge) and has been able to support most people prior to them losing their accommodation so there are only very low numbers of people with accommodation issues. A joint Finance document has been developed by all Section 151 officers from the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough County and District level Councils and information is regularly provided to Government. Looking forward the finances are hard to predict, but work is ongoing all the time to model the various scenarios.

Council Tax Hardship Support

The District Council has received £429k from Government to support people in difficulty with paying their Council Tax. This was immediately applied in line with Government guidance so that people on the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme received a further £150 off their bill, or reduction of their bill to £0 if it was previously lower than £150. Further opportunities to help more people facing difficulties with their Council Tax bills may be possible in the future.

Business Support

Business rates: the business rates discounts have been applied automatically to all businesses that are eligible.

Grants: there are 1,363 businesses that have been identified in the district that may be eligible for assistance from the Small Business Grant and the Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Grant. We have contacted all 1,363 businesses asking them to complete and return a simple form to claim the grant so that information can be checked and verified. Some Local Authorities took the decision to pay

grants by cheque to named company directors and straight into the bank accounts of businesses where they held bank details on file; at East Cambs we took the view that information needed to be verified before public money was handed over. To date we have paid out £11.76m to 962 businesses and we have been actively chasing the remaining businesses.

New grant: Government has announced a further £617m nationally to help small businesses that do not pay business rates but may nevertheless have costs relating to premises. We await details of the East Cambs allocation. There is a shared view amongst the District/City Council leaders in Cambridgeshire that there should be a common approach as to how businesses should be prioritised for support to ensure fairness throughout the county.

Combined Authority COVID 19 Capital Grants: the Combined Authority has created two funds for small and medium sized companies. An initial £2.4m has now been increased to a total fund of £5.4m. For grants of £2,000 - £49,999, the CA will fund up to 80% of the total equipment costs. For grants between £50,000 - £150,000 the CA will fund up to 50% of the total equipment costs.

For sole traders and non-Limited companies such as partnerships and companies with less than 5 employees a separate fund of £500k has been set up to support with capital grants of between £2,000 and £5,000.

The Combined Authority is leading the economic recovery plan for the county.

Community Support

The support to communities is a co-ordinated effort between the County Council, the District Council and Parish and community support groups.

The countywide COVID 19 Coordination Hub is established to:

- Help ensure that services provided by key workers are sustained at safe and appropriate levels through the redeployment of staff and the deployment of volunteers
- Co-ordinate the distribution of support to the Shielded group
- Ensure with our partners that we are making the best use possible of all available resources to minimise anxiety, to co-ordinate social action, and to ensure those most vulnerable are benefitting from appropriate community support
- Work closely with District/City Hubs to ensure all vulnerable people are supported (who in turn work with the Parish and Community volunteer groups)
- To contact all known carers in the county to offer advice, information and support and to give them a telephone number if they need help

In the early tranches of data from Government there were around 15,000 people on the registered shielded list across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. Around one third of this group report they have no support in place. All shielded people are receiving regular telephone contact from the case officers to ensure their needs are being met. Those without any support arrangements in place receive at least one call per week, with others receiving contact either every two or every three weeks. CCC is also contacting everyone by email or letter, to remind them that they are there should their support arrangements break down. There are around 5,400 shielded people across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough who are receiving a national food delivery each week, which is also supplemented by local deliveries of specialist items. Attention is now turning to providing value added support, such as books, games, education access, library access, etc to try to combat social isolation during the long period of lockdown. You can contact the **Countywide Coordination Hub on 0345 045 5219**.

The District Council is focussed on everyone else not in the shielded group, and is working to support the community efforts and to ensure no one falls through the cracks. Early on ECDC wrote to everyone over the age of 70 with information about how to get support. People contacting the

District Council for support are referred to the local scheme if one is in place; where no scheme is in place the District Council fulfils the request. You can contact the **District Hub on 01353 665 555**.

A huge thank you to all the Volunteers across East Cambs.

Bus, Walk, Cycle Consultation Extended

The Government has brought forward £2bn nationally for walking and cycling infrastructure, to help local authorities deliver quick win schemes to help during the Coronavirus pandemic, as well as to deliver larger improvements over the longer term. The £2bn is part of the £5bn fund that was announced in the spring 2020 budget for bus, walking and cycling infrastructure.

ECDC's bus, walk, cycle consultation has been extended to 31st May because of the Coronavirus outbreak. Please respond online if you can:

<https://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/roads-transport/bus-services-and-cycling-and-walking-routes-consultation>



The Local Plan and the Five Year Land Supply

The District Council can now demonstrate a 6.6 year supply of land and has published a new “Five Year Land Supply Report” on 21st April setting out the current position which you can view here: https://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/sites/default/files/ECDC%20FYLS2019%20Report%20v3%207_4_20.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3Ecn0OAK_RWPMEvjg5eElmAtYea21R9qpTHBV-8FSFgeUUpNzu6d9towU. **This means that Parish Councils considering planning applications can now, once again, cite “being outside the line” as a reason for recommending refusal of planning applications.**

The last report from June 2019 stated that we did not have a “five year land supply”. The primary reason for this was due to the backlog of homes not built since 2011 - the District Council has issued planning permissions for over 7,000 homes that have not been built and has no powers to force applicants to build these homes. The consequence of not being able to demonstrate a five year land supply is, in a nutshell, the loss of the development envelopes, the red lines round settlements outside of which development cannot normally take place (except under very specific circumstances).

However, the Report published on 21st April demonstrates that we have regained our five year land supply, and consequently development envelopes have now regained their status.

To further strengthen the land supply position, the Council has also undertaken a Second Review which concludes that the Local Plan does not need a full review, but that there are opportunities, through a “Single Issue Review” (that being the strategic housing policy, Policy GROWTH1) to strengthen the five year land supply position to make it more robust for longer. The second review report can be viewed here and makes for helpful reading to understand the complications of five year land supply issues:

<https://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/sites/default/files/ECDC%20LP%20Review%20April%202020.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1idWAtvNb8an4jwUuBeVOsO29Hn5QIfWD10mjd20CixnIIXsULrYyx1hl>.

Only Full Council can make the final decision on whether or not to move ahead with the Single Issue Review of the Local Plan and this will therefore come to a future Council meeting for decision.