

## **Gazette Column – November 2009**

If you have any questions about these - or indeed any other - matters, please do not hesitate to contact me – Sebastian Kindersley on 01767 651982 or [cllr.kindersley@scams.gov.uk](mailto:cllr.kindersley@scams.gov.uk) or write to the Manor Barn, East Hatley, SG19 3JA. Bridget Smith is on 01767 650510 or [bridget@glockling.com](mailto:bridget@glockling.com). and Liz Heazell is at 01223 870289

### **Avenalls Way Gamlingay**

Bridget has agreed with the neighbouring landowner that he will erect Badger-proof fencing alongside the garden boundaries in an attempt to dissuade the Badgers from digging up the gardens.

The Housing Portfolio-holder in charge of all the proposals for change within sheltered housing and beyond came to an extremely well-attended meeting at Avenalls Way recently – in response to the local petition presented by Doug Gilbert.

What is clear is that South Cambridgeshire District Council will have to start making some very serious cuts to its budget shortly in order to balance the books. However, we are determined that sheltered housing tenants – and indeed all the tenants of the District Council – suffer as little as possible from these forthcoming changes. Residents left Cllr Howell and his housing colleagues in no doubt about how strongly they felt. The cost of the abortive attempt to offload Council housing is now £1.4million we are told....

There have been some complaints of late about horses being taken through the path leading from Avenalls Way to Church Street. This path is used largely by our elderly residents and children going to and from school. One is that it is not safe for people to be negotiating their way around a horse and the other is that when horses defecate, (as they did last week) on the path it creates a potentially dangerous situation for those who are not very steady on their feet. Any chance of local riders avoiding this pathway?

### **Police News**

The Police have contacted us to say they have been receiving increasing reports of mini moto's causing a nuisance in residential areas. They urge you to report any instances of this happening and add any descriptions of the offenders would be helpful as these vehicles do not display index numbers as they are not legal to be on the road. They add that a section 59 warning notice was sent to one youth in the Gamlingay area for their involvement with mini motos.

Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership: This group presented to the South Cambs Scrutiny and Overview Committee at the beginning of the month and despite their claims to be doing great things to reduce crime and anti social behaviour the audit report on them claims that they are quite ineffective. They have about £150 000 of public money to work with and so it would be good to see more encouraging results. In response to Bridget questioning them about this they said that without them crime would have increased. However, this was not backed up with any evidence. Feeble. We have worked very hard locally to get people engaged with the Gamlingay Police Panel – covering all 13 Parishes – so it is really disappointing to see that the next stage up as it were is not pulling its weight.

### **Road Repairs**

To report problems with the highway you can either ring 0345 0455212 or e mail [streetscene@cambridgeshire.gov.uk](mailto:streetscene@cambridgeshire.gov.uk). For problems with streetlights phone 0800 253529.

## **The Future of Cambridgeshire**

Last month we wrote about the impact of development on Cambridgeshire. This month – finance! The effects of the recession are biting much harder and faster than we could have anticipated. We have some tough times ahead of us. Cambridgeshire County Council has just announced 35% cuts over five years and the Chief Constable for Cambridgeshire Police says that her force could see 20% cuts. This is a problem that affects the public sector as a whole, especially with inevitable government spending cuts following the next General Election.

South Cambridgeshire has to grapple with low interest rates, a reduction in chargeable services, an increase in employer pension contributions and the growing likelihood of no increase in future government funding. Simply put, we are living beyond our means and need to find ways to either increase our income or make significant savings from the next financial year.

We had already budgeted to save £325,000 on the budget this year. Services have gone above and beyond that to find £481,000 of savings, but we are now faced with finding an additional £1.6 million in savings for the 2010/11 financial year – a 10% budget reduction. The Medium Term Financial Strategy reflects the belief that the most responsible way forward is to make 10% savings next year, then use balances to top-up the budget over the following four years. This will create the most sustainable long-term position but, even with 10% overall savings next year, we will still need to find further savings each financial year.

While we currently hold a healthy £8 million in General Fund balances (separate from the Housing Revenue Account), if we don't make 10% savings next year we could only continue to live beyond our means for up to three years before facing a draconian 20% budget reduction. We are going to have to make hard choices sooner rather than later. That's a £1.6m cut across service areas. Our situation may also affect next year's staff pay award. With inflation in negative figures, we are projecting no change to salaries next year. However – for local Government there is no doubt – times are hard.

## **Rubbish**

Further to the article in last month's column about rubbish we have heard that Donarbon may provide its free compost for pick up at household recycling centres, rather than have residents drive all the way to Waterbeach to collect. Residents would thus be able to pick up compost at Thriplow, Milton, etc. This has now been agreed - though don't yet have the start date and info as to whether compost will be bagged or loose. While no charge will be made, there will be an honesty box and collections will go to a local charity, probably to be determined by local communities. More on this in due course.

## **Flies in Gamlingay**

Residents in parts of Gamlingay are experiencing a lot of flies in their homes. These are originating from the new chicken farm on Station Road. The owner is now being advised by SCDC Environmental Health Officer and the flies should be reducing by the time you read this. Please do report any similar problems to the SCDC contact centre or to your district councillor.

## **School Admissions**

Parents in Cambridgeshire are reminded that they have until 6 November 2009 to submit applications for secondary school places for their children in 2010. The process can be completed

online at [www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/admissions](http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/admissions), or by returning a paper form, which can be obtained from their current primary school.

Last year in Cambridgeshire, 94% of children were offered their first preference of school. Parents of children in Cambridgeshire due to start primary school in September 2010 have until 4 December 2009 to submit their applications for places. This process is the same as applying for a secondary school place and can also be completed online, or by returning a paper form to Admissions.

Parents can apply at [www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/admissions](http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/admissions) or by telephoning the Admissions Team at the County Council on 01223 699200 or 699662 for an application form.

### **Transport Innovation Fund**

Apologies for being long (hopefully not too boring...) on this subject again and again – but it is one major issue that is going to affect all of us – either because we will have to pay the Congestion charge (boo!) or benefit from a radically enhanced bus serve (hurrah!)

The County Council will shortly vote on whether or not to bid for the £500 million from the Government's Transport Innovation Fund (TiF) to stop congestion from bringing Cambridge to a grinding halt. It would see a package of improvements designed to transform public transport and the roads as well as walking and cycling facilities and follows the work of the Independent Transport Commission which recently published its report.

As a first stage, Cambridgeshire is asking for early confirmation of Government funding for Chesterton Station which would begin to be built in 2012 - three years earlier than planned.

A second stage will follow at the end of 2010 with a full bid for the remainder of the £500m package. This will include a trigger point for a congestion charge to be introduced that will need to be agreed by Government, partners and the public.

The Commission's report also said that a congestion charge should not be introduced until at least 2017 - eight years time, and it should only be considered after the £500 million of TIF improvements are in place and working and when congestion reaches a level where nothing else will help. The report suggested putting the decision of a 'trigger point' where congestion reaches an unacceptable level in the hands of the public, business and councils within Cambridgeshire.

The improvements include 75% of the whole of South Cambs being within 1km of a high quality public transport link – effectively a bus every 20 minutes. So there is a lot to be said for the project!

### **Speedwatch**

The Hatley Speedwatch scheme is now up and running and very successful it is too – with volunteers presenting results to the Parish Council which show just what a problem speeding is in the area. If you would like to set up a scheme or would like to know more then please come along to the quarterly Police Panels which alternate between Gamlingay and Haslingfield. All are welcome and it's a opportunity to discuss issues of concern with actual Police Officers. Next meeting is October 21<sup>st</sup> at Gamlingay Village College.

### **Community Orchards**

South Cambs is able to offer assistance for the setting-up of orchards through its Wildlife Enhancement Scheme. Please feel free to contact Rob Mungovan on 01954 713402 for further advice. The Cambridgeshire Orchard Group is organising a series of orchard management workshops, free to orchard owners:

- \* 8th November 2009, Little Downham: Planning for the planting of a new orchard
- \* 5th December 2009, Wisbech St. Mary: Restorative Apple Pruning
- \* 30th January, Steeple Morden: Restorative Apple Pruning

### **Buses around and about:**

There have been some cuts made to the 18 and 18A buses which affect everyone, but Longstowe in particular. Basically the afternoon service has been cut which has affected people trying to get to early evening shifts at places like Morrisons and Bourn Hall. Bridget would like to hear from anyone who is affected by this. We have asked the County Council to talk to Stagecoach on our behalf.

### **C2 Bus Service: The Hatleys > Croydon > Arrington > Orwell > Longstowe > Caxton > St.Neots**

Some good news about further bus provision. We are really pleased not only to keep the service to the Hatleys (the ONLY bus service they get a week) but that it has been extended to Orwell – where residents had submitted a petition to the County Council.

- Cambridgeshire County Council intends to continue the C2 service to St Neots from Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> October.
- Tickets can now be purchased on the bus (£2.50 return)
- Concessionary Pass holders can now use their pass and travel for FREE
- Orwell is now included on the C2 route

Cambridgeshire County Council has contracted Safford's Coaches to run the C2 service. The 29 seat bus starts from Hatley St George at 9:30am, serving the parishes of Croydon, Arrington, Orwell, Longstowe and Caxton. The C2 service then reaches St Neots Market Square at 10.30am. The return journey will now leave St Neots at 1.20pm, allowing passengers the opportunity to visit the Thursday market, facilities and shops that St Neots offers

### **Barrington Parish Council**

I was delighted to be able to support the application from Barrington PC to increase the number of Councillors by two which was agreed at South Cambridgeshire's Council meeting last month. Parish Councils are the bedrock of our local democracy and they work extremely hard and extremely well – so the more Councillors we have the merrier!

### **A603 at Eversden**

As many people know the Wheatsheaf junction on the A603 is extremely perilous for pedestrians trying to cross and for motorists who are unaware of the staggered junction. With the garage site vacant it was suggested that this might be an ideal opportunity to consider the installation of a roundabout. The matter was recently raised at the Police Panel meeting and the County Council's response is – I'm sorry to say – a resounding NO. Although the Council recognises local concerns and agrees that there is a history of accidents in the area, the level of these accidents does not make it a priority. A roundabout could not be justified here at the moment as there are many areas with a higher accident record which need attention.

To put this into context, there are over 200 identified accident cluster sites at present and just in order to get onto the cluster site list a site requires at least five injury accidents in a three year period. The Eversden location does not have this many accidents recorded. So says the County. In any case the speed reviews for both the A603 and A1198 are – I hope – nearly completed and I hope to be able to share them with you soon.

### **Cycleways in and around Cambridge**

A proposed £2.3 million package of improvements to cycle routes in South Cambridgeshire has been approved by Cambridgeshire County Council. Schemes include new routes and improved facilities to help link villages with good quality foot and cycle routes and were all supported by local councillors. The list of schemes that have been given approval:

- \* B1049 improvements (including Cottenham, Histon and Impington)
- \* Fen Ditton to Horningsea
- \* Harston to Trumpington
- \* Milton to Impington
- \* Babraham Park & Ride to Wandlebury

The projects could start construction as early as January 2010. They are part of Cambridgeshire County Council's jointly-funded £7.2 million Cycle Cambridge initiative, in partnership with Cycling England to improve cycling routes, facilities and training across the county.

### **Child Minding**

If you are not able to find a child minder phone Opportunity Link on 0800 2989121

### **Issues in Orwell**

I have been in touch with County Council officers about the slurry-dressed pavements which are now breaking up quite badly. They have responded saying “We will be ordering a few small repairs to make safe but would need capital funding to resurface/reconstruct. Unlikely that any capital funding is likely at this time based on comparison with many other sites” which seems a cop-out to me. I’ll keep pressing away.

Also in Orwell many thanks to the resident who reported vandalism on the bridge at the bottom of Meadowcroft Way. Officers have by now been out to make sure that it is (a) safe and (b) resistant to further vandalism.

I continue to try and get something done about the junction of Leaden Hill and Hurdleditch Lane where there is a problem with drainage leading to flooding (including sewerage) from time to time. The relevant County officers have repeatedly put in a capital bid for this project. No money. This is a dangerous precedent where houses could be flooded and where we seem to be unable to take action to prevent it. The most recent response on this is “The problem is in part caused by drainage run off from neighbouring field which is not a highway issue. Unlikely to receive any funding next year”

### **Cllr Liz Heazell writes**

#### **Haslingfield Railway Bridge**

Safety officers have said that if a boxed culvert is built to support the bridge the work will be classed as a major repair and therefore safety barriers will be required for the sides. This will be extremely costly as the barriers will need to be pile-driven into the ground in order to be strong enough to withstand impact from – for a example – an HGV.

It is hoped that University surveyors will attend a Parish Council meeting reasonably soon in order to consult on the costed options for the bridge. Work needs to begin shortly so that the weight limit can be lifted in particularly to relieve Harlton of the burden associated with the extra heavy goods traffic.

Sebastian has asked County officers to remove the direction signs from the A603 in order to discourage HGV vehicles from using Washpit Lane; and to put in “Unsuitable for HGV” signage. We are also anxious that any works on the Bridge delivers a safe path for cyclists and pedestrians and will be agitating hard that the County insists on this.

### **Social Housing Update**

All of us were very willing to help develop ideas for maximising the depleted housing budget at South Cambs. However, the relevant Councillor has declined to set up an elected Tenant/Member Housing Board, and no Member workshops for our input have been arranged. However, Liz Heazell has made some suggestions and hope officers can investigate ways of making them work. It’s frustrating that we keep been told how important working together is but nobody in the Executive seems inclined to practice what they preach.

### **Shame!!**

The SCDC Cabinet displayed little theatrical ability when they staged a debate on selling off affordable housing land in Shepreth – where 22 dwellings are needed for people with a connection with the Parish. The land is to be sold for large executive houses for the open market. The Cabinet hadn’t even thought to include a property value uplift clause in the sale which might have added more to the receipt for the hard-pressed housing department. Needless to say the decision overturned the wishes of the Parish Council and local Councillor.

### **Services for the vulnerable elderly**

Liz and Sebastian put forward a Motion at Council recently which called for a review of all services for the vulnerable elderly in the South Cambs area – tying in housing, care and all associated services – to be reviewed by a specially set up Scrutiny Panel. This did not succeed, so once again the ideas and energy of non-Executive members goes to waste. It is frustrating as not all Parishes have the sort of services that the vulnerable elderly need or want and there is a clear lack of flexibility of provision. Many residents feel strongly that Care in the Community is letting them down; and we, at least, want to find out how this can be made better.