

South Cambridgeshire District Council – Harston & Comberton Ward

Report to Harston Parish Council April 2021

Covid Update

Cases in South Cambridgeshire remain well below the national average at the time of writing. An important change with regards to testing is that anyone who records a positive lateral flow test will now require a follow-up PCR (polymerase chain reaction) test as an additional check.

Just over 79,000 people had been vaccinated in South Cambridgeshire by the end of March, of just over 141,000 people over the age of 16.

The government has confirmed planned easements can go ahead from 12 April. This includes the reopening of outdoor hospitality, gyms, non-essential retail, hairdressers and salons and outdoor attractions. The number of care home visitors will also increase to two per resident, all children will be able to attend any indoor children's activity, parent and child groups of up to 15 people can restart indoors and weddings will be able to take place with up to 15 attendees.

However, outdoor gatherings must still be limited to six people or two households, and people must not socialise indoors with anyone they do not live with or have not formed a support bubble with. People should continue to work from home and minimise domestic travel where they can.

5 Year Housing Land Supply (5YHLS)

Good news that, as from 1st April 2021, South Cambs and City jointly have 6.1 years of housing land supply for the period 2021-2026. This figure will now not change again until April 2022 unless there is a planning appeal or a challenge where a planning inspector rules otherwise. Maintaining the 5YHLS vital in fending off speculative developments and applying local plan policies on affordable housing.

Combined Authority Affordable Housing funding

Bad news last month as the Minister for Regional and Local Growth, Luke Hall MP, wrote to the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority regarding the remaining ~£45 million funding for affordable housing, which will now not be forthcoming. The ministry had been reviewing progress on the £100m Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Affordable Housing Programme and have unfortunately concluded that the programme has made insufficient delivery progress and that the value for money being achieved is below expectations.

Virtual meetings

South Cambs District Council leader has written to Jacob-Rees Mogg MP urging him to extend the option of virtual council meetings post 6th May. Similar letters are being sent by many district councils and parish councils. We are aware that some parish councils are in a difficult position due to the requirement to hold a meeting a certain number of days after the election, which falls after the virtual meeting deadline has passed but before their community hall can be used for public events. We are happy to share the letter if you would also like to write – we hope that volume will make the difference!

Changes to permitted development rights

Housing Secretary Robert Jenrick announced at the end of last month a package of measures including:

- New planning law enabling unused commercial buildings to be changed into homes.
- New planning rules allowing for the speedy extension of public buildings.

For the first of these, homes can be delivered through the simpler 'prior approval' process instead of a full planning application. The legislation aims to bring this right forward from 1st August and there will be a requirement that the building has been vacant for 3 months.

The second change will allow for the extension, erection or alteration of school, college, university, hospital, and prison buildings by up to 25% of the existing footprint of the buildings on the site (or 250m², whichever is larger) The height restriction is also being increased from 5m to 6m.

East West Rail (EWR)

Undoubtedly the biggest news in the ward this month is EWR launching a route consultation:
<https://eastwestrail.co.uk/consultation>

We now have much more clarity about EWR's intentions, and a big job trying to understand all of the impacts: on the environment, on the landscape, on noise pollution, on connections between villages, and generally on the quality of life in South Cambridgeshire.

We're disappointed that there has never been an opportunity for the public to be consulted on alternative approaches to Cambridge from Cambourne. A more extensive comparison between an approach into Cambridge North and EWR's preferred route has been published with this consultation to justify that decision, and will understandably come under close scrutiny by residents. We will continue to raise questions on their behalf. We also understand that campaign group Cambridge Approaches are taking legal advice on a judicial review of the consultation to challenge the failure to fully develop and include a northern approach as an option. We think this is the right next step for the campaign to challenge what is ultimately a government decision.

As we're sure the parish is aware, there will be a big impact on Harston: a flyover south of the village across the Cam, the A10 and the existing railway line. The preferred proposal moves the alignment of the existing railway line away from the village, but also closes the road to Newton.

We do urge residents and the parish council to include details of the specific issues of EWR's preferred route and how it affects Harston alongside any critique of their reasons to exclude the northern route. Should a judicial review fail to force EWR and the government to reconsider, that input into this consultation will be important as the final design is developed.

The consultation closes on 9th June.

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