

South Cambridgeshire District Council – Harston & Comberton Ward

Report to Harston Parish Council September 2021

Covid Update

Rates of Covid-19 in South Cambridgeshire have stabilised somewhat. At the time of writing South Cambridgeshire 298.3 case per 100,000 – slightly lower than the national average but slightly higher than the regional East of England average. Though it's good news rates have stabilised, we are expecting an increase now that the schools are back.

Children returning to school will no longer be in bubbles, but families are still being asked to be cautious and to stay alert for the signs of Covid and get a PCR test if they have symptoms. People under the age of 18 no longer need to self-isolate if they are a close contact of someone who tests positive, but they do still need to if they have symptoms or test positive.

Alongside under 18s, you no longer need to self-isolate if you're a close contact of someone who tests positive for Covid-19 and you are fully vaccinated. (Fully vaccinated means that you have been vaccinated with an MHRA approved COVID-19 vaccine in the UK, and at least 14 days have passed since you received the recommended doses of that vaccine).

People who are no longer required to isolate are still being asked to get a PCR test as soon as possible to check whether they have the virus. It's also important that people continue to take extra precautions, for example, wearing a facemask in public places, limiting contact with others and considering those who are more vulnerable.

Local Plan – first draft of Preferred Options released

The South Cambs and Cambridge City councils have published the first draft of the new Greater Cambridge Local Plan which will now be scrutinised by committee before going to public consultation.

The Council has aimed for an exceptionally green plan, with the environment and affordability of homes at its very heart. Meeting this need for new homes and jobs will mean that people are not priced out of the area, forced into long commutes. Residents told us how important reducing carbon emissions and enhancing the environment is, so locations with excellent public transport have been prioritised, shifting the emphasis away from unsustainable locations in rural villages. For all sites, there will be a requirement for the provision of 40% affordable housing.

There is a good balance of locations, with only 4% of the proposed new homes in rural areas, helping to preserve the character of the villages. The Green Belt is a vital tool for protecting the villages of South Cambs from urban sprawl. It is only possible to make changes to the Green Belt if there is very strong evidence to justify it. Just four of the sites put forward for the local plan met the very high bar required to release Green Belt sites. Two are extensions to research sites of national importance: the Cambridge Biomedical Campus and the Babraham Research Institute. The other two are housing allocations close to excellent public transport: 20 homes in Oakington next to the busway and 100 homes in Great Shelford near the railway station.

The plan also pushes as hard as possible to bring environmental benefits and the proposals also include suggested new green spaces and wildlife projects. The plan also sets a high bar for building standards, including policy recommendations for low-carbon building.

The council also commissioned strong evidence showing the need to reduce drastically the amount of water taken from the groundwater aquifer. The new local plan puts constraints on the amount of development if the water supply problem is not solved. We will be lobbying central government has to support the water industry to solve this problem, not only for supply but to help the area's chalk stream habitats to recover and thrive.

We know Harston PC was hoping it would be possible to achieve a small release of Green Belt around the village to enable the development of some much needed affordable housing, and we are disappointed that

doesn't appear to have been possible. Planning officers advise that the PC should approach those sites that appeared in the call for sites to see if they would be interested in bringing the site forward instead as a rural exception site. We are very happy to support the Parish Council in this effort if that is something they would like to explore.

Cambridge South-West Travel Hub

The County Council Planning Committee deferred making a decision on the Travel Hub at their meeting at the end of July. The committee had several concerns that they wanted officers to provide more detail on before making a decision and the application will come back to a future meeting.

Afghan Refugees

Many will have watched in horror at the event in Afghanistan over the last month. We are therefore very pleased to share that three families from Afghanistan will be provided a home and essential support by South Cambridgeshire District Council. The initial three Afghan families will be supported by the Council to relocate to the UK through the Afghan Locally Employed Support (LES) scheme. This follows commitments in recent years to provide homes to refugees from Syria, Iran and Sudan.

Council owned homes are not planned to be used to meet the initial pledge to house the three families and therefore it will not have an impact on the waiting time for local families who are already on the Council's housing waiting list.

Six Free Trees

Following the successful three free trees scheme last year, the council has this month launched a six free trees scheme. Every parish council in South Cambridgeshire can apply for six free trees which they can plant on Parish Council land.

This year, there is a choice of six native trees which can be either pot grown or bare rooted. It is a very simple process to apply but you will need to do so by the deadline of Thursday 30 September 2021. The supplier the District Council are working with will then deliver trees direct to parish councils.

<https://www.scambs.gov.uk/six-free-trees>

Visit South Cambridgeshire Website

The council's Business Support team is working on a new website to promote everything there is to see and do in South Cambridgeshire to support the local economy.

The site will be launched in the autumn and the council is inviting local businesses and event organisers to secure a free listing by submitting information and photos online via a short questionnaire. Go to www.VisitSouthCambs.co.uk to create a free listing or email visit@scambs.gov.uk for further information.

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