

# Annual report for parish and community councils: 2016/17

For the Cottenham, Histon and Impington (CH&I) division of Cambridgeshire which also includes King's Meadows, Oakington & Westwick, Orchard Park and Rampton.

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The themes of last year have continued. Again.

The Council has continued to work with the committee system and, as I noted in my last monthly report, the Leader of the Council, perhaps begrudgingly, agreed that it had been successful and had not resulted in the Council grinding to a standstill of ineffective decision making. I have worked on four committees, I've chaired one of them, and they all work pretty well. Perhaps the least effective has been the General Purposes Committee which has appeared partisan at times and especially when budgetary matters are on the agenda.

There has been continuing cost cutting, more on that below, and a continuing focus on making money out of the Council's assets which has had an unfortunate impact in Cottenham.

We've also seen continuing, but rather ineffectual and unaccountable, activity within the City Deal Executive. This is being joined by the Combined Authority as another not directly elected body with powers over spending tax payers' money. It can't be altogether good.

To start with some good news: there's not much but let's start positive ...

## Local schools are looking good

Both Orchard Park primary and Histon infants' schools were tested by OfStEd and rated good. Congratulations to their students and their families and their staff.

The Council has approved a major investment (£16 million) to build a new primary school at the top of Mill Lane in Histon and to convert the current junior school to a straight through primary. The Infants' school will close.

On the academy front the trust running IVC became the Morris Education Trust (MET). It has been given permission by the DfE to build a new special school, the Cavendish School, on site. Witchford Village College has joined MET which is now a MAT (a multi-academy trust).

Cottenham VC is already a multi-academy trust but has made no announcements yet about its future.

## Transport schemes delivered ... and not

After a disappointing Local Highways Initiative round for 2016/17 local councils were a little more successful this year with bids from Histon & Impington and Orchard Park being accepted.

There was good news regarding the 2016/17 schemes. More money became available and the Histon & Impington Baptist Church junction scheme made the revised cut. But there has been bad news as the Rampton traffic calming scheme has run into some public backlash and is being reconsidered. All concerned agree that the Parish Council did the right thing. It's just that nobody realised that the scheme as implemented would have such adverse consequences.

As a part of the City Deal there has been a proposal to put a bus lane (actually just a quarter of one) and better cycle lanes along Histon Road. The consensus has then been to reject the bus lane but to

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support the cycle lanes. For some reason these seem to have been kicked into the long grass (unnecessarily delayed).

## Flavour of the month: sustainable high streets

The Council voted unanimously to support a motion requiring it to support sustainable high streets.

## The Council is engaging

It ran a major event for parish councils last year and has set up a fund to help such councils implement schemes which might improve services and/or save CCC money. And consistent with this spirit of collaboration several meetings have taken place between CCC and H&I Parish Council to look at opportunities to integrate CCC adult social care with voluntary sector activity locally.

## Public transport moves forward

Chesterton Station seems to be on track to open in May. Timetables have now been published. Furthermore Stagecoach has announced extra guided bus services including ones which will go direct to the new station.

The other side of the guided bus story is of course the state of the guideway and it's clear that big repairs will be needed. What will be done and how much it will cost is currently confidential.

## BT seems to have become customer sensitive

After much complaining a letter written to the right person seems to have done the trick and BT Openreach has (1) installed more fibre capacity in Orchard Park, and (2) agreed to sort out an anomaly for several subscribers in Histon. Well done BT!

And now for the rest ...

## The division will change

Finally the Boundaries Commission made its mind up and has split the division into three parts. Histon & Impington and Orchard Park will be a new single member division, Cottenham and Rampton will join with Willingham for another, and Oakington & Westwick will join with Over and Longstanton for a third which will also include the first houses at Northstowe.

## CCC still doesn't tap dance very well

Despite a number of meetings both formal and informal the Council has still not understood what it needs to do in order to move ahead with any plans for development on its land in Cottenham. And although it did meet with Histon & Impington Parish Council it has said nothing regarding its land at Bypass and Buxhall Farms. The latter is of course the site for one of the new primary schools.

## Healthcare gets better but there are worries about the future

The good news is that our hospitals are now all rated 'good' and it's probably good that Hinchingsbrooke will be taken over by Peterborough & Stamford.

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The worries stem from the Sustainability & Transformation Plan which all clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) are obliged to develop to show that they can survive with less funding than they would like and still deliver quality healthcare. We are fortunate in Cambridgeshire that all the players in the health economy are working together constructively but there's still a big ask.

As it looks at ways to cut costs and to become more efficient it's inevitable that rumours run wild and any suggestion that a service might be under threat triggers an immediate outcry. The most recent example of this has been the proposal to relocate South Cambs Out of Hours service from Chesterton to Addenbrooke's

On the plus side the CCG is willing to talk about enhancements to primary care services in Cottenham and Histon & Impington.

Outside of Cambridgeshire the Council has taken the lead in getting the Local Government Association policy changed. It presented a motion in favour of increased funding for Public Health as the only way to address the ever-increasing cost of the NHS.

Note also that as 'devo 2' goes ahead, we're currently implementing 'devo 1', it's intended that this includes a strong focus on addressing inequalities because these adversely affect economic growth potential. It's accepted that the root of much of this inequality is public health related so this will be a cornerstone of the devo 2 bid.

## There have been a couple of council u-turns

It reversed two cost saving measures. The first to switch off lights overnight in response to public protest and the second to reduce gritting because it wouldn't save any money anyway.

In a related move the E&ECom rejected an officer recommendation that funding for bikeability training be cut.

## Political alert: the following two items relate to Council activity which I have strong feelings about and these might come through in this report.

### Council tax frozen

This is unchanged from what I said last year.

This year the Council could raise council tax by up to 2% and take a further optional 2% for adult social care charges arising from implementation of the National Living Wage. After a shorter session than last year, some of the Indies broke ranks and voted with the Tories, a vote in favour of a 0% council tax increase and taking the 2% adult social care option was successful. This deprives the Council of £5million for 2017/18 and for every subsequent year. At a time when its grant from central government has been slashed I think that was very wrong outcome.

I regard this as irresponsible at a time when our roads and pavements are showing increasing signs of disrepair and adult social care costs are continuing to rise.

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## Devolution goes ahead but we've got to have a mayor

After the Council dug its heels in the Government accepted that a rational geography for a devolution deal would be just Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. However it insisted on a directly elected mayor and there was a majority at the Council willing to accept this. Those against felt that it was not necessary and would result in significant extra costs. Business is said to be in favour of a mayor because it can 'make decisions quickly'. I guess this is the same business which simply hikes high street rents without regard to long term sustainability.

## End of political alert.

### And finally ...

That's twelve years as your councillor and I am standing again but only this time for Histon & Impington.

In the meantime thanks again to Mike Mason who does sterling work and has been terrier like in his follow up of the flooding and drainage issues around the division, has done excellent work supporting Cottenham Parish Council's opposition to the unwanted planning applications which it faces and has been ever vigilant where guided bus issues are concerned. Although we have different political affiliations we find it easy to work together and, coincidentally, have complementary skills.

Thanks also to all the parish councillors and the clerks who have communicated well and supported me. I trust that I have done the same.

Thanks especially to those people in Cottenham, Oakington & Westwick, and Rampton who've supported me. I trust that I've been able to respond directly when it's been needed. If I am re-elected I will continue to support your new councillors outside Histon & Impington and to be active on your behalf in the committees of which I am a member.

And allow me please to repeat one final point about the future. So-called upper tier councils will have less money. That's a fact. There's an opportunity for parish and community councils to do more but it needs to be done in a manner that delivers better value for money. So can I urge you all:

- Be active in talking to Cambridgeshire County Council about how you might share responsibility for some services and thereby perhaps make limited money go father by being smarter. This might include activity which could reduce demand for those services; and
- Work together. I'm sure that there are savings to be made by parish and community councils clustering and sharing contractors for example and even back office services. Just a thought.
- Take the lead in orchestrating work locally. There are multiple agencies but they are not always visible, they don't all know each other and they could be more effective as a group.

A collection of my 'and finally' items from my monthly reports of the last 12 months is available at <http://bit.ly/2oer7Jk>