

# Annual report for parish and community councils: 2015/16

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. The Council has continued to work with the committee system but with a little streamlining (smaller committees) and this has been largely successful. Of course cost cutting has continued and add to this a determination for the Council to be more commercial and make money from its assets. It's not very good at this especially where such activity might impact third parties. There's more on that below.

I'll return to the matter of cost cutting and what it means for parish and community councils at the end of this report

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

## Local schools are looking good

Both our village colleges have been rated 'good' by Ofsted.

The 'temporary' facilities for Histon Junior School were implemented in time for the new academic year and a little extra engagement enabled that to happen more smoothly than some had thought likely.

The Council is now giving serious thought to the provision of extra primary school places in both Cottenham and Histon & Impington. The former is much dependant on what happens with new developments

And related to our schools good news for IVC students from Milton as the Council's plan to withdraw their bus was scuppered on appeal.

## Both libraries seem secure ... for the time being at least.

Both have active 'friends' and these are so important in marshalling local support.

Histon Library benefited from investment in new shelves on wheels which makes it more flexible in its use of space as it becomes home to more local exhibitions and meetings. There's an evening with Alison Bruce later this month.

## Transport schemes delivered

The workers are out in Histon again to improve the High Street and the pavement outside the Building Society has now been made safe. There will be easier parking as a result of the current work alongside the Green. It will also increase the size of the Green. As a member of the Histon & Impington Bicycle Club said this morning: 'more space for us to meet as we start our Sunday morning rides'.

We didn't do so well in our bids for jointly funded schemes under the Minor Highways Initiative this year with only Rampton coming away with a successful bid. Unfortunately the chair of the panel changed the rules and councils making bigger contributions, within their means, were favoured. Time perhaps a small cheer for the A14. The work on the Girton junction seemed to take for ever but is now complete and appears to be having some impact. Anecdotally it seems there's less rat-

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running through Oakington in the morning rush hour as a result of flows through the junction being better.

More good news is that work is progressing on Chesterton Station which should open this time next year. I have asked about bus connections and remarkably Stagecoach is thinking about ways to link it in via the Busway to villages such as Cottenham. Bravo!

And now for the rest ...

## It looks like the division will change

The Boundaries Commission looked at the County's divisional boundaries and saw a little sense. The proposal for the future is for Histon & Impington to be a single member division, Cottenham and Rampton to join with Willingham for another and Oakington & Westwick to join with Longstowe for a third. That all makes sense and it was tabled as a done deal. However further consultation has now been announced although it puzzles me that it's not on the Boundaries Commission web-site which is pretty clear about its recommendations being final.

## The Citi 8 bus service is a little less than it was

Citing congestion in the city as a reason Stagecoach announced that it was terminating the Citi 8 service at Drummer Street instead of allowing it to continue to the Station and Addenbrookes. It's understandable and there are many connection opportunities but it's still an inferior service and Cottenham and Histon & Impington parish councils met Andy Campbell (local Stagecoach managing director) to argue against the change.

## Northstowe stutters ...

That's what I said last year! The Joint development Control Committee met several times. One meeting to approve phase 2 was strangely adjourned and a subsequent meeting saw us presented with a heavily redacted 'feasibility report' and then phase 2 was approved. Since then there have been no meetings and South Cambs has withdrawn from the committee which means, since it's a joint committee, it is no more. And in the meantime the minutes of the meeting where phase 2 was approved have themselves not been approved.

In the meantime a first housebuilder has been confirmed for phase 1 and Northstowe itself has been declared a 'healthy town'. According to the Cambridge News this means it will have fast-food-free zones and dementia friendly streets.

## CCC doesn't tap dance very well

The Council managed to annoy both Cottenham and Histon & Impington parish councils by its behaviour relating to plans for County Farms land. This is related to its perfectly reasonable desire to earn money from its assets.

In Cottenham it tabled a development proposal without spending the time to explain it to the Parish Council and to secure its support.

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In Histon & Impington it withdrew an agreed deal to lease ByPass Farm to the parish council because it needed to keep its own options open relating to new primary school capacity (and presumably its own development plans for Buxhall Farm).

At a time when councils are working together both were classic examples of how to not to do it.

## Big changes in healthcare... and a big failure...

The ambitious Uniting Care Partnership reported last year collapsed in Dec 15. It ran out of money and its shareholders couldn't provide any more, its customer couldn't afford anymore and the Government kept its hand in its pockets. There have since been multiple investigations and the Council's scrutiny committee has done some good work. It appears that there were some big and significant blunders made by some big parties who should have known better. However the proposed changes are continuing so maybe some good will come out of this in the long term.

## The street lighting PFI continues to cause grief

It's difficult to come up with a contract which would have such poor outcomes with the arbitrary way in which this one seems to have been implemented. But to make matters worse the Council, as a part of its cost reduction scheme, decided to take advantage of the technology in the new lights to switch them off overnight. Trouble is only some of the new lights have the new technology. It relaxed its earlier proposal so that the dark hours are now just 0200 to 0600 and has allowed local parishes to pay the bill if it wants to keep the lights on.

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

### Council tax frozen

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 mammoth session, the meeting ran for the best part of 12 hours, 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 2016/17 and for every subsequent year. At a time when its grant from central government has been slashed I think that was very wrong outcome.

### Devolution derailed

Out of the blue the Chancellor announced a devolution deal for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough teamed up with Norfolk and Suffolk. Despite there being no consultation and no political debate within the constituent councils several council leaders including Cambridgeshire's signed an 'agreement'. At a subsequent debate at the Council the deal was thrown out with clear preference, nay enthusiasm, for a Cambridgeshire Peterborough deal because it makes sense. I question how Cambridgeshire's leader, who has no executive authority, has the right to sign such an agreement. Anyway it's back to the negotiating table and who knows what will come out at the end.

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## Cambridge Central Library saved

A proposal was tabled and approved which would see a deal with a private company to allow more 'commercial' activity at the Central Library in Cambridge. The decision was called in but the approval was still approved despite the economics being biased and incomplete. Thankfully the person doing the deal from the private company shot himself in the foot and finally the Council saw sense and cancelled the deal. I was furious because this was the sort of wrong decision which should not get through in a committee system and in the second meeting it only did so on the back of the chair's casting vote.

## End of political alert.

### And finally ...

That's eleven years as your councillor and sometime later this year I'll have to decide whether or not to seek a further term.

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. Although we have different political affiliations we find it easy to work together and perhaps, 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.

And a 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.

A collection of my 'and finally' items from my monthly reports of the last 12 months is available at <http://bit.ly/23G9AeA>.