
County Councillor Report

Cllr Michael Atkins, Hardwick Division

October 2021

Summary

- Covid-19: Enhanced Response Area announced, vaccinations available for 12-15 year olds
- Consultation opens on Local Plan
- Marking COP26: Swaffham Prior and pledges
- Grants available for community flood groups
- News from the Combined Authority: buses and other transport
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Covid-19 Enhanced Response Area

On Monday 1st November Cambridgeshire was made an “Enhanced Response Area” for tackling the Covid pandemic by the national government. This reflects that the County is estimated to be several weeks ‘ahead’ of the rest of the country in the latest wave of infections, hospitalisations and deaths. Pressures on health and education services remain severe, particularly for ambulances and secondary schools. The ERA status will last for at least five weeks and will unlock further funding for:

- accelerating the rollout of vaccines to 12-15 year olds;
- accelerating the booster vaccination programme; and
- increasing vaccination rates in areas with the lowest uptake.

There are ongoing discussions with the Department for Education about additional measures for schools, but in the meantime, face coverings will be worn in communal areas in secondary schools, and meetings of staff/parents will be virtual where possible. In the final week before half term, 1,240 cases were identified in schools across Cambridgeshire so these measures are very important.

Vaccines are being offered to 12-15 year olds both in schools, and now also at vaccination centres on Saturdays and Sundays (the nearest for us being the Grafton Centre). Bookings can be made via www.nhs.uk/covidvaccine or by calling 119. The vaccines cannot be given on a walk-in basis to this age group so please book an appointment before visiting a centre.

If you are a household contact of a positive case, even if you personally don’t have to isolate anymore, you are strongly encouraged to take daily Lateral Flow Tests whilst the confirmed case isolates, particularly if you are going into school on a regular basis.

All of the previous advice continues to apply – get vaccinated, meet people outdoors where possible, wear masks and improve ventilation when indoors.

Consultation opens on Local Plan (District Council)

The District council is now inviting views on the Local Plan First Proposals as discussed previously. Residents have until 13th November to comment on the proposals, both the siting of new housing, and the important policies alongside it, such as biodiversity and access to green space. This is perhaps the most important piece of local government work affecting our area, so it’s important we

all contribute. If you have any questions, ask your District Councillor in the first instance, but failing that do come back to me. <https://www.greatercambridgeplanning.org/localplan>

Marking COP26

The County Council has been marking the Glasgow Climate Change meeting (COP26) in a number of ways. Councillors have been making green pledges to reduce their climate impact, in my case, cooking more vegan and vegetarian food.

I also took part in an e-bike ride to Swaffham Prior, where the Council is supporting the village to move off oil-heating to a community wide heat-pump scheme. It's the first scheme of its kind in the country, and is being followed very closely; I can see it being replicated in the future, particularly for other villages not on the gas network. Where villages are connected to gas I think it's still an open question whether we should be moving towards individual heat pumps, community schemes or replacing the gas with hydrogen: time will tell!

I must also report that e-bikes are pretty revolutionary. We were a mixed group of all ages and abilities and cycled 9 miles out to Swaffham without any difficulty whatsoever. They would make a very pleasant way to commute even longer distances, and an excellent way to stay active for leisure purposes too. Voi, who manage the e-scooters in the City centre, are also offering e-bikes now if you want to try one. I expect to see more support for these forms of travel in the future from the councils and particularly the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Mayor.

Grants available for community flood groups

A new fund has been launched for watercourse maintenance, particularly where the 'riparian owner' (i.e. the person responsible for maintaining the watercourse) cannot be identified or cannot afford to undertake maintenance themselves. Although riparian ownership is well established in law, it is not widely understood, and if watercourses are not maintained this can quickly cause or exacerbate flooding issues following heavy rain.

If there are any watercourses in your village causing concerns, please let me know, and we will see if we can secure improvements either from the owner, or from this new fund.

News from Combined Authority/Mayor (Cambs. & Peterborough)

The CA has secured funding for thirty new zero-emission buses in Cambridge city, which you will hopefully see soon. They are also trialling an on-demand bus service (called "Ting") in Huntingdonshire: a sort of cross between Uber and a bus. If it's successful we might see it rolled out in other rural areas.

In addition, they are refreshing the "Local Transport and Connectivity Plan", starting with a review of the key principles behind it. Residents are encouraged to engage with the process at <https://yourltcp.co.uk/>

Contact Details

Councillors and residents are welcome to contact me on any issue which is concerning them:

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