



East Cambridgeshire District Council

Minutes of a Meeting of East Cambridgeshire District Council
held at The Grange, Nutholt Lane, Ely, CB7 4EE
on Thursday 25 July 2024 at 6.00pm

PRESENT

Councillor Christine Ambrose Smith	Councillor James Lay
Councillor Anna Bailey	Councillor David Miller
Councillor Ian Bovingdon	Councillor Kelli Pettitt
Councillor Christine Colbert	Councillor Alan Sharp
Councillor Lorna Dupré	Councillor Caroline Shepherd
Councillor Lavinia Edwards	Councillor John Trapp
Councillor Mark Goldsack (Chair)	Councillor Ross Trent
Councillor Martin Goodearl	Councillor Lucius Vellacott
Councillor Keith Horgan	Councillor Alison Whelan
Councillor Bill Hunt	Councillor Christine Whelan
Councillor Mark Inskip	Councillor Gareth Wilson

A minute's silence was observed as a mark of respect following the death of former Councillor Paul Cox, District Councillor for Littleport West Ward from 2015 to 2019.

Cllr Christine Ambrose-Smith – “This is very much a personal memoir as Paul was only here for one term, however, I knew him for much longer. I first met Paul Cox in 1963 when I was about 7 years old. My family had moved to a rambling property on Victoria Street in Littleport during that year, to the rear of the property was a large building yard with workshops and garages. Exploring, as children do, I came across a young man doggedly digging some post holes across the width of the yard, this was Paul. With his soon-to-be-wife Maureen, he purchased a plot of land at the furthest end, fronting onto Barkhams Lane, the fence he was starting to erect was the first stage in the build of the property which was to become their home for the rest of their lives. Paul was also about to become our neighbour. Paul was born during the early stages of World War II, spending his childhood in a house near my grandparents, in City Road. He was a contemporary of my father's youngest brother and they were close friends until Richard's early death. Leaving school, Paul took up an apprenticeship with Pye's of Cambridge, at that time, a significant developer and maker of TV sets and their operating systems. This was to prove a perfect occupation, as Paul was always interested in the detail and improvement of anything he was involved in. As a young man, he became a founding member of a local skiffle group, not entirely sure how accomplished a musician he was, but within the world of skiffle, no doubt enthusiasm was the thing, and he forever remembered this as a golden period. In the fullness of time, Paul and Maureen became the proud parents of twins, settling into family life. Paul

became something of a sportsman; ten-pin bowling, windsurfing, badminton, early morning running, and the necessity to keep fit. With a group of friends, Paul became a founding member of the Rotary Club Littleport. As my husband was also a member, I remember the following years as one long round of fundraising and community events, raising considerable funds for local, national and international causes. When IT was in its domestic infancy, Paul took a deep and informed interest in this, and he became the local helpdesk for many of us. Some friends were convinced that emails would never catch on, a view Paul would have no truck with at all. During the mid-1970s, David and I cleared the workshop and garages behind my family home to build our own house. We became the sandwich filling, with the Cox's on one side and my parents on the other. Moving on, Paul became a Parish Councillor, serving as Chair of that organisation. He was eager to push forward computerised use within the Parish Council and designed the first CCTV system within Littleport. A true man of Littleport, Paul felt that Littleport should have the best that could be provided. I joined Paul at the Parish Council somewhat later and was later successfully elected as one of the four District councillors. Paul became very interested in this, so I suggested that he get himself elected as a candidate, which he did. Already old and great friends and colleagues together, we toured the outer reaches of Littleport, coming across many obscure Fen roads and tracks, unknown previously to either of us. Following the reduction in the number of wards and councillors within East Cambs, Paul sadly didn't get to be a candidate again but continued serving the people of our community as a Parish Councillor. Paul was interested in a wide range of subjects; classical and ancient history, more recent British history, local history, the drainage of the Fens, skating in the Fens, musical types, genealogy, wartime scientific advances, just a few of these come to mind. I've so many memories of the phone ringing, usually at some inconvenient moment to hear his voice, "Hello Christine, this is Paul, You'll never believe..." and so it went on; this was the moment to draw up a chair and prepare for the long haul. Although we had both visited Bletchley Park separately during the early days of that secret site being revealed and opened, we had great plans for a joint visit to see the more recent improvements and as, with many such plans, we never did get to go there together. Paul lost his beloved Maureen quite suddenly and far too early. With considerable courage, Paul remade his life and continued to find further subjects of interest to work on. Paul had suffered from various health issues for many years, until his health deteriorated quite quickly, passing away peacefully on the 6th of June this year. So, to sum up, Paul was a well-rounded person with a wide circle of friends, someone who always wanted to improve the community he had been born into and had spent his life in and Paul is sadly missed by many."

20. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Question from Bill Pepper, Chair, Wicken Parish Council to Cllr Vellacott:
Read out by the Democratic Services & Elections Manager.

"I write regarding the existing bus service which serves Wicken.

The only public transport Wicken benefits from is the weekly service, operating on a Thursday and travelling from Upware to Ely, via Wicken and Soham. The bus departs Wicken at circa 10:45, returning at circa 14:30. This has not changed for many years despite calls for an increased service.

Whilst this service is welcome, it fails to provide a viable option to private transport: many people who use the Thursday service, rely on friends, family or taxis for the return journey and the vast majority of Wicken inhabitants rely on private transport for commuting and for other day to day journeys.

Wicken Fen, a destination of national importance is visited by over 70,000 people annually and this level of tourism adds pressure on the local road network in addition to available parking at the Fen. A bus service particularly operating on a Saturday, from Ely or another origin would help alleviate such congestion as well as providing a welcome addition to the existing transport service to the village.

Under the East Cambs Local Plan 2015, it states under 8.41, Infrastructure and community facilities, Improvements to public transport services: “ The District Councils aspiration is to see existing service levels retained, and to encourage and support self-sufficient demand responsive transport services including committee transport.....” To date, no enhancement of the public transport service has been implemented.

I acknowledge you have regularly fielded questions from both parishioners and parish councillors regarding the existing limited bus service and have been both understanding and supportive within the confines you’re able to operate in. I further acknowledge you did ask the Mayor at the recent Combined Authority Overview and Scrutiny Committee for an update about the demand Response Transport in relation to Wicken. I understand that a route via Wicken is being considered in a Rural Community Study which will be ongoing until later this year.

Whilst it would be unreasonable to expect for the council to provide a multi-day, fully comprehensive public bus service for Wicken, could the Council please give an update on plans to increase the bus service to Wicken and also the time scale envisaged. “

Response from Cllr Vellacott:

“Thank you, Bill, for your very timely question.

I want to commend the fact that Wicken Parish Council supported a weekly Dial-A-Ride service, a service to the world-famous Wicken Fen, and supported two new cycle routes through the village.

I am a huge advocate of the motorist, and I believe young people should be supported to work hard and obtain their freedom, but you should not be forced to own a car to live in Wicken. There is no shop, no school and no bus – some children are even taking taxpayer-funded taxis to school.

I first contacted the Mayor, Nik Johnson, when he announced that the Mayoral Precept would rise by 200%, to discuss what we could do to restore a bus service via Wicken. This tax rise was an unnecessary overstep; the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority has missed out on millions of Government Bus Improvement funding.

And it wasn't due to a lack of commitment to road charging, as they claimed. I am inclined to put it down to a poor culture and six different CEOs in three years.

Whatever has gone wrong at the Combined Authority, the result is that East Cambs pays more and gets less, when some services near Cambridge are subsidised at a cost of over £100 per return journey. Nik said to me at the time that 'expanded Demand Responsive Transport services are to be closely aligned with the newly proposed Soham to Cambridge bus route' – and I will hold him to ensuring that Wicken is linked into this.

After all, within those plans to be scrutinised, some good proposals are already present. I'm delighted that Sutton will be linked into the St Ives Busway, and Soham to Cambridge. We just need to make sure more rural dwellers can access these services, that is only fair, as they pay the same precept.

I was pleased that this Council appointed me to the CPCA Overview and Scrutiny Committee, where the Mayor confirmed to me that a route via Wicken was being considered in a Rural Community Study. I await further details of this study in the autumn. There is to be an investment in a demand-responsive trial area in East Cambs – but the Mayor insisted that we must demonstrate community support for the project.

We can do that very easily, but we must have the assurance that the Mayor will action it using the data we provide. In any case, we are in the system, and I am working closely with the Director of Place and Sustainability to make sure the word 'Wicken' appears on every document the Mayor looks at going forward. This will help to demonstrate strong community demand.

I found it quite amusing that, when I was scrutinising the Mayor on this issue, he asked me if I had obtained my under-25 Tiger Card bus pass yet. I made the point that in order for that to be remotely justified, he had to give me a bus to use in the first place.

The Combined Authority are also about to consult on their proposals for Bus Reform across the region, which includes some franchising elements so that which services run is in public control. That could be good news for those affected by cuts, like the No.8 service via Littleport. The consultation responses must be taken seriously, unlike some congestion charging consultations undertaken by other authorities. I encourage Wicken Parish Council to participate fully in this, as I will.

It's a shame as well that the Mayor is not focusing more on rail too. With a bus to Soham and a dual line at the station, I fully envisage that Wicken could be linked directly to Cambridge and London. It could be transformative for local business and tourism, and excellent value for money for the taxpayer. We need carrots, not sticks, to encourage people onto public transport.

But it starts with making sure we include everyone, and the residents of beautiful Wicken need that assurance. In terms of a timescale, I acknowledge that we may have a long way to go before the familiar rumble of a bus engine is heard picking up passengers on North Street, but we are closer than we have been in years. I am quite stubborn when necessary, and whilst I am in office, I will not rest until I arrive at a

Wicken Parish Council meeting by bus and maybe then, I might even apply for a Tiger Card.”

21. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Akinwale, Brown, Cane, Holtzmann, Huffer, Pettitt and Wade.

22. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received from Councillors.

23. MINUTES – 23 MAY 2024

It was resolved unanimously:

That the Minutes of the Council meeting held on 23 May 2024 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.¹

24. CHAIR’S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair made the following announcements:

- **Cllr Cane**
The Chair congratulated Cllr Cane and wished her good luck as the MP for the East Cambs District. The Chair also thanked Lucy Frazer for her hard work.
- **Staff Achievement Awards**
The Chair expressed his pleasure in presenting awards for service and achievements by Council Officers. Peter Hiscott was recognised for his outstanding 55 years of service; starting with the waste service when the Council was known as Newmarket Rural District Council.

25. PETITIONS

No petitions had been received.

26. NOTICE OF MOTIONS UNDER PROCEDURE RULE 10

No Motion under Procedure Rule 10 had been received.

27. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS

Two questions were received, and responses given as follows:

¹ Minute 12 (2) - Response from the Leader – First Sentence – “Conservatives first put forward in 2019”.
Following the meeting, the Leader acknowledged that Cllr Dupré was the first to support the idea in 2016.

1. **Question from Councillor Kelli Pettitt to the Leader of the Council:**

(Read by the Chair)

“What is the Council doing in response to the Sunnica decision earlier this month?”

Response from the Leader, Cllr Anna Bailey:

“It is extremely disappointing that after years of making the clear case that a solar farm of this magnitude is in the wrong place, the Secretary of State has decided to grant a development order against the wishes of the community, the four affected councils and against the expert advice of the Examiner.

There is currently no direct benefit to our communities from this site. It is deemed to have a significant impact on our communities and there are also biodiversity concerns. Added to this, unlike other Solar farms, the community will not benefit from cheaper energy, nor will the Council receive any potential business rates income from the facility.

Together with Cambridgeshire County Council, Suffolk County Council and West Suffolk Council, we are examining the Secretary of State decision. As the solar farm is deemed to be nationally significant infrastructure and the development order is granted by the Government, we are not able to appeal the decision. Instead, our only recourse is to undertake a Judicial Review of the decision, known as a JR.

A JR is not an appeal process and cannot be launched because we don't like the decision made. A JR reviews whether a decision has been made lawfully, has it considered the correct issues and has it followed the right processes. Even if a procedural issue is identified, it does not mean the decision will change, it would simply be a re-run of the decision-making process. The bar for even getting the grounds for a JR heard is incredibly high, and incredibly costly. We are working with the other Councils to understand whether there are substantive and material grounds to challenge the decision.

Any action needs to be agreed by Council as the cost and officer time is considerable. I must be assured by the advice received from the Barristers commissioned by Suffolk County and West Suffolk that there is a clear path to a successful challenge. Any decision made will have to consider the risk associated with the challenge and that the financial sustainability of the Council is not compromised.

Time is pressing and any intention to act needs to be submitted by the middle of next week. Therefore, I am meeting with Leaders from the other Councils on Monday, following receipt of the Barristers' advice, to discuss this situation further.

Finally, if we are not able to take further action or are unsuccessful in a challenge, then the Council is committed to trying to reduce the impact of this facility on our communities. We will work with Sunnica to ensure biodiversity and management of the ecology on site is not an afterthought and get round

the table to identify added benefits Sunnica can bring to communities affected by the solar farm. I will also lobby government to get business rates coming back to the Council rather than into central government in order that the financial benefits can be felt locally. There remains a long road ahead, but the Council is committed to hold Sunnica and the Government to account.”

2. Question from Cllr Christine Whelan to the Leader of the Council:

“We have had a number of residents contact us about parking. We were promised a visionary scheme by the administration 3 years ago. We have not seen a recent update on this. Please can you confirm how many people have volunteered and how many people have been trained for this scheme?”

Response from the Leader, Cllr Anna Bailey:

“Cambridgeshire Constabulary’s Change Board met at the end of November 2023 and an agreement was reached that a pilot would be explored to establish the Road Safety Police Support Volunteer (RSPSV) role but that initially their remit (and delegated powers) be limited to road-safety issues, i.e. speeding and dangerous parking. Should the pilot be successful proposals for expanding their role (and powers) which can include parking enforcement could be submitted.

The Police were exploring the possibility of using Special Constables for the scheme as there are some Specials who are not currently operational, and this does open various deployment possibilities as they retain full powers (including all road traffic powers).

Officers have requested an update from Superintendent Sutherland, the Constabulary lead on this and once received it will be circulated to all Members.”

28. CORPORATE PLAN

Council considered an updated Action Plan 2024-25 (Z40, previously circulated) to support the implementation of the 2023-27 Corporate Plan.

The recommendation in the report was proposed by Cllr Bailey and seconded by Cllr Horgan. Cllr Bailey discussed the priorities and actions outlined in the Corporate Plan, focusing on the planned actions for 2024/25. In particular, the Council would continue with its aim to raise Council Tax only as a last resort, having delivered a Council Tax freeze for an 11th consecutive year.

- Applications were now being accepted for the four £100k homes at the Eden Square Project for local eligible individuals.
- The Planning Review had been completed and it was determined that the service was being well managed, with any necessary improvements already in progress and leading to further enhancements.
- The long-term changes in waste and recycling services that would be implemented in 2026 were progressing well, and the cross-party working group were thanked for their efforts on this project.
- Collaboration with Sustrans will continue to enhance cycling and walking routes and build a case for investment from other organisations.

- The Council successfully opposed the Cambridge congestion charge proposal by the Greater Cambridge Partnership and remained vigilant about future measures planned by the Greater Cambridgeshire Partnership, the Mayor and the Combined Authority.
- The project team had now been established for the new bereavement centre near Mepal, with construction scheduled to begin in late 2025.

The Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group expressed approval for certain parts of the Corporate Plan and Actions, such as the play spaces audit, and efforts towards inclusive play. She emphasised the importance of digital inclusion to prevent anyone from being left out due to technology barriers, as well as access to reliable mobile data. However, she believed that some aspects, especially regarding climate and nature actions and goals could be more ambitious. The actions outlined in the plan could not be relied upon, as she believed that the conservative administration had purposely concealed the inclusion of a crematorium to allocate funds to it discreetly, and as long as this remained part of the plan, then she would not endorse it. Cllr Dupré also expressed concern about whether the Council would be able to maintain essential services and asked why they had abstained on the Combined Authority's bus reform work and why the Road Safety Volunteer Scheme had not yet been implemented. She added that the Action Plan lacked clarity.

Cllr Trapp supported the priorities but pointed out that there were no specific actions outlined to address environmental crime in the district, help local businesses succeed in East Cambridgeshire or establish plans for a new local plan.

Cllr Vellacott stated that the Council was committed to providing valuable services to residents. The Council had collaborated with both parties to include the Inclusive Play Strategy and audit in its proposals. The new Digital Inclusion Project aimed to ensure that everyone was included. The Council's engagement with the CPCA Bus Reform Review should focus on rural communities and Cllr Vellacott supported the proposal for Road Safety Police Volunteers but expressed concern about the slow progress and urged the Council to push the Police to take responsibility. He also mentioned that he looked forward to implementing the waste and street cleansing review, including the introduction of black wheelie bins and improved recycling service. He expressed delight about the construction of the Soham to Wicken cycleway over the Summer. The Corporate Action Plan prioritised value for money and excellent service delivery, which Cllr Vellacott fully supported.

Cllr Sharp echoed Cllr Dupré's remarks about the joint party motion on the inclusive play policy. He also expressed gratitude to the cross-party working party for their efforts on the Sustrans and active travel initiatives, which he had brought up at the Cambridgeshire County Council's Highways and Transport Committee meeting.

Speaking as seconder of the Motion, Cllr Horgan supported and agreed with many points made, emphasising the collaboration between both parties on projects like auditing council-owned play areas to enhance them. Additionally, the need for a bereavement centre in the district was highlighted as important to residents.

Summing up as proposer of the recommendations, the Leader, Cllr Bailey agreed with Cllr Dupré's concerns about digital exclusion. However, she was disappointed with Cllr

Dupré's remarks regarding climate and nature work, as they were inaccurate and belittled the efforts of the authority. The Council was dedicated to achieving true net zero by 2035 and demonstrated the steps it was taking to reach this goal. The Council will be delivering the bereavement centre, and it was standard practice to develop potentially sensitive proposals in a confidential meeting before the information was made public. There had been no other proposal presented that took into account the biodiversity and species on the site, and no plan could support the creation of an outdoor leisure centre.

Following a vote, the Motion was carried (12 in favour, 0 against and 9 abstentions).

It was resolved:

- a) That the updated Action Plan for 2024-25 at Appendix 1, be approved.
- b) That the completed actions and progress made during the past 12 months be noted.

29. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM COMMITTEES AND OTHER MEMBER BODIES

Council considered report Z41, previously circulated, detailing recommendations from Committees as follows:

1. Finance & Assets Committee – 27 June 2024

a) Treasury Operations Annual Performance Report

The Chair of the Finance & Assets Committee, Cllr Sharp, proposed that the Treasury Operations Annual Performance Report, as attached at Appendix B, be approved.

The recommendations in the report were proposed by Cllr Sharp and seconded by Cllr Bovingdon.

Cllr Sharp expressed gratitude to the Finance Team for their efforts in managing the Council's finances. He mentioned that the Council made over £2 million in interest from the money markets last year. As a result, the Council was able to shift towards longer-term investments, ranging from three to six months to generate higher returns consistently. It was worth noting that there was no external borrowing in 2023/24, which marked a significant accomplishment for the Council.

The Leader mentioned that she was pleased to see that the earnings from East Cambs Trading Company, which amounted to £255,000, demonstrated how the Council had implemented new approaches. Additionally, East Cambs Street Scene had brought in £5.8 million for the Council so far.

Cllr Alison Whelan stated that it was positive to observe the funds being handled in a manner that produced returns, but it did bring up some concerns. The financial experts had already predicted the interest rates prior to the budget being formulated, so there should not be any surprise about the significant positive difference. In Cllr

Alison Whelan's opinion, this underscored the lack of financial proficiency in budgeting by the current administration.

Cllr Hunt was taken aback by Cllr Alison Whelan's comments and expressed gratitude to the financial team for their efforts. Their hard work resulted in investments rising by £1.6 million and the loan to East Cambs Trading Company decreasing by £1 million. Additionally, the interest on investments increased, leading to the Council receiving an annual return of £5.49 million.

Cllr Vellacott raised a rhetorical question asking how using interest rates when they were set, rather than assuming them beforehand, could possibly represent poor financial management.

Summing up as proposer of the Motion, Cllr Sharp recommended the report to Council and expressed that he disagreed with Cllr Alison Whelan's comments. He restated that her perspective did not align with his understanding of how the Council operated.

It was resolved unanimously:

That the Finance & Assets Treasury Operations Annual Performance Review be approved.

30. THE MAKING OF BOTH THE MEPAL NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN AND THE SUTTON REPLACEMENT NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

Council considered (Z42, previously circulated) both the Mepal Neighbourhood Plan and the Sutton Replacement Neighbourhood Plan.

The recommendations in the report were proposed by the Chair and seconded by Cllr Inskip.

Speaking as seconder of the Motion, Cllr Inskip emphasised the positive impact the Plans had on the local communities; these plans were required by law for planning purposes, with the communities' input taken into consideration during the development process. The Sutton Plan was created to replace the previous one, reflecting new planning laws and community priorities that had evolved over the past five years. Cllr Inskip praised the quality of both plans and urged the Council to endorse and support them.

Cllr Dupré was particularly pleased that both neighbourhood plans were being presented for making, as they had received strong support from the local communities during the referendum. Neighbourhood Plans were important in the planning process because they allowed local communities to have an impact on their area. Cllr Dupré thanked and congratulated the Parish Councils of Mepal and Sutton, as well as the community members who had participated in the process. She was delighted to support the proposals.

The Chair concluded by stating that both plans, one initial and one revised, were excellent examples that he welcomed and commented that these plans would be beneficial for other communities to use as models.

It was resolved unanimously that:

- a) Mepal Parish Council and Sutton Parish Council be congratulated on their preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan and Replacement Neighbourhood Plan respectively, and a successful referendum outcome in each case,
- b) That the Mepal Neighbourhood Plan and the Sutton Replacement Neighbourhood Plan be made part of the Development Plan for East Cambridgeshire with immediate effect.

31. ECSS MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT EXTENSION

The Council considered (Z43, previously circulated) to consider an extension to the existing Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the Council and East Cambs Street Scene (ECSS).

The recommendations in the report were proposed by Cllr Vellacott and seconded by Cllr Sharp.

Cllr Vellacott stated he was happy with the progress towards implementing black wheelie bins by April 2026, and the initiatives to increase recycling rates. Cllr Vellacott was also pleased that both political groups planned to continue with ECSS, as this was considered the most cost-effective option for residents, especially given the improvements in governance and structure over the past year. To maintain continuity and demonstrate ECSS's financial accountability, it was necessary to extend the existing MOA and, he praised ECSS for its efforts to enhance governance and financial responsibility over the recent years, as well as consistently meeting most of its KPIs. Cllr Vellacott explained that operating a trading company with the same priorities as the Council had resulted in shared objectives and cost savings for residents and with a more formal contract in place from 2026, this would firm up the Council's close alliance with the company and ensure the service was fit for the future, which Cllr Vellacott fully supported.

It was resolved unanimously that:

- i. An extension period as set out in 4.3 and 4.4 of the existing Memorandum of Agreement with ECSS be APPROVED.
- ii. The Director Legal be authorised to complete the necessary documentation to bring this decision into effect.

32. CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH COMBINED AUTHORITY UPDATE REPORTS

The Council received the reports (previously circulated) from the Combined Authority's Business Board AGM (13 May 2024), the Board (5 June 2024), Skills and Employment Committee (17 June 2024), Environment and Sustainable Communities Committee (19 June 2024), Audit and Governance Committee (20 June 2024), and Transport and Infrastructure Committee (26 June 2024).

It was resolved unanimously:

That the reports on the activities of the Combined Authority from the Council's representatives be noted.

The meeting concluded at 7:16pm

Chair.....

Date.....