

County Council Report May 2011 from Councillor John Reynolds

NICK CLARKE IS ELECTED LEADER OF CAMBRIDGESHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S CONSERVATIVE GROUP

Councillor Nick Clarke has been elected as Leader of Cambridgeshire County Council's Conservative group. Cllr Clarke will be elected Leader of Cambridgeshire County Council at the Council's AGM on 17 May, succeeding Cllr Jill Tuck.

He said: "It is an honour to be elected Conservative Group Leader and I am honoured to have the opportunity to be able to serve the people of Cambridgeshire as Leader of the Council after May 17. "Succeeding Jill Tuck as Leader means I have a hard act to follow. She has led the Council and the County over the past three years with sound judgment and a sure touch.

"The public expects and demands strong, effective leadership, and I believe I have those qualities. I am confident I have the ability, the energy and the time to provide the dynamic leadership the Council and the County needs. There are significant financial challenges ahead. But it is also time to get on with the job of creating prosperity, happiness and safe, strong communities for the people of our county.

He is currently Chairman of the Council's Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Committee, and a member of its Local Government Shared Services Management Board. He has also been a member of Cambridgeshire Police Authority and is a former board member of Greater Cambridge Partnership and Chair of the County's Federation of Small Businesses.

BE PART OF CAMBRIDGESHIRE'S TRANSPORT REVOLUTION

A new scheme to revolutionise transport in Cambridgeshire could unlock tens of millions in investment, make it easier for people to catch a bus and has the potential to create new businesses. Cambridgeshire County Council is working in a cross authority partnership to see if public services can align their resources to boost local transport and business enterprise.

Once agreed, pathfinder projects could be set up in the County by autumn to provide high quality community transport that will meet the needs of residents and statutory services ranging from taking children to school to providing transport to the local doctor. These local transport groups could include franchise agreements where residents are guaranteed a high quality service and which would encourage local enterprise, business and employment opportunities. The Council is looking to set up the first pathfinder projects in areas where bus subsidies are being reduced.

Alone the County Council spends more than £20 million on providing statutory transport with extra money available for community schemes. The Council wants to see existing businesses, budding entrepreneurs and charities to step forward and grab this opportunity to take part in the scheme. Cambridgeshire Future Transport is a partnership between the County Council working with district and city council partners as well as other public services and authorities. It also has representatives from community transport and bus operators to help provide business and industry knowledge.

The initiative will:

- Ensure transport is well managed, easy to use, and delivered at a reasonable price
- Handing budgets and power to communities so that they can find local solutions to local transport needs
- Looking at an innovation fund to help local entrepreneurs and charities start up and expand local transport services
- Drive through savings for public services while providing a seamless transport service

Currently the Council spends millions of pounds on subsidising large buses that are often empty and sometimes buses and even local mini-buses are left idle through the day between pick-ups. This means there is plenty of capacity not only for improvements to be made but to create jobs and increase economic prosperity. The new scheme being developed could plough millions of pounds into the hands of local residents and businesses and co-ordinate transport across organisations to provide a much better service.

COUNCIL GETS 'GOOD' INSPECTION REPORT FOR ADULT LEARNERS

Thousands of adult learners across the whole of Cambridgeshire are getting a good service the independent watchdog Ofsted has said. The Ofsted inspection of Adult and Learning Skills, which is provided by Cambridgeshire County Council found the services provided either good or outstanding.

The service dealt with almost 13,000 either part time or full time learners between 2009 and 2010. A range of courses are provided at centres across Cambridgeshire, including academic and vocational qualifications, training for employees as well as sports, crafts, creative arts and design.

The report praised the courses, tutors and venues as well as saying: "The county council has fully acknowledged the generous benefits of adult community learning for residents of Cambridgeshire and set a very clear strategic vision for the service. Library learning centres, adult guidance service and apprenticeship schemes are under a single leadership. To ensure its future the county council has advanced plans to establish a trust."

Ofsted particularly highlighted the way in which the service had met and targeted the needs of disadvantaged learners.

The report says:

- * Learners develop high level of skills in all subject areas. They improve their confidence, skills and knowledge to a high degree and achieve their personal objectives.
- * Literacy, numeracy and ESOL learners become more independent and develop their prospects for study and employment. Learners from the most marginalised groups find direction to their lives.
- * Most learners enjoy learning and are highly satisfied. They attend regularly and complete their courses. The learning venues are easily accessible where learners feel safe and secure.
- * The quality of teaching is good with 19% outstanding lessons. Most tutors are highly experienced and practising professionals. They communicate their passion through teaching, using a range of multimedia resources.
- * The service works in close partnership with the voluntary sector and schools to meets learners needs.
- * The service has a very clear strategic direction and vision. Its arrangements to check the credentials and background of the tutors are strong. The service makes prompt changes in response to the learners and partners views. It knows its provision well. The self-assessment report is mostly accurate. The service has a good capacity to maintain strengths and deal with the areas for improvements. Value for money is good.

The report also pointed out areas where the Council could improve including in a few centres improving the quality of accommodation. It also suggested the council continues to improve the tutors and learners understanding of setting and reviewing the achievement of personal learning objectives in a few classes, so that they fully understand the importance of monitoring their own progress and individual achievement. Maintain and develop further the strategies to improve the quality of teaching and learning so that learners on all programmes achieve well.

"Providing adults with learning opportunities is vital in helping people achieve their goals and improving their quality of life. The Council helps provide courses for thousands of residents across Cambridgeshire and we are pleased with this independent inspection which says we are doing a good job. Like all school reports we can always do better and we will continue to strive to improve and help residents achieve their ambitions."

REDUCING ELECTRICITY CONSUMPTION TO SAVE CARBON FUELS

Electricity consumption in council buildings decreased in March 2011 for six of our larger offices; five of the six show we used less electricity in March 2011 than during March 2010. Castle Court is showing the biggest decrease at -17%. These early figures suggest improvements including LED lighting, timer switches and employees being more energy aware are making a real difference. Let's make sure this reduction isn't a 'one-off' - stay vigilant and remember to switch off.

SCHOOL MEAL PRICE HELD FOR THIRD SUCCESSIVE YEAR

The price of a primary school meal will remain at £2.00 in September - the third year in a row without an increase. Cambridgeshire Catering Services (CCS), who provide school meals, increased the price of a school meal in September 2009 from £1.90 to £2.00. Managers pledged to keep the price at £2.00 for two years - and have succeeded - but have now announced that it will be kept at £2.00 for another year, until at least September 2012.

The reason prices are able to stay the same is that the number of primary school pupils taking school meals has been steadily rising. In the last three years, the proportion of pupils taking a school meal as opposed to bringing their own went up from 31.5% to 40%. During the forthcoming year CCS - which is part of Cambridgeshire County Council - will be offering parents the opportunity to pay for school meals and other school payments online.

In secondary schools, meal prices will go up in September from £2.15 to £2.20. As all secondary schools in Cambridgeshire offer a cafeteria service, the £2.20 amount will be the equivalent of an allowance against the price of a meal.

CCS already provides meals to over 200 schools across Cambridgeshire, Peterborough, Essex and Rutland, and has recently started providing meals to about 70 schools in Northamptonshire. A total of 17,000 children in Cambridgeshire now have a school meal every day.

ELY LIBRARY OPENS A NEW CHAPTER

Residents in East Cambridgeshire will be able to use the latest self service technology after Ely library re-opens its doors last month, following a major refurbishment. Building on the success of seven other libraries across the county, Cambridgeshire Libraries, Archives and Information has installed the popular and successful self-service technology in Ely. This helps visitors issue and return a range of items, from books to DVDs.

The new improvements also include installing a new customer service point, and rearranging the non-fiction books to incorporate the reference material, which will bring all the information on each subject together. The main entrance to the children's library has moved round to make it more secure for younger children and a new sofa, purchased by The Friends of Ely Library, for children, parents and carers to share, will be installed next month. The Teenage Library has moved to the other side of the library where there will be more space and shelving.

The local community and businesses as well as the Friends Group and library staff themselves have also come forward to help make further improvements. As a result of donations from various local sources the meeting room has had new flooring laid. Library staff have also got their brushes out and painted the meeting room and kitchen which is used by the local community.

The new self-service machines will enable customers to:

- Issue and return books, story cassettes, DVDs and CDs quickly and easily
- Check what books they already have out on loan
- Renew items
- Pay overdue and loan charges for story cassettes, DVDs and CDs

The self-service is quick and easy to use and staff will be on hand to explain how the machines work and to answer any questions.

"Where we have introduced self-service we have found it very popular with around 95 per cent of business going through the system. Ely is a very popular library and these changes will further improve facilities.

We would also like to thank the Friends of Ely Library for their kind donation as well as the local businesses and community groups who have come forward. It confirms, as we have always said, libraries are much more than places where you get books but are community hubs at the centre of local life."

CAMBRIDGESHIRE TRANSPORT BOSSES BACK REAL TIME BUS PLANS

Plans to invest around £600,000 in improving services for bus passengers and reduce congestion have been backed by transport councillors from across the Cambridge area. This will supported plans to invest developer money into extending a scheme to provide real-time bus information equipment in Cambridge. Bus users have asked the Council to improve information on buses which encourages more people to use them and reduce congestion within the city. Real time information signs, which are already being used in the city, are similar to those used on the underground and give up to the minute details about when the next bus will be coming.

The system has encouraged people, especially commuters, to use buses rather than increase car use and therefore reduce congestion and pollution. The money is coming from developers and has been earmarked specifically to improve transport within the Cambridge area and has been supported by councillors and officers from Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council. It will see new signs going up on some of the city's most busiest bus routes as well as large display screens in places were communities want to travel to, such as Addenbrooke' s Hospital and the railway station.

The scheme will see an extra:

- * 23 real time information signs in Coldham's Lane, Cherry Hinton and Fulbourn area
- * 27 real time information signs in Milton, Histon and Impington and the Science Park area and a large screen display at Tesco, Milton, where a large number of people visit.
- * 32 real time information signs in the South East of the city including Mill Road and Cherry Hinton Road area as well as four large screens at well used areas such as Addenbrooke's Hospital and the Railway station.

"This extension of the real-time bus information system across the Cambridge area will help to encourage more people to use buses and reduce congestion and pollution. We have listened to our communities and bus users who have asked for more accurate information so they have much more certainty about catching their bus. We already know that these measures are successful in other parts of the City and people have asked for more. This money is coming from developers and is specifically earmarked to improve transport and has the support of councillors and officers from South Cambridgeshire District Council and Cambridge City Council."

£5 MILLION BID TO IMPROVE TRANSPORT IN CAMBRIDGESHIRE

Council chiefs have agreed a bid which could see nearly £5 million ploughed into improving transport – especially in rural areas. Cambridgeshire County Council has agreed to back the £4.981million bid for the Local Sustainable Transport Fund. If successful the money would be spent on a range of projects over the next four years, to improve transport choice. It would include improving cycling in the whole of the county and just over £2.6 million on community transport schemes.

Schemes to encourage car sharing or alternatives to the car for commuters will also be funded. As part of improvements to community transport the bid includes setting up rail partnerships to help provide better facilities at stations that have been asked for and delivered locally. There will also be a major investment in cycling and walking in Cambridge and across the county, with new links and parking for cycles. In Cambridge the bid will look at helping to deliver the Chisholm trail as asked for by the cycling campaign as well as improving junctions and areas that currently put people off from cycling.

The proposals have been put together by Cambridgeshire County Council, the district and city councils and Cambridgeshire Horizons. "We have worked closely with partner councils and Cambridgeshire Horizons as well as listening to local residents to come up with these schemes. In particular we want to boost transport in rural areas and give residents more choice and more chance to influence what is happening locally for them. These proposals offer a range of transport improvements and we hope the Government will look at them very closely and back our bid."

RESIDENTS GET POWER TO ALTER SPEED LIMIT

Residents will get the power to change speed limits near their homes – if they stump up cash for the work. Neighbours living in a street or village will be able to investigate putting in restrictions themselves under a new policy from Cambridgeshire County Council. It could pave the way for changes in the speed limit that would normally fail to meet the authority's own funding criteria.

The council has taken a more flexible approach after heeding calls from communities upset they cannot get changes made despite accidents occurring. The council would be on hand to advise any group wanting to pursue a change in speed limit and the council would undertake the traffic regulation order, which would ensure a public consultation to gauge support.

Schemes would need to be advertised and people would have the opportunity to object, as is the case when the council brings in changes to speed limits. Any group which puts in speed reduction measures, such as flashing signs, would need to be responsible for the “whole life cost” of the scheme. A simple scheme involving changes to the numbers on existing signs at either end of a small village or a street, for example, could cost hundreds of pounds but a more complex scheme might cost thousands.

YOUNG PEOPLE AT SWAVESEY MAKE GREAT STRIDES TO PREVENT SMOKING

Young people at Swavesey Village College want local people to go health for leather by joining them on a 'smoke free' community walk on 8 May. The students - aged 15 - have organised the event to launch the award-winning Kick Ash programme at the college.

Kick Ash is a countywide campaign which sees young people driving forward initiatives to prevent smoking in the under 16's across Cambridgeshire. Families, friends and the community were all invited to take part in the two-mile walk to show they back the students' pledge to be smoke free.

A total of 24 students from Swavesey Village College have volunteered to work as Kick Ash mentors leading on all campaign activities. They have already worked with over 200 ten and 11-year-olds in primary schools and led work with 250 thirteen and 14-year-olds in their own school. Health Secretary and South Cambridgeshire MP Andrew Lansley applauded Kick Ash on a recent visit to Swavesey Village College and has pledged his support for the campaign. The programme also works with partner primary schools. The Kick Ash programme is supported by NHS Cambridgeshire and Cambridgeshire County Council and will visit 10 secondary schools and their partner primary schools over five years.

KEEP ON CYCLING

The blacktop surface on a cycleway planned to run alongside The Busway will now go on further, thanks to Housing Growth Funding from Cambridgeshire Horizons. Cambridgeshire Horizons originally allocated £890,000 of funding from the Housing Growth Fund (received from the Department of Communities and Local Government) to surface the path that will be used by cyclists, pedestrians and horse riders between Park Lane in Histon and Longstanton.

However, following detailed consideration of how the money will be used, there is enough to allow the cycleway to carry on all the way to Swavesey, improving the sustainable transport route. The County Council had already planned to lay a blacktop surface between Histon and Milton Road, as well on the entire southern section. The extension of the blacktop surface means crushed limestone, a surface often used on rural cycleways, will only be used between Swavesey and St Ives.

"Cambridgeshire Horizons decision to allocate funding so the blacktop can be extended to Swavesey is a real bonus for cyclists. Our framework contract looks to drive down costs and make every penny count. This has helped Horizons get more for their money. We have discussed the details with the contractors who will be carrying out this work and they are going to employ additional resources to make sure this work fits in to the other jobs we have planned and does not delay the opening. The work is due to commence as soon as the Busway is handed over, but will not delay the opening of the Busway itself.

BUSWAY HANDED OVER TO COUNTY COUNCIL

Contractors BAM Nuttall have completed the Busway project and handed over the route to Cambridgeshire County Council. Mark Lloyd, Chief Executive of Cambridgeshire County Council, met with BAM Nuttall's top boss - Steve Fox - today to finalise the completion of the contract and the handover of the project.

This is the longest Guided Busway in the world, which once open, will provide a world beating service. Like everyone we look forward to seeing buses running along this high quality scheme as soon as possible. The handover of The Busway is the news residents have been looking forward to. This is the first big step towards the route opening, but I would like to remind residents that the announcement of the opening date is still some way off. We expect around 3.5 million trips per year will be made on the route once it opens and it will certainly be the best way to travel to avoid the frequent queues and congestion on the A14."

At the beginning of May the Council will begin adding a blacktop surface to the cycleway between Swavesey and Milton Road, as well as surfacing the southern section. An additional junction to help access to the Clay Farm development - funded by developers - will also be carried out.

Yours John Reynolds

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