

A14 BEGINS TO MOVE THANKS TO CAMBRIDGESHIRE - LED CAMPAIGN

The new Secretary of State for Transport has been praised by Cambridgeshire council chiefs for listening to their arguments and moving improvements to the A14 a step closer. Cambridgeshire County Council has been leading discussions for partners with the Department for Transport (DfT) on finding ways to improve the congestion blighted A14 corridor. This week the DfT has announced that money has been made available to carry out the first two stages of a new A14 survey with the first phase due to be completed by Christmas.

The first short stage will see experts reviewing the problems and challenges surrounding the A14 corridor given the cancellation of the previous road improvement scheme. The second stage will be looking at what solutions, including rail freight and public transport as well as road measures, could meet these challenges. All parties are clear that this work is not about revisiting the detailed study work done some time ago (the Cambridge to Huntingdon Multi Modal Study, or "CHUMMS"), but rather looking at the current situation and deciding how best to move forward.

Ever since the Government announced there was not enough money for the original proposed improvements the County Council has been leading on negotiations with Government for the importance of this transport corridor not to be forgotten. Together with support from a wide range of partners, including District and City Councils, neighbouring County Councils and the Local Enterprise Partnership the County Council has made sure that Cambridgeshire will be part of any future decision making for the A14 corridor. The improvement of this corridor is critical if jobs are to be created and Cambridgeshire is to play its full part in the national economic recovery. .

Cambridgeshire County Council Leader Nick Clarke, said: "Addressing the transport problems along the A14 corridor is a top priority for this council. It is of local, national and international importance that we can find a way forward, to reduce congestion and delay, unlock development opportunities, and most importantly save lives. From the point when the Government announced they did not have the funding for the original scheme we have been campaigning for action on these issues, and made sure Cambridgeshire and our partners have been able to have a say. I am very pleased to see the new Secretary of State for Transport has listened to us and given the green light for the funding of these important stages of the survey. We will continue to work with the DfT and our partners, and to campaign for the much needed improvements along this corridor."

Local County Councillor John Reynolds added: "Finding a solution to east-west movements across this part of our area is absolutely critical to our economic growth aspirations. We know that we have many of the right ingredients to generate significant private sector job growth and to allow our existing companies to grow, and to attract others from overseas. However, until a solution is in the offing for the problems of the A14 corridor, it will continue to hamper our growth prospects.

KNOW YOUR LIMITS – ALCOHOL AWARENESS WEEK

'Know your limits' is the message residents across Cambridgeshire are urged to think about during Alcohol Awareness Week - which starts on Monday (14 November).

Agencies across the county, including the Cambridgeshire Drug and Alcohol Action Team, hospitals, prisons and treatments services, have joined forces to raise awareness of the risks of excessive drinking and to promote the help and support available. Alcohol Awareness Week is designed to help people recognise their level of drinking and to cut back if necessary.

Events are taking place across Cambridgeshire including:

- * Open days at Addaction Alcohol Treatment Services.
 - * A stall at Huntingdon market on Wednesday 16 November and a community event at Huntingdon Library on Friday 18 November promoting the Addaction service.
 - * Alcohol Identification and Brief Advice (IBA) follow up training.
- During the week there will also be informal education sessions in some schools.

Cllr Tony Orgee, Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing said "The dangers of alcohol are becoming increasingly well known. It's well publicised that excessive drinking can increase the risk of heart disease, breast cancer, liver disease, stroke and other diseases.

"It's recommended by experts that men do not drink more than 21 units a week and women no more than 14 units. We're not trying to tell people what to do or say how much they should drink, but during Alcohol Awareness Week we'd encourage everyone to give thought to the 'know your limits' message and consider their alcohol consumption."

CHILDREN'S SERVICES CONTINUE TO PERFORM WELL - OFSTED

Children's services in Cambridgeshire have sustained their good performance from last year, according to Government inspectors. OfSTED - the Office for Standards in Education - said the large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected were good or better and effectively supported children and young people to learn and stay safe.

The OfSTED report identified several strengths within the Children's Services provided by Cambridgeshire County Council:

- * Considerable and effective action has been taken to improve the recruitment and retention of Children's Social Care staff. Inspectors found this had resulted in good staff morale with staff feeling well supported by managers
- * An improvement in the quality of early years and childcare provision
- * For children under five, the very large majority of provision in nurseries and in primary schools is good and some is outstanding
- * Of the 11 secondary schools inspected during the academic year, seven are good and five of those have improved from satisfactory
- * For learning after the age of 16, sixth form college provision is either good or outstanding
- * The large majority of special schools, including those with secondary sixth forms, are good or better. Two of the three pupil referral units are outstanding and one is good
- * A recent inspection of the Council's adoption agency found a good service with outstanding features
- * The County Council's strategic plan appropriately identifies the need to close the gap in health and education outcomes for vulnerable groups.
- * Inspectors said the proportion of children and young people from low-income families achieving expected attainment levels at age 16 and 19 was improving and the gap with their peers in Cambridgeshire was reducing, but added that the proportion of those aged 5, 16 and 19 from low-income families achieving expected standards for their age was still below average.

Inspectors identified just two areas for further improvement. They highlighted the decline in the proportion of good or better primary schools and noted that education standards that are average for five to 11-year-olds were not rising as quickly as the national rate.

After good progress in recent years, Cambridgeshire's GCSE performance in 2011 has largely flatlined and not kept pace with improvements nationally this year. A strategy for improving GCSE performance is to be developed in partnership with secondary schools, including academies, and will include a specific focus on addressing attainment gaps for vulnerable groups.

After a decline in achievement at Key Stage 2 over the last two years there have been improvements in performance in 2011. Attainment is now above the national average in English and in line in mathematics, progress in English and maths has risen by 1 percentage point respectively. A strategy to increase the numbers of schools graded 'good or better' by OfSTED is well underway. Area Primary Teams are targeting these schools to accelerate their improvement.

Local County Councillor John Reynolds, said: "I welcome OfSTED's recent findings and recognition of the continuing progress we are making across Cambridgeshire to improve the lives of our children and young people. This is down to the hard work of all staff within Children and Young People's Services.

"Our achievements are particularly impressive given the many changes in the way Children's Services in Cambridgeshire are operating today - implementing the new Social Care unit of working with vulnerable families, targeting services more towards early intervention and prevention, redesigning the way we engage with and challenge the performance of schools and how we work constructively with academies, and managing the huge demographic growth in the county. This has all been achieved while saving £44m over five years.

"However, there is more we can and will do to improve outcomes for children, young people and their families and we are working in partnership with colleagues across Cambridgeshire to achieve this."

HEALTHY EATING AT CENTRE OF NATIONAL SCHOOL MEALS WEEK

Caterers at Cambridgeshire County Council will be focusing on the importance of healthy, nutritious meals during National School Meals Week this week. Cooks, food service contractors, food manufacturers, suppliers and schools are working together to communicate the importance of eating a healthy lunchtime meal. Throughout the week (November 7 - 11) Cambridgeshire Catering Service (CCS) - part of the County Council – have been promoting its new winter menu by encouraging pupils, parents and grandparents to try a school lunch.

Workshops have taken place in schools across the county raising the awareness of healthy eating. Children have had the opportunity to taste a variety of fruit and vegetables, created a healthy pizza and baked their own bread.

Following on from their successful event last year, Waterbeach Community Primary School have once again been hosting a Heroes Lunch on Wednesday 9 November. The school invited members of the British Legion and soldiers from the local barracks to join pupils for a special lunch to mark the importance of Remembrance Week. Poppy biscuits, baked by the school catering team and pupils, were sold and the money raised donated to the British Legion and Help for Heroes.

To further communicate the benefits of healthy eating, CCS have providing each pupil with a bookmark promoting the My School Lunch website, an important source of information about school meals in Cambridgeshire. Here parents can find current menus, details of upcoming promotional lunches, a ratings and review section for a selection of dishes and latest news items about the service.

Children are also able to access a funfair of educational games to teach them about food and healthy eating.

CCS provides school meals to the majority of Cambridgeshire's primary schools. It supports the Change 4 Life campaign, whose objectives include developing healthier eating habits.

More information about National School Meals Week and how it supports healthy eating can be found at www.iloveschoolmeals.co.uk

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PARNERSHIP APPROACH TO BEAT THE WINTER BLUES

Agencies across Cambridgeshire are working together to help people in the county stay safe, warm, and well when the winter weather hits. Under the guidance of the newly created shadow Health and Wellbeing Board, health services, road safety experts and care support services are sharing information, expertise and support to ensure that a comprehensive range of services is available to vulnerable residents, when they need it most.

Gritting and treating a wide network of highways, footpaths and cycleways, working with district and parish councils to grit community areas such as paths outside shops, community centres and doctors surgeries and schemes designed to cut drink driving and raise accident awareness among drivers will help to reduce hospital admissions and trips to GP surgeries or A & E as well as keep people safe.

The local NHS will be working with District Councils and with voluntary sector agencies such as Age UK to provide advice on how to keep warm and well over winter, as well as encouraging vulnerable people to take up flu vaccinations, and avoid slips and trips.

Cambridgeshire County Council Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing, Councillor Tony Orgee, said: "By working ever more closely together, health, welfare and safety agencies across Cambridgeshire, can do even more than in previous years to support our communities to keep safe, warm and well during the winter months.

"By treating the roads and footpaths we can limit the number of slips and trips, reduce hospital admissions and ensure that wherever possible road users and the public can go about their business in a safety and secure environment.

"I would encourage everyone who is eligible for a free seasonal flu jab this winter to take up the opportunity to protect their health. This includes

- * All pregnant women irrespective of their stage of pregnancy.
- * Adults and children who suffer from:
 - Chronic respiratory disease such as asthma, emphysema, cystic fibrosis
 - Heart disease
 - Diabetes
 - Kidney or liver disease
 - Lowered immunity due to disease or treatment

Dr Simon Hambling, GP, Chair of the NHS Cambridgeshire Clinical Commissioning Senate, and member of the shadow Health & Wellbeing Board, said: "This is a new approach to tackling winter for our patients and residents. Working together, we hope to keep more people well through the winter months so that we can concentrate resources on the most vulnerable in our community."

Cllr Sue Ellington, South Cambridgeshire District Council's Cabinet member responsible for public health, said: "We are all aiming to make sure the best possible advice and services are available to Cambridgeshire residents when the bad weather hits this winter. Transport is always important in rural districts and our budding community transport schemes will help connect the most vulnerable people." For further information, contact: Glenn Thwaites in the Communications Team on (01223) 699282 or Jessica Bawden at NHS Cambridgeshire on 07801 816767 or Gareth Bell at South Cambridgeshire District Council (01954) 713289.

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COUNCILLORS BACK PLANS FOR SWAVESEY SHORT STAY CAR PARK

Plans to put a short stay car park at Swavesey for The Busway have been backed by local councillors. Cambridgeshire County Council's Cabinet have agreed plans to build the short stay car park to pick up and drop off users of the nearby Busway stop.

A car park was originally planned for the site but had been deferred to keep costs down. Now the Swavesey stop has proved highly popular since The Busway opened, the plans have been reviewed and new proposals drawn up. It is proposed to build a facility that would have a disabled parking pay; a path to The Busway and an area sufficient for turning and parking of around 10 vehicles.

County Councillor Mandy Smith, Local Member for Papworth and Swavesey, said: "The Busway has been highly successful and obviously people are finding it useful in Swavesey. We have listened to local members and local businesses who have told us about the traffic bringing people to use The Busway. This new facility should make it even easier for them to access this brilliant transport link. I am pleased that the Council has listened to local councillors and the public and proposed this new parking facility."

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CAMBRIDGESHIRE FUTURE TRANSPORT

The Cambridgeshire Future Transport (CFT) initiative is looking to set up three local pilots, trialling a franchising approach to providing local public transport. This is an exciting opportunity to develop an innovative way of providing local transport services.

The franchise model is based on stimulating the set-up of small local companies providing mini-bus based transport in areas with poor accessibility. CFT could provide central business support and vehicles in return for a franchise fee, giving the franchise more chance of creating a successful business and therefore open up more opportunities to provide transport in the local community.

The three areas identified for pilots are currently;

- * Duxford/Whittlesford/Linton area
- * Haddenham/Wilburton Area
- * An area around Huntingdon including villages surrounding the Busway

For the pilots, we will work with an existing provider or community to develop services in these areas and will test the viability of franchises. The pilots will be an opportunity for local communities to help shape these services to ensure they provide transport that takes them where they want to go when they want to go.

The pilots will launch on the 5th of December for an initial period of 6 months. During this period we will develop services within your area which if successful will continue on beyond this period. As part of this process we would welcome a discussion with you and your community on what the transport need is within your area and how a franchise could potentially meet that need.

We would be more than happy to discuss the project, and we will also be contacting the county councillor from your division to keep them informed. In addition, we'll be contacting those parishes (and county councillors) not currently included in the pilot areas, to invite suggestions for future potential franchise areas if the initial pilots are successful.

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COUNTY COUNCIL TO CO-ORDINATE WORK TO FURTHER IMPROVE SAFETY ON A1307

Cambridgeshire County Council is co-ordinating work to further improve the safety record and to cut accidents on the A1307. The County Council has endorsed plans to bring together community, campaign and interest groups within and outside of the county to form a partnership which will develop proposals for improvements on the road.

The group will work to support the development of further accident reduction and road safety measures and to help ensure they have maximum impact on communities living alongside and close to the route and on motorists using the road. Work has only just started, but the group is expected to include County, District and Parish Councillors and representatives from existing campaign and safety awareness groups - including the Access A1307 group.

The County Council's Road Safety Team regularly reviews the accident record of county roads following serious accidents and following a recent double tragedy on the A1307, the team is currently looking again at any additional measures which could be introduced within existing financial resources to further improve the road's safety record.

Work already carried out includes reduced speed limits on some stretches, improved signing and lining, traffic island realignment, installation of a static safety camera, a road safety campaign to influence driver behaviour and 'accident blackspot' warning signs to alert drivers to the number of accidents on the route.

Local Councillor Tony Orgee, said: "The County Council has already carried out a programme of safety improvement work which has halved the number of accidents on this road in five years. While I am pleased with the impact of those improvements, we want to continue to work with local representatives and communities to assess what other improvements could be introduced and to make suggestions for other changes and to help us set priorities for the work given the current budget situation faced by Cambridgeshire County Council."

It is anticipated that members of the group will be appointed in November with the first meeting taking place in January.

CAMBRIDGE SCHOOLS CELEBRATE COMPLETION OF NEW BUILDINGS

Primary schools in Cambridge are meeting the demand for more places with the completion of several extensions and refurbishments.

Colville Primary School in Cherry Hinton has extended its buildings, enabling it to double its intake and cater for a total of 420 pupils. The £3.6m scheme includes new nursery accommodation, two speech and language classrooms, six Key Stage 1 classrooms and an activity studio.

Abbey Meadows Primary School in Galfrid Road has extended its buildings in a £3.3m project which means it will be able to take up to 630 pupils. The new accommodation comprises nine classrooms, a library, and a new playground and toilets.

A new school - Queen Emma Primary School - has been created in Gunhild Way to cater for the additional needs in the south of the city. The £7m school is a two-storey building consisting of 14 classrooms, a library, new playground and gardens and other accommodation. The school is part of The Queen's Federation - along with neighbouring Queen Edith Primary School.

Cherry Hinton Primary School - formerly an infant school - has had £1.1m spent to provide an extra class and multimedia suite, together with the refurbishment of existing facilities which will enable it, over time, to cater for the full primary age range of 4 to 11 years.

The former Cherry Hinton Junior School has also become a primary school - Bewick Bridge Primary - following a £4m programme of new building to provide 10 classrooms, with a new activity space and studio, together with associated accommodation and new playgrounds.

Plans have been approved to enable St Matthew's Primary School in Norfolk Street to cater for up to 630 pupils in 12 new classrooms, break-out spaces, new playgrounds and landscaped outside areas. £4m has been made available to fund these changes.

Local County Councillor John Reynolds, said: "I have been greatly impressed with the way the County Council has risen to the challenge of providing more school places in Cambridge in response to rising demand. These new facilities are modern, efficient, well-equipped and capable of meeting the needs of the 21st century. They will benefit children, teachers and governors for many years to come."

BE BRIGHT, BE SEEN AS THE NIGHTS DRAW IN

Road Safety Officers at Cambridgeshire County Council are urging all road users to take extra care on the roads once the clocks go back this weekend. The change of the clocks means it will be darker in the afternoons, when many people are making their way home from work or school. The darker conditions make it harder for pedestrians and cyclists to be seen by other road users.

Parents are being encouraged to make sure they and their children 'be bright, be seen' by attaching reflective strips to their bags and coats or other clothing. Cyclists are also reminded that they must use lights during hours of darkness and should ensure their bike reflectors are clean and clearly visible.

To support this message, Richardsons Cycles are providing reflective bands to be given to children at selected primary schools around the county, along with advice for parents from Road Safety Officers.

Local County Councillor John Reynolds, said: "It is very important that pedestrians and cyclists ensure they can be seen when making journeys in the dark, but it is equally important that other road users are extra vigilant in the knowledge that pedestrians and cyclists will be harder to see. All lights should be fitted to the bike, and although helmet or head torches are useful, they can be potentially blinding for other road users."

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MAJOR PLAN FOR COUNTY'S FUTURE GETS GREEN LIGHT

The future is looking brighter for sustainable housing and economic growth in the county as a major plan has been given the go ahead. The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Minerals and Waste Plan has been signed off after years of hard work and consultation led by the county's planners and following an in-depth examination by an independent planning inspector. Its key aim is to ensure that up to 70,000 new homes expected to be built in the next 15 years can be delivered as sustainably as possible.

The Plan has been shaped by years of close working with local businesses and communities across the county and has been developed by Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Council. The documents identify the best sites for sourcing construction materials such as sand and gravel for new housing, and waste management facilities for dealing with waste arising from future construction, new businesses and households in the county over the next 15-20 years.

The Plan also has a focus on protecting the environment and improving biodiversity. This includes increasing wildlife habitat in the county through quarry restoration, opportunities to source building materials close to major new infrastructure developments to reduce the need to transport heavy materials over long distances, and providing the best recycling centres to make it even easier for residents to recycle.

Local County Councillor John Reynolds, said, "After several years of close working with local communities and businesses in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, and a tough examination by the independent planning inspector, it is great news that the Plan has been given the go-ahead. It will make a real difference to the lives of residents in Cambridgeshire and confirms our view that the right way to plan for growth in the county is to work closely with local communities. Its key aim is to make sure that any new development in the county is delivered in a way that doesn't negatively affect local communities, now or in the future."

The Plan puts forward 70 sites for mineral extraction and waste management across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. The Inspector has given the go-ahead to all of these sites with the exception of one site to the south of Addenbrooke's Access Road in Cambridge. This site was put forward by planners for a state of the art recycling centre to enable existing and new communities in and around Cambridge to recycle as much as possible. After much consideration, the planning inspector recognised how much work went into the choice of site but rejected it on the grounds of protecting the Green Belt and the historic environment of Cambridge. The Inspector did however recognise the need for such a facility to improve present provision and to cater for planned new development. He therefore strongly encouraged the Councils to work together to identify a suitable site through their respective plans.

The County Council will look to work closely with the City and South Cambs as they progress with reviewing their local plans during the next year to explore potential options to address this need for the Southern Fringe area in line with the Inspector suggestion.

The Minerals and Waste Plan is due to be adopted by both Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Council in early 2012.

To find out more about the Plan, go to www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/environment/mwplan.

APPEAL FOR MORE ADOPTIVE FAMILIES

An appeal has been made by Cambridgeshire County Council this week for more families to come forward and offer a home to children waiting to be adopted. Figures released today show that 80 per cent of looked after children in Cambridgeshire who were adopted during the year were placed within 12 months of the decision being made.

Government statistics also show that 14 per cent of looked after children in the county were placed for adoption last year, ranking Cambridgeshire 62nd out of 149 local authorities. Cambridgeshire's success is partly down to a partnership agreement signed in July with Coram - a national children's charity and specialist voluntary adoption agency - in response to the Government's call for local authorities to improve their adoption services. Cambridgeshire County Council is looking to intensify its efforts to recruit more adopters for vulnerable children waiting for adoptive families.

The Council's adoption service particularly needs to find more families who may be able to parent children with more complex needs. In Cambridgeshire there are currently 51 children waiting to be adopted - 34 single children of various ages and 17 in sibling groups of two or three whom the Council wish to keep together. Most of the children have complex needs such as developmental delay, physical disability and uncertainty about their long term development resulting from complex family backgrounds of mental ill health, substance abuse during pregnancy, neglect and domestic violence.

Local County Councillor John Reynolds, said: "I am pleased with these figures. They illustrate our commitment to securing positive outcomes for young people in Cambridgeshire. But we are not complacent, and believe that with improved planning and decision-making we can reduce delays even further.

"An important initiative towards achieving this was the partnership agreement the County Council signed in July with Coram - a national children's charity and specialist voluntary adoption agency. We are confident the partnership will result in improved practices and fewer delays. I would urge anyone interested in adopting to come forward." As part of national Adoption Week this week, the County Council is urging people to come forward to offer a home to children waiting to be adopted. Anyone interested should call 0800 052 0078. An adoption social worker will be available to give information and answer any questions about adoption

MAKING SURE VITAMIN SALES ARE "HEALTHY"

At Cambridgeshire County Council's Trading Standards Service we have seen a sudden rise in complaints from older residents and their families on their behalf, about the pressure selling of vitamin pills over the telephone.

Some residents have had calls from people alleging to be doctors telling them that they must buy certain vitamin pills to protect their health. Others have been receiving persistent calls to the extent that they have felt bullied into buying these pills, only to find they have been sent more and more, resulting in mounting costs. In fact, some residents have parted with hundreds, even thousands of pounds.

The advice from Trading Standards is to never agree to anything on the spur of the moment, either on the phone or at the door. If the company is using high pressure selling techniques it often means their products aren't good value. Take your time to think about it. Talk to friends or relatives if it involves a lot of money. Particularly when it comes to vitamin pills (or any form of medication), it is important to speak to your own GP to make sure the products are suitable for you.

If you do feel pressured to enter into an agreement over the phone, then you are usually allowed to cancel and return the goods up to 7 working days after you receive them.

Furthermore, if you agree to buy something face to face from a salesperson that calls on you in your home, and you agree to pay more than £35, you usually have 7 days to change your mind. By law the salesperson must give you a written notice of this right to cancel.

If you think you have been mis-sold something, or been pressured into buying a product or having some work done, our partner advice team, Consumer Direct, is here to advise you. It is a free, confidential and impartial government advice service, who can be contacted on 0845 4040506.

You can actually take steps yourself to help reduce the number of sales calls you receive by registering with the Telephone Preference Service. This allows you to opt out of receiving sales and marketing calls and businesses are obliged by law to abide by that. To register, call the Telephone Preference Service on 0845 070 0707 or register online at www.tpsonline.org.uk.

Furthermore, if you would rather people didn't call at your door offering to sell you things or do work for you, we can provide you with a free 'We're not buying it' sticker for your front door. Call Consumer Direct on 0845 4040506 and we will post one to you.

If you have internet access, visit our website, www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/consumer, for news on current issues we are addressing, advice and information.

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WHY PAY WHEN YOU DON'T HAVE TO

Each month at Trading Standards we receive enquiries about things people have paid for that they could have got for free. In this article, we give advice on where you may be able to save unnecessary expense.

Warranties and Guarantees

When you buy goods, whether on their own (like a washing machine) or as part of a larger piece of work (such as a new bathroom installation), by law those goods must be of "satisfactory quality" and be "fit for their purpose". They must be of a standard that a person would expect, bearing in mind the price paid, and be free from minor defects, be as described, and last a reasonable length of time for a product of that type.

So if, for instance, the normal life of a washing machine is 5 years and yours stops working after two years due to a defect, you may be able to claim for a repair or replacement from the business you bought it from. This is the case regardless of whether you bought a warranty or guarantee. So consider carefully whether a warranty gives you anything extra.

Claiming from your debit card or credit card

If you are in dispute with a trader, instead of taking them to court, find out whether your bank may be able to help you. If you paid for something on a **debit card** and there turns out to be problems with the purchase, many banks offer a 'chargeback' scheme where they refund you.

Furthermore, if you pay for something worth over £100 and pay for at least some of it on your **credit card**, the credit card company is equally as responsible as the business that breaks its contract with you. So, if your holiday isn't as it was described, if your new dining table arrives damaged, or if your new TV breaks down soon after purchase, you can insist that your credit card provider helps you if the shop won't. This is even the case if you have paid off the amount you put on your credit card.

Personal Protection Insurance

We have received a number of reports about companies offering to claim compensation for the mis-selling of personal protection insurance on residents' behalf, whether in relation to a loan, mortgage or credit card. This is actually something you can do yourself.

The Financial Ombudsman has produced a leaflet which is available on www.financial-ombudsman.org.uk on how to make the complaint yourself. If you don't have access to the internet, you can contact the Financial Ombudsman for advice over the telephone on 0800 0234567.

European Health Insurance Cards

Even though some companies sell them, you can actually obtain a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) free of charge which entitles you to medical treatment that becomes necessary, at a reduced cost or sometimes free, when visiting a country in the European Union, Norway, Switzerland, Iceland and Liechtenstein. This is limited to treatment provided under the state scheme and you will need to produce your EHIC card. Visit www.ehic.org.uk to find out more and apply.

Legal advice

There are many sources of free legal advice available to residents. Trading Standards, in partnership with Consumer Direct, offers advice to residents on issues with businesses. Visit www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/consumer to see how we can help you or call us on 0845 4040506. The Citizens Advice Bureaux offer advice on a wide range of issues including debt, benefits, employment, housing and family issues. Visit www.citizensadvice.org.uk or call 08444 111 444. Also, many people can get free legal advice under their home insurance policies; check yours to see if you can get assistance.

PEOPLE GIVEN A CHOICE OVER LOCAL HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENTS

Cambridgeshire County Council's Cabinet has approved a new approach which will give local people a real influence over minor highway improvements in their community. For many years the County Council has contributed towards a jointly funded programme with district councils. Typically around £200,000 is made available each year and it is anticipated that a similar amount of money would be provided by the County Council next year.

The level of interest from district councils has reduced and the county council is now looking at ways to make the cash available directly to communities at a local level. Successful projects would be those which would provide improvements considered to offer benefit to the local community. Parish councils, community and residents groups and charities would be eligible to bid.

Bids would be invited up to a maximum of £10,000 per bid with an expectation that the bidder would provide some level of financial contribution to the overall cost - with a minimum contribution of 10% anticipated. Bids will be assessed by an advisory panel of County Councillors for each district area of Cambridgeshire. The panels will take into account the views of parish councils and district councillors, before making recommendations to the county council for funding.

Local County Councillor John Reynolds, said: "Local people know best what is needed in their community and this is an excellent opportunity for them to put forward ideas for improvements to the highways network which would benefit everyone in their area. This is a real opportunity for the local community to have a genuine influence over what goes on in their area and to work in partnership with the county council - localism at its best."

Successful projects could include better signing and lining, speed reduction measures, dropped crossing points, a new bus shelter or improved street lighting. Following Cabinet approval bids will be invited in November with the Member Panels sitting in January. The future maintenance of improvements constructed to County Council standards would remain the responsibility of the county council, but the running costs - perhaps electricity for street lights - would be met by the bidder.

DRIVE YOUR BUSINESS COSTS DOWN WITH WORKSHOPS FOR YOUNG DRIVERS AT WORK

With twenty per cent of work related road casualties involving drivers under 25, road safety experts have launching a new scheme to tackle the problem

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Road Safety Partnership have offered free workshops for young drivers in their own workplace to help them understand the different challenges they face when driving for work. Employers have hosted their own workshops, delivered by Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Road Safety Partnership Officers to 8-15 young drivers per half-day workshop, and have them tailored to their own business needs.

In research conducted by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA, 2009), three-quarters of employers said their young drivers were driving in situations not covered by the current learner test. The researchers also found more than two-thirds of young employees are driving vehicles at work which they were not trained or tested on when learning to drive.

Local County Councillor John Reynolds, said: "It is a sad statistic that so many drivers under the age of 25 are injured driving in work related incidents. Employers have a duty to ensure their employees have the right to use their work based equipment - this includes vehicles. Our half-day workshops addressed the young driver's attitudes towards driving for work, as well as practical skills such as journey planning and the safe carriage of goods. We hope they will bring down what are often avoidable incidents."

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DON'T RUIN YOUR LOOK WITH FACK UGG BOOTS

Criminals are continuing to target those who want to take to the streets in Ugg boots by targeting shoppers online. Trading Standards Officers in Cambridgeshire have seen an increase in complaints from residents who have bought fashion favourite 'Ugg' boots online, only to discover they were fakes.

This marks a familiar trend which saw over 30 complaints received by the service on the run up to Christmas last year.

Customers typically find that the boots are very poor quality or fall apart after only a few uses, and because these consumers are not dealing with law abiding businesses, many are having difficulty getting their money back, particularly when these businesses are based in China and other countries outside the European Union. Price is not the definitive tell-tale sign - some customers are paying large amounts of money for these boots and still finding they are fake.

Cllr Mathew Shuter, Cabinet Member for Enterprise at Cambridgeshire County Council, said: "Our Trading Standards Service works incredibly hard to support legitimate businesses and tackle rogue traders. They act on information which they receive - often from members of the public - to ensure those who try to sell counterfeit or dangerous goods are caught and, when necessary, dealt with by the courts. This often unseen and unheralded work, allows consumers in Cambridgeshire to buy with confidence and helps business who abide by the law to grow and succeed."

Local County Councillor John Reynolds, said: "Fake Ugg boots are not the only product we receive complaints about. Last Christmas for instance we also saw an increase in complaints about fake designer hair straighteners, which, in addition to being poor quality, can actually pose a safety risk. In fact last year on the run up to Christmas, the Metropolitan Police shut down more than 1,800 websites selling fake or non-existent goods.

"We advise shoppers to use a new website, www.brand-i.org, to locate retailers who are selling genuine designer or branded products. The website allows customers to search for webstores selling a type of product, a specific brand (eg Nike, GHD or Ugg) or to check that a webstore is an authorised supplier of a particular brand. The website is supported by the Trading Standards Institute and the listings are approved by the brands themselves, so consumers can shop in confidence knowing that they are buying genuine products."

Further tips for safe shopping online include making sure the website provides a UK postal address in case of problems, checking the business is really based in the UK by looking on www.nominet.co.uk for websites that end in '.co.uk' or www.allwhois.com for websites that end in '.com' and making sure the website address begins with 'https' and has the padlock symbol denoting it is a secure site. Just because the website address ends 'co.uk' does not mean the website it based in the UK.

Anyone who thinks they may have bought fake goods, and would like to report it or seek advice, should contact our advice partner, Consumer Direct, on 0845 4040506.

CONTRACTS SIGNED IN GROUNDBREAKING HINCHINGBROOKE HOSPITAL FRANCHISE

Contracts were signed recently between Hinchingsbrooke Health Care NHS Trust and Circle, paving the way for a groundbreaking new model of management for this Huntingdonshire NHS acute hospital. Via a unique franchise, Circle will take over the management of the hospital from 1 February 2012.

Circle was chosen as the preferred bidder to run the Trust in November 2010 following a rigorous thirteen month procurement process, which began in October 2009. Today's announcement follows an extensive 12 month period of scrutiny by the Department of Health to ensure the new franchise will provide the best outcome for patients, the local community and staff working at the Trust. Following the announcement last year, both Circle and Hinchingsbrooke staff have met regularly to build the solid foundations that will take the Trust forward for the next ten years.

Now staff will be invited to contribute their ideas to plan for the hospital's future. The Hinchingsbrooke Next Steps project is being managed by the Strategic Projects Team at NHS Midlands and East. Dr Stephen Dunn, its Director of Policy and Strategy, said: "This is a momentous day. Without this partnership, the future for Hinchingsbrooke could have been uncertain. Now, we have a solution which aims to repay the hospital's taxpayer debt of almost £40m, as well as giving it the best chance of a sustainable future. Patients will continue to receive high quality NHS services from NHS staff in the NHS hospital they know. This is not privatisation. Staff and assets will remain in the NHS."

Dr Dunn continued: "Circle secured this franchise following an open competition. They outshone the best of the best from the NHS and independent sectors. This will usher in a new era for this much loved local hospital."

Hinchingsbrooke Health Care NHS Trust, NHS Cambridgeshire and NHS Midlands and East have been working together to find a new partner to manage Huntingdonshire's Hinchingsbrooke hospital. The clinical and non-clinical services at Hinchingsbrooke hospital - other than where identified below - will be provided, from 1 February 2012, by the Trust under the management of Circle, via an innovative franchise agreement. This arrangement ensures that a full range of high quality acute hospital services - including accident and emergency and maternity services - will continue to be provided for local people at Hinchingsbrooke, as agreed at the end of the 2007 public consultation, for as long as commissioners request it.

Under the contract staff and assets will remain within the NHS, and patients will continue to receive NHS services. Circle is a 49.9% employee owned social enterprise that forms the largest partnership of clinicians in Europe - over 2000. Circle is co-owned and managed by the doctors, nurses and all staff who work in Circle's hospitals, treatment centres and clinics. Circle has significant experience of transforming NHS services from their Nottingham and Burton day surgery hospitals, where they treat around 130,000 NHS patients per annum.

Hinchingsbrooke hospital, which opened in 1983, is a modern purpose-built building, with 223 general and acute beds providing quality up-to-date healthcare, with an additional 23 beds within the maternity unit, nine beds in critical care and 24 specifically for day cases, alongside 23 cabins located in the Treatment Centre, the £22million unit which opened in November 2005. More than for 161,000 people in Huntingdonshire and the surrounding areas rely on the hospital for a range of services.

Services on the Hinchingsbrooke hospital site provided by other organisations, such as Cambridgeshire Community Services NHS Trust, through contractual arrangements with NHS Cambridgeshire, are unaffected by this franchise.

CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH FIRE AUTHORITY

The Joint Fire Control Centre opened without incident at Huntingdon Fire HQ on October 25th 2011. This initiative, driven by Cambridgeshire, will result in annual savings year on year in excess of £400K. We have recently been in negotiation with Buckinghamshire Fire Authority who wish to join with us.

John Reynolds
12th November
2011