

REPORT FROM COUNTY COUNCILLOR JOHN REYNOLDS 18th FEBRUARY

HORSEMEAT - COUNTY ACTION

Introduction

Part of the duties of the County Council is Trading Standards which includes the enforcement of the Food Safety Act which contains provisions to safeguard food standards, labelling and descriptions. The County Officers undertake both proactive and reactive work in relation to Food Safety which includes business advice, complaint investigation, inspections and food sampling. In recent years, our sampling work has focused largely on locally produced food, as well as participating in Food Standards Agency (FSA) directed sampling of imported and other foods.

Current Situation

The recent discovery of equine DNA in meat products containing beef has had and continues to have widespread press attention. The FSA have responded in a variety of ways, one of which is to co-ordinate a UK wide survey of food authenticity in processed meat products. The survey will use specialised analytical techniques to provide information about the possible presence of horse or pig DNA in a wide range of beef products available to UK consumers.

224 samples are being taken by 28 local authorities. The aim is to select products that are representative of the market from a wide selection of outlets spread geographically across the UK. Cambridgeshire have been asked to participate in this survey and officers are currently taking samples in the County. All samples are being taken formally and will be sent for analysis by our Public Analyst to enable enforcement action if necessary to protect consumers. The FSA will publish the results. Officers are also liaising with our Primary Authority partners in Cambridgeshire Catering and Cleaning Services' (CCS) schools catering team to provide them with any advice and assistance required.

Future Work

We fully expect the FSA to continue to co-ordinate food sampling and inspection across the UK. In Cambridgeshire, we will fully engage with this process. We will also continue to undertake our own programme of food sampling, using local knowledge and any other intelligence available in this area to direct our work. We will continue to work closely with our Primary Authority partners and other food businesses to ensure that everything that can be done is being done to eliminate meat product and other food adulteration.

NEW YEAR – ARE YOU A LIBRARY MEMBER?

The County Council wants to help more people access their services, learn new skills or find out more about the authority as part of its New Year campaign. Anyone living, working or studying in Cambridgeshire or neighbouring counties is welcome to join the council's library service - and it's free. It's easy to join, you can complete an application form online or by visiting any Cambridgeshire library.

A full Cambridgeshire Library membership allows you to borrow up to 12 items from any of the libraries. Items include more than just books - magazines, DVD's / Blu-Rays, CD's and audio books are also available.

Local County Councillor John Reynolds said; "If you're not already a member we really would encourage you to join to enjoy the service. Our libraries are a fantastic resource for young and old - there really is something for everyone."

CONNECTING CAMBRIDGESHIRE LANDS SUPER BROADBAND DEAL

British Telecom (BT) has been chosen as the winning bidder chosen to roll-out better broadband for homes and businesses across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough over the next three years. The contract award means that the council will achieve its challenging targets for better broadband. More than 90% of homes and businesses in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough will be able to receive superfast broadband (at least 24 Mbps) with basic broadband (2 Mbps minimum) available to very nearly 100% of premises by 2015.

Cambridgeshire County Council has committed up to £20million to the programme together with up to £3million from Peterborough City Council and an allocation of £6.75 million government funding from BDUK (Broadband Delivery UK). The County Council has approved the award of contract to BT to improve the countywide broadband infrastructure. The winning bid meets the ambitious targets set by the project by offering the greatest broadband coverage, with the highest speeds and the best value for money.

The money will be used to subsidise the rollout of a better broadband infrastructure for areas that would not otherwise get it. It is estimated that without this intervention, around a third of premises in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough would still be unable to access faster broadband services by 2015. Achieving the best broadband deal also means the County Council's resources will go further than delivering the telecommunications infrastructure by driving take-up, helping people to get online, exploiting new opportunities to deliver public services through technology, and supporting businesses to boost the local economy.

Local County Councillor John Reynolds said: "The Council took a bold approach to get the best broadband deal for the whole of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. Choosing BT as our investment partner means we will be able to achieve our ambitious targets for rolling out better broadband for all by 2015. We are making a significant investment at a time when public finances are under pressure but this is the right thing to do for the people and businesses of Cambridgeshire - for now and in the long term.

"Investing in better broadband is vital to driving local economic growth and building thriving, connected communities across our county. It will help Cambridgeshire and Peterborough businesses to grow and compete, allow more people to work from home and create new jobs. Better broadband connections will also ensure that our rural communities are not left out of the digital world so that people can get access to all the education, health and public services they need without having to travel.

Schedules for rolling out the new broadband infrastructure will be drawn up and agreed with BT as soon as possible after the contract signing. The roll-out will be delivered in phases based on the most cost-effective approach.

How can I find out more and keep up to date with the programme?

Regular updates and FAQs will be posted on the [Connecting Cambridgeshire](http://www.connectingcambridgeshire.co.uk) website at www.connectingcambridgeshire.co.uk

The Connecting Cambridgeshire project team can be contacted by email at contact@connectingcambridgeshire.co.uk

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DRAFT COUNTY BUDGET ANNOUNCED

Workers' pay and perks are being targeted by Shire Hall chiefs as they battle to make £32 million of cuts next year. County council leader Cllr Nick Clarke has put himself on a collision course with unions as he announced employees' "enviable" salaries, terms and conditions needed to be slashed to balance the books – and warned more jobs could be on the line if a deal is not struck.

Arguing public sector staff could not be spared from the pain endured by private sector counterparts in recent years, Cllr Clarke plans to take the "radical" step of pulling out of national pay bargaining in a bid to negotiate cheaper, local agreements. Unveiling the authority's budget, he said the equivalent of up to 100 full-time jobs could go in the next 12 months regardless of the negotiations.

The budget also proposes a 2 per cent increase in the county council's share of council tax – equivalent to an extra £21.47 for the average band D household. Cllr Clarke said that, with demand for services increasing and the amount of money available falling, the overall cost of the council's workforce had to be reduced. "There are people in the private sector who have been through these discussions endlessly and there are people who look with envy at terms and conditions at the county council.

"We have to retain the right numbers of staff to look after our increasingly large elderly population and our youngsters, and we can't continue to do it under current funding unless some other variable changes. "In this case is the cost of providing services. There is no magic answer here, we have to spend what we have and we must look at every single possibility for reducing cost." Ninety per cent of councils take part in national pay bargaining. Cllr Clarke, a successful businessman before he went into politics, said pulling out would be "radical" but that he was "not frightened" to do it.

The council aims to save £250,000 this year on staff costs, and £1 million in later years. The council is budgeting to freeze workers' pay, as has happened in the last few years. Rob Turner, branch secretary for Unison, said unions at a national level had the expertise needed to negotiate agreements.

He said: "We certainly won't be giving up our terms and conditions lightly. "Local government staff aren't that well paid – we haven't had a pay rise for three years and our pension rates have decreased. "Morale has been on the decline for a few years now and I don't see any way of it improving for the next two years with the announcement of these cuts."

Cllr Clarke said residents were prepared to pay more tax to protect frontline services. Not increasing the levy would trigger an extra £37 million of cuts to the council's services, leader Clarke said – on top of £32 million of savings which must be made anyway next year. The council's Government funding will be reduced by £10.3 million in April and it is also contending with a 12.4 per cent increase in the county's population, putting extra demand on services.

Cllr Clarke said: "The general public know that things cost more and, if you are a low-tax authority like we are that cannot take hits on its reserves, we need to provide more finance from somewhere if the public want to preserve the services we provide. "Our consultation said four out of five people are prepared to accept a council tax rise of 2 per cent or more to protect the services they value. "We think this is practical, it is about protecting the vulnerable people we have been elected to serve."

The council plans to save £1.7 million on its backroom services and also intends to reduce the number of management posts, moves which Cllr Clarke said had protected

most frontline services from savage cuts. But he warned future years would be “really tough” as more of the council’s budget was swallowed up by adult social care.

Cllr Clarke said: “We may in future have to think about the range of services we supply, and who we supply them to. “We wish to push that off as far away as we can, hoping to encourage the Government to deal with the national problem.”The authority has planned £1 billion of capital spending, half of which will go on new schools and school extensions.

Cllr Clarke said: “We have 33,000 acres of land in Cambridgeshire. Historically some is used for development purposes and it’s typically given away at not necessarily market value.

“We believe we can develop some of this land and use some of the profits to help fund our budget.” Cllr Clarke said the council was not looking to concrete over the countryside, but wanted to keep control of land which would have been developed anyway. The council is also planning to build a new care home in south Cambridgeshire.

A14 SUMMIT GETS WIDESPREAD SUPPORT

A top level summit gave widespread support to the principle of a local funding package to help fund improvements to the A14 which is strangling the economy in the eastern region. The A14 Summit, hosted by Cambridgeshire County Council, brought together representatives from Councils and Local Enterprise Partnerships affected by the whole route to discuss the issue. Congestion and accidents along the length of the A14, which is an important European link road, harms the economy of the eastern region and is a barrier for business locating in the area. Improving the road would not only boost the local and regional economy but would help the UK out of recession and allow housing and business growth along its length.

The meeting heard from representatives from the Department for Transport and Treasury how Government saw the improvements to the A14 as a priority. But members heard that the scheme could only go ahead if local authorities and organisations came together to help part fund it. Members at the meeting also agreed that this way of working together could also help bring forward other vital road and transport schemes such as the A47. Details will now be worked up and further negotiations and meetings will be held with the attendees with the hope of an offer being made to Government in the summer.

Cambridgeshire County Council Leader Nick Clarke, who chaired the meeting said: "I want to thank everyone who attended this summit which produced a productive and constructive debate. There was widespread support for the principle of a funding package to look at improving the whole route, especially pinch points, such as Cambridgeshire.

We now have to work with colleagues on the details of how this may work and the benefits we would all share in. There were two very clear messages from Government. We have made our case that improving the A14 is vital for the local and UK economy but this will only be delivered if some funding is raised by authorities and partners to help pay for it. The meeting has also helped us look at supporting each other in other transport schemes across the region, such as the A47. I look forward to working with colleagues in the future on helping deliver the A14 which will reduce accidents as well as boosting the economy and jobs."

It is envisioned the majority of the improvements would be funded by Government with the bulk of the rest coming from some form of tolling and a local contribution.

MINISTER VISITS SITE OF NEW STATION

Cambridgeshire County Councillor Nick Clarke, Leader of the Council met recently with the Rail Minister to discuss the scheme in more detail and view the site in person. Amongst the topics for discussion were the designs and passenger forecasts as well as the franchise and finance agreements that the County Council will need to make with the Department for Transport (DfT) and Network Rail (NR).

Cambridgeshire County Council's plans for the station are well under way and a planning application for the scheme is due to be submitted. The Council forecasts that the station will be used by a minimum of 3100 passengers per day in 2016, of which 1500 will be existing rail users switching to the new station, and 1600 will be new passengers. It is currently assumed that this will be at least a minimum train service on the line of the existing services plus one additional train per hour to and from London, which will give a half hourly service to and from King's Cross.

Cambridgeshire County Council Leader Nick Clarke, said: "The Minister's visit today was extremely worthwhile and we are both committed to delivering a high quality transport interchange by 2015. The Minister's coming here to view the details of scheme in person demonstrates the value the DfT have put on Cambridgeshire's part in boosting growth and leading the UK back to economic health.

"The new station will increase the attractiveness of the nationally important technology cluster in north Cambridge, all of which will be within one hour of London and 20 minutes closer to the rest of the world. This is important both for the local economy but also for the national economy as these engines of growth compete with other locations worldwide."

TRIAL TEXTILE AND SHOE RECYCLING COLLECTION SERVICE

A new textile recycling trial will begin next week in South Cambridgeshire in a bid to stop textiles and shoes ending up in landfill. Around 5,000 homes are being delivered blue recycling bags this week so they can put out spare clothing, shoes and household linen for collection alongside their blue bin. The first collection took place on Wednesday 30 January and will continue until further notice.

Households in the following villages will be covered by the trial: Bar Hill, Childerley, Chittering, Dry Drayton, Knapwell, Landbeach, Longstanton, Swavesey and Waterbeach.

The textiles and shoes collected will be tipped at AmeyCespa, separated from paper and sent to a textile processing facility. Textiles and shoes will then be sorted into reuse and recycling grades. Reusable items are sold for reuse in both the UK and abroad and non-reusable items such as worn clothing and old towels are sorted with some items being used for cleaning rags and industrial wipers. Other non-reusable items are sorted into type and colour, recycled and made into new fabrics.

Coats and jackets, pairs of shoes, accessories, trousers and jeans, sweatshirts, jumpers and t-shirts, shirts and blouses, dresses and skirts, baby and children's clothing, towels, blankets and rugs and bedding and curtains are all welcome and can be placed in the blue textile recycling bags.

Oily items, carpets, duvets, cushions, pillows, quilts and sleeping bags cannot be recycled in this way.

The trial has been funded by WRAP (Waste Resources Action Programme). If the trial proves successful we will look to roll it out to all homes in the district.

REPAIR TEAMS WAGE WAR ON POTHOLE

Road patching and pothole repair teams are now working across Cambridgeshire to fix winter damage to the county's roads. The county council has identified an extra £90 million of funding for highway maintenance in the county over the next five years and the teams will concentrate their efforts on fixing the areas of minor damage patching and filling potholes.

Since the beginning of January, nearly 1,500 potholes have been reported to the County Council and the crews have already dealt with more than 1,200 areas of damage, some of which had multiple potholes, on a temporary or permanent basis and they will continue to concentrate on this patching and filling throughout the winter period. More extensive areas of repair work or road resurfacing projects will be carried out by other teams working for the County Council across Cambridgeshire.

Local County Councillor John Reynolds, said: "The Council has committed substantial extra financial resources to highway maintenance including pothole repairs. By creating 10 repair teams dedicated full-time to fixing potholes and minor damage to the roads we hope to carry out any emergency or routine repairs as quickly as possible.

"I would urge the public to report any damage to the road surface as quickly as possible - we can only fix problem areas if we know about them - people can report a problem via our telephone contact centre on 0345 045 5212 or preferably online at

www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/transport/roads/reportingafault.htm which allows them to follow the progress of repairs to the damage they have reported."

The online Highways Fault Reporting System has been upgraded to provide:

- *Easier data entry for the public
- *Improved tracking so people reporting on-line can follow the progress of a repair
- *The ability to enter a second fault without the need to re-enter personal/contact details
- *Better system capacity to ensure fault reports do not fail
- *Better on-line access to advice and information from the County Council's Contact Centre.

LATEST FIGURES CONFIRMS CAMBRIDGESHIRE AS CYCLING CAPITAL

Census figures released this week show that Cambridgeshire is the cycling capital of Britain with at least 32 per cent of commuters taking their bike to work in Cambridge. In the past four financial years Cambridgeshire County Council has ploughed more than £9.5 million into encouraging more cycling in Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire.

The 2011 Census shows in Cambridge, at least 32 per cent of those in employment cycle to work - up from 28 per cent in 2001. This is by far the highest figure in UK comparing with 18 per cent in Oxford (up by 2 per cent in 2001) and 6 per cent in Exeter. The Census also shows more than 10 per cent of people cycle to work in Cambridgeshire

Local County Councillor John Reynolds, said: "These latest figures cement our position as the capital of cycling in the UK. Encouraging cycling is a top priority for the County Council as it improves health, reduces congestion and boosts local business. Not only were we one of the first councils to have a cycling champion but have helped to bring the Tour de France to Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire. We have and continue to invest millions of pounds in cycling facilities across the whole of the County."

NUMBER OF KILLED AND SERIOUSLY INJURED ON ROADS CONTINUES DOWNWARD TREND

The number of people killed and seriously injured on Cambridgeshire's roads has continued its downward trend, new figures show. The County Council compiles accident statistics for Cambridgeshire and the latest figures show that between December 1, 2011 and November 30, 2012, 28 people died and 262 people were seriously injured in road accidents a total of 290. This compares with 26 killed and 311 seriously injured in

2011. A total of 337 killed and seriously injured. Agencies which make up the Cambridgeshire Road Safety Partnership have been working together on a variety of measures including enforcement, education, driver training as well as physical road safety engineering.

We have continued to focus our efforts on specific issues and vulnerable groups where we have evidence linking to an increased likelihood of crashes where people are hurt or killed. These include young drivers, speeding, child car seats, drink and drug driving, and road layout improvements which have in some cases been put forward by local communities.

Local County Councillor John Reynolds said: "All deaths and injuries on Cambridgeshire's roads are a tragedy and the County Council and other agencies across the county are committed to doing everything they can to improve road safety to keep the number of fatal and serious injury accidents falling in future years.

"This reduction is very welcome and all agencies across Cambridgeshire will do everything they can to continue the downward trend. At the same time I would ask all road users to do their bit, to treat each other with respect and drive, ride or walk with care on Cambridgeshire's roads."

Visit www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk

NEW YEAR - NEW YOU – TIME TO LEARN A NEW SKILL ?

Looking to make a change this New Year? A wide range of day and evening classes are available for adults in centres across Cambridgeshire. You could learn a new language, try a new activity or gain new skills.

Local County Councillor John Reynolds said; "Residents thinking about a New Year resolution might like to consider trying something they have never done before and develop new skills and interests at the same time. They can do this flexibly through LearnDirect, online in library learning centres or in classes in their area."

Residents can speak directly to advisors at learning centres or look on www.cambridgeshire.net

A wide range of day and evening classes are available for adults in centres across the county including:

- * Courses for personal interest and self-development
- * Courses which lead to a qualification, or for professional development
- * Family learning and family literacy and numeracy courses
- * Courses for adults with disabilities and/or learning disabilities
- * LearnDirect courses at Library Learning Centres

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NORTHSTOWE

County Councillor John Reynolds reports on Northstowe delay.

“Over the past few weeks there have been detailed discussions between the Government and Gallagher, the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) and the two local authorities on how to bring about the early and accelerated delivery of new homes at Northstowe. A Business Case was submitted to Government by Gallagher in early January which laid out certain terms for the funding required. Since then, the HCA has been in further discussion with Gallagher and with the local authorities and the government is currently reviewing the business case. However, this Government process of due diligence involves the Treasury as well as CLG and requires more time.

The support from Government is critical to the viability of phase 1 and to the consideration of its planning merits, including the section 106. As a consequence the planning committee meeting has been postponed until a later date, probably in mid-March, when the Government will be in a position to confirm the details of its support to the longer term viability and development of Northstowe.

SCRAP METAL DEALERS BILL ‘GOOD NEWS FOR COUNCILS’

Responding to the Scrap Metal Dealers Bill today passing its final Parliamentary hurdle, Cllr Mehboob Khan, Chairman of the Local Government Association’s Safer and Stronger Communities Board, said:

“This is excellent news for councils up and down the country who have suffered at the hands of unscrupulous metal thieves. The passing of this important Bill shows ministers have listened to the LGA and others who have long argued that action must be taken to tackle this blight on our communities. Thefts of scrap metal have been spiralling out of control, and this has been in no small part down to the lack of adequate legislation for regulating scrap yards.

“This will be a huge step towards tackling a national problem which has cost the country hundreds of millions of pounds and caused chaos, disruption and heartache for millions. By supporting Richard Ottaway’s Bill, MPs of all political parties have recognised what a major issue this is. Councils have long been clear that we need a comprehensive and modern system for running the metal recycling industry, with a proper licensing system to hold scrapyards to account.

“Now that the Bill has passed through Parliament, we look forward to working with the Home Office and councils to make sure the system is up and running as quickly as possible. Communities up and down the country will be breathing a sigh of relief that parliamentarians have recognised the seriousness of this issue and are prepared to act to make it easier for councils and the police to both prevent and tackle this heinous activity.”

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