

Buckden Parish Assembly 2020

District Councillors Annual Report

Overview

Funding and the lack of it has been the central focus of the political year. In the early part of the year the focus was on reforming local government and improving services by ensuring that all the various councils, agencies, third sector groups etc worked in alignment. This process was called “Transformation” and at regional and sub-regional level it has had some success. The impact at local level has so far been less, apart from a reduction in visible police activity, and some very useful initiatives from the County Council.

It is hard to believe, but Covid first came to major public awareness in September 2019 and has been a focus or has dominated our lives since. No one can predict how life and work will change, but it seems that air travel and long-distance commuting by train will be reduced. Office buildings have been adapted for social distancing, which means that building capacity is reduced. The probability is that most office-based jobs will return on a basis of virtual working via Zoom and Teams, allied to home working plus staff working alternate weeks in the home or the office. Flexitime may increase. Clearly at local levels many different models and work practices will emerge. District Council meetings have only just re-opened on a Teams format, and surprisingly are popular and seen as efficient.

Huntingdon District Council

Huntingdon is a very proactive and well managed Council. It is one of the few District Councils to maintain a full range of waste services and to manage its daily responsibilities on a homeworking basis, to 76 percent of normal capacity. This is because it initiated software developments in the last two years to give it that capacity, called Council Anywhere which allows remote teams and remote locations to operate effectively. Huntingdonshire is a big area with districts as far apart as Stilton and St Neots and customer service levels have been improved in all the Wards.

Huntingdon has also invested in business and housing properties to give it a rental stream to counter the ever-reducing government funding, and while under financial pressure, it is not in the severe difficulty of many Councils who have spent reserves to find themselves near bankruptcy. Important for Buckden, the Parish Precept continues to be paid in full by HDC, unlike many other District Councils.

Other examples of the HDC response to Covid include checking 6,000 vulnerable households, supporting and helping the 3rd Sector Network, managing Grant payments to local businesses of £27m, redeploying One Leisure staff to help Pharmacy delivery and getting the Homeless off the streets and into accommodation.

Other Local Issues

East/West Rail

The route has been changed marginally and will now definitely going to link up to the East Coast Mainline. This is of course essential for commuters and the economy and the region and is a welcome development. In economic terms getting the new station complex as close as possible to St Neots would bring great economic benefits to us in Buckden. A new rail complex between

Tempsford and Buckden commuters is at present the most likely outcome, but the project is long term and with post Covid funding needs, may be deferred.

Cambridgeshire Metro

This project is now in preliminary planning. The reason we all need the new junction for the East/West line to be as near as possible to St Neots is because it needs to link with Mayor James Palmer's planned Metro line.

Linking Cambridge to St Neots will again bring huge benefit to the area. In part these decisions revolve around the level of local resident's responses, so it really is important for as many as possible to make their voice heard by the planners.

RIS2

Subject to confirmation on hold for Climate Change Impact

Election for Cambridgeshire Police Commissioner

This is deferred until 2021

Roundabout

Roundabout, there has been new work is to improve safety.

Ongoing Transformation

The next year will see more developments at local level, with parish councils and local voluntary groups having a greater role in supporting people in the early stage of needing help

Hamish Masson

District Councillor Buckden Ward