

DISTRICT COUNCILLOR'S REPORT – DECEMBER 2025

Dear Residents and Councillors,

As we approach the end of the year, I want to take a moment to thank you all for your continued engagement and support throughout 2025. This season is a time to reflect on the challenges we've faced together, the progress we've made, and the resilience shown across our community.

Christmas offers us the chance to pause, celebrate with family and friends, and appreciate the strength of our village spirit. Looking ahead to the New Year, I remain committed to working with you to ensure that our priorities are heard and acted upon, and that we continue building a safer, stronger, and more connected Buckden.

I wish you and your loved ones a joyful Christmas and a hopeful, healthy start to 2026.

Silver Street Development (Morris Homes)

1. Context

- The Silver Street site is now being developed by **Morris Homes**.
- Drainage proposals affect the **Taylors Lane** culvert that flows behind St Hughes Road and under Silver Street, which is adjacent to the site to the east of the village.
- The **Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA)** has undertaken borehole surveys and placed conditions on the site prior to planning being granted.

2. Original Plan

- My understanding is that the site was raised by ~2 metres to address **high groundwater levels** identified in borehole surveys.
- Surface water discharged into **Taylors Brook below the built-up area**, reducing property risk.
- More robust in managing groundwater and flood resilience.

3. Current Proposal (Morris Homes)

- **Attenuation ponds** draining naturally, mimicking field drains.
- **Pumping station** adopted by Anglian Water:
 - **Foul water** discharged into the **Buckden sewage system**.
 - **Excess surface water** pumped to Silver Street and discharged into **Taylors Brook via the public culvert**.
- Avoids land ownership disputes but concentrates discharge at a single point near vulnerable property.

4. Concerns

- **Groundwater:** Borehole surveys (initiated by the LLFA) suggest high groundwater, despite the Environment Agency's position. Not raising the site may leave it exposed as waters may not disperse away as suggested in the new plan.
- **Flood risk:** Culvert discharge could undermine foundations of the thatched cottage downstream on Silver Street and potentially affect other properties backing onto the culvert.
- **Sewage capacity:** Buckden's water recycling centre is already over capacity, with ~230 storm discharges in 2024.
 - **Both the original and current proposals rely on sewage infrastructure already under strain.**
- **Viability:** The site's overall viability is questionable if all issues — drainage, sewage, and the Buckden Roundabout redesign with traffic lights — are to be resolved to the satisfaction of residents.
- **Quality of design:** I fear corners are being cut with the new drainage plan, prioritising developer cost savings over long-term resilience.

5. Position

I am **more supportive of the original plan.**

- It addressed groundwater issues directly and discharged surface water below the built-up area.
- The current proposal continues to rely on sewage infrastructure already under strain, however, it also introduces additional surface and groundwater risks to development and surrounding properties.
- Further assurances are needed from **Morris Homes, Anglian Water, and the LLFA** on groundwater management, culvert resilience, sewage capacity, and compliance with LLFA conditions. I also understand that the housing mix in the new plan is likely to include more 4-bedroom homes than our statutory Housing Needs Assessment requires.
- Without these assurances, and without confidence in the viability of associated infrastructure changes such as the Buckden Roundabout redesign, the scheme cannot be considered safe or sustainable.

Local Government Reorganisation

Many residents have asked about the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) proposals and what they could mean for Huntingdonshire. Huntingdonshire District Council has now supported **Option E** - one of several structures proposed for reorganising local councils across Cambridgeshire.

Selecting Option E means that **Option C**, which would have seen Huntingdonshire partner with Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire, is now **off the table**. The most likely next outcome, if Government declines Option E as expected, is **Option A** - a merger with Peterborough -

because it performs much better against the Government's financial and population criteria, though there are concerns about the current Unitary's underlying debt and cultural links with Buckden from some quarters.

So why does this matter?

Pages 44–45 of the District Council's Overview and Scrutiny report explain how each option stacks up. The financial comparison is stark:

- **Option E** shows a **recurring loss of £1.1 million** a year for Huntingdonshire by year 5.
- **Options A and C** both show **recurring gains of £3 million to £3.2 million**.

With the Council's annual running costs around **£20 million**, that's a major difference.

- A £1 million loss is **5% of our operating budget gone**.
- A £3 million benefit is **15% more capacity to invest** in services.

That £4 million swing each year translates directly into what residents experience day to day.

For example, a £4 million difference could mean:

- 160,000 more potholes fixed instead of left unrepaired
- Four additional neighbourhood policing teams rather than reductions
- Permanent local social work posts instead of expensive agency reliance

The business case also shows **£4.8 million in extra demand** in children's services from rising caseloads and inflation, with **20% of posts currently filled by agency staff**. A positive financial outcome would help stabilise that workforce and strengthen support for vulnerable children.

To give an idea of scale, a recurring £3 million gain could service borrowing of about **£43 million**. That's enough to build around ten new £4 million community swimming pools or one to two major regional leisure centres, with scope to fund ongoing operation.

By contrast, Option E points to reduced resilience, tighter budgets, and fewer local choices. Its selection means Huntingdonshire's current Shared Services IT, Legal and Building Services partnership with Cambridge and South Cambs has effectively been discounted. If Government rejects it, I anticipate Option A (with Peterborough) will become the default next step.

Wishing you well,

Martin

Martin Hassall

District Councillor for Buckden, Diddington and Southoe

Phone: 07480 798 342 - Email: martin.hassall@huntingdonshire.gov.uk