

County Council report to Buckden Parish Council, July 14th, 2020

The topic which dominates our lives at the moment is clearly the pandemic and so much has been written and said about this in the local and national press and media that I don't need to repeat that here. The situation is evolving almost daily so a comment made on July 8th will be out-of-date by the time we meet!

As previously reported, all our local councils have been giving top priority to providing services to those in greatest need at this time of unprecedented pressures. This has inevitably turned out to be an expensive process, with a mixture of increased costs and falling income, mitigated to some extent by special grants from central government which fall well short of what is required.

The government has clearly made unprecedented financial allocations to help those in greatest need but there is enormous pressure on the budgets of local councils.

The Finance officers of all the constituent authorities of Cambridgeshire have been providing local MPs with precise details and I have these available to send on to anybody who is interested in the technical aspects. As representatives of local residents, parish councillors need to be aware of their conclusions, which are based on their professional roles and are not political comments:

As a collective of public sector organisations supporting Cambridgeshire and Peterborough we conclude that:

- 1. There is not enough money in the system;**
- 2. The breathing space that the Government has provided to date will expire in the near future;**
- 3. Therefore the Government needs to start refining approaches immediately to deal with this quickly to ensure that we can continue to operate collectively across the system to achieve effective recovery;**
- 4. Government needs to work with public sector agencies when considering what changes are acceptable, desired, and deliverable to deal with the situation.**
- 5. Without a clear action plan, public services and the people we are here to support will suffer, possibly irreparably.**

Conclusion 5 is clearly the most worrying. The implications for national and local taxation are obvious.

Far from being an annoying 'blip', what we are going through is extremely serious. We must start to realise and make others aware that things will not be back to normal for many years, if ever. Given the current structure of local government, the capacity of local communities and councils to plug the gaps is limited.

Local issues

- 1. Cycle path along Buckden Road.** I am pleased to report that, after many months and several increasingly exasperated messages, we will be receiving within a few days the cost estimate for the improvements sought jointly by Buckden and Brampton parish councils.

2. **LHI bids** The standard process for Local Highways Initiatives will continue this year (there has been some doubt about that because of financial pressures) so if the parish council has any projects in mind, it would be a good idea to firm them up. I have not yet been given a closing date for submissions.
3. **Better cycling provision** Cycling has increased greatly in the last few weeks (Halfords report a 57% increase in income for cycle purchases and repairs!) and some money is available (not much) for improvements to roads for cyclists. I have been lobbied to get the old railway track from Brampton to Grafham to be re-used as a cycle path but that would cost many thousands of pounds and is unrealistic. I will however be pursuing improvements to the existing road and also asking the A14 builders to complete the short link needed under the A1 where the old railway bridge is.

Now that the lockdown is easing slightly, I might be able to help with some specific issues raised by residents so please let me know if you think I can be of any use!

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Peter Downes, July 8th, 2020