

DISTRICT COUNCILLOR'S REPORT – June 2026

Dear Residents and Councillors,

The recent Partnership Agreement surrounding Project FAIRFAX presents a significant opportunity to establish Huntingdonshire as a national centre for high technology and defence innovation, which could bring substantial economic growth to our district. While I am very enthusiastic about the prospect of creating highly skilled jobs and attracting inward investment, it is essential that this expansion is firmly supported by robust improvements to our local infrastructure.

I know that Councillors will naturally be concerned about the potential impact of such large-scale development on our transport networks, particularly regarding the risk of increased traffic on the A1, the resulting pressure on the Buckden Roundabout, and the already pressing issues associated with the Silver Street development. We must ensure that our drive for regional growth is balanced with careful planning so that these new initiatives do not place an unmanageable strain on our local area.

Silver Street Development Update

Councillors will be aware that Morris Homes has submitted a reserved matters application for the Silver Street site. I am fully prepared to scrutinise this submission, particularly regarding the proposed foul water discharge rates and the associated infrastructure requirements. We must ensure that the developer strictly adheres to the original hydraulic modelling limits. I am currently unable to take formal action until the submitted documents are validated and published on the public planning portal.

Impending Changes to National Planning Legislation

The government has recently published statutory guidance regarding the National Scheme of Delegation of Planning Functions. These changes will significantly alter how planning decisions are made within our local authority. The new legislation explicitly removes the power of ward councillors to refer applications for debate by the Development Management Committee. Consequently, formal objections submitted by Parish Councils are less likely to act as automatic triggers for wider committee scrutiny. The overwhelming majority of planning decisions will soon be delegated solely to planning officers.

The Impact on Democratic Transparency

I feel compelled to share my significant concerns regarding this shift in national policy. The prevailing narrative often suggests that councillor interventions and local objections slow down the planning process. I firmly believe that these democratic

mechanisms are not the problem. The true risk to our communities lies in the removal of transparency.

When decisions are moved entirely behind closed doors, we lose the crucial layer of public oversight that catches critical infrastructure changes. Developers frequently attempt to substitute robust sustainable engineering solutions with cheaper alternatives to preserve their profit margins. Without the visibility provided by public committee debates, elected members will find it increasingly difficult to spot and challenge these technical deviations before they are quietly approved by officers.

I am already proactively engaging with the Constitution Working Group to establish strict local criteria that will force high risk applications back into the public forum. I remain committed to protecting our district from inadequate infrastructure and will continue to update you as we navigate these new regulations.

Update on the Huntingdonshire Defence Cluster and Project FAIRFAX

As this is a new topic that has not been brought before the Parish Council previously, the following outlines a recent major development regarding regional investment at the District Council level. Given our ongoing focus on managing local infrastructure, it will be important to monitor how this wider growth might impact our surrounding communities.

Overview of the Agreement

A Partnership Agreement was signed at the UK Real Estate Investment and Infrastructure Forum in Leeds to accelerate the delivery of the Huntingdonshire Defence Cluster and Project FAIRFAX. This expands on a December 2024 agreement, officially bringing the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, Urban&Civic, and Newlands Developments into partnership with Huntingdonshire District Council and the Ministry of Defence.

Key Objectives

The project aims to develop a nationally significant centre for defence, intelligence, innovation, geospatial technologies, and advanced manufacturing. The cluster will build upon the existing strategic assets of RAF Wyton, RAF Alconbury, and RAF Molesworth within the North Huntingdon Opportunity Zone.

Community and Economic Benefits

Collaborative efforts will focus on coordinating the necessary infrastructure, skills, and economic opportunities. The development is expected to generate highly skilled jobs, deliver new homes, support local businesses, and attract inward investment to the region.

Partner Contributions

Urban&Civic will provide essential research, development, and office space at the Alconbury Weald Enterprise Campus. Newlands Developments are bringing forward new industrial and logistics space at Newlands Park to support the project. The Combined Authority views this growth cluster as central to their Local Growth Plan and their ambition to triple the local economy.

Wishing you well,

Martin

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