

Buckden District Councillors Report

Dear Residents and Parish Councillors,

This month, I thought that it would be helpful to address the recent media reports regarding the means testing of winter fuel payments and its implications for our local community.

Regardless of our opinions on the new government's means testing of winter fuel payments, Keir Starmer and Rachel Reeves are unlikely to change their stance due to the motion against it at HDC's October Council Meeting. Most importantly, HDC can only control the limited services it provides. The motion from the Conservative group was part of country-wide political initiative and, in my opinion, mixing local and national politics.

It seems easy to forget that the Conservatives lost over 300 councillors back in May. Bringing this bundled motion to Council was a Westminster manoeuvre. It seems that our Westminster Conservative politicians continue to let their local government councillors bear the brunt of their political strategies. We lost some good Tory councillors back in May because behaviour like this encourages the public to vote along party lines rather than for their best local representatives. In my opinion mixing national and local politics is unwise.

I think that we can all agree from a community perspective it's important to encourage those who are entitled to claim pension credit to do so, as it is a gateway payment to winter fuel allowance. To claim Pension Credit, residents can either:

Claim online: Visit the GOV.UK Pension Credit page and apply online if you already claim State Pension and there aren't any children or young people included in your claim.

Call the Pension Credit claim line: Call 0800 99 1234 (textphone 0800 169 0133) and they can fill in the application for you over the phone. Lines are open Monday to Friday, 8am-6pm.

Apply by post: Print out and fill in the Pension Credit claim form or call the claim line to request a form. Send the claim form to the Pension Service. You don't need a postcode or a stamp.

I hope we can work together to ensure our local governance remains focused on the needs of the community that the district council can directly control.

National Cycle Network – Proposed Grafham to Brampton Quiet Way Pilot Update

This proposal aims to enhance the National Cycle Network, by creating a route between Buckden/Brampton and Grafham that offers a safe, traffic-free spaces for families, less mobile individuals, walkers, and horse riders to enjoy. Where off-road paths are not possible, on-road sections must have low traffic speeds and volumes to ensure safety and comfort for all users.

I attended the Grafham to Brampton Pilot Quietway Councillor Briefings on Friday, 25th October. Councillor feedback seemed incredibly valuable to Sustrans in developing a deeper understanding of the local context and concerns related to the project. The presentation and discussion appeared to help alleviate some of those concerns among Councillors. There seems to be a strong willingness to find the best solution for Grafham, Brampton, Buckden and neighbouring communities.

What this means for residents is that Sustrans is committed to a transparent and collaborative approach. They are currently finalising dates and venues for the community drop-in events. Once these are confirmed, a resident update letter will be distributed. This will ensure that residents are kept

informed and involved in the ongoing development of the project. Please try to attend a drop-in event if you can.

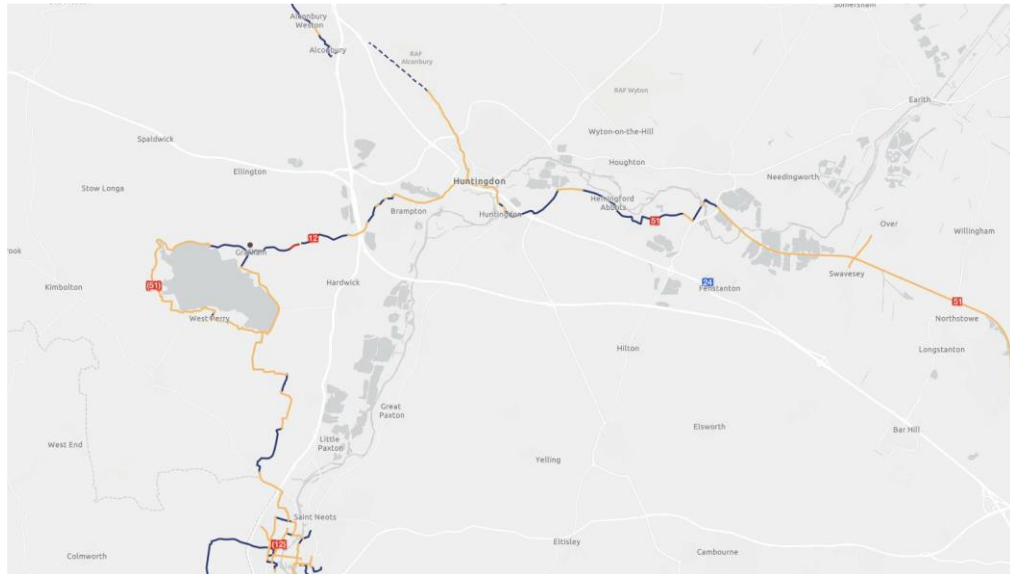


Figure 1 - The National Cycle Network Around Buckden

Considering proposals holistically, the Quiet Way is being proposed alongside HDC's Priority Natural Landscapes initiative, aiming for larger, interconnected habitats of 40 to 100 hectares. For residents concerned about over-development in Grafham, Buckden, and Brampton, a Quiet Way might offer an additional, unpublicised benefit by potentially restricting development and protecting our Ouse Valley Priority Natural Landscape.

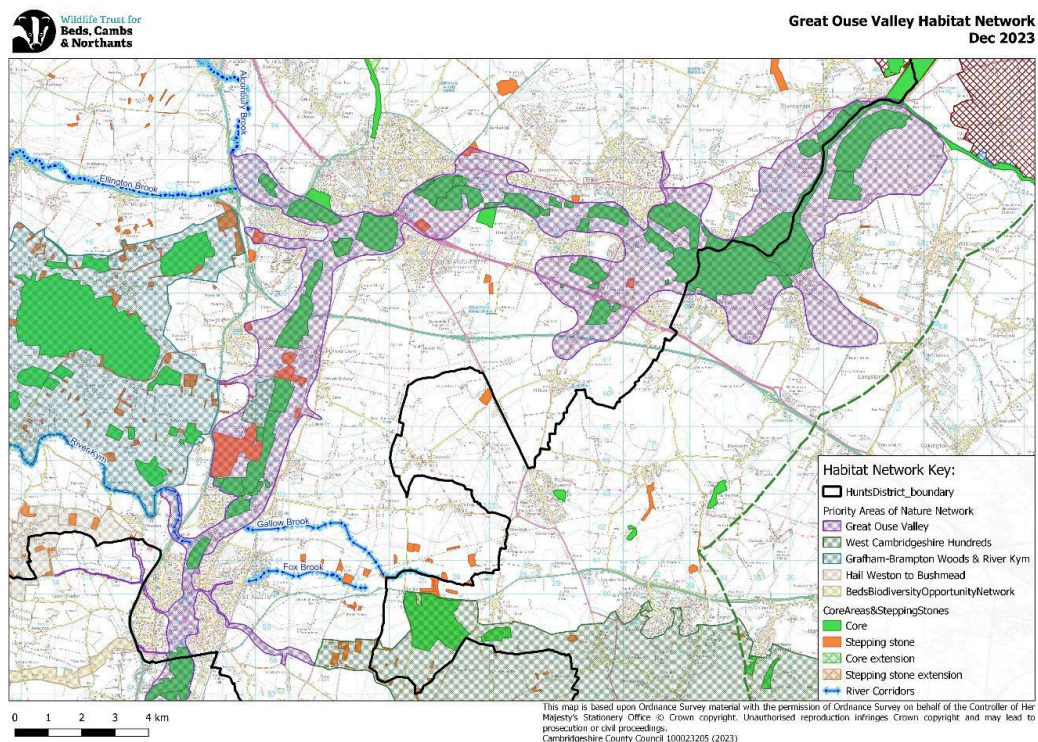


Figure 2 - Proposed Great Ouse Valley Priority Natural Landscape

Importance of Scrutiny at Huntingdonshire District Council

Before my resignation from Cabinet, I indirectly initiated an LGA peer review of some of our council's governance processes. I was motivated by a growing concern over HDC's governance processes, one of which is scrutiny. Recent training sessions have highlighted that our scrutiny process has been largely ineffective for many years, starting well before the present administration.

One critical issue identified is that the agenda has been predominantly set by officers. This practice has resulted in every decision made by the council being routed through the committee. While this may appear thorough at first glance, it has often prevented the committee from scrutinising issues of greater importance to our residents.

It's imperative to address these inefficiencies to ensure our scrutiny process genuinely serves the interests of our community. Effective scrutiny is essential for transparent and accountable governance, and I remain committed to advocating for improvements in this area.

To strengthen the link between the community and the scrutiny process, residents are encouraged to suggest topics for scrutiny. This initiative allows community members to actively participate and highlight issues that matter most to them, ensuring that our scrutiny process remains relevant and effective in addressing local concerns.

One pressing issue is the need for a multi-agency approach to the ever frequent annual winter flooding problems. I would support requests from residents and/or the Parish Council to scrutinise this or other areas of concern. It's important to note that a key criterion for a topic to be included on the O&S agenda is that it must have a cross-district impact.

Wishing you well,

Martin

Martin Hassall

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