

District Councillor's Report – September 2023

Dear Residents,

As I write my report, we are tantalisingly close to having a new cycleway between Brampton, Buckden and onward to Hinchingsbrooke School, Hospital and Huntingdon. My hope was that it would be ready in time for the September start of school term, but it looks like it will be delayed by a few days.

I plan to ride the route as soon as it is open. My eldest son has now 27 and it's a shame that he never rode his bike to Hinchingsbrooke as a child due to safety concerns. I'm hoping that today's generation of kids will be able to leave the bus behind and experience the fitness and independence benefits of cycling to school.

I hope that this small, but important, inroads into active travel will be the start of much more rapid progress in active travel. It appears that the Church Commission has a developer for the Silver Street site, which is likely to mean more traffic in the village and on the Roundabout. I am also concerned about additional traffic on the A1 when the new A428 bypasses the Black Cat Roundabout. Reducing our car journeys by using active travel mechanisms, even by a small amount, will undoubtedly help.



Thanks to those who worked with me on our Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP), the Parish Council, County Council and all who have lobbied, funded and volunteered their time to make this happen. Going forward I would like more active travel connections between Buckden, Diddington and Southoe with St Neots, Huntingdon and Grafham Water.

Cabinet Members Approve New Garden Waste Subscription Service

Huntingdonshire District Council's Cabinet Members agreed to introduce a fortnightly garden waste subscription service that will come into effect in April 2024 at a meeting on Thursday 24 August.

Cabinet Members approved the new subscription service at a meeting on Tuesday 18 July but the decision was then called-in for a review. A "call-in" is a statutory process which enables a prescribed number of members of the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Panel to make a request that a decision that has been made, but not yet implemented, be reconsidered by the person or body making the decision.

An Overview and Scrutiny Joint Panel meeting took place on Thursday 10 August to discuss the call-in before referring the decision back to Cabinet Members with a summary of the deliberations to determine a final recommendation.

Not all properties in Huntingdonshire require a garden waste collection service as they do not have a garden. Introducing a subscription means that the service will only be paid for by those households that choose to use it. This is similar to bulky waste collections where only households requesting the service have to pay.

The current garden waste collection costs us approximately £800,000 per year, and as the district expands, these costs will rise. Meeting the demand will require additional vehicles and staff. By introducing a chargeable garden waste service, we can ensure that the service remains sustainable.

Around 65% of councils have introduced a charge for collecting garden waste and this is something that a lot of neighbouring boroughs do already.

Currently 42% of the waste we collect in the grey bin is organic waste. Waste that should go into the green bin. We want to work with our local community to find better ways to reduce, recycle, reuse and collect all types of waste.

HDC is committed in supporting residents to reduce waste by encouraging people to think more about what they are disposing of. Garden waste, for example, can be composted or used for mulch - these approaches are much better for the environment than our current collection methods. In the next phase of the project HDC will be reaching out to Parish Councils and wider community to find better ways of supporting the reduction, recycling and reuse of waste.

As we look to make the service as accessible to those who want to use it, people will also be able to share bins under their own informal arrangements.

Bin Collection Strikes Suspended in August after Talks with Staff

I am pleased that there has been some progress in our discussions with staff and that strike action has been suspended. It is in everyone's interests for this to be resolved without industrial action. The new pay offers that we have put forward meet our commitments to rewarding staff where we can, avoiding redundancies and cuts to services, whilst maintaining the financial sustainability of the council.

As I write this report a ballot across all staff, agreed with the Employee Representation Group and UNISON, is being prepared. The ballot will contain options linked to how staff wish to receive pay rewards in the future. Discussions with staff indicate that there are different opinions across the staff group on how best to distribute pay awards in times of high inflation and cost of living crises.

Past below inflation staff pay rises dating back to 2013 make this situation especially challenging.

Wishing you well,

Martin

Martin Hassall

District Councillor for Buckden, Diddington and Southoe

Executive Councillor for Corporate & Shared Services - Phone: 07480 798 342

Email: martin.hassall@huntingdonshire.gov.uk