

District Councillor's Report Oct 31st 2023 - Cllr Tom Bygott

Longstanton District Heritage Society Archives

It has come to light that there are problems with a Heritage Annexe project that the developer of part of Northstowe, Homes England, has been working on with Cambridgeshire County Council. It was envisaged that the Heritage Annexe would be used for the storage and display of items in the Longstanton District Heritage Society (LDHS) archives. At the launch of the Heritage Society many local residents, descendants of people who used to live in the village and former RAF Oakington WWII veterans joined the Society and many contributed to the LDHS Archives. The archive includes a digital collection, films, interviews and a physical collection, all of which has been collected over a period of nearly 20 years.

Despite Homes England making significant financial contributions to the Heritage Annexe project and providing rights to use a plot of land adjacent to Northstowe House, it has been announced that the Heritage Annexe project will be cancelled.

I have done some research into the nature of a legal obligation that Homes England has (contained in a document called the Northstowe Phase 2 Section 106 Agreement) in relation to the LDHS Archives. It states: "In bringing forward the Development the Owners shall accommodate the Longstanton District Heritage Society Display Facilities and shall provide or procure the necessary rights of access to the Longstanton District Heritage Society Display Facilities to enable the management and maintenance thereof". It also makes clear that the storage and display facilities must be provided "within the Development", i.e. in Northstowe.

Whilst it may be regrettable that money has been wasted on a Heritage Annexe project that has failed, it is clear that the developer's legal obligation is not discharged until display and storage facilities for the LDHS Archives have been provided within Northstowe. I will be calling for these facilities to be provided to a standard that matches the historical importance of the archives, and properly safeguards and celebrates the shared heritage of Longstanton, Northstowe, Oakington and Westwick.

District Council four day working week

It has been revealed that an 'independent' report on the 4-day working week trial at South Cambs District Council had been edited by council officers ahead of its release. The true report shows a very different picture to the governing group's previous optimism.

The Bennett Institute's independent report on the 4-day week has been repeatedly cited as evidence that the 4-day week trial for 450 desk-based staff in South Cambs is working. But it has now become public knowledge that this 'independent' report was tampered with before its release – artificially improving the results of the 4-day week.

Quotes from managing officers at the council that were removed from the report suggest the 4-day week has in fact been highly damaging. One manager said they "did all the unfinished work on my day off so that my team could have time off. It had a very negative impact on my wellbeing."

Most managers felt that there was "envy" between workers. The report states: "Those who have Mondays off complained that they find it harder to start the week on Tuesday than those who have Fridays off". The report continues: "On the other hand, those who have Fridays off feel that they are under pressure to get things done quickly before they are closed. And then when they come on Monday, there are not many people, and they have to postpone the meetings until Tuesday."

All this negativity makes a grim reading for the council's governing group – whose leadership means the council is unable to properly serve residents and elected councillors. A quote from one councillor – also removed from the report – said: "I have emailed some people at least three times and received no response." This is perhaps because, according to one manager, "we don't always have to deliver perfect work and that's okay."

This is highly concerning for councillors and residents alike. Not only has the 4-day week inflicted damage on council services – the leadership’s decisions have been an act of self-harm to the reputation of the council.

This story has been reported several times in the national media, including The Times www.thetimes.co.uk/article/four-day-week-report-edited-by-council-leader-to-make-it-more-positive-5lmqb88l3 and the BBC www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cambridgeshire-66923646.

Congestion charging continues to be raised

At the most recent meeting of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, "road charging" was yet again raised for a debate and vote as part of the Local Transport Plan. This was despite leading politicians saying the proposed £5 per day Cambridge congestion charge would be taken off the table at the beginning of September.

The Plan was not approved by the Combined Authority as Peterborough Authority essentially had a veto. But road charging is still a contentious political issue in Cambridgeshire. The South Cambs representative at the Combined Authority meeting was clear that all options including road charging needed to be on the table and that there did need to be restrictions on cars. I have consistently spoken out and voted against all forms of road charging and will continue to campaign against it. I do not believe putting extra financial pressure on working people is appropriate, especially in the current climate.

Fly tipping

South Cambridgeshire District Council receives around 1,600 reports per year regarding fly tipping. The Council is urging residents to do the right thing and properly get rid of their rubbish in the following ways:

- Giving it away for free on Facebook marketplace, Gumtree or taking to a local charity shop.
- If possible, reuse, repair or recycle items before getting rid of them.
- Be sure to choose a reputable registered waste carrier disposal service.
- South Cambridgeshire District Council can arrange for collection of bulky items for many common household goods. It collects a maximum of nine items per collection. Up to three items can be booked for the minimum charge of £32.50. Additional items are then £5.50 each.
- Take additional rubbish to one of Cambridgeshire’s Household Recycling Centres.

Anyone who sees fly tipping should report it via:

www.scams.gov.uk/recycling-and-bins/report-or-request/report-environmental-issues/

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