

District Councillor's Report Dec 17th 2024 - Cllr Tom Bygott

Supporting family farms

I am proud to back British farmers – strongly opposing the Government's family farm tax. It was encouraging to see over 20,000 farmers and their families protesting against the tax in London on 19th November.

Our farmers put food on our table and care for our natural environment. We depend on them for our survival, so it is simply wrong that the Government's farm tax threatens Britain's farming families who have fed our nation for centuries.

For those on Facebook, there is a video at www.facebook.com/share/r/1Dsg7mKqS/ supporting British farmers. There are also petitions that can be signed at <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/700138> and stopthefarmtax.com.

I seconded a motion at the District Council on Thursday 28th November on this topic. South Cambridgeshire is a rural district. Although only a small proportion of our population is still actively involved in farming, many of us are descended from farming families and others have chosen to move to this area because we love the countryside.

The end of the family farm, which the Government's policy wants to bring about, by extending the scope of Inheritance Tax to prevent farmers' children from inheriting their parents' farm, poses grave risks for the sustainability of the countryside. Today's farmers will become employees of giant agribusiness corporations that are not subject to the tax. The concern that farmers have in maintaining and preserving the countryside, its hedgerows, woodlands and wildlife for future generations will be replaced by corporate indifference and an exclusive focus on short term profit targets.

There is a video recording of the debate at: www.youtube.com/embed/QeIgiZ0FSfM beginning at 3hrs 18mins into the meeting.

Non-compliance checks on South Cambs taxis

Recent stop checks on taxi drivers and their vehicles have revealed alarming levels of non-compliance with licensing conditions. Out of 17 drivers inspected, only two emerged without issues, while the remainder received advisory letters or had penalty points issued against their Council-issued licences.

Conducted by licensing officers from South Cambridgeshire District Council and police officers from Cambridgeshire Constabulary, these stop checks scrutinised essential compliance measures, including the display of driver badges, door signage, and the presence of a first aid kit and fire extinguisher.

Several violations were identified, including:

- Two vehicles parked illegally on double yellow lines, and one parked on double red lines at Addenbrooke's Hospital, disregarding a clear 'no parking at any time' sign. Additionally, some drivers failed to display their identification badges or had missing door signage.
- One driver faced a fixed penalty notice for failing to wear a seatbelt, despite regulations stating that private hire drivers must use a seatbelt once their customer has exited the vehicle.
- Two vehicles were in breach of policy due to aftermarket window tinting in excess of the regulations, resulting in one immediate suspension and one delayed suspension notice.

This operation has raised serious concerns about the commitment of some taxi drivers to uphold the safety and legal standards required of licensed operators. Most drivers were cooperative, but two had a poor attitude towards Council and Police officers, leading to one driver being cautioned by the Police. Their suitability to continue to hold a licence may lead to a referral to the Taxi Licensing Sub-Committee.

Fraud awareness - #DoTheRightThing

Residents are being encouraged to #DoTheRightThing to prevent or avoid fraudulently claiming Council Tax discounts or exemptions.

Since July 2023, over £800,000 in lost Council Tax has been identified – placing an unfair burden on others and reducing the funds available for essential public services. Residents should check if they are eligible for Council Tax discounts at www.scamb.gov.uk/council-tax/what-council-tax-discounts-and-support-can-i-get/check-if-you-are-eligible-for-a-discount, and to report suspected fraud online at <https://reportafraud.co.uk/southcamb>.

Pension Credit

Pensioners are being encouraged to check if they are eligible for Pension Credit this winter to receive help with Winter Fuel Payments.

Applicants must apply by 21 December 2024, and backdate the application to at least 22 September 2024, in order to be eligible. Please visit the council's webpage at <https://www.scamb.gov.uk/cost-of-living-support> for more information.

East West Rail update

The East West Rail organisation is holding another consultation on their plans for the proposed railway from Bedford to Cambridge. It closes on Friday 24th January 2025 and can be filled out at: <https://eastwestrail.co.uk/consultation2024>.

This is the first of two consultations, the second of which will be statutory. Once they have completed their consultations and finalised the proposals, they will prepare and submit their DCO application to the Planning Inspectorate, which processes applications on behalf of the Secretary of State. Following the examination into the DCO application, the Planning Inspectorate will make a recommendation to the Secretary of State who will decide whether development consent should be granted.

The route that they are consulting on is essentially unchanged from the previous consultations, but more technical work has been done and the route maps are more detailed. The proposed route is parallel to the new A421 dual carriageway from the Black Cat roundabout at the A1, via a new station interchange with the East Coast Main Line at Tempsford, passing north of Croxton and Eltisley and south of Papworth Everard. There is to be a station north of Cambourne, after which the route passes close to the villages of Caldecote, Hardwick, Toft, Comberton, the Eversdens, Harlton, Haslingfield and Harston before joining the main line from King's Cross and entering Cambridge from the south.

The EWR project team has decided not to include the suggestion of a northern route into Cambridge with a station at Oakington.

A series of consultation drop-in events are being held, those in Cambridgeshire will be held in:

- Cambourne, Cambridge Belfry, 3 December 2024, 2pm - 7pm
- Tempsford, Stuart Memorial Hall, 13 December 2024, 2pm - 7pm
- St Neots, St Neots Town Football Club, 7 January 2025, 2pm - 7pm
- Comberton, Comberton Village Hall, 10 January 2025, 2pm - 7pm
- Cambridge, The Clayton Hotel, 18 January 2025, 12pm - 5pm
- Cherry Hinton, St Andrew's Parish Church, 21 January 2025, 2pm - 7pm

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