

District Councillor's Report Dec 20th 2022 - Cllr Tom Bygott

Election results

May I take this opportunity to thank all those who voted in and helped with the by-election on the 3rd of November. I am delighted to be given the opportunity to serve as your District Councillor, and will work hard to represent your interests at the District level. I would like to congratulate Cllr Natalie Warren-Green who was also elected in Longstanton ward, and to thank Sarah Cheung-Johnson and Alex Malyon for their service as your retiring councillors and to wish them well as they now focus on raising their young families.

During the many doorstep conversations that I had with residents of the ward, three issues clearly emerged that need to be addressed:

- Ensuring that the District Council takes action to resolve the problems with the groundwater and underground aquifer that have led to the ponds in Longstanton and Northstowe drying up
- Holding the developers and the District Council to account for the delivery of community facilities such as shops, a community centre and GP's surgery in Northstowe, and
- Campaigning to stop the imposition of a Congestion Charge in Cambridge

Groundwater issue

At the July 2021 meeting of the District Council (when I was District Councillor for Girton ward), I asked a question about what was being done to follow up on the HR Wallingford report into the possible cause of the drying up of the ponds. In the answer to my question, we were promised that an Action Plan had been written and was being reviewed by the parish and town councils and ward councillors. This Action Plan took a very long time to come into the public domain, but in response to my question at the November 2022 Council meeting about when this Action Plan would be made public, the District Council has now created a section on its website at www.scambs.gov.uk/community-safety-and-health/northstowe/northstowe-groundwater-investigations that contains links to the HR Wallingford reports and the Action Plan and provides a description of the various issues.

I don't think that this is adequate yet, but at least it is a start, and the main issues are now in the open where residents can read about and access the relevant documents. The text starts off by saying that it is the Environment Agency that is responsible for enforcing legislation on matters to do with groundwater. This may be true in a technical sense, but as the Local Planning Authority the District Council is in a much greater position of leverage. Property developers who wish to continue making a profit and who wish their planning applications to continue to be approved need to be on their best behaviour. It is easy for developers to wriggle their way out of following regulations when no-one is watching, but it is ultimately the power to pause or stop future development approvals that will make them sit up and notice.

Congestion charge

The Greater Cambridge partnership is currently running a consultation on its Congestion Charging scheme. The consultation runs until noon on Friday 23rd December and the documents and survey can be found at: <https://consultcambs.uk.engagementhq.com/making-connections-2022>

There is also a petition asking for Cambridgeshire County Council to hold a referendum before implementing this new tax: https://cambridgeshire.cmis.uk.com/ccc_live/ePetitions/tabid/115/ID/60/-Petition-demanding-referendum-to-decide-on-congestion-charge-for-Cambridge.aspx.

The £5 daily charge would cover the whole city, including Addenbrooke's and Royal Papworth hospitals. Hospitals are usually sited at the edges of cities so that city residents can easily access them via the convenient public transport that operates within cities, but where residents of outlying villages can also access them. In most villages, development is too sparse to support viable public transport, and most long-distance travel is done using the car. We need to make sure that our hospitals are easily accessible from both the city and the countryside.

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