

District Councillor's Report June 27th 2023 - Cllr Tom Bygott

East West Rail

The East West Rail company made its long-awaited announcement on 26th May on the route that the proposed railway will follow. The official routes that were consulted on pass by Cambourne, with a station either north or south of that town, before heading south to join with the existing line from Royston near Harston. Two pressure groups - the Cam Bed Rail Road (CBRR) and Cambridge Approaches (CA) - had been campaigning for a "northern route" that would pass through Oakington with a station on Cambridge Road.

The route that will be put to the official statutory consultation, probably later this year, is very similar to one of their earlier preferred routes. It will have a station north of Cambourne before heading south at Caldecote and passing close to the villages of Toft, Comberton, Little Eversden and Haslingfield before joining the line from London King's Cross near Harston and then entering Cambridge from the south and passing through the new Cambridge South station near Addenbrooke's hospital.

The announcement and maps of the proposed route can be found at:

<https://eastwestrail.co.uk/routeupdate>. The map from Cambourne to Cambridge can be found at: <https://eastwestrail-production.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/public/ListsBlockMedia/a5b8b573ee/Approaching-Cambridge-v2.pdf>

One of the main reasons for opposition to the southern route was a series of high embankments and viaducts close to villages on the southern route. They say that their work since the previous consultation has helped them to identify potential opportunities to reduce or remove viaducts and embankments. They believe that they could remove or reduce the height of approximately half the length of embankments or viaducts compared to what was shown at the consultation. This work will be developed further and they have promised to provide details at the statutory consultation.

Demolition of the Hotel Felix

One of the responsibilities that I have carried on from my previous role as District Councillor for Girton, Dry Drayton and Madingley has been to oppose the demolition of the Hotel Felix on Huntingdon Road, one of Girton's most historic and best loved heritage buildings. It had been built as a private country house in 1852 and is still in excellent condition, having been fully renovated to a very high standard to become a luxury hotel in 2002. The hotel was sold in 2018, closed permanently during the covid pandemic and the property developers submitted an application to South Cambs District Council in February 2021 to demolish it and build an 80-bed nursing home.

I called the application in to the SCDC Planning Committee where it was rejected unanimously last July. The developers then appealed the decision to the Planning Inspectorate, which decided on June 5th to uphold their appeal and allow the demolition to go ahead.

This decision shows that the heritage protection system in this country is not fit for purpose. Only a tiny minority of heritage buildings constructed since 1850 have listed status. The vast majority are protected only by their owner's preference to keep them standing over the cost of rebuilding and there is currently no law against demolishing an unlisted building. At the Hotel Felix hearing, the applicant pointed out that they were legally entitled to demolish the building at any time, and that planning permission was only required to construct a new building in its place. The Victorian Society, who helped me campaign to preserve the Hotel Felix has proposed an amendment to the Levelling-Up and Regeneration Bill, currently before parliament, to fix this problem.

Taxation, 0% VAT on demolition and rebuild vs 20% VAT on repair and maintenance, further stacks the odds in favour of existing buildings being swept away. Demolishing interesting buildings on a site using permitted development rights means that local authorities may be less likely to refuse a subsequent planning permission for a development that is less desirable than the existing building. It is not environmentally sustainable to demolish usable and solid buildings and replace them with less well designed (and usually less beautiful) buildings that have a shorter design life.

Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service public survey

The Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service is holding a public survey of residents and business owners in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. The fire service is required to create a 3-to-5-year plan that identifies the fire and rescue related risks in the county and how it plans to mitigate or be prepared for them. It also identifies the opportunities it will take to continue to improve its services to communities. The fire service is currently preparing to write its next plan for 2024/29 and they are seeking views from people in the communities they serve, so their thoughts and expectations of the service can be reflected in the plan.

The survey will provide the fire and rescue service with valuable information about what residents and business owners in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough expect of their local fire service, as well as gathering people's thoughts on different risks and situations. The information will be used to help the fire service ensure it is targeting its resources in the most effective way. Here is a link to the survey which will take 10-15 minutes to complete: <https://bit.ly/43pzLHU>

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