

**Ruth Betson, District Councillor**  
**Report to Cambourne Town Council**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> April 2019**

Last month I reported on the press release that the Conservative Group had put out about the budget. This month I would like to give a few more explanations that will perhaps help in understanding why we took such an unprecedented step.

The budget for SCDC was put to the council in February. The budget report raised many concerns because, despite increasing council tax, increased funds from government, the introduction of new charges, increasing over 30 current charges, spending considerable amounts of reserves and identifying cuts of £2.5 million pounds over the next five years: £3 million pounds worth of cuts or income still needs to be found to make the budget workable.

One of my colleagues asked at the February Council meeting for further clarity on where these savings would come from, but so far, the administration has not set out a plan.

It has been suggested that the £3 million gap would be solved from an investment strategy that involves borrowing £100 million over the next five years and using the monies to make commercial investments. I appreciate the need to find alternative sources of income to fund local government services and am supportive of the concept of doing this via investments. Initiatives taken previously in Ermine Street have been successful and produce around £2 million per annum worth of income. However, the decision to invest in Ermine Street was taken by full council. More recently the decision to invest in an ice rink in South Cambs was taken by full council and went through a full scrutiny process. The investment strategy presented to us in February enables the investment decisions surrounding the £100 million being borrowed to be made by 4 individuals (2 councillors and 2 officers). We proposed an amendment to put in place some method of scrutiny to oversee the investment decisions being made, unfortunately this was voted down and the original proposal was successful.

There are many factors that contribute to uncertainty in local government finance. The budget indicates over a 60% decrease in the reserves the council holds, leaving a reserve of £3,371,000. However, there is £3 million shortfall in the calculations, which could then result in the reserves dropping even further and below the recommended minimum of £2.5 million. Owing to careful management in previous years, the Council currently has nearly £8 million in reserves. It is prudent for an organisation like the Council to keep funds in reserve, as we are living at a time of great uncertainty.

All of this amounts to a high risk and economically frail budget in my view and I didn't feel that I could, in good conscience, take such risks on behalf of the residents I serve. I therefore voted against the budget.

### **Low Carbon District to replace Water Recycling Centre**

It has been decided to move the old Water Recycling Centre that sits between the Cambridge Science Park and the new Cambridge North Station. The Water Recycling Centre was built in 1895 and has since undergone a number of improvements as the City of Cambridge has grown up around the works. It now treats used water from customers in Cambridge and surrounding villages, while at the same time maintaining the quality of the River Cam.

A decision hasn't yet been made as to where the new facility to treat waste water will be built. These aren't popular to relocate because of the level of odour that they can emit during the summer months.

This will expand the area around the new station that can be used for development. The initial plans are to build about 5,000 houses on land owned by Anglian Water and Cambridge City Council, it also enables a further 3,000 houses to be built on adjacent land. There are also plans to support the proposed employment growth in the area.

The development is envisaged as a low carbon district, and has been chosen to receive a significant amount of funding from central government, after the Chancellor announced it was one of four schemes in the country set to be awarded a share of £717 million. The project was prioritised by the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority for the Housing Infrastructure Fund in 2017.

With the proximity of the railway station, the Science Park and surrounding business parks, the hope is to attract residents who either work locally or commute on public transport, rather than adding to the road congestion along the A14, A10 and Milton Road.

### **Next meetings**

4<sup>th</sup> April – Council meeting cancelled

6<sup>th</sup> April – catch up with Cllr Philippa Hart, Portfolio Holder for Customer Service & Business Continuity

9<sup>th</sup> April – evening surgery

13<sup>th</sup> April – morning surgery

16<sup>th</sup> April – Scrutiny Committee

Best wishes,  
Ruth Betson

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