



East Cambridgeshire District Council

Minutes of a Meeting of East Cambridgeshire District Council
held at The Grange, Nutholt Lane, Ely, CB7 4EE
on Thursday 22nd May 2025 at 6.00pm

Present

Councillor Chika Akinwale	Councillor Julia Huffer
Councillor Christine Ambrose Smith	Councillor Bill Hunt
Councillor Anna Bailey	Councillor Mark Inskip
Councillor Ian Bovingdon	Councillor James Lay
Councillor David Brown	Councillor David Miller
Councillor Charlotte Cane	Councillor Kelli Pettitt (Chair)
Councillor Christine Colbert	Councillor Alan Sharp
Councillor Lee Denney	Councillor John Trapp
Councillor Lorna Dupré	Councillor Ross Trent
Councillor Lavinia Edwards	Councillor Lucius Vellacott
Councillor Mark Goldsack	Councillor Mary Wade
Councillor Martin Goodearl	Councillor Alison Whelan
Councillor Kathrin Holtzmann	Councillor Christine Whelan
Councillor Keith Horgan (Vice Chair)	Councillor Gareth Wilson

Prior to the commencement of the meeting, Prayers were led by
Reverend Mike Banyard, Priest Vicar at the Cathedral.

A minute's silence was observed as a mark of respect following the death of
former Councillor Bill Pickess, District Councillor for the Ely South Ward from
2003 to 2007

Cllr Bill Hunt gave the following tribute:

"I first met Bill Pickess in this room in 2006. He was sitting on the Planning Committee and I was the county councillor for Haddenham, Wilburton and Stretham. A new town was being proposed called Mereham and all the population were against it. All the councillors were against it and the officer's recommendation was for refusal on this thing that would ruin the local area. I made my case that it should be thrown out and I could see nods everywhere. However, independent thinking Bill Pickess said that this was something that was going to happen anyway, so he might as well agree with it! So, although the Committee said no by 11 votes, it wasn't 12 votes and so I had a very low opinion of Bill and thought that he couldn't understand what the good arguments were. However, in 2012 my son was very interested in politics and

for that matter still is and he wanted to stand as a local councillor and he stood in Ely South. His co-conspirator, I would say, was Bill Pickess. So, a lot of my son's political education came from a fairly independent thinking man. Of course, Bill was generous with his advice and he helped my son, gave him good advice on many occasions and the net result was that my son got elected to Parliament.

"Bill was a lover of local government, and he gave his heart and soul to it. The last time I saw him he was still very active in local politics. He was a committed local man and a real lover of Ely. I think that he was one of those people who contribute to society. He was a real goer, a real gentleman and someone who was a real privilege for me to have met and known. I am sure he is looking down and being critical of us tonight."

1. Public Question Time

Question from John Setchell

"I am here on behalf of the Campaign for Unitary Authorities in Cambridgeshire, who have written to all councillors to set out some suggested principles for determining how the new unitaries should be formed.

"The key points are:

- There must be a genuine improvement in democratic accountability: changes must increase democratic accountability while being able to take difficult decisions;
- Each council should have a coherent economic area;
- Each council should contain a reasonably coherent culture;
- Each council should cover a single travel for work area;

"Additionally, we believe, unitaries should reflect coherent housing/rental patterns, have clarity about funding, that councils should be able to share services and work together and that councils must not be so large as to 'lose touch' with the people.

"We also believe there must be clarity of relations with a Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority and Mayor. Although our organisation is opposed to the existence of a mayoral position, we recognise that government will likely retain it. It is not clear why it will be necessary in the context of say three unitary authorities to have an overarching authority. For instance, it would make little sense to have a unitary council, managing issues like housing, growth and transport, but have another body set the strategy for these.

"The question we have for the District Council is 'Do you agree with the principles we have set out? Will you push for a unitary authority that has clear powers to manage change effectively with strong democratic accountability, and which ending up looking in multiple directions?'"

Response from the Leader, Cllr Anna Bailey

“Thank you very much for your question and for representing your organisation here tonight. The decision by government to fast track one of the most significant changes to local government in 50 years or more has brought with it many challenges, not least the nature of how we judge the merits of any new unitary proposal. All proposals need to evidence how they meet the governments key criteria, which includes:

- “Achieving average population sizes of 500k or more, and to be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity, and withstand financial shocks.
- “The new unitary must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services.
- “Be a credible geography and identity, meet local need and demonstrate local support.
- “Support economic growth and devolution arrangements.
- “Increase housing supply (a key point for the Government).
- “Be of a sensible economic area, so we do not create advantage or disadvantage for other areas.
- “Enable stronger community engagement, neighbourhood empowerment and democratic accountability.
- “With a presumption that new unitaries will be built on existing council boundaries.

“Many of these criteria do correlate to the principles identified by the Cambs Unitary Campaign Group and while I believe some of the government criteria for success are utterly flawed, not least the proposal that unitaries should cover and provide services to populations of 500k or more, I do agree that we must ensure we retain or improve democratic accountability, keep our councils as local as possible, and ensure the identity and needs of our cities, towns and villages are reflected and nurtured equally within the new Unitary Councils.

“Any proposals put forward to Government must address a whole area and while there may be an argument for a strong single unitary in one part of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, this cannot and must not disadvantage other areas. Therefore, there is a significant and delicate balancing act between financial sustainability, identity, economic growth and housing that we must achieve to ensure that any new Unitary is put on a sustainable footing. We have gone out to consultation. I think we are the only authority in the area to have done this and got a significant response in a short period of time. They were very positive about this Council, I am pleased to say. We will be going back out to our residents, parishes and businesses soon to find out what really matters to them so that our proposals genuinely reflect their views where possible.

“I would just add that the best thing about East Cambridgeshire District Council is that we are small, nimble and close to the people and the businesses that we represent. I think that this is a huge asset and will be a huge loss when we are made bigger. I cannot support the diktat that councils should be 500,000 people or more. Most councils of that size in the country are failing. So in my opinion small really is beautiful in the world of local government. I am working with other

leaders across the county and chief executives. We are meeting regularly and doing our best to reach an agreement, although this may prove difficult. We are working to the deadline of November, when the area has to submit its final proposals to Government.”

Question from Vanessa Brammer

“The reason I am here is because I am hearing a lot of information from social media and village talk about the proposed crematorium. I am from Sutton and when I heard about this meeting on Monday, I tried to get others to attend, but they could not get here due to work. So, because I was off, I said that I would come. I really wanted to ask a few questions about this proposed crematorium. I have lived in Sutton for 30 years and I have seen information in the village about the Mepal Outdoor Centre that used to be on the premises. There have been some instances, with illegal raves and security had to come in. I do not agree with important decisions being made on social media and I do not agree with us finding out about it in the village a lot later than we should have done. £13 million is a lot of money, which is being discussed in Sutton. There is a petition, which I have signed, and many other neighbours have also signed, against the crematorium. I would not wish to say farewell to my loved ones and closest friends next to a biodigester, which is right next door, and it stinks. It is also right next door to the A142 with the lorries and heavy traffic. But the main point we are all trying to make is that £13 million is a lot of public money, that is money that was given to us – the community – to be built on infrastructure, such as parks, skate parks and places for children to go. We have to go to Haddenham to get to a skate park, which is a lovely thing for kids. We have nothing in Sutton. Now the money is obscene. £13 million being spent on a crematorium, when we already have plenty of them in the area. I also have heard rumours that this decision was taken in secret, behind closed doors. So, I would like someone to confirm whether it was or wasn't. We would also like to ask the Leader if there would be a public enquiry as to how public money is spent.”

Question from Charmaine Switsur, which was read out by the Chair

“Firstly, I support the decision to build the Bereavement Centre being near Mepal. The sooner the better.

Secondly, I believe the site is so much more than a beautiful, tranquil and desirable spot to rest -much more special than other nearby crematoria. I myself would like to rest there one day, when I die.

“This rich, biodiverse environment needs to be protected. My question to the Council is what are you doing to protect this wonderful biodiverse area? What assessment has the Council done in relation to its effect on the biodiversity and nature?

“I do hope that all the plans for this wonderful facility will soon be underway.”

Question from Drew Silver, which was read out by the Chair

“Can we have an independent public inquiry into council behaviour surrounding the repurposing of what was the site of Mepal Outdoor Centre?

"1, and many others in the East Cambs district, have raised concerns following the exclusion of the public during the first 18 months of the project's development and the unethical spending of funds.

"Development should be immediately halted until we can verify there is a genuine need for a crematorium that warrants £13 million expenditure in that location and whether or not it's what the public wants."

Question from Simon Hazeldine, which was read out by the Chair

"Please can you explain why you are trying to force through a Crematorium project when:

"1, The site is badly affected by an overpowering smell from the Biodigester Plant next door, as well as flies from the stagnant lakes. This makes the site totally unsuitable.

"2, Crematoriums nationally are seeing a downturn in business due to the popularity of 'no-fuss' cremations. This means the viability of the long-term business is extremely uncertain.

"3, Several posts on local social media have shown roughly 80% of people expressing an opinion are against the plans. The council is supposed to represent the local people!

"4, The costs have nearly doubled in just a few years and will almost certainly exceed the £13 million pounds currently being quoted. That is a shocking waste of public money that could be far better used in the community.

"5, Nobody asked for a crematorium! If no alternative use can be found for the land, why not just allow the site to return to nature?"

Response from the Leader, Cllr Anna Bailey to those questions

"It is helpful for future reference if we can have questions in advance, so I can be more prepared. I thank you for coming and hope that you will stay for the debate, so that you can hear a much more rounded discussion, than perhaps has been taking place on social media.

"There were various questions. With regards the time it has taken, there was an ambition to have a crematorium well before the elections in 2019. It was included in the Council's corporate plan many years ago. At that time no site had been identified. We were advised by experts that it would be unwise to advertise the fact that the authority wanted a crematorium as it is a highly competitive and litigious field. However, the plans for a crematorium have been known for a very long time and the decision was not taken behind closed doors. Some information has been in exempt papers, but the covering report has always been in the public domain. The decision regarding the final business case was taken in open session in February 2024. When you are dealing with a commercially sensitive project it is normal to do preparatory work behind the scenes. This information cannot be openly shared with other commercial operators. This is the normal process and goes on at every other council in the country, when working on commercially sensitive projects.

"In relation to the costs, it was £9 million that was set aside when originally looking at this, but we hadn't got a price. We have been out to tender. It has been a very competitive process; we had a lot of bids. The framework contract

allowed the Council to select a preferred provider and then go line by line through each bit of public expenditure. It has been reviewed by the Council's independent quantity surveyors. It really matters that taxpayers are getting value for money, and I am assured that they really are. If it goes ahead, it will be a fixed price contract. The price will be set.

"This project is not just about a crematorium. It is more than that. The project is about securing, enhancing and protecting a very beautiful, much loved and special site for the community, now and into the future. The site is unique. It is a designated wildlife site. It is home to a nationally important species, and we have been working with the Wildlife Trust who are really pleased with the management plans that we have brought forward as part of this project.

"We want to offer a really supportive service. Mike Banyard talked about the necessity to support the bereaved. That is what we want to do. I think we can do it at this site. It is an eco-crematorium using electric cremators and there aren't many in the country. That matters to a lot of people. There is going to be a natural burials area, a pet cemetery area, woodland walks, a lakeside setting. The chapel looks out onto the lake. A beautiful vista on which to say goodbye to loved ones. Residents will be able to enjoy the site for walking, bird watching and controlled fishing through a fishing club. Those are the activities that the Wildlife Trust have said are compatible with the biodiversity and wildlife on the site. It will remain a site that will be available for our whole community.

"The electric cremator limits the crematorium to two services a day. What that means is that it is very different to other crematoriums, as people will be able to have time on the site to gather with loved ones at an event afterwards and have time there. I believe that most people don't go back to crematoriums, but this is a massive site with a huge lakeside walk and this will naturally encourage people to go back and reflect and think about their loved ones.

"The site needs to be secured and managed to protect the wildlife there. We had an ambition to deliver a crematorium. This will serve the vast majority of the population of East Cambridgeshire. Most people live in Ely, Littleport and Soham and the crematorium will be accessible to those people, who don't currently have facilities in the district.

"You asked about the use of CIL. The Community Infrastructure Levy is a pot of money that we collect from all CIL chargeable development. It is the best thing we did as a Council as we have received £35 million. CIL has supported a massive number of projects across the district, including new community centres, leisure centres, cycle routes, footpaths, bridges, schools, learning hubs, GP surgeries, new and improved roads, sports facilities, new car parks and land for cemeteries. Nearly £6 million has been allocated to parish councils and Sutton, having a neighbourhood plan, receives 25% of all CIL receipts for development that happens in Sutton. There are very few restrictions on how this money can be spent locally. The district council has much greater restrictions on what we can spend our CIL receipts on. The parishes don't, as long as they can show that it supports growth, so that

ambition for a skatepark would be a legitimate project for Sutton Parish Council to fund through its CIL receipts. The district council's portion of CIL funds is much more about strategic projects. We have supported the Ely southern by-pass, the A14 upgrade and the hive leisure centre. These are much bigger projects to support growth. The crematorium is a project that supports growth. The district is growing at 2%, one of the largest growth areas in the country and we need to cater for this, and we have an opportunity to do this really well.

"The site is near the bio-digester, but the buildings are some distance away and this never caused any issues in the past by people using the site. I don't think that this will be an issue.

"There was another question about nature biodiversity. Specifically, they were saying that they want us to get on with it and what we were doing to protect biodiversity. Over the past the year, the council has undertaken numerous ecology surveys and has been working closely with the Wildlife Trust to develop an ecology management plan and the layout of the landscaping. The natural environment has featured in every part of our design, including the retaining or restoring of the large natural sand dunes, in the planting additional native trees and grasses around the site and maintaining the natural burial area as a flower meadow. Residents will also be able to memorialise their loved ones with additional trees, and bat or bird boxes, as we really want to encourage nature into the site.

"In the coming months we will also be inviting expression of interest from fishing clubs to use the northern edges of the lake. The successful club will have to demonstrate how they will manage the lake carefully to protect the wildlife and ensure people fish there responsibly.

"The site will be open to the public for contemplative walks and bird watching, so that everyone will be able to enjoy the beautiful surroundings. When the time is right, we will be inviting the public to an open day to the new Bereavement Centre so that we can share with you the newly restored natural landscape.

"I really hope those people who have come here, will stay and listen to the debate. I think that you will hear a more rounded view on what our proposals are and why we think it is a good idea."

2. Apologies for Absence

No apologies for absence were received.

3. Election of Chair 2025/26

Cllr Kelli Pettitt was nominated as Council Chair by Cllr Anna Bailey and seconded by Cllr Julia Huffer. Cllr Bailey stated that Cllr Pettitt was the chair of Fordham Parish Council, had researched the role and had a calm head. She would make an excellent Chair.

Cllr Christine Whelan was nominated as Council Chair by Cllr Ross Trent and seconded by Cllr Christine Colbert. Cllr Trent stated that Cllr Christine Whelan was a fair and popular councillor.

A secret ballot was held in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.2.1. Cllr Pettit received 14 votes and Cllr Christine Whelan received 14 votes. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4 the Chair had a casting vote which he used to vote for Cllr Pettitt.

It was resolved:

That Cllr Kelli Pettitt be elected as Chair of East Cambridgeshire District Council for the municipal year 2025/26.

Cllr Pettitt then read aloud, and signed, the Declaration of Acceptance of Office for Chair of Council.

4. Vote of Thanks to Outgoing Chair and Presentation of Past Chair's Medallion and Scroll

The former Chair, Cllr Mark Goldsack, was presented with flowers, a medallion, given to all past chairs, and a commemorative scroll. Cllr Goldsack said how proud he was to have chaired Council for two years and have his name on the honours board, joining his late friend and former schoolteacher Mike Rouse. He was honoured to have attended numerous events on behalf of the Council, including the armistice day commemoration in Ely Cathedral. He had chaired the sometimes fractious and often friendly Council meetings with a smile and an open approach. He thanked members, officers and the public for their support. He thanked Cllr David Brown for his assistance as Vice-Chair. He concluded that he had set out to chair the Council in accordance with the Local Government Association's Debate Not Hate campaign by finding harmony where possible. He was grateful to all members for their support regarding this. He wished the new Chair and Vice-Chair all the best for the future and felt secure in the knowledge that they had the right support to succeed.

Cllr Anna Bailey stated that it was a great responsibility to Chair the Council and that Cllr Mark Goldsack had carried out his duties with fairness and good humour for two years. She expressed her appreciation to Cllr Goldsack for representing the Council at many civic events. She thanked him for his service.

Cllr Lorna Dupré thanked Cllr Mark Goldsack for his work as Chair of the Council, for his fairness and that generally he had been an exemplary Chair.

5. Election of Vice-Chair 2025/26

Cllr Keith Horgan was nominated as Council Vice-Chair by Cllr Anna Bailey and seconded by Cllr Julia Huffer. Cllr Bailey was pleased to propose Cllr Horgan, who was a stickler for detail and would make an excellent Vice-Chair.

Cllr Gareth Wilson was nominated as Council Vice-Chair by Cllr Christine Whelan and seconded by Cllr Christine Colbert. Cllr Christine Whelan stated that Cllr Wilson had a wealth of experience of serving as a councillor and would make an excellent Vice-Chair.

A secret ballot was held in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.2.1. Cllr Horgan received 14 votes and Cllr Wilson received 14 votes. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4 the Chair had a casting vote which she used to vote for Cllr Horgan.

It was resolved:

That Cllr Keith Horgan be elected as Vice Chair of East Cambridgeshire District Council for the municipal year 2025/26.

Cllr Keith Horgan then read aloud, and signed, the Declaration of Acceptance of Office for Vice Chair of Council.

The Chair thanked Cllr David Brown for his service as Vice-Chair. Cllr Bailey praised Cllr Brown for his knowledge of the rules and for his calm support of the Chair over the last two years. Cllr Lorna Dupré thanked Cllr Brown for his service in his important duty of faithfully carrying out the role of Vice-Chair.

6. Declarations of Interest

Cllr Charlotte Cane declared an interest in agenda item 11, the motion on councillors' roles in planning applications. She explained that she would not participate in the debate or vote so that she could freely discuss and vote on this matter in parliament.

Cllr James Lay asked the Monitoring Officer for an explanation of what constituted a declarable interest. The Monitoring Officer replied that each councillor was responsible for deciding whether a matter under discussion constituted an interest and she could provide advice on any specific issue.

7. Minutes – 25 February 2025 and 20 March 2025

It was resolved unanimously:

That the Minutes of the Council meeting held on 25 February 2025 be agreed as a correct record, subject to the amendment of the word "residents" to "visitors" in the first sentence in the fourth paragraph on page 9.

That the Minutes of the Council meeting held on 20 March 2025 be confirmed as a correct.

8. Stretham Ward District By-Election Result

The Chair welcomed Cllr Lee Denney to the Council and looked forward to working with him.

It was resolved:

That the result of the Stretham Ward By-Election be noted, and Councillor Lee Denney be welcomed as a new District Councillor.

9. Chair's Announcements

The Chair made the following announcements:

- Seminars on Local Government Reorganisation would be taking place on Tuesday 27 May and Thursday 29 May and the members should inform Democratic Services of which seminar that they would like to attend if they had not already done so.
- Ian Smith, Director Finance, had announced that he would be retiring and the Chair thanked him for his work over the years, which included presiding over some of the best financial management in the country and for delivering many large-scale projects. The Chair wished him a long and happy retirement.

10. Petitions

No petitions had been received.

11. Notice of Motions Under Procedure Rule 10

(i) Councillors' Role in Planning Applications

Cllr Lucius Vellacott proposed and Cllr Bill Hunt seconded the following motion.

East Cambridgeshire District Council, hereinafter referred to as the 'Council', notes that:

- The Deputy Prime Minister has published a planning and infrastructure bill designed to liberalise planning rules
- The Local Government Association has written to ministers to express its reservations about this plan
- This Council has a commitment under its Corporate Plan to support community-led, affordable and sustainable development, with investment in infrastructure

The Council believes that:

- Whilst the Council places on record its admiration for the high-quality work of its planning officers, it is additionally the democratic role of

locally elected councillors to be involved in the decision-making process of selected planning applications which affect their residents' lives and land

- Such applications are not necessarily restricted to large or non-routine applications
- This plan could represent a further setback to community-led development
- Removing the ability for councillors to choose to debate and vote on specific developments in their localities could erode public trust in the planning system and local government more generally
- Regional Mayors will soon be responsible for strategic planning and will be given new powers to "call in" applications for decision
- Local Planning Authorities will be significantly larger and more remote from local communities after Local Government Reorganisation
- Ministers lack the level of localised information which councils and councillors have as to which decisions should be made by officers and by councillors
- These measures represent an erosion of local democracy and accountability

Therefore, the Council resolves to:

- Instruct the Leader of the Council to write to MHCLG and Charlotte Cane MP, outlining this Council's opposition to the proposals and inviting them to work with the Council to find appropriate solutions
- Instruct the Operational Services Committee, in consultation with relevant officers, to do all it can to ensure that robust mechanisms continue to exist for Councillors both to express views on and to determine planning applications related to their ward, in anticipation of the Bill becoming law
- Continue to encourage and provide advice and assistance to its parishes in the preparation and completion of local Neighbourhood Plans over the next three years, including those which are beginning the process of creating one, such as Wicken Parish Council

Cllr Lucius Vellacott spoke in favour of councillors being able to "call-in" planning decisions but lamented that the Government wished to curtail this. He doubted that ministers would be interested in relatively minor planning applications, even those of considerable local interest. He also expressed concern that, under the new proposals, the Mayor would be able to "call-in" decisions that he disagreed with.

Cllr Vellacott quoted a member of the planning team, who had advised that officers were for the land, but councillors were for the people. It was important that councillors were able to represent the concerns that residents had.

Cllr Vellacott stated that the Motion did three things. Firstly, it offered constructive engagement over what works. Secondly, it commissioned a review into how local councillors can continue to effectively determine planning

applications and thirdly, it committed the authority to supporting parish councils with their neighbourhood plans. He concluded that whatever the future of local government, it deserved to be able to determine future development and residents needed to be able to effectively voice their concerns on proposed development in their communities.

Cllr Mark Inskip expressed his support the motion, which sought to maintain democratic oversight of the development process. He and his group were enthusiastic supporters of Neighbourhood Plans, which engaged and involved local communities. He recognised that the Government's proposals threatened that democratic oversight. It was also unclear if adequate environmental protection would remain. He reported that Liberal Democrat MPs had voted against the bill's second reading in Parliament. He expressed particular concern over clause 46 that sought to remove power from local councillors and give it to officers, who would be expected to impose the will of the Secretary of State.

Cllr Mark Goldsack stated that the current "call-in" procedure ensured that councillors' local knowledge, including the views of the people, could determine planning applications. He expressed his support for the Motion and welcomed the fact that it had cross party backing.

Cllr David Miller spoke of the importance of having local, democratically elected representatives taking planning decisions, as they were accountable to the public.

Cllr Bill Hunt stated that the current system worked. The Planning Committee did an excellent job, partly because it was better to have 12 people examining a matter rather than just one person. Local councillors could use their local knowledge to determine applications and benefit from site visits before making a decision. He doubted that a unitary authority, serving 500,000 people, would be able to do such a good job. He regretted that under the Government's proposals we could be losing this service to the public. He welcomed the cross-party support for the Motion.

Cllr Lucius Vellacott thanked Cllr Inskip for his insightful comments and his support. He recognised the importance of Neighbourhood Plans and hoped that local representation would continue after local government reorganisation.

On being put to the vote, the Motion was declared to be unanimously carried, with one abstention.

12. To Answer Questions From Members

One question was received, and the response was given as follows:

1) Question from Cllr Mary Wade to Cllr Anna Bailey:

"Illegal on-street parking continues to be raised by residents in Ely and East Cambridgeshire as a problem.

“In my first council meeting I raised this question on behalf of my residents and received positive news from the Leader of the Council in terms of a plan for a police enforcement role to tackle the issue. This had been confirmed to residents through an article written by the Leader of the Council on the East Cambs Conservative group website with the title ‘A New Police Enforcement Role to Tackle Illegal Car Parking and Speeding in East Cambs’, in 2022.

“Further reassurance was provided a year later in 2023 when a council spokesperson told the Ely Standard that ‘East Cambridgeshire District Council has been developing the new road safety officer volunteer role with the county’s police force to address issues such as speeding and parking enforcement’.

“Eighteen months after that update provided to the residents via the Ely Standard and following positive progress reports to members in the council chamber following questions from myself and Cllr Vellacott, is the Leader of the council still confident that the new road safety officers will prove effective in addressing illegal on-street parking in the district.

“In particular, can she confirm:

1. The number of applicants to the Expressions of Interest run by the police last Autumn.
2. The number of road safety officer volunteers who have completed training.
3. The number of parking penalty tickets issued by road safety volunteers.”

Response from Cllr Anna Bailey

“Thank you for the question, which provides me with a very timely opportunity to give an update. I am aware that the Liberal Democrat and Independent members of this Council would like to spend public money bringing in civil parking enforcement to deal with the incredibly annoying issue of illegal on street parking in our district. However, as I have previously stated in this chamber, on street parking enforcement is a responsibility of the Police and the only authority that can take on the criminalisation of illegal on street parking is the County Council. Cllr Lorna Dupré is now the deputy leader of the County Council, and my sincere congratulations to her. The County Council is now be run solely by the Liberal Democrats and so the Liberal Democrat and Independent colleagues on this Council may want to pursue this issue with Cllr Dupré.

“I am as disappointed as Cllr Wade that the promised pilot of Cambridgeshire Police has not been forthcoming yet and I share the concern about the ongoing abuse of on street parking in hot spots around the district. I have regularly pushed the police for progress on this matter, but they are not in my control, unfortunately I have very little sway with the police force. I am pleased to say that responsibility for this has been taken over by Superintendent Adam Gallop who is acutely aware of public opinion on this. I met with Superintendent Gallop at the Council’s offices on 16th May to discuss the matter in a positive meeting. Cambridgeshire Police have now got a record

number of Police Constables in place and are recruiting more PCSOs and so Superintendent Gallop has proposed an alternative way of dealing with the illegal parking in the District, which had been suggested by the Council many years ago, to increase the police resource to deal with the matter and this can be set up quickly. I hope that this will finally improve the situation. Of course, this doesn't prevent Cllr Dupré from pursuing civil parking enforcement in her new role in the County Council, which I suggest could be run in a similar model to that of South Cambridgeshire District Council, where the County Council has taken on all responsibility for enforcing parking in the district of South Cambridgeshire, with no involvement by the District Council whatsoever."

Cllr Mary Wade stated that her question: "is the Leader of the council still confident that the new road safety officers will prove effective in addressing illegal on-street parking in the district" had not been answered. Cllr Anna Bailey replied that she was content that she had answered the question.

13. Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council, Group Leaders and Deputy Group Leaders

Council considered a report (AA1, previously circulated) containing details of the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council; Political Groups; and Group Leaders and Deputies for the forthcoming year.

Cllr Anna Bailey was nominated as Leader of the Council by Cllr Julia Huffer and seconded by Cllr Lucius Vellacott. Cllr Huffer stated that Cllr Bailey had led the Council since 2019 with unwavering commitment and steely determination to ensure that services and facilities remain available to all our residents. She has already begun negotiations over the difficult issue of Local Government Reorganisation and continued to have the full support of the Conservative group.

Cllr Lorna Dupré was nominated as Leader of the Council by Gareth Wilson and seconded by Cllr Mark Inskip. Cllr Gareth Wilson stated that now that as the Council was politically balanced it was a good opportunity to make a change. He was pleased to support Cllr Dupré, who would do an excellent job in this role

Cllr Bailey received 14 votes and Cllr Dupré received 14 votes. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4 the Chair had a casting vote which she used to vote for Cllr Bailey.

Cllr Julia Huffer was nominated as Deputy Leader of the Council by Cllr Anna Bailey and seconded by Cllr Lucius Vellacott. Cllr Bailey stated that she was enormously grateful to Cllr Huffer for her support as Deputy Leader, who worked well with her and other councillors.

Cllr Christine Whelan was nominated as Deputy Leader of the Council by Gareth Wilson and seconded by Cllr Mark Inskip. Cllr Gareth Wilson stated that Cllr Christine Whelan had proven leadership skills and he hoped that the

Council would agree that it would be inappropriate to have one party holding both the Leader and Deputy Leader position.

Cllr Huffer received 14 votes and Cllr Christine Whelan received 14 votes. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4 the Chair had a casting vote which she used to vote for Cllr Huffer.

It was resolved:

To elect Cllr Anna Bailey as Leader and Cllr Julia Huffer as Deputy Leader;

That the details of the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council; Political Groups; and Group Leaders and Deputies for the forthcoming municipal year, as detailed in paragraph 3.1 of the Officer's report, be noted.

14. Political Proportionality

Council considered a report (AA2, previously circulated) detailing the political balance of the Council, and the implications for the allocation of seats on Committees, Sub-Committees and other Member Bodies. The Elections and Democratic Services Manager explained that any amendment to the allocation of seats would require a unanimous vote.

It was unanimously resolved:

That the political balance, as detailed in Appendix 1 of the Officer's report, be noted, and the allocation of seats on Committees, Sub-Committees and other Member Bodies as set out in Appendix 1 of the report, be approved.

15. Membership of Committees and Sub-Committees (Including Substitutes) and Other Member Bodies 2023/24

Council considered a report (AA3, previously circulated) presented by the Elections and Democratic Service Manager which proposed the memberships of the Council's Committees, Sub-Committees, and other Member Bodies, as provided by the Group Leaders. The report also proposed amending the Constitution to allow equal political representation on the Council's sub committees, that were not subject to political proportionality. It also recommended the appointment of independent members, parish council members and a lay member, on various committees. It was noted that the report had been amended to include Cllr Lee Denney as a member of the Licensing Committee and a substitute member of the Licensing (Statutory) Sub-Committee.

Cllr Anna Bailey expressed her thanks to all councillors and independent members for their service on the committees and her pride in the Council's committee system, which provided everyone with a role. Cllr Anna Bailey proposed and Cllr Julia Huffer seconded the recommendations in the report.

It was unanimously resolved that:

- i. The membership of Committees, Sub-Committees, and other Member Bodies for 2025/26, as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report, be approved.
- ii. The appointment of Stephen Joyce as Lay Member of the Audit Committee, be approved.
- iii. An amendment to the Constitution to allow an equal allocation of committee seats on the following sub-committees that do not fall under the political proportionality ruling:
 - Finance & Assets (Ethical Governance) Sub-Committee
 - Personnel Appeals Sub-Committee
 - Licensing Sub-Committee (Statutory)
- iv. The Council approve the appointments of 2 Independent Persons and 2 Co-opted Town/Parish Councillor Members, as set out in Appendix 1, on the Finance & Assets (Ethical Governance) Sub-Committee.

16. Election of Chairs and Vice-Chairs for all Committees and Sub Committees 2025/26

Council considered an oral update recommending the election of Chairs and Vice-Chairs for all Committees and Sub Committees 2025/26.

Finance and Assets Committee Chair

Cllr Anna Bailey nominated Cllr Alan Sharp to the position of Chair of the Finance and Assets Committee. Cllr Lorna Dupré nominated Cllr Alison Whelan to the position of Chair of the Finance and Assets Committee. A vote was taken and Cllr Sharp received 14 votes and Cllr Alison Whelan received 14 votes. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4 the Chair had a casting vote which she used to vote for Cllr Alan Sharp.

It was resolved to:

Elect Cllr Alan Sharp as Chair of the Finance and Assets Committee.

Finance and Assets Committee Vice-Chair

Cllr Anna Bailey nominated and Cllr Julia Huffer seconded Cllr Ian Bovingdon to the position of Vice-Chair of the Finance and Assets Committee. Cllr Lorna Dupré nominated and Cllr John Trapp seconded Cllr Alison Whelan to the position of Vice-Chair of the Finance and Assets Committee. A vote was taken and Cllr Bovingdon received 14 votes and Cllr Alison Whelan received 14 votes. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4 the Chair had a casting vote which she used to vote for Cllr Ian Bovingdon.

It was resolved to:

Elect Cllr Ian Bovingdon as the Vice-Chair of the Finance and Assets Committee.

Operational Services Committee Chair

Cllr Anna Bailey nominated and Cllr Lucius Vellacott seconded Cllr Julia Huffer to the position of Chair of the Operational Services Committee. Cllr Christine Colbert nominated and Cllr Lorna Dupré seconded Cllr Mark Inskip to the position of Chair of the Operational Services Committee. A vote was taken and Cllr Huffer received 14 votes and Cllr Inskip received 14 votes. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4 the Chair had a casting vote which she used to vote for Cllr Julia Huffer.

It was resolved to:

Elect Cllr Julia Huffer as the Chair of the Operational Services Committee.

Operational Services Committee Vice-Chair

Cllr Anna Bailey nominated and Cllr Julia Huffer seconded Cllr Lucius Vellacott to the position of Vice-Chair of the Operational Services Committee. Cllr Christine Whelan nominated and Cllr Christine Colbert seconded Cllr Mark Inskip to the position of Vice-Chair of the Operational Services Committee. A vote was taken and Cllr Vellacott received 14 votes and Cllr Inskip received 14 votes. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4 the Chair had a casting vote which she used to vote for Cllr Lucius Vellacott.

It was resolved to:

Elect Cllr Lucius Vellacott as the Vice-Chair of the Operational Services Committee.

Audit Committee Chair

Cllr Anna Bailey nominated and Cllr Julia Huffer seconded Cllr David Brown to the position of Chair of the Audit Committee. Cllr Mark Inskip nominated and Cllr Charlotte Cane seconded Cllr Lorna Dupré nominated to the position of Chair of the Audit Committee. A vote was taken and Cllr Brown received 14 votes and Cllr Dupré received 14 votes. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4 the Chair had a casting vote which she used to vote for Cllr David Brown.

It was resolved to:

Elect Cllr David Brown as the Chair of the Audit Committee.

Audit Committee Vice-Chair

Cllr Anna Bailey nominated and Cllr Julia Huffer seconded Cllr Lucius Vellacott to the position of Vice-Chair of the Audit Committee. Cllr Mark Inskip nominated and Cllr Christine Whelan seconded Cllr Lorna Dupré to the position of Vice-Chair of the Audit Committee. A vote was taken and Cllr Vellacott received 14 votes and Cllr Dupré received 14 votes. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4 the Chair had a casting vote which she used to vote for Cllr Lucius Vellacott.

It was resolved to:

Elect Cllr Lucius Vellacott as the Vice-Chair of the Audit Committee.

Licensing Committee Chair

Cllr Anna Bailey nominated and Cllr Martin Goodearl seconded Cllr Julia Huffer to the position of Chair of the Licensing Committee. Cllr Lorna Dupré nominated and Cllr Christine Whelan seconded Cllr John Trapp to the position of Chair of the Licensing Committee. A vote was taken and Cllr Huffer received 14 votes and Cllr Trapp received 14 votes. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4 the Chair had a casting vote which she used to vote for Cllr Julia Huffer.

It was resolved to:

Elect Cllr Julia Huffer as the Chair of the Licensing Committee.

Licensing Committee Vice-Chair

Cllr Anna Bailey nominated and Cllr Julia Huffer seconded Cllr Martin Goodearl to the position of Vice-Chair of the Licensing Committee. Cllr Lorna Dupré nominated and Cllr Christine Whelan seconded Cllr John Trapp to the position of Vice-Chair of the Licensing Committee. A vote was taken and Cllr Goodearl received 14 votes and Cllr Trapp received 14 votes. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4 the Chair had a casting vote which she used to vote for Cllr Martin Goodearl.

It was resolved to:

Elect Cllr Martin Goodearl as the Vice-Chair of the Licensing Committee.

Planning Committee Chair

Cllr Anna Bailey nominated and Cllr Julia Huffer seconded Cllr Bill Hunt to the position of Chair of the Planning Committee. Cllr Lorna Dupré nominated and Cllr Mark Inskip seconded Cllr Christine Whelan to the position of Chair of the Planning Committee. A vote was taken and Cllr Hunt received 14 votes and Cllr Christine Whelan received 14 votes. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4 the Chair had a casting vote which she used to vote for Cllr Bill Hunt.

It was resolved to:

Elect Cllr Bill Hunt as the Chair of the Planning Committee.

Planning Committee Vice-Chair

Cllr Anna Bailey nominated and Cllr Julia Huffer seconded Cllr Mark Goldsack to the position of Vice-Chair of the Planning Committee. Cllr Lorna Dupré nominated and Cllr Mark Inskip seconded Cllr Christine Whelan to the position of Vice-Chair of the Planning Committee. A vote was taken and Cllr Goldsack received 14 votes and Cllr Christine Whelan received 14 votes. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4 the Chair had a casting vote which she used to vote for Cllr Mark Goldsack.

It was resolved to:

Elect Cllr Mark Goldsack as the Vice-Chair of the Planning Committee.

Personnel Appeals Sub-Committee Chair

Cllr Anna Bailey nominated and Cllr Julia Huffer seconded Cllr Alan Sharp to the position of Chair of the Personnel Appeals Sub-Committee. Cllr Lorna Dupré nominated and Cllr Mark Inskip seconded Cllr Christine Colbert to the

position of Chair of the Personnel Appeals Sub-Committee. A vote was taken and Cllr Sharp received 14 votes and Cllr Colbert received 14 votes. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4 the Chair had a casting vote which she used to vote for Cllr Alan Sharp.

It was resolved to:

Elect Cllr Alan Sharp as the Chair of the Personnel Appeals Sub-Committee.

Personnel Appeals Sub-Committee Vice-Chair

Cllr Anna Bailey nominated and Cllr Julia Huffer seconded Cllr Ian Bovingdon to the position of Vice-Chair of the Personnel Appeals Sub-Committee. Cllr Lorna Dupré nominated and Cllr Mark Inskip seconded Cllr Christine Colbert to the position of Vice-Chair of the Personnel Appeals Sub-Committee. A vote was taken and Cllr Bovingdon received 14 votes and Cllr Colbert received 14 votes. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4 the Chair had a casting vote which she used to vote for Cllr Ian Bovingdon.

It was resolved to:

Elect Cllr Ian Bovingdon as the Vice-Chair of the Personnel Appeals Sub-Committee.

Finance & Assets (Ethical Governance) Sub-Committee Chair

Cllr Anna Bailey nominated and Cllr Julia Huffer seconded Cllr Alan Sharp to the position of Chair of the Finance & Assets (Ethical Governance) Sub-Committee. Cllr Lorna Dupré nominated and Cllr Mark Inskip seconded Cllr Alison Whelan to the position of Chair of the Finance & Assets (Ethical Governance) Sub-Committee. A vote was taken and Cllr Sharp received 14 votes and Cllr Alison Whelan received 14 votes. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4 the Chair had a casting vote which she used to vote for Cllr Alan Sharp.

It was resolved to:

Elect Cllr Alan Sharp as the Chair of the Finance & Assets (Ethical Governance) Sub-Committee.

Finance & Assets (Ethical Governance) Sub-Committee Vice-Chair

Cllr Anna Bailey nominated and Cllr Julia Huffer seconded Cllr Ian Bovingdon to the position of Vice-Chair of the Finance & Assets (Ethical Governance) Sub-Committee. Cllr Lorna Dupré nominated and Cllr Christine Whelan seconded Cllr Alison Whelan to the position of Vice-Chair of the Finance & Assets (Ethical Governance) Sub-Committee. A vote was taken and Cllr Bovingdon received 14 votes and Cllr Alison Whelan received 14 votes. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4 the Chair had a casting vote which she used to vote for Cllr Ian Bovingdon.

It was resolved to:

Elect Cllr Ian Bovingdon as the Vice Chair of the Finance & Assets (Ethical Governance) Sub-Committee.

Licensing (Statutory) Sub-Committee Chair

Cllr Anna Bailey nominated and Cllr Julia Huffer seconded Cllr Keith Horgan to the position of Chair of the Licensing (Statutory) Sub-Committee. Cllr Lorna Dupré nominated and Cllr Christine Whelan seconded Cllr John Trapp to the position of Chair of the Licensing (Statutory) Sub-Committee. A vote was taken and Cllr Horgan received 14 votes and Cllr Trapp received 14 votes. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4 the Chair had a casting vote which she used to vote for Cllr Keith Horgan.

It was resolved to:

Elect Cllr Keith Horgan as Chair of the Licensing (Statutory) Sub-Committee.

Licensing (Statutory) Sub-Committee Vice-Chair

Cllr Anna Bailey nominated and Cllr Julia Huffer seconded Cllr Lavinia Edwards to the position of Vice-Chair of the Licensing (Statutory) Sub-Committee. Cllr Lorna Dupré nominated and Cllr Christine Whelan seconded Cllr John Trapp to the position of Vice-Chair of the Licensing (Statutory) Sub-Committee. A vote was taken and Cllr Edwards received 14 votes and Cllr Trapp received 14 votes. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4 the Chair had a casting vote which she used to vote for Cllr Lavinia Edwards.

It was resolved to:

Elect Cllr Lavinia Edwards as Vice-Chair of the Licensing Sub-Committee (Statutory) Vice-Chair.

Licensing (Non-Statutory) Sub-Committee Chair

Cllr Anna Bailey nominated and Cllr Julia Huffer seconded Cllr Martin Goodearl to the position of Chair of the Licensing (Non-Statutory) Sub-Committee. Cllr Lorna Dupré nominated and Cllr Gareth Wilson seconded Cllr John Trapp to the position of Chair of the Licensing (Non-Statutory) Sub-Committee. A vote was taken and Cllr Goodearl received 14 votes and Cllr Trapp received 14 votes. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4 the Chair had a casting vote which she used to vote for Cllr Martin Goodearl.

It was resolved to:

Elect Cllr Martin Goodearl as the Chair of the Licensing (Non-Statutory) Sub-Committee.

Licensing (Non-Statutory) Sub-Committee Vice-Chair

Cllr Anna Bailey nominated and Cllr Martin Goodearl seconded Cllr Julia Huffer to the position of Vice-Chair of the Licensing (Non-Statutory) Sub-Committee. Cllr Lorna Dupré nominated and Cllr Gareth Wilson seconded Cllr John Trapp to the position of Vice-Chair of the Licensing Sub-Committee (Non-Statutory). A vote was taken and Cllr Huffer received 14 votes and Cllr Trapp received 14 votes. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4 the Chair had a casting vote which she used to vote for Cllr Julia Huffer.

It was resolved to:

Elect Cllr Julia Huffer as the Vice-Chair of the Licensing (Non-Statutory) Sub-Committee.

17. Schedule of Items Recommended from Committees and Other Member Bodies

Council considered the report AA4, previously circulated, detailing recommendations from Committees as follows:

1. Audit Committee – 15 April 2025

a) Audit Committee Annual Report 2024/25

The Chair of the Audit Committee, Cllr David Brown presented the Annual Report 2024/25, as attached at Appendix A. He thanked all the members of the Committee who had contributed to the work carried out over the year, including the scrutiny of the Council's Risk Register. He was happy to report that there was only one outstanding action relating to 2024/25. He explained that the disclaimed audit opinion on the Statutory Accounts was due to national issues and outside the control of this Council. He thanked Stephen Joyce, the Independent Lay Member, for his invaluable contributions. He also thanked officers and the auditors for supporting the work of the Committee. Cllr Keith Horgan welcomed the fact that the Liberal Democrats had returned to the Audit Committee, as it was important that there was cross-party scrutiny of the issues discussed by the Committee. He thanked Cllr David Brown for the exemplary way that he chaired the Committee.

The recommendation in the report was proposed by Cllr David Brown and seconded by Cllr Keith Horgan.

It was unanimously resolved:

That the Audit Committee Annual Report be approved.

18. Bereavement Centre Budget

Council considered the report AA5, previously circulated, to consider the updated Bereavement Centre business case and supporting budget proposal. The Director Operations presented the report. She explained that the Council had approved the business case for the Bereavement Centre in February 2024. Progress had been reported quarterly to the Finance and Assets Committee, with further updates provided through member briefings.

The Chair explained that confidential figures were detailed in the exempt report and the debate would have to move into confidential session if councillors wished to discuss these figures.

Cllr Anna Bailey thanked officers for their work on this project, which was more than just a bereavement centre. It would enhance and secure a designated wildlife site for the community. The Wildlife Trust supported the Council's

proposed plans for the site. Residents will be able to enjoy the site for bird watching, walking and fishing. It was hoped that a room on the site would be made available for community use.

Cllr Bailey reported that the bereavement centre would offer a special service for residents. With a maximum of two services a day, mourners would have time after the service to gather in the function room and not be moved on. The majority of the population of the district were a short car drive away from the site.

Cllr Bailey explained that the cost of the crematorium was comparable to other crematoriums that had been built. The separate costs had been reviewed by the Council's independent quantity surveyors and were part of a fixed price contract. An income for the Council would be generated by the centre from its second year of operation. The project was funded by the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) contributions from developers, which existed to fund infrastructure in the district. The bereavement centre met the criteria to receive CIL funding. There was enough CIL funds left to support numerous other projects and just under £6 million was being awarded directly to parish councils to fund local projects. Further development in the district ensured more CIL funding in the future.

Cllr Mark Inskip expressed his opposition to the building of a bereavement centre on the site of the Mepal Outdoor Centre in a ward he had represented since 2019. He expressed concerns regarding the decisions taken to close the Mepal Outdoor Centre and build a crematorium, which had been taken in private and were first leaked to the Ely Standard in July 2020. He understood that these plans had been worked on in secret for 18 months before being revealed by the media. The first Council meeting to discuss this matter had been held in private session on 31 July 2020. It was after this meeting that the Council issued a press release confirming these plans. The results of the public consultation in January 2021 were not released until August that year. It showed that 85.4% opposed the plans. Nevertheless, the Council continued with the project and estimated that the total cost would be around £7 million. However, these projected costs have increased to nearly £13 million, with almost £2 million already spent. CIL funding was supposed to be used to fund community infrastructure and amenities. He asked if those who supported the project believed that the public supported using CIL funding for a bereavement centre instead of other facilities such as health, school, leisure facilities, foot paths and cycleways. He also questioned whether building a crematorium made sound business sense with other facilities in Huntingdon, Cambridge, Bury St Edmonds and March. Facilities in Peterborough and Cambridge reported that the number of cremations were falling, proving that there was insufficient demand for the proposed centre. This would drive down prices and result in operating losses that would have to be funded by the Council.

Cllr Keith Horgan stated that he previously examined the business case, with Cllr James Lay, using his experience of over 40 years of assessing company reports. Following the work, both he and Cllr Lay had voted in favour of the bereavement centre on 20 February 2024. He continued to support the project

as the business case was sound. It was a good investment and was the right decision for residents. If the business case no longer made sense he would vote against the project.

Cllr John Trapp stated that none of the parish councils in his ward supported the project. They would prefer to see the CIL money being used to fund more practical projects, such as the cycle way from Lode to Bottisham or walkways between equipment in play areas to make them more accessible, which could not be afforded. He expected that all parishes in the district faced similar issues. He suggested that water cremation would have been more sustainable, as it only used a quarter of the energy of more conventional cremations. He understood land had been offered in Soham for the bereavement centre, which would have been a more central location in the district. He noted that Cllr Bailey had acknowledged that the market for crematoriums was highly competitive and he questioned whether the project would ever be able to make a profit. He concluded that cancelling the project now made more financial sense than continuing to fund it.

Cllr Bill Hunt disagreed with the negative attitude of those who opposed the project. He stated that years ago he had served on a working party regarding the future of the site with the Leader of the Opposition, so the project should not have come as a surprise to her and her political group. Whilst canvassing, residents had informed him that they were concerned about development being built without infrastructure. The bereavement centre was infrastructure that people in the area needed. He explained that 80% of people were now being cremated, an increase from 50% around 50 years ago. Population in the district was also increasing. He stated that he could travel to the site from Ely in just under 20 minutes and he believed that people were usually prepared to travel much further to funerals. He believed that most councils would have to borrow money in order to fund projects of this size, whilst this authority could fund it entirely from receipts and was not reliant on the need to make a profit. Meanwhile, the derelict site was costing money to maintain. He suggested that local projects should be funded before local government reorganisation abolished this Council and moved all the CIL funds to a new authority which would focus on projects in urban centres outside the district.

Cllr Christine Ambrose Smith stated that she had served on the working group on the Mepal Outdoor Centre with Cllr Bill Hunt and Cllr Lorna Dupré. Cambridgeshire ACRE had the franchise, but they had given control back to the Council because they could no longer run it. The Council had attempted to find another agency to operate the centre, but this ultimately had been unsuccessful. As a result, the site had been left derelict. If this project was agreed, funding would continue to exist for parish councils to improve facilities in their areas.

Cllr Gareth Wilson explained that the Mepal Outdoor Centre had closed because it needed £1 million of investment, which the Council was not prepared to pay. However, the Council was now prepared to pay £13 million to build a bereavement centre on the site, which will not be able to compete against the

existing facility in March. He lamented the closing of the Centre, which young people from throughout the area used and greatly enjoyed.

Cllr Julia Huffer explained that CIL funding existed for accessible play areas and Fordham Parish Council would be using this to replace play equipment in the village. She suggested that a market existed for a bereavement centre, which only had two services a day, as it would allow mourners to spend more time at the centre, whilst other facilities had to move mourners on to make way for the next service. She said that it was untrue of Cllr Christine Colbert to state that the Council had deliberately closed the Mepal Outdoor Centre, as the charity had been running at a loss and no alternative organisation could be found that was prepared to run the Centre. This authority was not in the business of running outdoor centres and the County Council had just closed an outdoor centre in Stibbington.

Cllr James Lay stated that he believed that having two upmarket funerals a day at the proposed bereavement centre would work well. However, the market was changing. Larger companies were taking up more and more of the market share and according to a cost of dying report from Sun Life in 2025, the number of direct cheap cremations had increased from 2% in 2021 to 20% last year. The number of pre-plan funerals was also increasing, so that people could keep costs down and pass more money on to their relatives. He feared that the project would be a waste of money.

Cllr Alan Sharp explained that the project was communicated to the public in 2020. It was necessary to keep commercially sensitive information private, otherwise competitors would have been given an unfair advantage. The expected profit figures were a conservative projection, and any operating profit will go back to the Council. The authority had a good track record of operating commercially, as the success of the East Cambs Trading Company had shown. He concluded that the outdoor centre had been destroyed by arson, and something needed to be done with the site.

Cllr Christine Colbert stated that in the past, when a member had been named by another councillor they had been allowed to respond immediately. She agreed with the comments made by Cllr James Lay.

Cllr Lorna Dupré lamented that discussions during the first 18 months of the project had been held in private and that now the administration was ignoring huge public opposition and attempting to approve the project, even though costs had increased from £8 million and £13 million. She stated that this was a waste of money, which should have been spent on local community projects, such as education facilities in Littleport and North Ely or the health centre at Soham, instead of on a commercial venture that would have to compete with the private sector. The site was not ideal, as it was next to a smelly biodigester and a busy highway. It was located on the western edge of the district, which would be difficult for residents from the eastern part of the district to access. It was only 12 minutes' drive from the crematorium in March, which was operating under capacity and mourners do not consider council boundaries when considering where to hold a funeral. She explained that due to local government

reorganisation, the new unitary authority could end up with two or three crematoriums in its administrative area. She expressed doubt over the assurances of profit provided by the consultants, as the market was changing, with an increasing preference for cheaper cremations and so the demand for another crematorium in the area did not exist. She concluded that the proposed project was a waste of £13 million, which instead should be spent on the community facilities that it was intended for.

Cllr Charlotte Cane thanked those who had submitted public questions to the meeting and noted that only one had supported the project. She opposed the building of a crematorium that would deliver a poor return on the investment, increased carbon emissions and would be in competition with a number of other crematoriums in the area. She understood that there was currently no money in the CIL fund and projects such as the health centre in Soham could not be funded. She stated that a charity had wanted to take over the site, but its request had been rejected as it had not been given time to draw up a business plan. The cost of the project had increased from £8 million to £13 million and she estimated that it would take 40 years for the crematorium to pay back the original investment and this was not taking into account wear and tear maintenance costs. She concluded that this was a bad use of public money and asked how anyone who had any business sense could support it.

Cllr Chika Akinwale agreed with previous speakers that the funds being allocated to the crematorium project could be better spent on community facilities. In particular, play facilities accessible to disabled children should be funded to promote social inclusion.

Cllr Lucius Vellacott explained that the Conservative party had included the crematorium in its manifesto before winning the 2019 election. He praised the report which contained several assurances. A specific market analysis had been carried out, which indicated that the project would be profitable and in any case this was never the main driver for the initiative. He stated that the building of a crematorium on the site was the only solution that would protect the biodiversity in the area. He explained that he would prefer to have an outdoor centre on the site, but unfortunately this was not viable. He reported that the costs had risen to an increase in prices, particularly in the steel industry. He explained that the Council could pay for the crematorium without jeopardising other projects as it was being funded from the CIL budget for strategic infrastructure. Facilities in the future could be funded both by CIL and the profits from the project. Without this extra revenue there would be more pressure on the Council to increase Council Tax. He concluded that he wanted the Council to be able to give local residents the opportunity to say goodbye to their loved ones by the lakeside in the heart of fens and he hoped that at the end of his life his friends and family would be able to go back to the site, due to the decision that he had taken this evening.

Cllr Anna Bailey stated that those opposed to the project had not provided an alternative proposal for the site. The Mepal Outdoor Centre had closed years ago and despite the best efforts of the Council, it had become clear that an outdoor centre on the site was not viable and so it was incorrect to argue that

the Council had either closed or abandoned it, in order to build a crematorium. She explained that the public engagement exercise, reported by Cllr Inskip, had only received 188 responses and 85% of them admitted to having strong allegiances to the closed outdoor centre. The Wildlife Trust had informed the Council that only low impact leisure use should be permitted and this was incompatible with an outdoor centre. She reported that whilst health and leisure activities were not the responsibility of this Council, CIL funds had been used for a variety of health centres and leisure initiatives. The funds from CIL were for infrastructure projects like the bereavement centre, which unlike the crematorium in Huntingdon, could be built without having to borrow any money. She stated that it would be an eco-crematorium using electric cremators and this would reduce carbon emissions as it was more efficient than other cremations.

Cllr Anna Bailey proposed and Cllr Lucius Vellacott seconded the recommendations in the report. Cllr Charlotte Cane requested a recorded vote and these were made as follows:

For (14): Cllrs Christine Ambrose Smith, Anna Bailey, Ian Bovingdon, David Brown, Lavinia Edwards, Mark Goldsack, Martin Goodearl, Keith Horgan, Julia Huffer, Bill Hunt, David Miller, Kelli Pettitt, Alan Sharp and Lucius Vellacott.

Against (14): Cllrs Chika Akinwale, Charlotte Cane, Christine Colbert, Lee Denney, Lorna Dupré, Kathrin Holtzmann, Mark Inskip, James Lay, John Trapp, Ross Trent, Mary Wade, Alison Whelan, Christine Whelan and Gareth Wilson.

Abstain (0)

With 14 votes in favour and 14 votes against the vote was tied. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4 the Chair had a casting vote which she used to vote in favour of the recommendations.

It was resolved that:

- a) Note the updated revenue business case modelling as set out in Appendix 1.
- b) Approve a further allocation of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) of £4,757,087 for the capital build of the Bereavement Centre.
- c) Authorise the Director Finance to secure alternative funding via internal borrowing where CIL is not yet available, in consultation with the Chair of Finance and Assets Committee (as detailed in section 5.5).
- d) Authorise the Director Operations, in consultation with Director Legal, to finalise and enter into the contract between the Council and Contractor A as set out in Appendix 2.

- e) Authorise the Director Operations, in consultation with Director Legal, to procure and enter into a contract with an electric cremator provider.

19. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority

a) Appointments to the Combined Authority

Council considered a previously circulated report requesting that appointments be made to the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority for the municipal year 2025/26.

Cllr Anna Bailey proposed and Cllr Julia Huffer seconded the recommendations in the report.

It was resolved unanimously:

1. That the following appointments and nominations to the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority for the municipal year 2025/26 be approved:
 - a. That Cllr Anna Bailey be appointed as the Council's appointee to the Combined Authority with Cllr Julia Huffer appointed as the substitute member;
 - b. That Cllrs Lucius Vellacott and Christine Whelan be nominated as Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, with Cllr Keith Horgan and Mark Inskip nominated as their respective substitutes;
 - c. That Cllr Mark Inskip be nominated as a Member of the Audit & Governance Committee, with Cllr Christine Whelan nominated as the substitute member.
2. That the Chief Executive be authorised to make any amendments to the appointments to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Audit and Governance Committee, in consultation with the Political Group Leaders, if the political balance is amended by the Combined Authority between now and the next Council meeting.

b) Update reports

Council received the reports (previously circulated) from the Combined Authority's meetings in February 2025 and March 2025.

It was resolved:

That the reports on the activities of the Combined Authority from the Council's representatives be noted.

20. Actions Taken on the Grounds of Urgency

Council considered a report (AA6 previously circulated) to note the action taken on the grounds of urgency in relation to the Wentworth Parish Council – Council Tax.

It was resolved:

That the action taken on the grounds of urgency be noted.

Exclusion of the Press and Public

Cllr Anna Bailey proposed and Cllr Goodearl seconded that the meeting should go into private session. It was resolved unanimously:

That the press and public be excluded during the consideration of the remaining items because it is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the public were present during the items there would be disclosure to them of exempt information of Categories 1 and 3 of Part 1 Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

21. Partnership Working Through Section 113 Agreement

Council considered the report, AA7 already circulated, on whether Anglia Revenues Partnership (ARP) should enter into a Section 113 agreement with Maldon District Council to provide Fraud Services.

Cllr Keith Horgan proposed and Anna Bailey seconded the recommendations in the report.

It was resolved to:

Approve that Anglia Revenues Partnership (ARP) enter into a Section 113 Agreement with Maldon District Council, to enable ARP officers to provide Fraud Services to the Council.

The meeting concluded at 9:15 pm

Chair.....

Date.....