

District Report

Cllr Richard Williams

We are now in the pre-election period ahead of the District Council elections on 7th May. As is usual at this stage in the electoral cycle, the District Council has significantly reduced formal decision-making and public announcements. As a result, there is relatively little substantive new business to report over the past month.

That said, there have been a small number of important developments.

Greater Cambridge Development Corporation

The most significant issue over the past month has been the District Council's response to the Government's proposal to establish a centrally-led Urban Development Corporation for Greater Cambridge.

An Extraordinary Meeting of the Council was held in March to agree the Council's formal response to the consultation. The final position adopted by the Council was to clearly and unequivocally object to the Government's proposals.

I proposed a series of amendments to the original draft response, which were accepted with cross-party support. These amendments significantly strengthened the Council's position. In particular, they ensured that the Council's response made clear its objection in principle to a centrally imposed Development Corporation, highlighted the democratic deficit that would arise from transferring planning powers away from locally elected councillors, and emphasised that the key barriers to growth in Greater Cambridge are national infrastructure and funding issues rather than failures of the local planning system. The amended response also raised concerns that the proposals risk undermining existing planned development rather than accelerating it.

As a result, the Council's final submission clearly makes the case that growth in Greater Cambridge should continue to be led by locally accountable authorities working in partnership with Government, rather than through a centrally controlled body. I believe the strengthened response better reflects the concerns that many residents and communities have about these proposals.

In addition to the District Council's formal response, I also submitted my own personal response to the Government's consultation. In that response, I objected in principle to the creation of a centrally led Development Corporation for Greater Cambridge, reflecting my concerns about the loss of local democratic control and the risks associated with removing planning powers from locally elected councils.

Local Government Reorganisation

A public consultation on Local Government Reorganisation was open throughout March, giving residents the opportunity to comment on the different options for the future structure of local government in Cambridgeshire. South Cambridgeshire Council supported "Option B", which would see Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire combined into a single unitary authority, with the rest of Cambridgeshire forming a separate council. The decision now rests with Government, and we are likely to receive an indication of the preferred model over the summer.

The current timetable still suggests elections to the new unitary authority taking place next year, although it remains to be seen whether this timetable will hold

Weekly Food Waste Collections

The new weekly food waste collection service is now beginning to be rolled out locally. In Whittlesford, residents should have received their grey food waste bins this week. Weekly food waste collections are due to start from 11th May.

As previously reported, the introduction of this service represents a significant operational change for the District Council, requiring additional vehicles and staff, and there remain some wider questions about the long-term costs and delivery of the scheme.