



Combined Authority Board

16 October 2024

Title: Public and Member Questions

Public Report: Yes

Question 1 – from Neil Mackay, local resident (asked on his behalf by William Bannell)

I have here a copy of a letter from the Department of transport to the then Chief Executive of the Combined Authority Eileen Milner the letter is Dated 7th Jan 2022

The letter states that bus improvement funding to the tune of £4.29million would be provided in January 2022

The Letter states that ALL funding

-INCLUDING THIS FUNDING - will depend on your willingness to implement ambitious bus priority measures.

Later in the same paragraph it goes on to say 'In particular, the CPCA should commit to progress the reinstatement of the busgate on Mill Road, with access for Blue badge holders, as committed to by the Mayor in Late September.' (2021)

I went to Public questions at Cambridgeshire County Council recently and they informed me you had no power to make such a commitment

I am left thinking, the reason the legally quashed Mill Road Bridge TRO was so urgently relaunched and rushed through the County Council H&T committee, was because the bus funding grant money would need to be sent back to central government if the bridge failed to be closed.

I would like to know, why you made such a firm commitment to the Department of Transport? (ahead of any public consultation) Please could you explain?

Question 2 – from Dr Graham Turnbull, local resident

Achieving a balance between economic growth in the CPCA region and protection of the environment, particularly our water resources, is an unresolved challenge.

Alignment of infrastructure development and creation of additional housing and non-household developments to a single unified, coherent and realistic timeline is essential.

In the September the successful Darwin Green appeal (APP/W0530/W/23/3328390) the Secretary of State agreed with the Inspector's judgement that while the weight of evidence before the Inquiry suggests that abstraction pressure is contributing to ecological deterioration, there is insufficient evidence to fully understand the potential impact of the appeal development. She also agreed with the Inspector's judgement that the proposal would add to pressure on existing waterbodies and cumulatively add to any existing pressure on the ecology of Surface Water Bodies.

The Environment Agency Water resources 2023-2024: analysis of the water industry's annual water resources performance published 7 October 2024 listed additional water supplies to our region as 2030-2035 for the Grand Union water, 2035-2040 for Fen Reservoir and 2040-2050 for the Lincolnshire Reservoir. Proposed water saving measures have yet to produced recorded sustained reduction in consumption at domestic water meters.

Currently the region is depleting the aquifer to supply the current population and relief is a decade ahead.

The Mayor is overseeing continued economic growth in the Authority and Government promises increased devolved powers to support that growth, including infrastructure.

Do the Mayor and the Authority have the powers needed to reliably align the annual completion and occupation of new housing and non-housing developments with a water supply that is sufficient to avoid further ecological deterioration and arrest the continuing over-abstraction from the chalk aquifer?

Question 3 – from Councillor Anna Bailey

On 15th April this year Stagecoach cut the number of buses on the Number 9 bus route from Littleport to Ely to Cambridge from three buses to one, citing problems with commercial viability. From the same day Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) commissioned A2B to provide one additional bus to service the route. The effect of these changes is that the route has been operating with only two buses since 15th April on a reduced timetable, with a notable gap in service at peak times. This situation hasn't been helped by the fact that the CPCA, which is the Transport Authority, has declined my request to place bus timetables at the bus stops along the route; I am grateful to Stagecoach for agreeing to my request to do this instead.

The reduced timetable is not operating services at the times people want and need to travel. This is evident in the passenger usage data:

- In the 10 weeks prior to the reduction in service there were 32,249 passenger journeys, equating to 3,225 passenger journeys per week.*
- In the 15 weeks after the reduction in service there were 18,190 passenger journeys, equating to 1,213 passenger journeys per week.*

This represents an approximate 62.5% drop off in the number of passenger journeys on the Number 9 bus service since the cuts, at a time when the people of Littleport, Ely, Little Thetford and Stretham are paying a 200% increase in the Mayoral precept on their Council Tax bills for bus services.

This is a hugely regrettable and predicted loss of passengers on this route which will be hard to win back. This situation could have been avoided with:

- public engagement with users of the Number 9 in the run up to the changes*
- better timetabling of the second A2B bus commissioned by CPCA, based on feedback from residents and users of the service*
- commissioning of the third bus to provide better frequency*

Will the Mayor therefore urgently convene the long requested public meeting for users and potential users of the Number 9 bus service to establish what times people want to travel and will the Mayor commit to commissioning the third bus and tell residents of East Cambridgeshire when they can expect reinstatement of a full timetable on their Number 9 bus service?

Question 4 – from Councillor Anna Bailey

It is incredibly disappointing to hear that the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) has been delayed...again.

CPCA is the responsible body for preparing the LNRS for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough and has been given some £300,000 by the previous Government to deliver this important piece of work. CPCA has commissioned Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC) to oversee its production.

Informally, work commenced at CCC in early 2022 with the appointment of a full time LNRS officer in November 2022, with an expectation that a draft strategy would take around 5 months to produce. This work has been beset by delays as well as management and governance issues.

Two years on and still we have no draft LNRS. At a recent meeting of the Steering Group all parties were agreed that the draft document is of such poor quality that it simply cannot be taken forward.

Two years on we have no draft document and there appears to be no plan to salvage the situation.

The failure to produce the strategy in a timely manner is having detrimental impacts. It is impeding East Cambs District Council's and other constituent Councils' ability to successfully implement biodiversity net gain efficiently, it is harming confidence in the farming community which desperately needs certainty, and simply, it is impeding the work needed to get on with delivering habitat and nature recovery in our county. This is a hugely regrettable and disappointing state of affairs.

Surely it is time, urgently, to find a competent body to carry out the work instead and to provide confidence to this Board and other interested parties that any newly agreed timeframe will actually be adhered to.

Will the Mayor and the CPCA be seeking a refund from Cambridgeshire County Council and, more importantly what is being doing to get this work back on track, when can the constituent councils expect to receive the completed and adopted LNRS and how can we be assured that it will actually happen?