

County Council – 9 February 2021

Written Question under Council Procedure Rule 9.2

1. Question from Councillor Ian Manning

Recently it was reported that complaints made to the arms length management company responsible for Grenfell Tower were ignored as residents were put on a list to not be responded to (see <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/oct/21/grenfell-fire-inquiry-landlord>). Noting the County Council's policy on when and if contact with residents can be restricted here: <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/council/contact-us/council-complaints-procedures/customer-handling-policy#decision-to-restrict-contact-with-cambridgeshire-county-council-0-10> please could the County detail:

The number of such individuals currently on any such lists, the date they were put on the list, last review date and the summary reason for adding them.

Can the Council confirm that it has no residential tenants, either directly, or via This Land Ltd, and currently has no plans to do so?

Response from Councillor Mark Goldsack, Chairman of Commercial and Investment Committee

The County Council holds no residential tenancies for any of the assets within its portfolio and has no plans to do so. This Land Limited also has no residential tenants at this point in time. Given the nature of their business it is possible that This Land might issue a residential tenancy in the future. However, there are no proposals within their business plan, and highly unlikely ever to be, that would involve the development of high rise blocks of flats.

2. Question from Councillor Bill Hunt

1. Please advise me of the planned dates for start and finish of Lancaster Way roundabout scheme on A142 near Witchford.
2. What is the extra cost of the additional crossing safety measures on eastern arm of A142?
3. Who is paying for this extra work?
4. May I have a map and description of these enhanced crossing and safety measures?
5. Would the western arm design proposed by Ely cycling campaign on the A142 have delayed completion of this scheme and what would have been the (estimated) additional cost?
6. Were additional funds available?
7. How many jobs were created on the business park as a result of these improvements?

Response from Councillor Ian Bates, Chairman of Highways and Transport Committee

Thank you Councillor Hunt for these questions in relation to the scheme on the Lancaster Way Roundabout which the County Council is delivering on behalf of the Combined Authority and East Cambridgeshire District Council.

As I am sure you are aware, this was considered at length at the end of last year at the Highways and Transport Committee and has been the subject of much discussion between CCC and CA officers. I have provided individual answers for each of your specific questions below.

1. Please advise me of the planned dates for start and finish of Lancaster Way roundabout scheme on A142 near Witchford?

Construction of the scheme started on the 1st February 2021 and the works are due to complete by 30th April 2021 although the team is working to shorten this programme where possible.

2. What is the extra cost of the additional crossing safety measures on eastern arm of A142?

The crossing on the Eastern arm of the roundabout is included in the current scope of works and was added after the public consultation on the scheme. The actual cost of the crossing works is £218k and the cost of these works are included in the allocated funding from the Combined Authority and East Cambridgeshire District Council.

3. Who is paying for this extra work?

The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) and East Cambridgeshire District Council are paying for the whole of the scheme and there are no financial implications for the County Council.

4. May I have a map and description of these enhanced crossing and safety measures?

I have attached a plan (appendix) of the proposed changes to this written answer. In broad terms, what is being provided is widening to accommodate 2 lane entries on the A142 legs and Lancaster Way leg with additional queuing length on Lancaster way. Improvements for cyclists and pedestrians were reviewed during the design stage through a controlled crossing feasibility report recommending a Toucan crossing to be provided on the A142 to the east side of the roundabout connecting with the existing shared use pedestrian and cycle path infrastructure.

5. Would the western arm design proposed by Ely cycling campaign on the A142 have delayed completion of this scheme and what would have been the (estimated) additional cost?

Officers have looked at this and estimated an indicative extra cost of about £30,000 for construction of new shared use path sections connecting to the crossing, however, there are a number of risks in this such as re-profiling of the existing embankments and statutory undertakers' costs that could make this significantly higher. These works would increase the overall construction delivery programme of the scheme and delay the opening of this much needed scheme although without further work, it is not possible to quantify exactly how long the delay would be.

6. Were additional funds available?

No additional funding is available for this as far as I am aware. Officers have agreed funding for the East side crossing, but I am not aware that any more funding would be available for the western arm crossing.

7. How many jobs were created on the business park as a result of these improvements?

The scheme will benefit Lancaster Way Business Park which already provides employment for about 2,000 staff. This vital scheme is also projected to support economic growth within East Cambridgeshire and is expected assist in the generation of just over 3,000 jobs, 75% of which are expected from the local area.

3. Question from Councillor Graham Wilson

The heavy rain in late December 2020 caused extensive surface water flooding over large parts of Cambridgeshire. Much of the flooding was exacerbated due to the lack of maintenance of “ordinary watercourses” by riparian owners and blocked road gullies and drains. This question concerns the implementation of the County Council’s responsibilities in my division of Godmanchester and Huntingdon South:

1. Maintenance of ordinary watercourses

Cambridgeshire County Council is the Lead Local Flood Authority and has powers under the Land Drainage Act 1991 to regulate ordinary watercourses (outside of internal drainage districts) to maintain a proper flow by enforcing obligations to maintain flow in a watercourse and repair watercourses, bridges, and other structures in a watercourse. In Godmanchester many ditches, streams and connecting culverts were partially or completely blocked with debris and silt before the December 2020 floods.

Please can the Council Leader advise:

- where and when in Godmanchester and Huntingdon South, the council has enforced obligations to require riparian landowners to maintain flow in a watercourse and repair watercourses, bridges and other structures in a watercourse in the last five up years to December 2020 to reduce the risk of flooding
- what resources it has to undertake this work
- whether he will assure the public that CCC will ensure watercourses across the county are regularly inspected by CCC officers and enforcement action taken to keep watercourses and ditches clear of debris and silt in order to maintain flow and reduce flood risk

2. Cleaning of road gullies

The Conservative administration made a decision some years ago to stop the annual cleaning of all gullies within the County, and instead set up a targeted planned maintenance programme. Cambridgeshire County Council also say they will clear blocked gullies and drains where issues are identified through their cyclic inspections regime or following reports from customers through the online reporting tool. Depending on the hierarchy of the location, a cyclic inspection is due to be carried out either monthly, quarterly or annually by Highway Inspectors; reported issues are investigated by the Local Highway Officers and any required works are organised. Officers say “The safety of the public is our priority and we will always endeavour to repair defects that meet with our intervention levels within the specified response times. As you will be aware, our budgets are extremely stretched and they are only sufficient to carry out essential repairs that meet intervention criteria.”

Please can the Council Leader advise:

- what the planned drainage maintenance programme and cyclic inspection programme in Godmanchester and Huntingdon South is
- how many gullies and road drains have been cleared as a result of those programmes in the last five years to December 2020
- how many gullies and road drains have been cleared as a result of members of the public reporting faults in the last five years to December 2020
- what resources it has to undertake this work across the county
- whether he will assure the public that CCC will ensure road gullies and drains are regularly inspected by CCC officers and action taken to keep gullies and drains clear of debris and silt in order to maintain flow and reduce flood risk

Responses from Councillors Josh Schumann, Chairman of Environment and Sustainability Committee & Councillor Ian Bates, Chairman of Highways and Transport Committee

Responses to the questions are set out below:

- where and when in Godmanchester and Huntingdon South, the council has enforced obligations to require riparian landowners to maintain flow in a watercourse and repair watercourses, bridges and other structures in a watercourse in the last five up years to December 2020 to reduce the risk of flooding

No formal enforcement action has been taken, however in numerous locations across Huntingdonshire, including Godmanchester the council has attended site to meet with landowners and highlight areas where maintenance is required (e.g. clearance of vegetation to maintain flow).

- what resources it has to undertake this work

The small team is involved in a wide range of flood risk management activities including planning, consenting, flood investigation, delivery of projects and riparian enforcement. There is no team specifically dedicated to watercourse enforcement, however appropriate action is taken when the team becomes aware of maintenance issues on watercourses

- whether he will assure the public that CCC will ensure watercourses across the county are regularly inspected by CCC officers and enforcement action taken to keep watercourses and ditches clear of debris and silt in order to maintain flow and reduce flood risk.

As identified above, the LLFA has powers rather than duties under the Land Drainage Act 1991 and we are not in a position (nor are any other LLFAs) to regularly inspect watercourses. We do however commit to working with communities more closely to raise awareness of riparian roles and responsibilities and we encourage residents and councillors to report issues of blocked or poorly maintained watercourses to us at floodandwater@cambridgeshire.gov.uk

- what the planned drainage maintenance programme and cyclic inspection programme in Godmanchester and Huntingdon South is –

Cyclic inspections are undertaken across the county network based upon the hierarchy of the road, for example an A road will be inspected monthly where as a cul-de-sac will receive an annual inspection. Godmanchester in its entirety will have the gullies cleaned between the 1st Feb – 31st Mar 2021.

- how many gullies and road drains have been cleared as a result of those programmes in the last five years to December 2020 –

Although we keep records of works undertaken, this is not a figure that can be easily prepared as it would take many hours and may not be complete. It is therefore not possible to answer this directly, but as noted above, gullies are inspected on a cyclic basis and when one is identified as being blocked, it will be cleaned.

- how many gullies and road drains have been cleared as a result of members of the public reporting faults in the last five years to December 2020 -

Similarly, although we keep records of works undertaken, this is not a figure that can be easily prepared as it would take many hours and may not be complete. It is therefore not possible to answer this directly, but all reports will be investigated and if a gulley needs cleaning then it will be.

- what resources it has to undertake this work across the county –

There are two in house gully machines managed by Skanska, that deliver gulley cleaning across the county. In addition to these, throughout the year, we use third party drainage contractors across the county to carry out cleaning, jetting, route cutting and investigations of drainage systems.

- whether he will assure the public that CCC will ensure road gullies and drains are regularly inspected by CCC officers and action taken to keep gullies and drains clear of debris and silt in order to maintain flow and reduce flood risk –

There is already a cyclical programme of inspections as noted above and any identified works required works will be undertaken by officers in accordance with the Highway Operational Standards. That said, we are looking closely at how cleaning of gullies can be improved and we already have some additional resource for February and March to address the worst affected areas.

Additional responses received since the meeting on 9 February 2021

Question:

How many gullies and road drains have been cleared as a result of those programmes in the last five years to December 2020

As per the recent FOI request, asking a similar question, I can confirm that there has been no planned gulley clearance work undertaken in Godmanchester. However there has been gully clearance work carried out on a reactive basis. Unfortunately given the system currently in place for managing highway assets it is not possible to easily provide a figure for the work that has taken place.

Our system records data on a street location basis and when an order is raised by our officers for gully or drainage work, it links to a code for drainage. This code can be used for any repairs to drains or gullies, for example a loose drain, a missing drain cover or a blocked gulley. In addition orders can be raised for numerous streets in the same location or parish. This means that a manual check on every order raised during this period and a manual filter of the description of works would be required to produce the data requested. In addition to this, our system's financial coding was changed in 2019/20, which means it is not a simple task to manually check each order across two sets of financial codes.

What we can confirm is that a gully crew in a day will typically be able to clear 150-200 gullies per machine, depending on the condition of the gully when inspected and the work required to clear the drain. In the past, we have had two in-house crews and just recently we have added two additional crews which allows us to confirm we are currently clearing in excess of 600 gullies per day. Please note however that come the 1st April 2021 this daily figure will reduce, as we revert back to using only our two in-house crews.

To date no gullies have been cleared in Godmanchester, however the current countywide programme will see 949 gullies cleared by the end of March.

Question:

How many gullies and road drains have been cleared as a result of members of the public reporting faults in the last five years to December 2020

When a resident makes a report on our online reporting tool, our system records that as a separate report and therefore, there may be more than one report for the same drain/gully from numerous residents or the resident may, as mentioned above, be reporting for example, loose drain covers and selecting this option as the nearest in relation to their enquiry.

In terms of the Report it Tool, the two relevant main drop-down headings are Flooding or Roads & Pavements Surface. If you select Flooding, there is no sub-group. If you select Roads and Pavements surface, your subsequent options are Road pothole/damage, Footway pothole/trip hazard, Kerb Damage, Manholes and Grating, Mud on Road and Roots Damaging Surface. There is no specific option to allow residents to report a blocked gulley or drain so as you can see, from this data, we would not be able to identify the number of specific gulley reports.

To produce data for this question would therefore involve manually reviewing every report of which there are many thousands. In addition to this, upon inspection by our officers, the drain/gully may or may not require clearing, but the reporting system cannot distinguish between the two so the data held would not give a true reflection of work actually done.

Question:

Where and when in Godmanchester and Huntingdon South, the council has enforced obligations to require riparian landowners to maintain flow in a watercourse and repair watercourses, bridges and other structures in a watercourse in the last five years to December 2020 to reduce the risk of flooding?

No legal enforcement action has been taken over this period in either Godmanchester or Huntingdon South, however, in April 2016 we did write a formal letter to landowners to resolve issues regarding maintenance of a drainage ditch at Silver Street in Godmanchester. As far as we are aware this situation was successfully resolved.

I appreciate that you will be disappointed we are unable to supply more detailed data in relation to your questions, but I trust that the explanation above demonstrates why this is the case and provides all the information that is available.