

COUNTY COUNCIL – 19TH MAY 2020

ITEM 8 – PETITIONS *(this item will be taken just before Agenda Item No.12(a))*

Text of the petition titled ‘Proposed abolition of the Cambridge Joint Area Committee (CJAC)’ containing 1,518 signatures.

We, the undersigned, petition the Council to:

Suspend the proposal to abolish the Cambridge Joint Area Committee, which addresses transport issues in the city, until the coronavirus pandemic is over, and more extensive consultation can be carried out.

Cambridge residents are concerned that:

1. Their interests in local transport matters will not in future be represented by local councillors.
2. They will find it very much more difficult to attend and observe meetings where decisions about their neighbourhoods are made.

Cambridgeshire County Council has published a proposal to abolish the Cambridge Joint Area Committee (CJAC) by July 2020. This committee has a central role in deciding on many local transport matters, such as cycling schemes; pedestrian crossings; parking, waiting and loading restrictions; traffic calming; residents’ parking schemes and charges; vehicle access and weight restrictions; dockless bikes; and electric vehicle charging points. The committee comprises councillors from Cambridge City Council as well as the county. It has existed for over 20 years, and its meetings are well attended.

Under the new proposals, local transport matters will in future be decided by County Council officers or a new Highways and Transport committee which, from next year, will meet in new offices in Alconbury (24 miles from Cambridge). Decisions will be made by a majority of people who do not live in Cambridge, and may have little experience or understanding of the city.

In other parts of the county, town and parish councils provide a forum for detailed consideration of Local Highway Improvement proposals, Traffic Regulation Orders and other local transport schemes. Without CJAC, there will be no equivalent forum in Cambridge.

Statement to Full Council meeting on 19 May 2020

(To be read on behalf of Edward Leigh for Smarter Cambridge Transport)

CJAC provides a public, democratic and accessible forum for Cambridge councillors and residents to inform and challenge decision-making about local transport schemes.

Its relevance is greater today than ever, with the government having recently instructed councils to implement new walking and cycling schemes to facilitate safe travel to work, schools, shops and so on.

Officers and members in this chamber may feel confident they will make good decisions through delegated powers and public deliberation by the new Transport and Highways Committee. However, history tells us that better decisions are made when they are informed and shaped by people with local knowledge and a personal interest in the welfare of their neighbours and neighbourhoods.

The reorganization of the Economy & Environment and Highways & Infrastructure committees makes good sense. It does not follow from this that abolishing CJAC does too.

Our petition asks members to defer a decision on this until more extensive consultation can be carried out. That could suggest a different strategy – one that recognises the importance of getting the details of local transport schemes right, and enables councillors and residents in all parts of Cambridgeshire to inform and shape them.

We are sure all members can agree that a process that allows discussion and debate at a time and place (including potentially online) that is accessible to as wide a range of people as possible is best for democracy and sound decision-making.