

County Council – 15 July 2025

Written Question under Council Procedure Rule 10.4

1. Question from Councillor Elliot Tong

Last year, Cllr Alex Beckett, chair of Highways and Transport, stated that Cambridgeshire County Council was approximately £600 million behind in highways repairs. Following further work, has this figure changed?

Response from Councillor Alex Beckett, Chair of Highways and Transport Committee

In March 2025, the Highways and Transport Committee considered and approved a report regarding the Capital Maintenance and Improvement Programme under Item 2.3. Within this report a revised estimate for the cost to address the condition of roads is included Capital Highways Maintenance and Improvements Programme. This highlights a figure of £410m to address the core condition of all roads and a further £530m to address, long term, the soil affected road issue affecting 40% of our road network. This does not, however, include our other highway assets such as footpaths and structures.

Importantly, the rise in the backlog figure does not mean the network is deteriorating more rapidly, but reflects this administration's continued push for better data and a fuller understanding of the condition and scale of the challenge. Improved surveying, data integration, and modelling have allowed us to take a more accurate and comprehensive view than ever before.

A new whole network road condition survey is currently underway; this is due to conclude by the end of August. This will enable officers to prepare detailed lifecycle planning costs linked to the total investment required to repair our road network, and a recommended minimum investment threshold. This will cover all our assets and give members a clearer picture of the level of investment required in our highway network which will inform a report that will be presented to the Highways and Transport Committee in October 2025.

2. Question from Councillor Elliot Tong

In Cambridgeshire County Council's Draft Statement of Accounts for 2024-2025, it is noted that '[i]n 2024-25 the company [This Land] entered a challenging financial period linked to national economic stresses on the house-building sector as well as a local site specific issue, that meant the company struggled to meet interest payments to the council as they fell due, and was not able to present a future business plan to the council that realistically showed loan repayments being made in full. Consequently, in March 2025, the council exercised strong and sound judgement by agreeing a restructuring of the loan portfolio to convert around half to capital contributions which are non-interest bearing and will be repaid contingent on performance.' As the nature of these arrangements was confidential, as set out in the meeting's minutes, a £60 million loan has been effectively written off in secret from the general public.

Residents' trust in Cambridgeshire County Council is being lowered by the covertness surrounding its relationship with This Land. It is essential that more is done to improve transparency and accountability.

Section 26 of the Local Audit & Accountability Act 2014 (1) notes:

At each audit of accounts under this Act, other than an audit of accounts of a health service body, any persons interested [\[F1\]](#) or any journalist may—

(a) inspect the accounting records for the financial year to which the audit relates and all books, deeds, contracts, bills, vouchers, receipts and other documents relating to those records, and

(b) make copies of all or any part of those records or documents.

The external auditor (KPMG) audits Cambridgeshire County Council's single entity accounts AND the consolidated group accounts, which together form the annual statement of accounts. On p.137 of this year's draft accounts, Cambridgeshire County Council explicitly states that these include This Land ('[a]s the council has control of the entity and there are material transactions with the company, the This Land Group is consolidated in the Group Accounts').

As such, will Cambridgeshire County Council now provide me, as a member of the public, with an unredacted copy of This Land's draft accounts for 2024/25 with immediate effect, something that a member of the general public should not be denied as they form part of the consolidated accounts and therefore come within scope of (S26A)?

Response from Councillor Karen Young, Chair of Shareholder Sub-Committee

Can I start by clarifying that the loans were restructured and not written off, in fact the £59.85m converted is contingent on performance and as such an element may be repaid. This Land themselves will continue accounting for the full repayment of the amounts lent by the Council. It is also worth noting that when this Company and the loans were set up rather unusually the transactions and obligations between the Council and This Land not only did not provide an economic advantage to the company but put it in a disadvantaged commercial position: with full interest payments across an early stage and wide portfolio and extensive overage arrangements to capture future profits. Aside from the pandemic and global and national economic crises it is the interest payments back to the Council that has largely driven the reporting losses of the Company. Since 2021 the Council has enabled the company to remain operating, unlike so many other similar businesses locally and nationally, and that has protected and retained jobs in the Company and many local sub-contractors, as well as creating nearly 1000 homes, a third of which are affordable for first time buyers.

Whilst we appreciate the need to discuss this and I understand that the entirely necessary confidential sessions may have frustrated some, we have a responsibility to protect the commercial interests of the Company. However, next week I will chair the Council's Shareholder Sub-Committee to assess the Company's Business Plan and that will be in the public domain. That will contain some commercially sensitive and confidential appendices and as you will see from our accounts and other reports dating back to the Avison Young report in January 2022, we are being transparent and we are holding the Company to account.

On the matter of the accounts, the Council needs to produce Group Accounts relating to This Land as a wholly owned company: these are now available on the Council's website and are on the agenda for this month's Audit and Accounts Committee. To consolidate in accordance with the accounting code certain items are extracted to present a clear and accurate picture of the group's overall financial position. This includes stripping out intra-group transactions and balances. The company is subject to a completely separate accounting and audit regime, and This Land's detailed balances (other than intra-group balances) do not form part of the council's accounting records. Together with the timing requirements for the Council's production of the draft accounts, this means the group accounts are produced using abbreviated and unaudited financial accounts from This Land. The Council complies fully with the public inspection requirements and has given statutory notice earlier this month about how any interested person can request documents under this procedure. As with previous years, the Council would expect to make available the This Land accounts and transactions that it has relied on in producing group accounts, in the event these are requested through the inspection process.

In addition to the requirements referenced in the question, the This Land Company Accounts are subject to a separate audit in accordance with the Companies Act and will be filed with Companies House no later than 31 December 2025 and will (as with previous years) be publicly available.

3. Question from Councillor Dr Peter Rees

"Why is Cambridgeshire County Council keeping Temporary Traffic Regulation Orders secret? A spurious GDPR argument is being used to prevent residents knowing what is being planned for their area. Councillors are being blocked from sharing notices with residents on the basis that TTRO notices are GDPR-sensitive, but in my experience I could not find anything substantially sensitive and when I requested redacted versions, none were provided. It's not good enough that decisions are made in secret and then residents only find out what is going on in their road *after* it has been approved, this is against the Gunning principles of meaningful consultation. The Essex Highways text on TTROs stipulates that 'Before an application, consultation must take place', but in Cambridgeshire, the three words 'Before an application' are omitted. Other authorities are committed to transparency and meaningful consultation, why not Cambridgeshire? Will the Council now commit to consulting stakeholders before an application is made instead of only informing them afterwards?"

Response from Councillor Alex Beckett, Chair of Highways and Transport Committee

Cambridgeshire County Council is committed to transparency and early engagement in the delivery of Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) and Temporary Traffic Regulation Orders (TTROs) and continues to make improvements to the way these are communicated and managed. Examples of recent improvements include the introduction of a bus route impact question on TTRO applications, following a member request, to better assess public transport disruption.

All confirmed TTROs are published publicly via the One.Network platform, where they are accessible to residents and stakeholders. In addition, statutory consultees (including emergency services and bus operators) are notified in accordance with the legal process.

Elected Members are also consulted on TTRO applications during a standard 10-working-day window.

A new process is being introduced in July 2025 to improve transparency and address GDPR-related concerns. Instead of circulating the original application form (which may include contact details or other sensitive information), a new Intends notice will be issued to local members and parish councils. This will include a clear summary of the proposed works and a diversion route plan, and can be freely shared and displayed publicly, including on parish notice boards.

It is to be noted that There is no statutory requirement to consult before a TTRO application is submitted. The Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 and associated 1992 regulations do not mandate pre-application consultation. However, the Council's current approach, where elected members are invited to comment before an order is confirmed, meets both legal requirements and best-practice expectations.

The reference to Essex County Council's process reflects local interpretation and policy rather than national legal obligation. Cambridgeshire's process remains aligned with statutory requirements and is designed to balance operational delivery with democratic input. While pre-application consultation is not a legal requirement and cannot be enforced, the Council encourages promoters of significant works to engage early with local members and communities. This helps improve scheme design and supports greater transparency without introducing legal risk – based on the concerns raised we will see if this can be strengthened further.

Emergency TTROs, made by notice under section 14(2) of the Act, are used where urgent action is needed to protect public safety, prevent damage to the highway, or restore essential services. These are issued immediately and are exempt from consultation due to the urgent nature of the works.