

The Riverporter

ISOLATION DAY 82 - READ AND FORWARD ON!

On-line Issue 6: I2 June 2020

A TOTALLY INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER • UNCONNECTED WITH ANY GROUP OR ORGANISATION

In this issue ...

After twelve weeks of hibernation life is re-awakening. For readers of the other Hunts newspaper, local news has been largely usurped by Covid related information. However *The Riverporter* seems to find plenty of news to report.

In this issue we cover the latest Town Council Zoom meeting, which continues to be quite surprising and entertaining, plus an article on the amazing Flora around our river and meadow. We also report on the Masterplan for St Ives which could have major implications for the future of our town and as if to highlight the re-opening of businesses we report on an exciting new venture.

ST IVES MASTERPLAN SLAMMED

Recently the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) and its Mayor James Palmer issued the good news that Cambridgeshire's market towns could receive up to £1 million each, as a share of the CPCA's investment strategy.

The authority said that ten market towns can now bid for a share of £10 million with up to £1 million available for each. Mr Palmer said it was an 'unprecedented investment in the market towns, at exactly the right time'.

The CPCA's strategy saw each town given £50,000 to develop a 'masterplan'. They also said that masterplans for March, Wisbech, Chatteris, Whittlesey, St Neots, St Ives, Huntingdon and Ramsey had been completed and approved with the first funding applications likely to go to its board for approval from July 2020 onwards, and that funds must be spent by March 2022.

This must be good news?

On the face of it this is good news, as St Ives may have £1 million spent on it in the next two years. But, as is often the case, that may not be the whole story. *The Riverporter* has found that there are big concerns about the 'Masterplan' and in particular about how this plan for the future of our town has come about.

A year of planning

In early May last year Huntingdonshire District Council (HDC) invited 'Stakeholders', mostly representatives from the local authorities, with two or three representatives from local businesses, to discuss a masterplan for the town. 'Stakeholders' were asked to give their views on the town's development, prosperity and productivity.

Two or three meetings followed, run by Metro-Dynamics, a company employed by HDC to compile the plans for St Ives, Huntingdon and Ramsey. It had been stated that any proposals would go out for consultation to the wider public, however the draft plan, initially deemed a work in progress and not for public issue, suddenly came before HDC and CPCA Cabinets and received approval without further scrutiny.

Plan not fit for purpose

Speaking with several important groups, including St Ives Civic Society and a number of prominent people, concern was voiced that the 'Prospectus For Growth' plan is very poor (the words used by one person were somewhat more direct than that) and that there had been no meaningful public consultation.

Graham Campbell, Chairman of the Great Ouse Valley Trust commented '*The Prospectus for Growth states that a new elevated highway in the area between St Ives and Huntingdon (the third river crossing) should be built in the next 5 to 10 years. No data is produced to justify this assumption.*

There is no mention of the unique, nationally important landscape, that would be sacrificed as a result. The river valley brings in the tourists and attracts the brightest and best to come and live and work in our wonderful, unique area. Its protection is vital to our economy and to the physical and mental health of future generations. Amazingly it seems this report has been published and approved without any consultation with the wider public.'

An early report of the process by Metro-Dynamics stated that there would be 'stakeholder consultation with residents' and that they would publish an interim report. It went on to say that the final report would include business cases for investment. It seems this did not happen and that the first time St Ives residents could see the report was after it had been approved by HDC's Cabinet.

Where has all the money gone?

HDC received £50,000 to produce the masterplans for each town, which we, at *The Riverporter*, thought was quite a lot of money to spend on such a poor document.

We asked HDC to detail how that money had been spent, but were told we would have to make a Freedom of Information request to know that, which we have done although it is likely to delay getting the information for several weeks, especially with the effects of the Covid crisis still ongoing.

One eminent resident, who understands the processes involved in creating plans for taxpayer funded projects summarised the Prospectus For Growth as follows:

'There is no fiscal evidence, at any stage, that these 'ideas' have merit. There are many leaps of faith with no-supported assertions and basic geography and facts seem to be ignored. If this report is the answer - than what was the question?'



Flowering Rush at the river's edge

Great Meadow beside the Great Ouse

Of flowers wild on Lammas meadow long and wide and St Ives' fabulous riverside many of us we surely owe much of what we know to dear Bridget Smith.

Whose memory we hold dear at this time of year.

Hemingford Great Meadow and its meadow's edge walks are a delight at all times of the year. But delight gives way to excitement when in May a carpet of buttercups appears that overlays the meadow, as far as eyes can see. Now in June this bright yellow abundance makes way for subtler hues and a profusion of water-meadow plants, grasses and flowers.

We can count among them yellow hayrattle and lady's bedstraw, yellow-orange birds-foot trefoil, lilac cuckoo flower aka lady's smock, reddish-purple knapweed and red clover. These are typical of flood meadows managed for hay. Look close and you will also spy deep-red great burnet and creamy white meadowsweet.

Look closer still and you may even glimpse bright-blue skullcap.

In July this Lammas meadow will give up its hay. But not before fading plants drop their seed, so next year's spectacular display is guaranteed.

The timing is good, because now the focus can move from Great Meadow to Great Ouse. The joy in July and August of the meadow's river-bank and water's-edge riot of colour is there for all to share. Whether walking on the bank or by Electric Boat trip from St Ives Quay.

In May and June yellow flag had already delighted the eye. But now it's the patches of purple-loosestrife and pinkish-purple willowherb and the flotillas of yellow water lily that will capture our attention. And there are other striking flowers like marsh woundwort, woody nightshade aka bittersweet and hemp agrimony. My favourites at the water's edge are branched bur-reed and flowering rush.

Like others I would not have got to appreciate these but for Bridget Smith's expert and ever friendly guidance. **Ian Dobson**

Editor's note. Bridget Smith was an accomplished botanist, a Reeve of Hemingford Great Meadow and distinguished past Chairman of St Ives Civic Society.



Above: An example of one of the many errors in the report. This map outlines land under the control of HDC suggested for use as an Innovation Hub. Sadly this is incorrect as the areas we have marked yellow are privately owned, including a garden.



Welcome to The Courtyard

Pictured the new pods, which currently include Up-cycled and Retro Furniture, Shabby Chic, T-shirt Printing, Bali Wooden Sculptures, Gifts, Cards, Paints, Boutique and The Book Barn. The opening hours are 9am-5pm Monday to Saturday and 10am-4pm Sundays.

Why not pop in and have a look?

A very new and exciting venture in St Ives will open next Monday 15th June and will include up to 20 individual businesses.

'The Courtyard' will sell everything from crafts, homewares, furniture, trinkets, gifts, antiques, refurbished items, retro chic and baby clothes.

It will be open 7 days a week and is situated on the cobbles in the Hyperion Yard.

Like the Antique Centre, each business, which will operate from a box or pod, will be managed by individual dealers.

Complete makeover during lockdown

Hyperion Auctions has also had a complete makeover and will re-open for business from 15th June. The showrooms have been painted and decorated and upgraded with a new auction system and new security.

The break has allowed the company to re-brand with new signage and can now accept entries for their next FINE ART sale which is on 20th June.

Of course social distancing guidelines are being adhered to and viewing will be appointment only.

Owner Rod Best said *'Running alongside our house clearance and auction business we are very excited to announce that we will now be offering 'Estate Services' - but more on this later.'*

To complete the makeover Hyperion have also upgraded their 25 dealer area in the Antique Shop with social distancing measures in place.

The shop now has a large collection of very high quality Silver and will also open for business on Monday 15 June at 9am.





having your say ...

Get it off your chest, email Erik at: editor@theriverporter.uk

Erik's assistant Milly is too tired to do the filing!



The Riverporter

NEWS UPDATE

Council meetings - such fun on-line

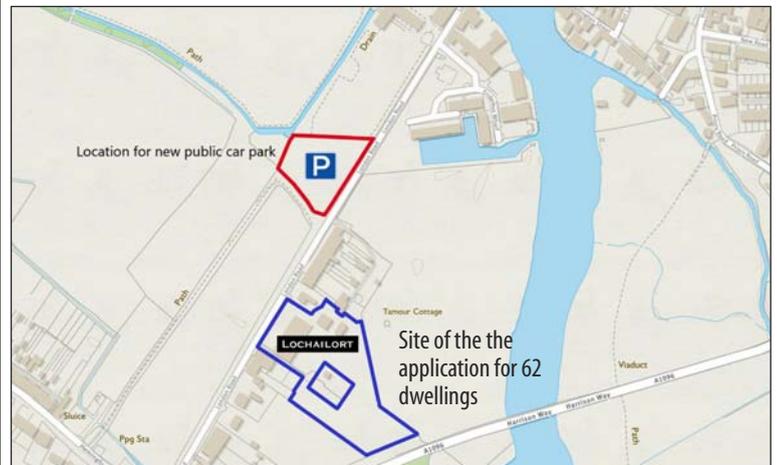
In our on-line edition No.4 (15 May) we said that the new 'Zoom' Town Council meeting was more entertaining than TV. Of course it was a special meeting, the 'Mayor Making' meeting, at which a band of six councillors tried to upset the normal flow of things by not electing the Mayor elect. We assumed that the shock of these proposals was the reason that the meeting became engaging, but that may not be the case ...

Now readers of *The Riverporter* may assume that we might be critical of the council during these difficult times, but we are happy to say that we wish to praise the council for how it has got to grips with Zoom and say that Wednesday's meeting was extremely well handled. Much of this praise must go to the new Mayor Jonathan Pallant who chaired the meeting very well and is obviously well versed in Zoom technology.

Town Council offered Car Park

Of course any meeting is only as interesting as its agenda and, although it was a limited one, on Wednesday there was one item which aroused the passions of locals who responded quickly and efficiently to the threat to lose an important area of green space. The item was an offer by Lochalort St Ives Ltd to give the Town Council a field off London Road as a car park.

Lochalort, the developers of the old Murkets garage are seeking to build 62 dwellings on the land and they said that they had identified parking on London Road as one of the issues during consultation. With that in mind they had arranged to purchase the land (see map below) from Mr Radford, the owner, in order to give it to the Town Council to use as a free car park.



David Stewart of the Civic Society and Helen Dye and of St Ives Eco Action Group and Roger Mitchell presented reasons why the land should be retained as green space, which included the fact that DEFRA has designated it a habitat of principle importance, that it is in a conservation area and next to the very important Hemingford Meadow. Other issues raised were the advise from the Head of the Environment Agency to avoid building in flood areas and of course the fact that it does flood. Ms Dye pointed out that the Local Nature Partnership, 'Natural Cambridgeshire' was committed to 'doubling nature' across the county and that following the Covid crisis here was an opportunity to put nature conservation at the centre of economic recovery. The need for more parking spaces was also questioned.

At this point councillors had their chance to give their thoughts and the first five councillors who spoke were neither for or against the proposal and it appeared that further discussion on the proposals may be agreed. That was until Councillor Fuller spoke.

He pointed out that car parks are not cheap to run. He said that, as it would be a council facility there would be business rates and other costs including CCTV, lighting and security. Cllr Fuller reported that two years ago HDC's survey showed that St Ives has sufficient car parking to 2027 and that whilst it is a generous offer, the land is not in the local plan, the area is not convenient and there are revenue and capital funding issues. He said this was an attempt at mitigation by the applicants to add more weight to their planning application and not pure altruism. He ended by saying that he supported the green issues raised by the speakers and written submissions by Mr Jackson and Mr Dobson and that it would not stop people parking on London Road, so he could not support the proposal.

Following this decisive intervention, two councillors decided not to support the proposal and, although no vote was taken, councillors agreed not to continue discussions with Lochalort.

Burleigh Hill Centre comes in for more criticism

Colin Sanderson used the public participation section of the Town Council meeting to remind councillors that he had already complained about several issues at the centre and added to those with a complaint about the lack of first aid items and more importantly that there had been no AGM and no accounts published. Councillor Dry, Chairman of the centre committee, said that the lack of these was due to the manager being furloughed.

Mayor questioned

The meeting continued with the Mayor's announcements, which is currently limited to helping with the Covid Hub rather than face to face engagements. In an unusual move Cllrs Drye and D'Souza asked several questions about the Mayor's activities, which Cllr Pallant answered fully. The Town Clerk confirmed that Cllr Pallant had been very active on the Hub and Cllr Fuller praised the Mayor for being the only Mayor in the District that took part in District wide discussions to reopen the town centres.

Dear Erik, St Ives Town Council Weeding Terrorists at it again in Warners Park.

Several years ago the SITC ground team sprayed the edge of the grass with weedkiller and now they are at it again ...



Make up your own mind from the pictures of the professional job they do! NOT!!!

Gordon Walker

Dear Erik and Heidi, The Cares and Worries of our Feathered Friends

I was out for a walk with my master this morning. I saw our feathered friends in dynamic action, protecting their young, shouting out loud their harsh kaarr-kaarr cries. First I saw a jackdaw couple up high - protecting their nest and seeing off a predatory red kite. Then I saw a pair of carrion crow hopping from roof to roof - looking out for their young fledging on the ground beneath them, learning to fly.

All of this within a stone's throw of St Audrey Lane. **Doberman**

HCRFM gets in a pickle

Eleven volunteer presenters on Huntingdon's Community Radio station say they stood down or were sacked after managers banned any discussion on air of Black Lives Matter.

One of the eleven, Alex Parnell, took to Twitter to protest that he had been sacked after four years as a voluntary presenter .

'A handful of presenters (including myself) spoke up against the censorship and expressed that we should be actively opposing racism,' he tweeted.

HCR104 said on Tuesday that they feared discussing the topic could put them in breach of the broadcasting regulator Ofcom, but 24 hours later the station backed down and provided a platform for Black Lives Matter issues, and offered a welcome return for the volunteers.

HCR104 also promised to set aside airtime for a BAME committee member to air their views on their flagship Sunday.

COPE FORUM

There are still places available on COPE's exciting new initiative that brings older adults together for stimulating, telephone-based conversations about subjects of shared interest. They have an engaging range of topics and some excellent facilitators, so you can join in from the comfort of your own home!

If so, please use the attached form (see links below) and email it to COPE at: cambridgecope@hotmail.co.uk.

The deadline is Monday 22 June.

Talking Together leaflet:

https://mcusercontent.com/629680d2b7f684c4566192c83/files/de662bb9-d80d-4e35-a6ac-2dccff7f0c14/Cope_Talking_Together_leaflet_A5.pdf

Registration form:

https://mcusercontent.com/629680d2b7f684c4566192c83/files/f8419377-1d8f-40b6-982e-9b071f0badeb/Registration_form_TT_June_2020_editable_3_1_01.pdf



There has been some on-line comments about removing the Oliver Cromwell statue.