

The Riverporter

COVERING THE NEWS FOR ST IVES AND AROUND

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Issue I99: 19 December 2025

A TOTALLY INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER • UNCONNECTED WITH ANY GROUP OR ORGANISATION

Ho Ho Ho it's Christmas . . .

This is the eighth Riverporter Christmas for St Ives and each year there has been much to report.

2025 has been no exception with lots happening in our area and we end the year printing more copies than ever, so more of you can read our local news. Every single issue is also available online at www.theriverporter.uk.

2025 has been interesting to say the least. It began with ex-Ivo teacher, David Chambers and 2nd World War veteran, Ed Kelly, being mentioned in the King's New Years Honours list. Ed was also awarded the Freedom of St Ives in August, but sadly died, aged 101, in September.

We also lost The Riverporter's best news hound Erik, ex-Mayor Martin Collier, Free Church stalwart Stuart Denham, popular landlord Jerry Schonfeldt and boxer Joe Bugner, once of St Ives who died in Australia.

The 600th Anniversary of our Mediaeval Bridge saw huge crowds watch troops from the English Civil War Society blow it up on Saturday 26th July and wage battle at Hill Rise Park over the weekend, where there was a fabulous living history display.

Other events included WOW Day, where hundreds walked the Ouse Valley Way; Toll Bridge day, when people crossing the bridge had to play a game to cross. Picnic in the Park, the Carnival & Music Festival and The Old Riverport Jazz & Blues Festival which was bigger and better than ever and an added bonus was the Freedom of The Town Parade which was led by the Band of the Welsh Guards and drew thousands to watch.

It was also a political year that saw two new County Councillors elected. Julie Kerr, who was also made Town Mayor, won the St Ives North & Wyton seat and Labour's Alex Bulat won the St Ives

South & Needingworth seat. The first time the Conservatives had failed to be elected. After years of waiting, Parking Enforcement was at last taken over by HDC to the shock of many who received tickets. The year ended in more controversy as the A141 improvement plans were deemed totally unworkable and the Draft Local Plan totally unreasonable without massive improvements in infrastructure and a better A141 plan.

On top of these concerns, UK Government plans to reorganise local government created divisions among Cambridgeshire's councils. It resulted in Huntingdon MP Ben Obese-Jecty calling some councillors traitors and a severe rebuke from St Ives Mayor, Julie Kerr and Buckden District Councillor Martin Hassall (RP 198).

Riverport Radio enjoyed a summer day trip to Hunstanton on a new route from St Ives by Whippet Coaches. Ron, John and Milly (seen above with Santa) had a lovely day out at the seaside for just £12 return (with a bus pass). You can hear all about it at Riverport Radio Podcast go to <https://riverportradiopodcast.buzzsprout.com>

A Happy New Year to all our readers from Ron, John, Milly and Tilly of course.

SNOWMAN TRAIL & TOWNROW PRIZE WINNERS



DIARY OF EVENTS

Please email: editor@theriverporter.uk

DECEMBER

Sunday 21st - Santa Arrives by Boat 11.30am The Quay followed by SnowFEST in the Corn Exchange with Grotto and Giant Snowdome.

Sunday 21st - Candlelit Carols at the Free Church with music provided by musicians from COSI at 5pm.

Monday 22nd - SnowFEST continues in Corn Exchange 10am to 4pm.

Wednesday 24th - Christmas Eve Service - mainly singing well-known Christmas Carols (around 30 minutes) 5pm at the Free Church.

Wednesday 31st - A New Year to Remember St Ives Corn Exchange. Doors Open 7pm. Tickets are £65 and include a welcome drink, 3 course meal, DJ and London's Fireworks on screen at midnight.

JANUARY 2026

Wednesday 14th - Langley Bread Distribution at St Ives Corn Exchange 10am for widows and widowers from St Ives.

Friday 16th - Civic Society - Policing & Financial Crime in Regency London and Cambridge. A presentation by Susan Grossey 7.30pm at the Free Church. Members free, visitors £3.

Saturday 17th - COSI Northern Lights Concert 7pm at the Free Church. Under 16s free, Tickets £10 on the door or online.

Friday 30th - Chapel Arts Concert - GET NOT GOT. Funky blues at St Ives Corn Exchange 7.30pm. Tickets £10 online or on the door. www.ticketsource.co.uk/cexevents.

FEBRUARY

Friday 20th - COSI lunchtime concert - featuring a wind quintet. A free concert, 1pm St Ives Free Church.

Friday 20th - Civic Society - St Ives Historic Houses through time. With local historians, Keith Grimwade and John McKinnie. 7.30pm at the Free Church. Members free, visitors £3.

Friday 27th - Chapel Arts Concert - Kim & Lee. Eurovision winning musician and songwriter. St Ives Corn Exchange 7.30pm. Tickets £10 from the venue or www.ticketsource.co.uk/cexevents.

MARCH

Friday 20 March - Civic Society - The Enduring Art of Stained Glass in Huntingdonshire. A presentation by local author Reverend Stephen Day. 7.30pm at the Free Church. Members free, visitors £3.

Friday 27th - Chapel Arts Concert - Marina & Johnny. An evening of Country music. St Ives Corn Exchange 7.30pm. Tickets £10 from the venue or www.ticketsource.co.uk/cexevents.

APRIL

Friday 17 April - Civic Society - Mayflower Pilgrims & Links with Fenstanton. A presentation by Adrian Moss about Fenstanton's links with the Mayflower. 7.30pm, Free Church. Members free, visitors £3.

Friday 24th - Chapel Arts Concert - Lift Music Collective. St Ives Corn Exchange 7.30pm. Tickets www.ticketsource.co.uk/cexevents.

Four lucky winners of the Snowman Trail received a £50 Townrow Voucher from Store Manager, Vanda Coulson on Wednesday.

The competition, which is for children under the age of 12 years and sees them visiting at least 20 of the 28 stores that take part to collect a sticker, which is placed on the Trail Map. The winners are then picked at random from the completed entries. The Snowman Festival has been going for at least 10 years and brightens up Christmas in St Ives with snowmen decorating the shops. A prize is also given for the best shop display.

Pictured left to right are the winners: Maya and Leah Griffey who shared the prize, Audrey Pettitt, Harrison and Arthur Russell with mum Julia, who also shared the prize and Reggie Doe. Also pictured are Townrow's Manager Vanda and Assistant Store Manager Andrea and four snowmen!

A Christmas Message from the Mayor of St Ives

As I think about this most joyful season, I would like to offer my heartfelt Christmas greetings to everyone in our wonderful community of St Ives. I hope that you, your families, and friends enjoy a blessed, happy, and peaceful time together. I also hope that all our local businesses experience these blessings and prosper.

Christmas invites us to pause, to breathe, and to appreciate the people we hold dear. When we reflect, it is the laughter around the table, the small acts of kindness, and the simple moments of togetherness that stay with us.

Yet we know that this time of year is not easy for everyone. For those who may be feeling isolated, lonely, or missing loved ones, Christmas can make those feelings feel heavier. Please know that you are held warmly in the thoughts and prayers of our community, and that you are not forgotten. On Christmas Day, I will have the privilege of helping at the Free Church here in St Ives, sharing lunch with all who join us. I am very much looking forward to spending the day in companionship, conversation, and community spirit, exactly what Christmas is all about.

May this season bring you comfort, joy, and hope. On behalf of St Ives Town Council, I wish you all a truly wonderful Christmas and a bright and peaceful New Year.



Rotary's busiest month of the year

Rotarians, their family and friends have been working hard this month. Santa and his elves have been out and about in St Ives and the surrounding villages, along with three static visits to the town centre and larger supermarkets. This is one of the biggest fund-raisers of Rotary's year, and ensures that they can continue to provide financial and practical support across our community.

The Musical Christmas Cracker took place in the Free Church on Sunday 14th, with music provided by the Huntingdonshire Concert Band to support the Acorn Cancer Support Group, who work to alleviate the physical and emotional distress of cancer patients and carers.



Rotary also donate to four different groups who provide Christmas lunches, St Helens' Lunch Club in Colne (above), St Ives Day Care Centre (where Rotarians also volunteer to serve the meals), Over Day Centre and Hunts Blind. Rotary have also recently given money to the St Ives Foodbank and St Ives Dementia Friendly Community Group, as well as providing winter coats for 40 children in need.

The Rotary Club of St Ives would like to thank all of the 'Rotary friends' who have helped us during this busy time. We have a saying - *'The more people we have, the more people we can help'*, so we are always looking for new members and event volunteers. It's not all work and no play though - we're all getting together for a fun Christmas party, and looking forward to a full programme of speakers at our meetings in the New Year.

If you'd like to know more, please scan the QR code (right) to visit our club website, or email membership@stivesrotarycambs.org.uk



Pictured L to R are TT members: Sandra Souter (Secretary), Sarah Pendleton, Gilly Jackson, Nigel Wheatley, Gordon Walker (Treasurer), Sheila Stones (Chair), John Souter and Margaret King plus Civic Society Members: Simon Ward, Christine Phillipotts (Chair), Celia Briggs, Peter Theakston, Anne Theakston and Richard Bielby.

Not a reference to the Charge of the Light Brigade but a fitting tribute to the Town Team to mark their re-enactment production in July which commemorated the 600th anniversary of our town's bridge, attracting 5,000 visitors.

On Friday 5th December the Civic Society acknowledged the exceptional work of the Town Team in promoting the town's heritage with a presentation held at the Golden Lion. Civic Society Chair, Christine

Phillpotts, presented the Town Team's Chair, Sheila Stones with a Certificate of Appreciation and, to mark their appreciation, gave honorary memberships of the Civic Society for the year ahead to each member of the Team.

Public frustrated at Local Plan meeting

A packed Civic Society's meeting (below), held last week to examine the implications of the proposed developments outlined in HDC's Local Plan, caused great concern among attendees. It began with Simon Ward, a local resident giving his view of the Plan, which essentially outlined that without serious improvement in the road network, the housing being proposed should not be accommodated. It became clear that there was concern on many fronts from those attending. Issues such as the environment, school places, water supply and indeed flooding were mentioned.

Paul Boothman, of H&W PC, urged those present to demand HDC pauses the plan until Local Government Reorganisation is complete, which might enable us re-evaluate the appropriate level of development we can absorb with the proper infrastructure.

The obvious frustration with the process was evident from all quarters - the short consultation time of 6 weeks on a 476 page document - the fact that this might be the last chance for the public to comment - the seeming lack of previous consultation - concern over damage to the environment and that the proposed A141 improvements are unworkable, all weighed heavily on the meeting.

Although some people felt that

the public's views might be ignored it was pointed out that public pressure was likely to be the only way that the Council will take notice. (After all it was public pressure that resulted in the formation of the Civic Society and the opening of Harrison Way in 1980 to prevent Hemingford Meadow being destroyed).

The meeting ended with those present being urged to respond to HDC's consultation by Wednesday 17th December, the closing date.





Milly and Tilly love your letters.



having your say . . .

Get it off your chest
email **Milly at:**
editor@theriverporter.uk

PLEASE NOTE: Letters are reproduced as presented by the writer. Editing is confined to grammatical corrections or minor trimming to fit the space. *The Riverporter* neither condones or condemns the opinions expressed.

Dear Milly & Tilly,

Having spent the last four hours doing my best to respond to HDC's 'Preferred Options Draft Local Plan 2046', here are two reflections in addition to the many other comments people have made:

- The consultation process is de facto undemocratic. It is unrealistic to expect people to engage with a 476 page document and online form with over 100 comment boxes (I stopped counting).
- The plan fails to recognise that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. For example, you can comment on the individual developments between Huntingdon and Needingworth, north and south of the river, but the cumulative impact of these is not evaluated.

It is disappointing that this is where we have ended up after so much previous work.

Keith Grimwade

Dear Milly & Tilly,

Do the Royal Mail know it is Christmas?

They have decommissioned the post boxes on Ramsey Road & Needingworth Road, with a notice saying they will be shortly replaced with an automated box. Where do local residents post items in the meantime?

More proof that the Royal Mail are not fit for purpose.

Anthony

STAR CRAFTERS THANK YOU!

Star Crafters would like to thank everyone who has supported us this year, by donating yarn for our projects, buying a Pumpkin or a Christmas Decoration, or donating to our Justgiving page. Your support has enabled us to donate £250 each to four good causes. The money has gone to the St Ives Dementia Friendly Community, Holt Island, St Ives Day Centre, and The St Ives Acorn Cancer Support Group.

Thanks **Elaine**

BHF Candle Lighting in the Bridge Chapel raises £1,545

Prolific fundraisers for the British Heart Foundation, Jean Chandler, Helen Hunter and Anne Strong have announced that they raised the incredible sum over the past four weekends in the Chapel.

They would like to thank everyone who donated and all the people who support their other fundraising throughout the year. However they would also like to make a plea for some younger people to join them over the next year, as they are no longer spring chickens and need help especially moving tables and chairs etc.

If you would like to help please call Jean on 01480 469557

All I want for Christmas is... Option E!

A message from Alex Bulat, County Councillor, St Ives South and Needingworth

As the new year approaches, it is a good moment to look back on the main events of 2025 and to consider the priorities for our community in 2026.

Over the past eight months representing St Ives South and Needingworth on the County Council, I have learned a great deal from local residents. Whether through conversations on the doorstep, my monthly surgeries at the Library or at the many community events held in the town, I have valued the opportunity to listen and learn. I would like to thank everyone who has taken the time to write to me or speak with me in person over recent months. Local councillors are elected to raise and address the concerns of residents, and the more people are willing to engage, the stronger and more representative local decision-making becomes.

It has been a busy period at the council, with debates on Local Government Reorganisation, where I made the case against St Ives being merged with Peterborough, and various committees where I raised local issues, from the busway

to the St Ives sluices. I have also worked constructively with councillors from across the political spectrum to ensure residents' views were properly represented during the A141 consultation and other local matters. That said, much of a councillor's work takes place away from the headlines. It involves reporting issues to council officers, suggesting local highways improvements, helping people find the services they need and signposting them if necessary, and supporting the many organisations and voluntary groups that contribute so much to life in our town.

As Christmas approaches, many people will be looking forward to spending time with family and friends, whether at home, attending some of the wonderful events in town, or further afield in the UK or abroad. At the same time, it is important to remember those who may find this time of year difficult. A kind word, a warm space, or support for a local charity can make a real difference for many over this period.

I would like to wish all residents a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

To listen to the latest Riverport Radio Podcast go to
<https://riverportradiopodcast.buzzsprout.com>

OTHER NEWS

The Langley Bread

The annual St Ives tradition of the Langley Bread distribution will be upheld at 10am on Wednesday 14th January 2026, at St Ives Corn Exchange. 100 grocery bags comprising bread, jam, teabags, sugar and biscuits will be distributed. Eligible recipients are widows and widowers who are on the electoral register for St Ives.

Sewage discharge sparks concern

A dramatic increase in sewage discharges has raised alarm bells in Huntingdonshire, prompting urgent calls to address the growing environmental crisis.

Councillor Martin Hassall, spearheading efforts to tackle the issue said '*Trend data is only produced annually in arrears, making the whole process opaque. This significantly hinders our ability to understand and respond to emerging problems in real-time.*'

Hassall has lobbied the Environment Agency and they have now fitted a 'Sonde' (right) to monitor the levels of pollution downstream of the Buckden Water Treatment Centre. He wants to see similar devices for all of the county's rivers.



Anglian Water maintains that the discharges are permitted and not classified as pollution, while the Environment Agency suggests these authorisations are necessary to prevent sewage from backing up into homes. '*We're effectively choosing between protecting properties and damaging our environment, a choice that residents shouldn't have to support*', continued Hassall.

Anglian Water's ageing sewage infrastructure is already under severe strain, yet new housing proposed in the Huntingdonshire Local Plan is routinely tied into the network as a matter of course. Connection concerns raised by Anglian Water or residents can be overlooked in the planning process, leaving us exposed to worsening pollution.

In 2024 there were 1,329 sewage dumps into the River Great Ouse in Cambridgeshire, lasting a total of 17,602 hours - equivalent to over 2 years of continuous pollution.

Update from the Town Council

Three new Councillors are now in post: Cllr Jeff Massey, Cllr Keith Brown and Cllr Craig Smith, following co-option to the Council. Town Council Elections will be held on 7th May 2026 and The Bridge Magazine has been sent out to all residents. Hard copies are available from the Town Hall and can be viewed on St Ives Town Council website.

At December's Council meeting, councillors discussed nine grant applications from local groups totalling just under £60,000. The amounts being awarded will be decided at January's meeting, when the funds available will be known. The Council did decide that 6% of the Precept will be allocated for grants. In past years this has been a higher figure but financial constraints prevent this. This is likely to mean that around £73,000 will be allocated for grants but this figure also includes money for the Norris museum, which last year amounted to £33,000, reducing the money for other groups to about £40,000. Finally the Civic Sunday Parade next year will be on Sunday 20th September.

TWIG Volunteers Induction Day

Having now set up the working group to get the Hicket Woodland Improvement Group up and running, its volunteers met the Ranger allocated to shape and oversee the work to be done. One of the early steps will be to establish what ecosystems exist within the woodland to create a baseline for the working parties activities.

An induction day has been set up to provide volunteers with training, support and materials to be held on January 8th, 2026 at 6pm. There are 4 places still available. Anyone interested in joining the group should contact: Chair@stivescivic.org.uk

Campaign for Arthur Rank Hospice

Local Lib Dems are backing a campaign to protect funding for Arthur Rank Hospice, where cuts threaten to lead to the closure of nine beds there.

Cllr Sarah Conboy, Hunts Lib Dem Group Leader said: '*The cuts to Arthur Rank Hospice will have a massive impact on patients across the county, including here in Huntingdonshire. End-of-life facilities like Arthur Rank are so important.*' Over 16,000 people have already signed the petition to the Health Secretary to protect the beds at Arthur Rank, showing how concerned local people are about this.

Residents can sign it at www.snmclibdems.org.uk/campaigns/save-arrh-beds

Hospital apologises to John Davies' family

Following a Coroner's report into the death of ex Mayor John Davies, Dr Callum Gardner of NW Anglia NHS Foundation, apologised for not spotting heart abnormalities on an ECG examination four months before his death on March 19th 2021.

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SSI Screen St Ives Community Cinema



Downton Abbey - The Grand Finale

Thursday 8 January 2026 at 7:30pm

Doors open 6:30pm. Tickets £7

Director: Simon Curtis, 124m, Cert: PG

Downton Abbey: The Grand Finale, Julian Fellowes' last outing of the Downton Abbey saga depicts the Crawley family in the 1930s facing social disgrace and financial difficulties. Lady Mary's (*Michelle Dockery*) divorce from Henry Talbot causes a scandal, while the family grapples with money problems. Amidst these challenges, Robert hands over the reins to Mary, who takes charge as the new Lady of Downton Abbey. The film ends with the family embracing change and securing the legacy of the estate for the next generation.



The Phoenician Scheme

Thursday 5 February 2026 at 7:30pm

Doors open 6:30pm. Tickets £7

Director: Wes Anderson, 101m, Cert: 15

The plot of Wes Anderson's **The Phoenician Scheme** centres on wealthy businessman Zsa-zsa Korda (*Benicio Del Toro*), who, after surviving numerous assassination attempts, appoints his daughter Lisel (*Mia Threapleton*), a nun, as his sole heir to his estate and a massive infrastructure project called the "Phoenician Scheme". The film follows Korda and Lisel on a journey to convince investors to fund the ambitious but ethically questionable plan, which involves manipulating agricultural markets to cause famine, and depicts their evolving, complex father-daughter relationship amidst the chaos.

Tickets at screenstives.org.uk or in the Corn Exchange

The COURTYARD St Ives

Located in the cobbled courtyard of Hyperion Auctions in St Ives, you will find our unique market style shopping experience.

30 independent local businesses, selling everything from Christmas Gifts, home wares, furniture, trinkets, gifts, baby clothes, refurbished items, retro chic, books, artisan jewellery and much much more.

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