

East Cambridgeshire Parish Conference

10th October 2017

Devolution presentation by Mayor Palmer, Mayor of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough

Mayor Palmer (MP) spoke about his passion for the area and that as a local resident, he is aware of the matters concerning East Cambridgeshire.

His appointment has meant that Cambridgeshire and Peterborough now have one voice and more contact with Parliament.

MP detailed some of the strengths of the area including the prominent science and agricultural industries and also being home to one of the world's best universities. East Cambridgeshire has a 1.5% unemployment rate, which is below the national average, with currently more jobs available than people to fill them. MP praised the area's strong economy and informed that whilst Cambridgeshire and Peterborough contributed £5 million to the national economy, there was a clear north – south divide within the area.

MP identified some of the challenges faced by the district, such as the housing deficit and improving the areas Gross Value Added.

MP stated that land prices in and around Cambridge meant that some people, particularly younger people, found it difficult to buy their own home. Land prices and subsequent house prices have meant that some people have been forced to travel further distances to their place of work. MP advised that he would be focusing on the creation of corridors for work and housing and improving transport links (especially the A10 between Cambridge and Littleport, proposals for better rail links or light rail links, Soham Railway Station, the M11 north of Cambridge and other transport links throughout the entire area). He advised that in his role he aimed to influence delivery timescales for priority projects that would improve the lives of residents. MP spoke about plans for an underground rail network to be built for Cambridge City to alleviate congestion and aid commuting across the City. MP advised that parish councils have a moral responsibility to embrace growth and accept housing development in their towns and villages so that more people can live and work in the communities that they wish to do so.

MP advised that the population of Cambs and Peterborough was 830,000 and was an area with lots of space. He spoke about attracting investment and skills to the area; he listed international competitors as Silicon Valley, Boston and Shanghai; and about potential opportunities to cap land value around Cambridge to enable more affordable houses to be built. MP referenced the ECDC Local Plan that has just been submitted.

MP took the following questions from the room:

Q: Do you think a Labour government would continue to support Mayors?

MP: There are Labour Mayors already in some of our major cities including Manchester, London and Liverpool.

Q: Do you have any plans to improve the A142?

MP: The aspiration is to improve roads countywide whilst trying to get more people to use the major highways such as the M11 north of Cambridge.

Q: What are the plans for the A10?

MP: The ideal solution would be to turn sections of the A10 into a dual carriageway. Improvements will be focused between Cambridge and Littleport. The government is aware of the issues concerning this road.

Q: Do CCC still have funding for smaller roads?

MP: CCC still has funding for smaller roads; the Combined Authority will manage the major projects.

Q: What are the Mayor's thoughts on high rents set by landlords?

MP: Landlords are a symptom of the problem of not having enough houses therefore they can charge high rents due to there being not enough supply to meet demand. High rents also prevent people, particularly young people, from buying their own homes.

Q: Should grants be available to developers before houses are built to ensure that sufficient infrastructure is in place?

MP: This could be a sensible approach although Community Infrastructure Levy money is available to provide sufficient infrastructure such as more schools. Better road networks could potentially be built if a land value cap was in effect.

Q: Do we need a CCC?

MP: Devolution is an opportunity for all tiers of government. The cost of government in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough is £2.2 billion; there may be opportunities in the future to save some of this money which could potentially contribute towards adult social care.

Q: Is there still a role for parish councils?

MP: Parish councils are very important as they have the power to influence what goes on in communities. MP praised the work of parishes and schemes such as the Community Land Trusts; he advised that the CLT model could be replicated throughout the district. MP advised that as well as important roles like maintaining recreation grounds, cemeteries and being the local eyes and ears of the community, parish councils have a moral responsibility to allow for housing growth in their towns and villages.