

A TOTALLY INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER • UNCONNECTED WITH ANY GROUP OR ORGANISATION

Dolphin Hotel to house more than 100 asylum seekers

In a message sent to local town and parish clerks, Joanne Lancaster, Managing Director of Huntingdonshire District Council, explained that the Home Office and Serco would be placing asylum seekers in the Dolphin Hotel from Thursday 24th November.

Ms Lancaster explained that HDC had no influence over the decision and the council was pressing Serco to communicate this decision locally. Serco is a public services company that specialises in the delivery of essential public services nationally and locally in Defence, Transport, Justice, Immigration, Health, and other Citizen Services.

Serco was awarded UK asylum support services contracts with an estimated value of £1.9bn, its largest ever contract award.

The Home Office and Serco are planning to place the asylum seekers initially for three months, but this could continue given current accommodation needs.

This is not part of the Afghan Resettlement programme but relates to other groups arriving by whatever means they have at their disposal and the 67 room hotel could provide accommodation for more than 100 asylum seekers.

Without details about the mix of single people and families, it may be more, or it could be less.

The hotel will be staffed 24/7 by a combination of security and housing staff who have experience in working with Serco.

HDC's Response

HDC informed local councillors that they had written to the Home Office outlining their concerns about the appropriateness of placing asylum seekers in a hotel in St Ives, given the relative remoteness of the town from community networks that would be capable of supporting numbers of vulnerable people with such diverse backgrounds and needs.

They also suggested that the Home Office and Serco will need to take ownership of responding to questions that arise from the community and service providers.

Weekly meetings with partners, including the police, Home Office, Serco, and Cambridgeshire County Council will be used by HDC to escalate issues, if required.

Public service agencies will do all they can to ensure that local service delivery is not adversely impacted by Serco's plans and Cambridgeshire County Council will lead on communications which should include an FAQ section for residents and media.

Local Engagement

Serco has said it is committed to continued engagement and

collaborative working with all relevant statutory stakeholders during the period the site is in use and will engage with local authority and policing colleagues. Serco is also keen to engage with voluntary support agencies where appropriate, however any engagement in this context will consider the ability to follow Covid related guidance.

Eds note.

The Dolphin most recently featured in our pages in issue RP93 in September, concerning a notice that some declared as contempt by the hotel's management for customers. In a response to criticism on social media, hotel owner Ravi Gupta said

'Statistics show that thousands of covid cases were avoided by taking the homeless off the streets. I am proud of having housed them and I am sure that many of the righteous who comment here have their hand out asking the government for furlough, benefits, etc. Further, the Dolphin is private property so you don't have any right to say who's allowed at the Dolphin.'

The question remains... is housing asylum seekers altruism or just a business matter.

COVERING THE NEWS FOR ST IVES AND AROUND

Another great weekend in St Ives



Crowds fill Market Hill for the switch-on

This year's Christmas lights festivities proved a great success with thousands of people filling the centre for the switch-on and firework display.

The Riverporter contacted the organiser Michael Burke to find out how it had been for him and his team and what they are planning for next year. Michael told us...

'We have been overwhelmed by so many wonderful comments about this year's Christmas lights and the weekend as a whole. As a committee a lot of work goes into planning the event and with a number of changes, expanding the event it didn't come without hurdles to overcome.'

'The dedication of the team of volunteers who worked tirelessly is a testament to their joy of making the town look so festive and as a priority encouraging people from the town and further afield to see what our town has to offer.'

'We have spent a lot of time raising money to improve on the new lights and this is only the beginning. With financial

support going forward we want to continue to develop and improve and build on what really was, in the words of many of our social media followers 'the best ever!'

Mayor also gives praise

'Firstly, I want to extend my gratitude to the committee for making the Christmas Lights weekend such a success. I must also express my sincere gratitude to every business, community group, individual and colleague at the town, district and county councils who pledged money and support towards the event. As a Town Council we allocate money each year but with a lot of hard work, commitment and enthusiasm from Michael and the team it shows what can really be achieved.'

In all of the years I have lived in St Ives, without a doubt this has to be the best ever. I personally cannot wait to see what is to come in 2022.'

An excellent town turnout

Once again St Ives turned out in force to remember those who gave their lives for our country. This was the last service led by Roy Mottram after 24 years. One attendee said that this year the sound system was better but there was still not enough song sheets - We all want to sing! he said.

Left: Mayor Pasco and Town Councillors at the service.



Left: Father Christmas, District Council Chairman, Mac Maguire (centre) and St Ives Town Mayor, Pasco Hussain, address the crowds and complete the Switch-On ceremony. Mayor Pasco said it made him happy to see so many people enjoying the day.

SSI SCREEN ST IVES

Thu 2 Dec 2021 8pm

Tickets £5 from screenstives.org.uk
or the Corn Exchange

Doors open 7pm

Enjoy a pre-screening drink in the
Riverport Cafe with licenced bar

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Saint Frances

"SHARP, SWEET, AND PLEASANTLY UNSENTIMENTAL"
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"SOME KIND OF MIRACLE!"
★★★★★

"BURSTING WITH POSITIVITY"
★★★★★

"FRESH, FUNNY AND FRANK"
★★★★★

"WILDLY ENTERTAINING"
★★★★★

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A little local scandal?

A while ago The Riverporter was contacted by a Mr Vance Wells from Swavesey. He had read the report 'Jason's ammunition finally exposed' in issue 89 of The Riverporter. Mr Wells told us that he had got no response to a complaint he made when he had contacted Police & Crime Commissioner Mr Ablewhite. However that wasn't the only blip in the story Mr Wells told us.

The full tale concerns fraud at a parish council and a lack of interest in getting to the truth by the authorities including Cambs Police.

It starts in 2014 when Mr Wells, a Forensic Auditor was asked by concerned residents to look at the activities at Longstanton Pavilion following an Audit in 2013 by Moore Stephens. The Police had arrested Parish Clerk, Pauline Haywood, on suspicion of theft, but she was released because they said there was 'insufficient evidence for a conviction'.

Then along came Mr Wells, who offered to do an audit, pro bono, and was authorised to do it by Parish Chairman Gill Ashby on 10 Feb. 2014.

On 10 March Gill Ashby, in an email, rescinded this authorisation when Mr Wells refused to have a council member present when interviewing people in connection with the audit. She also informed the Police that Mr Wells was no longer acting for the council.

At a hastily called Extraordinary General Meeting by the new Longstanton Parish Council (LPC) at the end of March 2014, Mr Wells said had discovered evidence of fraud, which he estimated to have exceeded £90k.

In Mr Wells own words ... 'the meeting ended in chaos, and I was eventually arrested and charged with harassment. Since then I have been threatened with arrest a number of times and up to 5 years imprisonment if I don't shut up.'

Despite this in November 2016, because of the evidence discovered by Mr Wells and because of pressure put on the Police, Pauline Haywood was charged and eventually convicted of stealing £17,000 between 2009 and 2011. She was given an eight-month sentence, which was suspended for two years.

That is not the end of the matter

During the audit Mr Wells found that an 'Employee Fidelity Guarantee' insurance claim with a policy limit of £60,000 had been raised by LPC and later abandoned without cause. With losses in excess of £90k, there can be little doubt that this claim could have succeeded. Instead, the new Parish Council, still under Ashby's Chairmanship, raised the precept by 84% to cover these losses.

Since then Mr Wells has sought to get redress for the people of Longstanton and to get the council to pursue the insurance claim that might recover up to £60,000. In 2015 he wrote to District Cllr Mr A Riley but did not receive a reply. In 2017 following further efforts to get the matter dealt with Mr Wells was charged with harassment following a complaint by Cllr Riley. In February 2020, with the agreement of the four ex LPC

Chairmen, Mr Wells wrote to the current Parish Chairman, Dan delaMare-Lyon, offering to complete all necessary formalities to recover the £60k still outstanding from Allianz Insurance. All that was required was the Chairman's signature. Again he did not receive a reply.

Further letters to the Police, including the Chief Constable, have failed to move this matter forward but once again Mr Wells was seen to be the problem and in December 2020 he was again charged with harassment for sending an email. The summons stated he had written 'without reasonable excuse'. But Mr Wells suggests that 'attempting to recover £60,000 for the parishioners of Longstanton definitely does constitute a reasonable excuse'.

Now it may be that Mr Wells may be someone who 'rubs people up the wrong way' but nevertheless if he is right then his evidence should be considered seriously. One thing is for sure Mr Wells is not put off lightly because in April this year several police officers arrived at his house and threatened to break down his door if he didn't accompany them to the Police station. Mr Wells demanded to see the warrant but none was forthcoming and he refused to go with them. According to Mr Wells this episode was very distressing for his wife and neighbours and the police have still not produced a warrant.

It seems inconceivable that Mr Wells efforts over seven years has yielded little support from those in authority. Last week he was hopeful that the new Police & Crime Commissioner will help bring this matter to the IOPC and Chief Constable's attention but once more he was thwarted.

Trust restored? I think not

Although this may not seem a 'big issue' compared to the £millions possibly wasted on dodgy Covid contracts or the more important concerns of global warming, it does highlight issues that *The Riverporter* has been writing about. Such as the lack of trust people have in the authorities, councillors and even the police. When faced with proof of fraud, Longstanton Parish councillors did not take steps to fully protect its parishioners and the District Councillor and Police also seemed to turn a blind eye to the evidence. Finally most worrying is the fact that the whistle blower, an elderly resident, whose diligence helped convict a thief, found himself with a criminal record and threatened in his own home by the police, while the ex Parish Clerk, Pauline Haywood, walked away with thousands of pounds.

Please note *The Riverporter* has seen documented evidence of the above facts and we also contacted the Chief Constable Dean to ask if he had seen the letter Mr Wells had sent him. We were told we could not speak to Mr Dean but Shelley Sprat, Deputy Head of Corporate Communications told us ...

'We can confirm that Chief Constable Nick Dean has seen the letter from Mr Wells, dated August 10 2020, and is aware of the issues raised in it.'

Our amazing St Ives springs back to life... How about dinner and a show?

We are all aware of the effect that Covid 19 has had on our lives these past two years, but it seems, as we slowly emerge from the lockdown blues, that the nightlife and entertainment sector in St Ives is really bursting into life. Over the past few weeks we have seen a plethora of changes and updates to many of the businesses in town among



them is the beautifully re-fitted *Oliver Cromwell pub* in Wellington Street.

The lovely new interior is supported by a great new menu and planned events.

The Tap Room on Bridge Street has also



received a comfortable new interior with a total make-over, new menu and new chef.

We spoke with new Tap room owner Amanda who said ... 'We are over the moon with our new refurbishment, alongside this we are welcoming our new chef Alba from the Riverside terrace, who starts full time in December. Look out for a new food menu with added Christmas dishes soon.'

The Corn Exchange has exploded back into action with superb, refitted bars downstairs, new lighting, and a stylish new coffee lounge upstairs open 9 to 4 every day.

Last Friday saw the first sell out music event with Victor Velocette rocking a packed

audience and firmly putting the Corn Exchange back on the entertainment map.



Bridge Street has a new Indian cuisine restaurant with the opening of 'Dhaba' situated in the old Di Rita's building. Already locals are raving about the excellent menu.



Di Rita's is now situated at No 2 The Pavement, next door to the Corn Exchange, and offers Italian cuisine in stylish surroundings, with a great range of fresh bakery products.

As we go to print, we are informed that The Robin Hood on Market Hill is, at last, tipped to open as a fine restaurant and cocktail bar in the new year. The delay was apparently caused by a bat survey that took 2 years to complete! So there is positive news, despite some store closures. When you add these amazing places to those we already have, and the fantastic town events organised by our tireless volunteers it's no wonder why St Ives is thriving.

Time for lunch I think!



having your say ...

The Riverporter

Voted Best local newspaper of the year 2019/20 in the Cambridge Building Society's Community Magazine Awards



Milly stands in again, following more fireworks in town that upset Erik.



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

Dear Erik, Subject: Wonderful time had

My husband and I have just returned from two days staying in St Ives. We really enjoyed ourselves and thought St Ives quite a go ahead place. You seem to have numerous organizations, even fencing! Everyone was friendly and the town and roads so clean !!!!! We visited the museum, walked The Quay and bridge and enjoyed the town and its market. We were so impressed to see how so many of the shops/buildings are acknowledging Remembrance Day in their displays. Whilst browsing in one shop I overheard the manager instructing a volunteer, (both youngsters compared to me) that on the 11th all staff stop for the minutes silence. This is so heartening to hear in this day and age. Thank you St Ives - we will return.
Barbara Simmons from Kent.

Dear Erik, Subject: A tragedy waiting to happen?

For many of your readers, your account of the recent accident at the Crown St/Bridge Street junction would make sad reading. But as your headline implied, many will not be surprised that such an incident finally happened. It is only one of many locations in our Town Centre where illegal and thoughtless parking continues to blight our town - and as reported, can also put lives in danger. During 50 years of living in this beautiful town, I recall a period lasting for about five years when there was a 'full time' Traffic Warden daily patrolling the streets dealing very successfully with illegally parked vehicles. She was marvellous at the job - very very firm but done with fairness and a cheeky sense of humour. I wonder if anyone recalls this lady - and is it not time that we had the likes of her back on full time patrol once again? BUT - who is to pay for this? It appears the Police Authority, County and District Councils do not have the inclination for tackling this problem and no doubt all will plead financial poverty as usual. So - why not St Ives themselves providing say half of the annual salary for a traffic warden? An 'annual donation' of just £1 or £2 a year from each household should raise a good portion of a wardens annual salary - with the rest being met by the statutory authorities to make up to the full amount.

I feel sure that many households would be happy to pay this small ring-fenced and annual 'donation' in order to see this much needed job re-instated. **Stewart Denham**

Dear Stewart, In issue RP54 we reported that HDC's budget seems to include a sum of £200,000 for On-street Civil Parking Enforcement [traffic wardens?] in their capital programme. In RP55 we printed this picture of Stan Reynolds and Violet Dendy who were the traffic Wardens you may recall.



There is still no sign of HDC completing the Civil Parking Enforcement and until they do it is unlikely we will see Traffic Wardens again. **ED**



We are glad to hear that the Riverport Singers rehearsals are going brilliantly for their first concert on 10th December at 7pm in St Ives Corn Exchange.

They have a wonderful programme prepared and will be welcoming the Over Community Singers and Drummers to share the stage, who will bring their brand of energetic rhythms and uplifting songs. Tickets can be obtained from the Riverport Café Bar.

OTHER NEWS

It's Small Business Saturday . . .

This Saturday is 'Small Business Saturday', when you can choose to use small, local businesses over large national companies. Martin Cooper, owner of The Refill Shop of Ikigai, said: 'If everyone in Cambridgeshire spent just £1 in an independent shop, that could make the difference between local businesses being open in the new year or not. Buying locally isn't only about keeping the high street full of shops, it's also about reducing the environmental impact of your shopping low, by keeping down the miles.'



AI4I and St Ives road plans go together

During 2021, the Combined Authority took community soundings in two separate 'Have-Your-Say surveys' of people in the A141 Huntingdon and St Ives areas. Following analysis of the comments and insights received from the public, the Mayor asked his team to merge what were formerly parallel improvement proposals into one study to be moved forward as one project. The Mayor has also asked Combined Authority officers to work with their counterparts at Cambridgeshire County Council to accelerate delivery of some 'quick-win' infrastructure improvements in St Ives that were identified during the feasibility work.



Dr Nik said, 'The Combined Authority intends to make travel better, greener, safer and more joined-up for the communities of Huntingdon and St Ives. It makes sense to take them forward as a single, connected plan that works for both areas, responds to the climate crisis and the need to support good growth for the region, growth that is healthy and properly sustainable.'

This work is led by the Combined Authority itself, with support from Combined Authority members that include Cambridgeshire County Council and Huntingdonshire District Council.

Road safety, congestion, air quality, protection from rat-running and concerns about HGVs were all high on the agenda of people responding to the Huntingdon A141 Have-Your-Say survey to gather public opinion on the transport options around Huntingdon. Clawing roads back from motor vehicles for cyclists and walkers also topped the wishlist for St Ives. Overall, the St Ives findings reveal a community wanting safer and less congested travel with reduced journey times and an appetite to have the town well-connected for growth. Most respondents were residents of St Ives and the majority of trips taken by respondents in the local area were made by foot, cycle and car.

'I'm pleased to say that the feasibility study by Cambridgeshire County Council revealed some really smart infrastructure improvements within St Ives that could make a big difference to people in the town. I've therefore asked Combined Authority officers to sit down with their colleagues at County to consider how these quick-win improvements can be brought forward fast to be physically delivered alongside the next study stage', said Mayor Dr Johnson.

Cocaine dealer jailed for 2 1/2 years

Police stopped Mohammed Islam (right) as he was driving along the M11 in his grey Audi A3 on 25 November last year (2020). Their suspicions were confirmed when a search uncovered 12g of cocaine, £1,015 in cash and a mobile phone. Officers then searched his bedroom at his home in Houghton Road, St Ives, where they found a further 44g of cocaine and 96 diazepam tablets, scales and deal bags. Another two mobile phones were also found in Islam's other vehicle, a BMW.



Photo: CAMBS POLICE

It was when officers arrested a local drug user that they were able to link Islam to dealing class A drugs after they found text messages, including bank details, from Islam on the user's mobile phone. At Peterborough Crown Court on 22 November Islam was sentenced to two and a half years in prison after pleading guilty to possession with intent to supply cocaine.

Town Council reject canoes on The Quay

Last Wednesday's Planning and Amenities committee meetings had the same item on both agendas. It was a proposal by Millside Canoe Hire to seek approval from the Town Council for a canoe hire business to be run from the quayside. The proposals suggested a pontoon would be sited next to the Electric Riverboat Companies pontoon.

The Planning Committee said that the Quay was a totally unsuitable place from which to run a canoe business. The committee would advise Millside Canoe Hire of their decision. Although no one spoke in favour of the proposal it was accepted that a canoe hire business could have a place in St Ives but not on The Quay. It would be more appropriate out of the centre, such as on Nobles Field.

This was not a formal planning application, which could still be made of course. There were objections from local residents and other river users, primarily on the grounds that this is a busy tourist 'hotspot' for the town and, potentially, having lots of canoes around could prove dangerous, particularly as many visitors are families with young children. Another concern was that this is a prime mooring area for visiting boats and further restricting this use would be counter-productive in attracting visitors to the town.



Writing in the air

Last week residents noticed a plane writing a message in the skies above of St Ives. This expertly created vapour trail caused observers to wonder what it meant and as usual there were a few humorous answers such as:

- The amount of pigs in blankets not available in St Ives restaurants? (This followed an earlier comment by a diner at the Marsh Harrier who complained that there were no pigs in blankets.)
- The number of cars backed up to the A1307 at 6pm each day.
- Weekly expenses claim by our MP Jonathan Djanogly from a second job.
- The price of sky-writing?
- The amount of cars caught in the guided bus way trap this year.
- The amount of flies they killed during the flypocalypse.
- Loo rolls found in a St Ives secret stash.

The real answer appeared to be less amusing but very worthwhile. It was the amount of money handed over to BBC's Children In Need from Little Gransden Air show. So well done.

A snippet from Private Eye

Cambs Tories know how to rake in the cash, according to this piece from Private Eye.

DESERT XMAS PUDDING OR PROFITER ROLES TEA/COFFEE WITH MINCE PIE

Chatteris Conservative Club Christmas Lunch menu

HYPERION

**Entries Invited for Our
Next Fine Art Sale on 4th
December**



Sold in our Fine Art Sales this year:



19th Century French Napoleon III Cave a Liqueur Mother of Pearl Decor Sold £1000

**1ct Diamond Set Solitaire Ring Sold
£1500**



**A Graham Sutherland 1903-1980 Ceramic and Tile
brass mounted coffee table Sold £2250**



**Darwin (Charles). On the Origin of Species Sold
£1500**



**Fine Ruby & Diamond Bracelet
Sold £5500**



**Yong Mun Sen (1896-1962) Malaysian. 3 Malaysian
Junks against Shoreline, Watercolour Sold £3100**



Hyperion Auctions, The Salerooms, Station Road, St Ives PE27 5BH
www.hyperionauctions.co.uk 01480 464140



TOMORROW

Join us for an update on local environmental issues and to connect with like minds at our first ever...

Climate Café

**Saturday 27th November
10am - 12pm**

St Ives Free Church
Market Hill, St Ives

Calendar of events

If you know of other events email: editor@theriverporter.uk

DECEMBER

Saturday 4th - ARTSFEST, 10am-4pm, Corn Exchange.
Santa and Chief Snowman arrive The Quay at 1pm.

Wednesday 8th - Huntingdonshire Arts Soc: The Art of Snow and Ice 2:30pm Corn Exchange, Guest fee: £5.

Saturday 18th - The Children's Snowman Trail Prize Draw

Saturday 18th - St Ives Choral Society Family Christmas Concert Free Church St Ives. Tickets £8 - acc. children U12 free. Available from The Fair Trade Shop or from TicketSource.



JANUARY

Wednesday 5th - Langley Bread, St Ives Corn Exchange. 10am-12pm.

Saturday 8th - COSI Winter Concert 7pm. Details on Facebook or email: gillianatherton@aol.com

Wednesday 12th - Cinderella Pantomime. The Centre Theatre Players (runs until the 16th), Burgess Hall. **Tickets: 07555 394697.**

Friday 28th - Chapel Arts @ The Corn Exchange Lexie Green and Johnny 'Magic Boy' Wright. 7.30pm in the Riverport Café Bar, St Ives Corn Exchange.

Tickets: £10 from www.ticketsource.co.uk/eventsstives or can be purchased from the Riverport Café Bar.



ADVERTORIAL

Thinking of moving in the New Year?



The housing market is busy, so this might be the right time to take advantage of the momentum and put your own home on the market. With record numbers of homebuyers looking right now, there has never been a better time to sell. Here are our top tips to make your sale as successful, quick, and hassle-free as possible.

1. Make it light and airy

Darker rooms generally look smaller than lighter ones, and this can be a big turn off for potential buyers. So we'd suggest making sure that blinds are open, and curtains are apart, to flood your home with light.

2. Keep the garden tidy

The front garden is the first thing that a potential buyer will see, make sure that you give them a reason to smile straight away, remember, you never get a second chance to make a great first impression. Similarly, the back garden can be a deal clincher and an impressive outdoor space could set your home apart from the competition.

3. Bathrooms and kitchens

These two rooms are the most expensive for a buyer to upgrade. However, if you've made an effort to clean and declutter them, you'll be giving potential buyers another reason to be positive about your home.

4. Declutter

You've heard this a million times right? Believe me it works, buyers want to see the room, the size and features, they don't want to be distracting by "stuff". Make sure your house is remembered for the right reasons.

5. Be flexible

Be "buyer ready", it's not always convenient, but buyers turn up when you least expect them, make sure your house is ready. When buyers sell their own houses, they start looking immediately, if you're not ready to see them, someone else will be!

For more information about selling your house, call one of our sales team on 01480 388 888.

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