

The Riverporter

ISOLATION DAY 82 - READ AND FORWARD ON!

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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.



