

The Riverporter

COVERING THE NEWS FOR ST IVES AND AROUND

PLEASE READ AND PASS ON

Issue I98: 5 December 2025

A TOTALLY INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER • UNCONNECTED WITH ANY GROUP OR ORGANISATION

Option E confirmed but not everyone is happy

At the Cabinet meeting, St Ives Councillor Julie Kerr, criticised MP Ben Obese-Jecty for the comments he made in Parliament. In particular his assertion that councillors used AI to choose which option to vote for and that NOT voting for option E amounted to treachery.

Prior to HDC's meeting on 19th November, to decide the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) option that HDC would submit to the Secretary of State, Huntingdon MP, Ben Obese-Jecty, posted online his comments made in Parliament. These included his concern that some HDC councillors were considering voting for option C and might do so because AI suggested they do. He also suggested that any councillor who didn't vote for option E, making Huntingdonshire a Unitary Authority, would be a vote against Huntingdonshire. He also stated that the electorate would remember this at May's elections. He even alluded to them being a 'Traitor' rather than a 'Faithful' and that they would be throwing Huntingdonshire under the Guided Bus.

His lengthy speech included reasons NOT to vote for other options and suggested that councillors, mainly Labour ones, voted out of self interest.

While that may be the case in some areas of the County it doesn't appear true in Huntingdonshire, where the Leader of the Council, Sarah Conboy, a Lib Dem, wanted a free vote and asked councillors to vote for the best option for their constituents.

The following week the Cabinet met to confirm the option HDC would put forward and Councillor Kerr criticised the MP.

She saw his comments as an attempt to undermine HDC's joint administration and to vilify any councillor who might vote for option C and was scathing about his suggestions that an algorithm had led councillors to vote a particular way, when she knew that all HDC councillors had carefully considered the options.

The Riverporter contacted Julie Kerr, Ben Obese-Jecty and Martin Hassall, who was mentioned by the MP, for comment and their responses appear on page 2.

Since our last issue the 7 local councils in Cambridgeshire have sent to the Secretary of State their choices for LGR, which were three choices for option B, two for option D, one for option A and one for option E so it seems that option E may be a long shot.

The Riverporter was delighted to make our Saint very happy. He posted a picture of himself reading the last issue, saying how delighted he was to feature. We are not suggesting St Ivo uses AI, but *The Riverporter* has become **The Riververporter!**



It's set to be a bloomin' good year

St Ives in Bloom is happy to report that the last of this year's daffodils have been planted! From the ground being too dry and hard, to the air being too wet and rainy, we have had to postpone several of

our bulb planting events. Finally, on Wednesday 26th November, the last bulbs were planted. Robin Bletsoe (below left) led the St Ives in Bloom team, with 'emergency' workers from the Rotary Club -

thank you so much to everybody for all their hard work. A special thank you to Robin, who has led our bulb planting for over a decade - what a difference he has made to our verges and parks!



DIARY OF EVENTS

Please email: editor@theriverporter.uk

DECEMBER

Saturday 6th/7th - BHF Candle Lighting in the Bridge Chapel. Light a candle for a loved one. 10am to 4pm both days.

Saturday 6th - Christmas Charity Concert The Free Church 7pm.

Sunday 7th - Christmas Tea Dance hosted by Lesley's Social Dancing. St Ives Corn Exchange 2pm to 4:30pm. Tickets £10

Friday 12th - Open Mic Night St Ives Corn Exchange 7pm Free.

Saturday 13th - Family Christmas Concert, St Ives Choral Soc. accompanied by Thorndown Primary School Choir. 6.30pm. Free Church Tickets from www.ticketsource.co.uk/st-ives-choral-society

Saturday 13th - Christmas Party with Carla Gray, Graham Buxton and So 80s! St Ives Corn Exchange. Doors Open 7.30pm. Tickets £12

Thursday 18th - St Ives Corn Exchange Quiz Night. Quiz starts at 8pm. Hosted by Wayne DuBoise. Entry fee £2 per person.

Friday 19th - Somersham Town Band Christmas Carol Concert St Ives Corn Exchange 7.30pm. Tickets £10 or £12.50 with Mulled Wine.

Sunday 21st - Santa Arrives by Boat 11.30am See AD page 4.

Wednesday 31st - A New Year's 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

Friday 16th - Civic Society - Policing & Financial Crime in Regency London and Cambridge. A presentation by Susan Grossey exploring the world of crime in Regency London and Cambridge. 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. Old music done in a new way - U2, Talking Heads, Strangers and more re-imagined as movie themes - St Ives Corn Exchange 7.30pm. Tickets £10 from the venue or www.ticketsource.co.uk/cexevents.

MAY

Friday 15 May - Civic Society - The Life of Lord Fairhaven: A presentation by Helen Ackroyd, a distinguished National Trust speaker. 7.30pm at the Free Church. Members free, visitors £3.

Read on-line at www.theriverporter.uk or see our Facebook page. Email: editor@theriverporter.uk

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Not everyone is happy cont. from p1

Following the comments made by Councillor Kerr *The Riverporter* contacted MP, Ben Obese-Jecty, to let him know we would be featuring his and Cllr Kerr's remarks in this week's paper. We offered him the opportunity to defend his statements made in Parliament. Below is his reply.

I was shocked and dismayed to see Cllr Kerr use her platform and position at the Council to launch a blistering and vitriolic personal attack against me, rather than use the opportunity to explain why she was voting for Option E, why it is the best choice for Huntingdonshire and the potential dangers of voting for the other options.

Her comments were ill-judged, inaccurate and disappointing, coming from a local councillor I believed I had a good working relationship with.

On the use of AI, Cllr Martin Hassall circulated an email to all councillors, including Cllr Kerr, on 21st June outlining analysis of the options he had collated using Google AI. I have been informed from reliable sources that other councillors have also subsequently used Chat GPT. I have consistently backed Option E ever since it was first announced by Huntingdonshire District Council on 25th September. I have never once sought to take credit for it being on the table. Cllr Kerr should evidence where I supposedly have.

I believe Option E is the best choice, as I clearly laid out during the debate I led in Parliament on 19th November discussing the impact of Local Government Reorganisation on Huntingdonshire. Given the District Council overwhelmingly supported Option E at the vote on the same day and then backed it at Full Cabinet on 24th November local politicians of all persuasions are clearly aligned on this issue. I struggle to see why Cllr Kerr is seeking to create disharmony where there was none.

Ben Obese-Jecty (MP)

Following Ben's comments we also contacted Buckden Councillor Martin Hassall to get his reaction, which is below.

I was disappointed by recent comments made in parliament by MP Ben Obese Jecty, which implied that Councillors have been using AI to make decisions. My use of AI has always been strictly for analysis. The document I shared with members was fully referenced and transparent about its use, with the sole aim of providing an evidence based view free from political bias or internal interests.

In June 2025, my analysis showed the South West option (Option C) as the strongest and most resilient future for Huntingdonshire. This conclusion was subsequently supported by officer analysis presented to the Council's committees and Cabinet. By contrast, Option E - promoted by Ben Obese Jecty - would leave Huntingdonshire, on its own, with a population of only 186,000 and an annual recurring loss of £1m. Against government criteria, this makes Option E untenable and increases the likelihood of Option A [being chosen?], partnering Huntingdonshire with Peterborough, which Ben himself has opposed.

To then brand Councillors who voted against Option E as 'traitors' was reprehensible. No Conservative councillor voted against Option E, and it is my view that this language influenced not only his own party colleagues but others as well, discouraging them from opposing an option that is demonstrably flawed. Such rhetoric risks undermining evidence based decision making and unfairly pressures local representatives.

Councillor Martin Hassall.

Martin also included with his comments some of the papers that helped him to conclude that Option C was the better choice. Having looked at them it does present a sound case for supporting that option.

Finally we offered Councillor Kerr the opportunity to reply to Ben's letter and we print her comments below.

I am not surprised by his [Ben's] response. To clarify, the MP used his platform and presented information in a way that misrepresented the situation. My comments were simply made in defence of my colleagues. It is disappointing that he chose to use his large platform to publicly discredit opposition members who supported Option C, yet objects when I use mine to challenge his assertions.

No data or business case was available in June 2025; we did not receive that information until the end of October. Anyone who knows how Martin works will understand that he is extremely thorough. I expect he used AI at that early stage only to gain an initial sense of the viability of Option C compared with alternatives being explored by other authorities. With no formal data available at the time, I imagine many people - including Conservative councillors - did the same.

If you listen to Martin's remarks at the full council meeting, it is absolutely clear that he had read all the business cases in detail. He also served on the Joint Overview & Scrutiny Committee that examined LGR, and his contributions clearly reflected a detailed understanding of the papers. I know Martin's work ethic, and the MP's comments about him were a distortion of the facts in my opinion for political gain. My own comments were simply to defend my colleagues and to call out that political game-playing.

Councillor Julie Kerr.

So there you have it. A process that should see the reorganisation of local councils to save money, streamline the current system and meet the aspirations of the residents of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, has concluded with no single agreement between the authorities concerned. In our opinion a totally flawed process that will be decided next summer by the Secretary of State and implemented in April 2028. It has divided opinion and is unlikely to achieve any of the benefits so desperately needed.

150 boxes collected by St Ives Rotary

The Rotary club would like to thank all readers of *The Riverporter* for their support in our Shoebox 2025 Appeal.

The response has been humbling with members of the public, local schools, Cubs, Beavers, Squirrels, other charities, and members and friends of the Rotary Club contributing over 150 shoeboxes.

They were transported by Rtn Beccy Roberts, our International Committee Chairman to a meeting place with Hugh Scudder from the charity cr2ee (right). He will be delivering these personally next week to Moldova and through to Ukraine with many other urgent supplies in a large articulated lorry. Please take a moment to visit their website to understand the



humanity they are trying to offer the people in Moldova and The Ukraine.

www.cr2ee.org.uk

The President and members of the club wish all your readers a Very Happy Christmas and please look out for us on our Santa Sleigh starting soon.

Thorndown delighted with donation

Thorndown School were delighted to receive such a kind and generous donation from Toyota to help support reading for pleasure at home for the families of Thorndown. With the help of FOTS and Toyota working together, we have been able to purchase story boxes, knowledge boxes and poetry boxes. Every Friday a child from each class is chosen for each box and they take it home over the weekend to share with their families.

Pictured are the Friends of Thorndown fundraising team, Lisa Johnson, Claire McMullan and Leesa Parsons being presented a cheque donation by Rob Reynolds from Toyota. With Mrs Browne (Phonics Lead) and some of the Thorndown primary school children.



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having your say . . .

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

Milly and Tilly love your letters.

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,

I have today reported the following to the County Council – 'As buses enter the bus station from Station Road the kerb stones on the right have been damaged leaving one kerb stone to be standing proud. This is a major trip hazard and needs sorting urgently. Also, below the kerb the block work is also damaged leaving a large pool of water on rainy days.'

Everyone crossing the bus station entrance should take extra care until the County Council fix this.

In the meantime, if anyone is injured, which I hope does not happen, the County Council can be held liable.

Regards **Anthony**

Dear Milly & Tilly,

Would it be correct to assume that the husband who has complained about our church bells doesn't snore? I live very very close to the church and am used to the bells but snoring has required me to purchase earplugs (£6.99 for 20 pairs Amazon) and they successfully cut out bells and snoring!! If you buy a house near a church expect church bells! **Name withheld.**

Dear Milly & Tilly,

I'm impressed by the campaign being mounted by H&W PC. The argument is clear. How can HDC ask us to approve the Local Plan before we know the new unitary authority boundaries? **Stringer Jack**

Dear Milly & Tilly, I sent this to County Council Highways:

This morning in St Ives I passed by an older man walking with a walking stick and he fell over. Two men helped him up and he said that he was OK. When I walked back past the site I noticed that a drainage grid in front of Wellington Wise was not properly secured so that when I walked past him on the kerbside, the other end of the grid lifted and has obviously tripped him up. I went to Wellington Wise to explain about the danger and was told that the council was well aware of it and had been for some time. I went to the Town Hall but couldn't gain access. This needs to be fixed today.

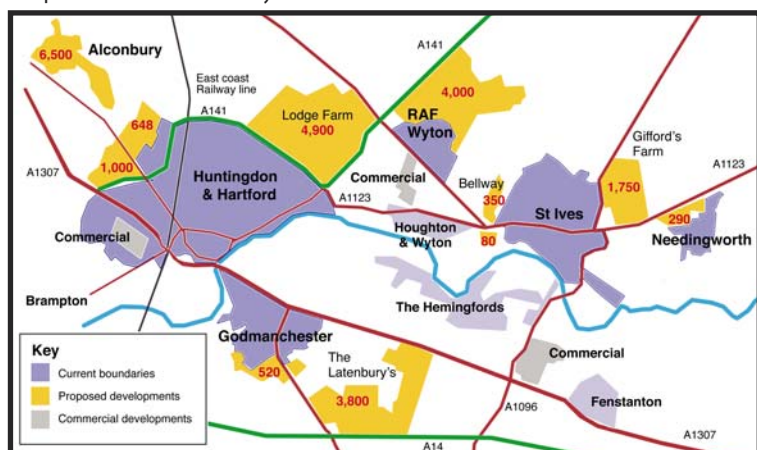
This is the reply from County Council Highways: *I have investigated the reported issue, and the defect does not currently meet our criteria for repair. I understand this may be disappointing to learn, however we have set criteria against which we assess defects. These help us prioritise repairs. If the defect gets significantly worse and you believe it meets our criteria outlined, please re-report the defect and we will carry out a further inspection.*

I feel so bad for the poor man who tripped. How many people need to fall over before this is fixed? **Caroline**

Civic Society call for public meeting

The meeting (see right) will examine the implications on St Ives of all the proposed housing & commercial developments outlined in HDCs Local Plan, and publicise objections to the A141 Development Scheme. As the map below shows the Local Plan allows for nearly 24,000 houses in the area and without substantial changes to the infrastructure these proposals risk serious damage to the character and the viability of the area.

The current A141 proposals would be totally inadequate should any of these developments go ahead, putting the viability of the town centre in jeopardy. Last year the Civic Society set up a forum for local groups (FoRSIT) to work together with Town and District Councillors and independent businesses. This is your chance to discuss that future vision for St Ives.



The Riverporter

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

OTHER NEWS

Town's County Councillors object

'The current A141 'St Ives Improvement Scheme,' as proposed, will not resolve the town's traffic challenges and may in some respects worsen them.' Say County Councillors Alex Bulat, David Keene and Julie Kerr. 'An effective and sustainable solution must be based on up-to-date data, strategic foresight, and genuine local consultation'.

They also urged the project team to pause the current process and establish a working group involving local councillors, residents' representatives, and community organisations such as Roadwatch to co-develop a more informed and workable plan.

Volunteer encourages more to join

Retired district nurse Kim Brown (left in the picture), 71, is encouraging others to volunteer with Sue Ryder's Grief Kind Spaces. Kim, from Hartford, has been volunteering for the last six months. *'My husband died seven years ago. His last days at Sue Ryder St John's Hospice were so peaceful and beautiful. I wanted to give something back, having received so much care and support myself.'* The Sue Ryder Grief Kind Space in St Ives is open every Friday, from 10am until 12 noon at Morrisons' Community Room, St Ives, PE27 4NB



Winter is coming to Field lodge!

But don't worry, unlike the grim tidings from Game of Thrones, our winter forecast is looking bright. Trade your swords for sleigh bells, because Saturday 13th December, 3pm - 4pm, sees us Stepping into Christmas! With entertainment from the fabulous In Two. Come and enjoy some festive refreshments, as we rekindle the magic of Christmases past. Field Lodge Care Home is pleased to host this year's Care Uk Christmas party. Booking is required. 01480 710207.



**What is the
Impact of the
Local Plan on
St Ives?**

Meeting 13 December 2025

Your opportunity to discuss a future vision for St Ives from the current traffic proposals to local planning developments

1.30pm – The St Ives Perspective –
Simon Ward St Ives Architect

2.00pm – What the Local Plan means for
St Ives – Mayor Julie Kerr

**Come along and let us know your
views**

**St Ives Free Church
1.30 pm Saturday 13th December**

All welcome



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

FEST IS A NOT FOR PROFIT VOLUNTARY GROUP - RUNNING EVENTS FOR THE PEOPLE OF ST IVES

SANTA'S SNOW FEST

Santa and the Chief Snowman arrive by boat at The Quay, on Sunday 21st December, at 11.30 am

Image credit to Media Imaging Solutions

Visit him in his Grotto
at St Ives Corn Exchange for 'Santa's Snow FEST Weekend'

SUNDAY 21st December 12noon - 4pm
MONDAY 22nd December 10am - 4pm

Image credit to Media Imaging Solutions

With crafts and A HUGE SNOW GLOBE

All children to be accompanied by an adult.
Admission £2 per child

Image credit to Media Imaging Solutions

In support of the Snowman Festival

With thanks to our sponsors continued support

Image credit to Media Imaging Solutions

www.stivesfest.org.uk

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

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While you're browsing why not take a seat in our outdoor café for coffees and snacks made by our excellent Barista here in the Courtyard.

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www.courtyardstives.co.uk

Image credit to Hyperion Auctions

Image credit to Hyperion Auctions