



THE INDEPENDENT

MILL ROAD NEWS

N°25
Early Spring
2020

Bang, clatter and puff

January, February and March are often lack-lustre months. This is as true for us as it is for everyone else who lives in the northerly parts of the northern hemisphere. As always the days are short and the nights are long but, although we have not had a snowflake yet – not even a timorous crystal, the weather has been vicious. Ciara blew into town recently. Local newspapers city and county-wide published sad but beautiful photographs of huge trees lying with their roots dangling in the air, not us, we have so few trees.

When a wild wind like Ciara visits she chooses plastic bags and car fumes to huff and puff at. As predicted storm Dennis chased after her from St Valentine's Day onwards and the pair played ten-pin bowling with our dustbins. What a noise! An urban cacophony!



Alas, you can't put an ASBO on the weather but a cheerful diversion might be a freshly squeezed orange juice in Romsey Town. February is the height of the orange season in Europe.

Mill Road News Editorial Team

Stretching hope and help

You could not get a more simple visual representation of the inequalities of our city and Mill Road than when you walk past a homeless person on the street during the winter months. The dull light manages to blend the person, together with their worldly belongings, into the hard grey concrete of the pavement, tugging at the hardest of a cynic's heartstrings. But very quickly, on cursory investigation into this aspect of homelessness, it soon emerges that the issues involved are anything but simple.

Although the journeys to the street do present common themes, each journey is as individual as it is multi-layered. The contrast between the warm walking and the freezing sitting couldn't be more stark until it becomes apparent that the gap is nowhere near as wide as one might think.

I met with Andy Smith, the City Council's Housing

Advice Partnerships Manager, at Café Remy on Mill Road to hear explanations. Andy has been working in an official capacity for over 15 years with matters associated with homelessness and so has great insight and understanding into many of the issues concerned.

He said that there is a problem with availability of accommodation in Cambridge and rented accommodation can be expensive but there are many initiatives that the City Council is involved with that many people don't realise exist.

For example? As far as the actual rough sleepers are concerned they do have outreach workers whose job it is to go around the Cambridge Streets, three times a day, to engage with people on the street, asking if there are any medical issues they would like help with, checking where they intend to sleep that night, giving out hot drinks and making sure they are aware of the

continued on next page >>



different places available for help. During the winter months the Cambridge Churches Homeless Project (CCHP) provides a warm bed and a good meal to rough sleepers in a rotating system of Church shelter (St. Barnabas and St. Philip's churches on Mill Road are part of the project).

Although rough sleepers only represent a fraction of the homeless in Cambridge, they also represent an ever-present reminder of the difficult dilemmas that any busy, modern city faces: how fast to grow, how to manage growth, how to cope with the casualties of an often migratory workforce needing work and accommodation, how to balance the liberty and freedom of an individual to be where they choose to be with the sensibilities and needs of others who may be disturbed by that individual's presence.

Cambridge statistically has negligible unemployment and is one of the fastest growing cities in the UK and so it needs to confront problems which many other cities of the UK do not have – an influx

of needy people.

Andy also told me about the Council's scheme to encourage householders to take in lodgers under the tax-free *Cambridge Supported Lodgings* initiative whereby full support, help and advice is given to anyone who is able to help towards alleviating the housing problem that Cambridge is experiencing. See:

www.cambridge.gov.uk/rent-your-spare-room-with-cambridge-supported-lodgings

So, the message is: yes there is a problem, quite a few different organisations are doing their best to aid the council, but it is a problem that needs more help, understanding and volunteers from the community as well.

Another valuable insight can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hu2to8y8mio>

John Caldwell

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The Big Issue

Currently there doesn't seem to be a Big Issue vendor working in Petersfield, Mill Road and I miss the weekly contact with a local seller as I am now buying the magazine elsewhere instead. First of all, it's a good read and I often use it as an excuse to break for a coffee, sometimes leaving my copy to be picked up by someone else who might start buying copies on the strength of it.

I don't always agree with everything in the editor's column or with John Bird's articles but they are always thought provoking and give important insight into social problems and possible ways to address them. The book and film reviews and information on upcoming exhibitions and events are useful; the straight crossword is often hard and the cryptic crossword the only one I can regularly attempt with some success.

Not all sellers are homeless but any accommodation they have is usually temporary and insecure. The Big Issue Foundation helps people not only with finding somewhere to stay but with getting

ID, a bank account and training for jobs and job interviews, with addressing health needs and any addictions.

Sometimes vendors encounter hostility and it must take great courage to stand outside and sell. Some, understandably, find it too hard, but I have met many for whom it has started to turn their lives around and helped them gain



the confidence and skills to move on. They have found pride in doing a job and learning how to do it well. They also retain agency over when they work and how many they try to sell, important for anyone feeling trapped in poverty and bureaucratic mazes.

I have had many short, uplifting conversations with local vendors. One told me "You wouldn't believe how shy I used to be. It's still hard and some people can be hostile. My mate selling down the road looks out for me and vice versa. But I've learnt so much and I know I'm doing something worthwhile. I now feel I can make something of my life"

Sarah Oliver



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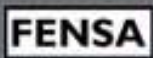


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How you can 'Pay It Forward'



It's hard not to notice the rapidly increasing numbers of homeless individuals across the UK.

Theresa Feetenby felt compelled to find a way to help the homeless residents of Cambridge. Like many, over the years Theresa had given money to those begging on the streets before switching to buying food.

In July 2018, Theresa became the mastermind behind *Pay it Forward*, a scheme which allows vulnerable and homeless individuals to exchange vouchers for food and drink (excluding alcohol).

Pay it Forward has partnered with; Jimmy's, Cyrenians, Wintercomfort and Romsey Mill Family Centre and is hoping to work with other similar support organisations.

The project is growing and students from Cambridge University's 'impact through innovation' are designing an app to allow businesses and supporting organisations to track the vouchers easily.

But there is a demand for more cafés and shops (chemists, grocers, etc) to be involved with the scheme and sell the vouchers. Theresa is working alongside Cambridge City Council to ensure there is no cost to local businesses. The council has kindly agreed to fund the cost of printing the vouchers and publicity material.

The incentive was started at the Black Cat Café and is slowly gaining momentum in the local community but there is room for more businesses to sell the vouchers and Theresa is always looking for new volunteers. Alternatively, if you are a local business who would like to provide financial support then we'd love to hear from you.

For more information on any aspect of the incentive please contact Theresa by emailing pifcambridge@gmail.com or visiting www.pifgiftvouchers.org



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Sudden hikes in rents **kill** business



Photo by John Caldwell

On most High Streets the number of unlet shops is seen as a measure of economic well-being. *Is this true of Mill Road?*

Resilience

On the Petersfield stretch there are currently five unlet units and in addition to that there are three units that were devastated by fire last summer that are yet to be renovated. These are Gees, Taank and the Tattoo shop.

Taank the opticians refused to be fazed by bad luck and are still trading from a deluxe portable cabin to the back of their shop, accessible from St Barnabas Road, whilst the Tattoo shop is trading from Piero's basement while their shop is being repaired.

Trends in Romsey

Over the bridge there are only four unlet shops. *Does this indicate that Romsey is becoming cooler and more sought after than Petersfield?* If it does, there is not a great difference. One much loved business which has recently disappeared from Romsey is the High Tea Club.

It was one of my favourites with a quiet enclosed garden at the back where I could sit and work. The café was featured in the Guardian a few years back as being an exceptional venue.

Although widely acclaimed, it didn't really manage to bed itself down into Mill Road's history, and word on the street has it that the building will be converted into flats. Planning permission does not appear to have been sought yet, so possibly this will not happen. This lovely café came and went within a few years unlike lots of

businesses on the road that have been trading for decades, if not generations.

Sudden hikes in rents kill business

I was sad to learn that one really well established business that has traded in Romsey for many years is having to make difficult choices and may cease trading.

Their problem is not unusual, the proprietors are being asked to absorb a staggeringly high increase in rent. This has been the case with other businesses along the road too. Therefore to answer our question – *does the number of unlet shops on a High Street indicate a slowing down of the local economy?* the answer is probably "no". But if the question is *do lots of unlet shops show a lack of economic well-being?* the answer is probably "yes!".

Sudden hikes in rents kill business.

Put your name on the waiting list

On the positive side however there is a restaurant on Mill Road that has a three month waiting list for a table, plus, other new businesses that are thriving too.

It is very difficult to draw conclusions from anything that is happening on Mill Road, but, those businesses that reported the greatest losses over the summer closures, during the road and gas works, tended to be on the Romsey side of the bridge whilst those who either did not suffer, or experienced an actual increase in trade are on the Petersfield side of our road – which is closer to town.

Charlotte de Blois

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An island unto itself

The traffic debate in our area is long-standing and at times it deteriorates into a fierce joust. Traders need to receive deliveries and some people blame them for creating congestion.

Many traders ask that vans and lorries mount the pavement to allow traffic to flow which worries pedestrians, particularly the elderly and the parents of toddlers, both of whom are likely to be the traders' best customers.

What we rarely do, when trying to reason on this difficult issue, is to think of the impact of activities and decisions outside our area.

Beyond our borders but only just

In January planning permission was given for a new 153 bed Premier Inn in East Road. *How will this impact us?* The hotel has no parking facilities.

What this will bring to Mill Road is difficult to predict. Premier Inn expect that their guests will use public transport. Good. It is likely that many will arrive by train but *what about the journey from the station to East Road? Will the Petersfield stretch of our road be clogged by more and more taxis?*



The upside of the decision is that trees will be planted along East Road and pavements will be widened. Petersfield's restaurants are likely to thrive as long as visitors are not put off by unruly traffic.

Our Councillors were constructively critical

Petersfield Councillor Kelley Green was at the meeting and expressed concern about the environmental impacts of

the hotel and asked whether it should be 'future-proofed' in its design to mitigate against any change in demand'

She was talking about the application of the hotel policy, officers said it contained no upper limit on hotel provision. 'Future-proofing' comes from the premise that there is carbon embedded in building construction, so we should avoid building and then demolishing buildings.

Councillor Green was also concerned about congestion on East Road, air pollution and the impact of having a newly located bus station within East Road, without any traffic management policy in place for the local area'.

Councillor Mike Davey was also present at the meeting and supported Councillor Green's reservations about congestion.

Charlotte de Blois

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Homeless but not phoneless

Statistics indicate that there are 160 homeless people in the city centre of which 130 are in temporary accommodation. This means that one would expect there only to be 30 homeless people with nowhere to go at night.

Walking down Mill Road one questions this statistic. Some street people shy away from Jimmy's as they need to hand over "details" – while others are fiercely independent in their response to welfare cuts, job loss and possibly addiction.

I had the pleasure to chat to Lee outside the Church who explained how he wanted to change his life and liked to say 'I'm homeless but not phoneless'. Lee has, with the help of the people around him, managed to set up his own business – *It Takes a City*. He patiently explained why he advocates for *It Takes a City*.

Looking at this website I can finally answer the question *how can I help?*

Well click on <http://ittakesacity.org.uk> and find out who you can donate tampons, socks and furniture to.

Or how you can cater for an event or get your garden cleaned while developing skills for homeless people in Cambridge through various social enterprises. **Hema Tasker**

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Established. Independent. Passionate.

Mill Road News is published by the non-profit organisation Mill Road Bridges, c/o The Six Bells Pub, 11 Covent Garden, Cambridge, CB1 2HS UK. Mill Road Bridges is a volunteer community group serving Petersfield & Romsey wards in Cambridge.

We welcome your submissions on any topic about the Mill Road community.

Send images and short articles to info@mill-road.com. Please note that our articles cannot favour a political party, they should not be of a purely commercial nature, and we reserve the right to edit, refuse, or postpone use of

submissions. Any views expressed in the Newsletter are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the editor or group.

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MRB logo: Sam Motherwell, Gwydir Street

Get involved

in new developments in Petersfield and Romsey

Residents will have noticed that there are two new neighbourhoods taking shape in the Mill Road area, one at the old Council depot site (known as the 'Ironworks') and one at the former Ridgeon's site on Cromwell Road.

Both of these sites are being developed by the Cambridge Investment Partnership (CIP www.ip-cambridge.co.uk). This is a partnership formed between the Cambridge City Council and Hill Investment Partnership, with the aim of accelerating a building programme to meet the city's housing shortage. These two developments in Romsey and Petersfield are an integral part of the Council's affordable housing programme to deliver 500 new council homes in Cambridge.

The 'Ironworks' site (below) at the old Mill Road depot will comprise 236 new homes of which 118 (50%) will be council-owned rented homes, and a brand new community centre building.



The Cromwell Road site will comprise 295 new homes of which 118 (40%) will be council-owned rented homes.

If you would like to find out more, the council is holding a public engagement meeting on Monday 2nd March 2020. The meeting will be held at the Salvation Army Hall on Mill Road, with arrival for a prompt start at 7.30pm. There will be presentations to provide updates on progress from the developers and builders, and you will be able to raise issues and any questions you may have. The meeting is open to all residents and there is no need to book a place.

For more information about the meeting contact the council at: neighbourhoodcommunitydevelopment@cambridge.gov.uk or call 07920 205684.

For more information about the developments see www.cambridge.gov.uk/get-involved-in-the-new-neighbourhoods
Simon Aslett

Dates for your Diary

29 February

Two hour Emergency Baby and Child First Aid Class
Ross Street Community Centre. 10am to 12 noon. Tickets: www.cambridge.minifirstaid.co.uk

2 March

Salvation Army (Young People's Hall Entrance)
Residents' Liaison meeting with the council, focusing on Ironworks and the Ridgeon's site. 7.30 to 9 pm
www.cambridge.minifirstaid.co.uk

10 March

Mill Road History
'Town vs. Gown: Social divides in Cambridgeshire antiquarian life'.
Ross Street Community Centre. 7.30 to 9pm.

24 March

Robinson College. Carbon Neutral Cambridge and the Cambridge Forum for the Construction Industry. Half day conference aiming to help the construction industry, councils and the community work together to decide how to achieve Net Zero construction. Tickets £50, book at www.cfc.org.uk/cfc-event/243/climate-emergency-conference

4th April

CSD Brass Concert St Philips Church, Mill Road.
FREE entry with retiring collection
Are you looking to join a friendly, local, non-contesting band? Contact csdbrass@gmail.com for more information, we welcome players of all levels.

14 April

Mill Road History
Mill Road History Workshop Who Lived Here? The Bath House Gwydir Street. 7 to 9pm Tickets: £3

12 May

Mill Road History AGM and VE Day 'Bring an Object, tell a story. Ross Street Community Centre. 7.30 to 9 pm.

Activities on the Road

Mill Road WI (Women's Institute) meets in Romsey Mill on the 3rd Wednesday of each month at 7:15 to 9pm. The first meeting is free, £5 for further meetings until you become a member. Millroadwi@gmail.com Twitter: @millroadwi

Cambridge Mosque Free Guided tours and educational visits are available. Book tickets at <https://cambridgecentralmosque.org/>

Cambridge Street Aid To make a donation visit the contactless donation points at Mandela House or other points around the city.

Letters to the editor

Dear Editor,

Following the concerns expressed by many Cambridge residents regarding the forthcoming Local Plan Issues and Options consultation, members of the FeCRA Committee (a city wide organisation of residents association) and other representatives had an informal meeting with City Council official Stephen Kelly.

There is a lot of concern from residents about the lack of vision, and what appears to be a piecemeal and growth-driven interest-led approach to development which lacks coherence and strategy and doesn't acknowledge the need to address the biodiversity and climate emergencies. These have now been recognised in Council policies, but plans seem to be going ahead which pay only lip service to them.
Wendy Blythe



Visit our webpage, mill-road.com, to discover more about Mill Road and add your own contributions. Scan the QR code.

Letters and opinions can be addressed to the editor at info@mill-road.com