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THE NEWSLETTER OF RAILFUTURE EAST ANGLIAN BRANCH

www.railfuture.org.uk

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November 2008

Hello, and welcome to the final edition of RailEast for 2008, following rather swiftly (or so it seems to your Editor) on the heels of '139'. But it's the first from the Editor's new home (see back page address), surrounded as he is by unpacked boxes, and off-their-hook pictures awaiting placement. Ah well, someday.

As I write this the world is witnessing one of the most profound fiscal shakeouts for many decades. The implications are depressing, and to think that it will not impinge on UK Government spending, such as transport, would be unrealistic. Yet, how can we forget just how much money panicky governments have borrowed to shore up an indulgent banking sector.

Safest projects will be those directly connected to the 2012 Olympics as this is a 'global' commitment. For just about everything else though, time alone will tell. What I *can* guarantee is that Railfuture East Anglia will vigorously continue its work, lobbying behind-the-scenes, through the media, and with you via its important quarterly meetings.

On a brighter note, and at the risk of being accused of sycophancy, may I offer a big "thank you" to our Chairman and Secretary for organising a particularly good meeting in Norwich, reported below. It gave everyone there the opportunity to dissect a particular train service; in this case that offered by East Midland Trains between Norwich and Liverpool.

So, Railfuture work is not just quiet, discreet lobbying; it is about giving *you*, the highly valued member, the chance to say your bit, to influence, and hear first hand the railwayman's angle on things. And that's why it would be great to see still more of you attending these gatherings. Indeed, our very next meeting continues this policy of getting together with people who run the railway. Read on..... CB

Cambridge Meeting 14.15 Saturday November 29th 2008

We are fortunate to have as our guest speaker, **Gilly White, the External Relations Manager of Cross Country**. She will no doubt be able to describe the plans for the development of this service and answer your questions.

Please come along to the meeting hear what she has to say and make the fact that she has kindly given up her Saturday for us, all worthwhile!

Just for once this meeting is **not** being held at St Benet's: instead it will be at

1 www.railfuture.org.uk

the **Alex Wood Hall, Norfolk Street, CB1 1LD**. Ms White's subject is the Arriva Cross Country service from Stansted Airport to Cambridge, Ely, March and Peterborough thence through the East Midlands to Birmingham, probably our most important regional passenger service.

Over the years it has evolved to its present hourly service that, thanks to Arriva, is rapidly receiving well presented, high quality rolling stock and becoming much more reliable. This is vital as it connects with many longer distance rail services along the route as well as its direct connection with air travel at Stansted. The big problem is, of course, its inability to cope with the varying traffic patterns along the route because of too few carriages. PW/CB

Norwich Meeting

Notwithstanding 'techno' gremlins with his computer and projector, John Hillman, Stakeholder Manager for East Midlands Trains (EMT) managed a highly informative presentation about the Norwich to Liverpool service, as our Secretary, Nick Dibben, reports:

The 245 miles of railway between between Norwich and Liverpool also links other important cities such as Manchester, Sheffield, Nottingham and Peterborough: a population of of around 6m. Over 3.8m journeys are made on this hourly, generally two-coach service, with consequent overcrowding.

Refurbishing the Class 158 trains will increase by 19 the number of seats per train, but at the expense of seats at tables. The new Nottingham-Sheffield-Leeds service, starting in December, will ease overcrowding in this central section. Unfortunately, the government's much vaunted 1300 'extra' coaches package offers nothing directly to this route! EMT are hoping, however, to get 6 additional units released when new rolling stock goes to other operators in 2010.

Still, the overcrowding means that little marketing can be done at present, despite EMT feeling that there is untapped demand, especially for business travel. But this requires more capacity and shorter journey times. Indeed, on 11 October EMT ran a Meridian 125mph train from Nottingham to Norwich purely in the interest of operating flexibility, as 4car Cl.158s is the medium term aim.

This issue of building new trains for the route provoked some lively discussion: from an operator's viewpoint new trains invoke expensive crew training, new depots and further facilities. They also tend to offer fewer seats as more space is allotted to 'accessible' toilets. Overall, John Hillman left us in no doubt that EMT see much greater potential in this route than 'other agencies' are prepared to admit, or back! So it's up to us to keep this route firmly in the focus of local politicians, of whatever their persuasion. ND

And Further Column Inches.....:

our Press Officer, Peter Lawrence (PL), wrote to say that Eastern Daily Press(EDP) contacted him for the Branch views on what we would like to hear

from John Hillman: extra rolling stock, and the restoration of some through summer trains to Great Yarmouth were the key issues. This translated into a half page EDP feature on 26 September, about EMT's service from Norwich to Liverpool. So that's one effective way to spread the word. Another is by writing to your MP. 'Write Now-Right Now!' PL

Cambridgeshire County Council

Unlike other counties in our area, Cambridgeshire County Council does not have a rail policy group to discuss future development. Such groups are usually attended by councillors, the rail industry and user groups like Railfuture. The Council has however, agreed to meet with the Branch to discuss ideas for the rail network, an important issue, given the growth planned for the county. The Branch will be looking for an update on Chesterton Interchange station; the possibility of re-opening the Wisbech Branch; and how the county intends to deal with expected domestic waste from London. A full report will be given at our Cambridge meeting on 29 November. ND

First Capital Connect(FCC) respond to criticism:

In the last issue Jerry Alderson and myself made some observations on the 'snapshot' survey covering Great Northern services to Peterborough and Cambridge. FCC MD, Elaine Holt, felt we were a tad unfair in our opinions and wrote to say so. Certainly we never wished to imply that the 'snapshot' was anything other than an isolated day (in Autumn 2007), and took absolutely no account of any impediments to running the service that day. Travellers, of course, only know or care that their train actually turns up, has a seat for them, and subsequently arrives on time, or not. Ms Holt also went on to emphasise the benefits promised from May next year:

"We are doing everything we can to push for extra capacity," she said. What we see as the first stage of this push, is the Peterborough and Cambridge Capacity study which will bring benefits from next May."

Elaine continues: "this does far more than increase four trains to 12-carriages; it is a whole new timetable that has been specifically targeted to offer more seats on peak services. There will be 1,779 more seats during the morning peak and 2,490 during the evening peak – an increase of 15%. There will be five additional trains, platforms are being lengthened to accommodate the longer trains, whilst more efficient use of our eight-car services will equally add to capacity."

The good news for Jerry, and many others, is that the 07.15 from Cambridge will be a 12-carriages affair and eight minutes quicker to Kings Cross. Similarly the 07.45 will be six minutes faster, also by not making stops en route. Coming back in the evening, Elaine tells us: "the 17.45 to Cambridge will now leave a minute earlier, and be fast to Cambridge, no longer calling at Royston or Letchworth. Alternative stopping services will be supplied for these stations on route to Cambridge. Similar benefits will be felt on dozens of journeys on the GN Route."

In conclusion ,she said: "We are continuing to pursue opportunities to improve capacity on the route and are already working with the Dep.forTransport to seek a further five extra trains for the GN Route by December 2009." Which is fine news, and confirms FCC's utter commitment to improving their services.

Jerry Alderson, for his part, reiterates that his original comments were triggered purely by personal experience and noting the start of work to extend platforms at the south end of Cambridge station. Nothing else.

Much more recently he noted the following exemplary behaviour. Jerry takes up the story: "The quality of information provided by drivers on First Capital Connect occasionally excels. On 24th October my train (07.45 ex Cambridge) was severely delayed because of a broken rail on the two-track stretch between Welwyn North and Welwyn Garden City. Our driver explained fully what had happened, the problems that it had caused, what would happen (we would go via the Hertford Loop), when we would be able to proceed, and how late we were likely to arrive in London. He even apologised for his optimistic estimated time of arrival." "Full marks for effort, and I would like to think that all FCC drivers are briefed to follow his fine example." Amen to that. CB/JA

Improved performance all round

And FCC's autumn punctuality figures squeeze them to the top of the list for our region's Train Operating Companies, even if a fraction down on target.

National Express East Anglia:	92.5%
National Express East Coast:	91.2%
First Capital Connect:	93.4%
East Midlands Trains:	90.9%
Arriva Cross Country:	91.6%

Network rail must also be warmly commended for their considerable contribution to this first class result. Well done everybody, keep it up. CB

And More Power to....

Over the weekend 9/10 November, a power substation, just to the east of Hitchin, was doubled in output amperes. Now all the substations on FCC are capable of powering 12 coach trains. Alleluia! CB

IPSWICH STATION LIFT

Trevor Garrod reports that, thanks to Railfuture Board member Clara Zilahi, users of Ipswich station learned in late August of a last minute spanner in the works in the long-awaited proposal to instal a passenger lift at this busy station. Ipswich Borough Council objected to Network Rail's plans on the grounds that the lift and bridge would not "sit (sic) in with the heritage nature of the station."

East Suffolk Travellers Association (ESTA) Chairman, Trevor Garrod, had a letter published in the East Anglian Daily Times, pointing out that while Ipswich

station was indeed a building of character, it was not a museum.

Letters to Network Rail (NR) and Ipswich Borough Council were eventually answered in October. We were informed that "discussions are continuing with planning officers" and NR "aim to submit a revised application that seeks to address the council's requirement by the end of this year or early next year." NR are still proposing to commence construction in the summer of 2009. TG

BECCLES LOOP

Stakeholders have been informed by NR that they are "finalising internal funding arrangements and pursuing options for third party funding for further stages of the project. The preferred option is for placing this loop at the station." in other words, the option which local campaigners pressed for 20 years ago! Well, pressure seems to work.....sometimes. TG

LOWESTOFT STATION

The Department for Transport recently launched a consultation exercise which would make it easier to close stations such as Lowestoft, cut back the track and build a new stations 400 metres inland.

ESTA has replied to this "Minor Alterations" consultation, and objected strongly to any move to water down the existing rights of users to object to a closure. The consultation paper talks about how many people may live within 800 yards of a relocated station. It says nothing about ease of interchange or about the needs of visitors using the station.

Meanwhile, the Railfuture Passenger Committee has agreed to grant £200 to ESTA out of the Rail Defence Fund to help the association conduct a survey of passengers. It is planned to do this survey during two weeks in 2009 - one week in winter and one in summer. If any member could help for a day (or longer) with the survey, please contact Rod Lock, The Beehive, Hall Rd, Oulton Broad, Lowestoft, NR32 3AW. TG

St. Neots Re-born

Member John Henderson (JH) reports that over the summer, St.Neots station ticket office was re-built and he reckons the results "are pretty good." The free indoor space is about 50% larger than it was and used materials for the roof and walls that blended well with the original. New ticket gates were installed and "I've not seen any problems with these" he says. As with many stations, the main issue at St.Neots is the lack of car park space and buses.

FCC / NR are now tackling the former with an extra 200 spaces going on to the old sidings at the south end and an old car hire site on the north side. However, some villages having just one bus per day to the station, timed to exactly miss key peak period trains. Immediately east of the station is a huge new housing community development and football ground covering nearly half a square mile. The station already has a spare track on the east side and it would be very easy to put a new platform there to give the new community

easy access to the station. However, what was finally agreed between developer and authority is just a footbridge over all the tracks that will lead into the station car park. Needless to say, the settlement has a new access road complete with useless cycle track. You really wonder, don't you? JH
Views From the Chair: Peter Wakefield takes a personal view.

Charles Taylor.

We have received this letter from Joan, Charles' widow.

To all Railfuture Members:

Thank you very much for your donation to Mencap and Biblelands, in memory of Charles.

It was very kind of you and much appreciated.

A total of £1,200.00 was raised for the two charities, which was wonderful.

Again, many thanks,

Best wishes,

Joan Taylor.

Meldreth Station Footfall Count

On September 18th, a small group of us undertook the count of passengers using Meldreth station. This was with the kind permission of First Capital Connect. FCC in fact were more than kind in their hospitality for which we thank them.

The service level provided at Meldreth by FCC is very good and on the 'snapshot' day ran very well, although there was disruption at either end of the route during the day.

We attended every train of the day from 06.02 to 01.17. The service is every 30 minutes in both peaks and hourly off-peak. Passengers were counted using every service of the day. 67 people used the 08.08, the busiest train, with several others not far behind. In all, 737 people were counted: 369 boarding/alighting trains en route to Cambridge and 368 boarding/ alighting services en route to London.

By far the strongest flows were to/from Cambridge. We calculated on the basis of this snapshot, using a 6-day week owing to Sunday disruptions etc, that some 230,000 passengers use the station each year. (Off.Rail Reg give 195,000.)

We were able to make several observations of the users. Many were cyclists. 84 bikes were taken on/off the trains. Many others 'tied' their bikes onto any handy secure fence or post. There are no 'Sheffield Stands' and we would recommend that at least 5 of these be provided on both the Meldreth and Melbourn sides of the station.

Many, if not most of the passengers walked or cycled from Melbourn. Several people asked us the way to Melbourn, as there are no direction signs on the

station to either village. We feel these should be provided. In view of its importance, perhaps Melbourn should revert to its old name of Meldreth *and* Melbourn. This would enable Melbourn to be 'picked' by timetable internet search engines.

The station is staffed with *one* shift starting with the first train of the day. Several users commented very favourably on the staff members, who provide exceptional service and are a great credit to FCC.

Once again, many thanks to FCC, for allowing us to carry out this exercise. PW

Please note that we wish to carry out a similar count at Newmarket in the near future. Volunteers are needed....names and addresses to PW, please.

Late Changes

There have been a couple of occasions recently, when we have had to make late changes to dates of meetings. We discussed the problems that this may cause you at the last Branch Committee meeting. We agreed that changes should be very rare events but, that if we should need to change anything previously published, because of exceptional circumstances, we should build up a data base of email addresses so that we may inform you.

If you agree to the Branch holding your email address for emergency purposes please send it to me at petawake@yahoo.com Any message to you will be Bcc, 'blind', in that you will not be able see the addresses of other intended recipients. PW

Dangers of Overcrowding

There has been a great surge in rail usage over the last 10 or so years and very welcome it is too. No doubt some of the increase is due to road congestion and parking restrictions in the large towns, linked to a robust and growing economy.

However, in my view, some of the increase must also be ascribed to much improved, safer rolling stock, more frequent services within a more reliable timetable and smoother, quieter ride owing to a much better track quality. Many of the fares are perceived to be reasonable too, especially if linked to the various railcards and good marketing. Although we all know about those wallet-quaking peak hour fares that damage the railway as they are always the ones quoted in the press.

The downside of all this is, of course, that many services are simply too overcrowded. Users on a short 15 mile or so journey may well be content enough with a squashed, stand-up journey on at least some days, but with the longer distance journeys they certainly are not. On many ECML, WCML or Cross Country journeys, trains are miserably overcrowded, luggage pushed under legs, blocking aisles, doorways and so on, passengers in vestibules, movement difficult. Some of this is due to poor train design, but mostly it's down to lack of rolling stock.

We want our trains to be full but not to the extent they often are. People must always come first and the journey on a train should add to our quality of life not take away from it. The general ambience should be pleasurable. PW

Cambridge Station Area redevelopment.

The redevelopment plan for much of the former railway and industrial lands has been given planning permission by the City Council after protracted debate. The plan, called CB1, by developers Ashwell, envisages a station square, surrounded by shops, offices, hotels, a transport interchange, multi-story car park, bicycle park, housing, and medical centre. The outcome ought to be a fitting gateway to the city. The perceived disadvantages, as seen by a number of residents groups, will be an increase in traffic and a permanent change of character to the southern part of the city as it becomes a commercial hub.

The traffic problem is maybe overlapped as possibly many of the additional workers will arrive by train and bus. As to change, Cambridge is already a major regional centre and surely additional development, to be sustainable, should extend from its major transport hub.

What is odd, however, is that no eastern entrance to the station has been proposed. This would counter many of the worries over traffic increases and enable thousands of residents easier access to the station, avoiding the congested railway bridges. Additionally there are tentative proposals to cut the major city artery, Mill Road, by preventing access to through traffic. If that does happen, the need for an eastern station entrance will be greater still, with the only remaining vehicular access via the bridge at the south end of the station, already heavily constrained. The land is available, so let our first call for be for a new entrance and associated road access. But what are your thoughts on this matter? PW

Thank you, Peter. And now on with the general news and comment. CB

Kings Lynn and University of East Anglia Conduct Railway Survey

A study into the way business uses rail links between Norfolk and London was recently conducted, with industry leaders being urged to share their experience of the First Capital Connect service in an on-line questionnaire.

With King's Lynn's population expected to grow and emerging plans to expand commerce in West Norfolk, a good rail link to London and Cambridge could become even more crucial, said Paul Norman, business development manager for Norfolk Chamber of Commerce.

The survey was part of wider research commissioned by the business partnership, Shaping Norfolk's Future, into the economic impact of the Norfolk train links to London. A further questionnaire is also being circulated about the service from Norwich to London Liverpool Street.

The results, which will be studied by MBA students at the University of East Anglia, will be used to assess the economic impact of trains on business and to propose improvements. "This is to find out how much companies would use the trains", Mr Norman continued, "if they were more frequent, whether it would benefit their business, or whether they feel it would reduce their carbon footprint."

He went on to say: "We want to know if there is a desire or need to increase the service levels (from Kings Lynn). A lot of companies of all sizes use that link on a regular basis to do business with London. It is a well-utilised service and with the A10 being what it is - a nightmare - you could perhaps avoid using the car if there were more trains."

Mr Norman said the rail link to the capital could become "even more critical" if West Norfolk Council succeeds in plans to expand Lynn's Hardwick industrial estate into 27 hectares of land adjoining the A149.

It is hoped the idea will provide space for businesses to invest in King's Lynn and provide jobs for a burgeoning population, which is expected to rise from 41,500 to 50,000 people by 2025 as part of the council's ambitions for growth.

"Lots of businesses in places like Cambridge look to King's Lynn where rates are cheaper - and with mobile phones and fast broadband you can trade quite effectively from a remote base," he said.

The questionnaire operated for a week. If you still wish to contribute, it may still be possible via www.shapingthefuture.org.uk. But be quick.

Ed: I suspect you're already thinking "what a great benefit more double track between Downham Market and Kings Lynn would be." Only too true.

East-West Rail Link

There have been further encouraging developments of late, chief amongst which is probably the exciting news from Chiltern Trains that they want to run an Oxford-Bicester-Marylebone service. This involves a new link between the E-W Route and the main line at Bicester. *Provided* they are given an extension to their existing franchise, Chiltern say they would provide the service and pay for the new infrastructure.

Also, the results of a study initiated to evaluate options for the section between Bedford and Cambridge are due to be issued shortly. This is not intended to define a detailed route as this could cause planning blight. Instead, it is looking for suitable rail corridors to extend the route east of Bedford. Design work on the western section between Oxford and Bedford is set to continue with £2m being available to develop the proposals to Network Rail's GRIP 4 stage (Single option scheme design).

The potential for the line as a strategic rail link is, at last, being realised and the possibility of running long distance passenger and freight trains from the South Coast to the North West over the Oxford - Milton Keynes section will be considered during this stage.

To help raise awareness of the benefits of the East-West Rail Link, Railfuture is producing a new leaflet which will be distributed across the region. The leaflet will also contain a postcard that members can send off to their MP asking for their support in urging the Government to back the entire route. Copies of the leaflet should be available at the Cambridge meeting and will be distributed with the next Rail East. ND/CB

Major Success for PLUSBUS in Cambridge

Since it was launched in January 2007, the Cambridge PlusBus scheme has had the fastest growth of any PlusBus scheme in the country. Total tickets sold now place Cambridge third in the 'league table' of more than 300 PlusBus schemes nationwide.

PLUSBUS is an integrated ticketing scheme covering the whole of Britain which makes bus and train travel cheaper and more convenient.

National Express East Anglia which operates Cambridge station, is part of the PLUSBUS scheme, offering customers the opportunity to buy tickets for train travel along with unlimited bus journeys in Cambridge in a single transaction.

Cambridge joined this scheme in 2007, whereby PLUSBUS tickets can be added to any train fare to or from Cambridge at a cost of £2.70 for one day's unlimited bus travel.

David Lewis, Sales & Marketing Director for National Express East Anglia said: "The PLUSBUS scheme has been a great success in Cambridge. It is the fastest growing PLUSBUS scheme in the country. It has made integrated transport a reality for many more people in Cambridge."

PLUSBUS is operated by Journey Solutions, a public transport initiative funded by the UK's major bus and train operators including National Express. It is also supported by the UK Government. It is now available in more than 300 areas, including virtually every town and city in Britain with a population of more than 100,000.

Full details of PLUSBUS services are available from www.plusbus.info, National Rail Enquiries on 08457 48 49 50, Traveline on 0870 608 2 608 or from www.nationalexpresseastanglia.com

NB: In a very timely email from First Capital Connect we learn that PLUSBUS will launch in Huntingdon, St Neots, Arlesey, Biggleswade and Sandy on 2 January 2009. And may they emulate, pro rata, the Cambridge success.

On-train Security: More action

In a commendable move to raise passenger perception of safer travel, National Express East Anglia has introduced a team of "Safer Travel" officers. Although not intended to travel on every train, they will become increasingly evident in

their task to help reduce bad behaviour, fare dodging and vandalism. A further aid to effectiveness, interestingly, they will be equipped with head-cameras enabling anti-social activity to be recorded. Evidence admissible in Court, apparently! ND

Eco-Towns..New Sites

The story of the proposed eco-towns continues to evolve with the government deciding that planning for two new towns in East Anglia should go ahead. These are near Norwich, at Rackheath, and Elsenham near Stansted Airport. Both are to be rail served.

In the case of Rackheath, a further bit of good news if that proposals include a freight depot, although details are necessarily vague at this time. Still, such a development, especially as a major distribution point for most of Norfolk, would be ideal. Superficially it seems to make very good business sense too. We hope such facilities are on the agenda elsewhere.

For further details, see the websites at www.elsenham-info.co.uk and at www.rackheatheco-community.com. Coltishall is being dropped as an eco-town, although substituting Rackheath will require a new station on the Norwich to Cromer route. PW/CB

How Good is your Local Railway History?

Peter Lawrence writes to say: "Having been a rail campaigner in East Anglia for some thirty six years, imagine my surprise when I opened a copy of "Railways of Britain" Norfolk and Suffolk, by Colin and David McCarthy, to discover two rail lines which I never knew existed."

And these are the two entries which so intrigued Peter: Shrubhill Goods to a point somewhere between Shippea Hill and Lakenheath opened 1867 closed 1881; and Feltwell Aerodrome to Lakenheath Station opened 1917 closed 1919 (Ministry of War line). Were you aware of either of them? If so, are you able to fill out their story as Peter would love to learn more about them; indeed, so would many of us. If you can, either contact Peter via the address on the back page or, if you use email, include your editor in the address, ie: cfb79ten@googlemail.com , I might well include it in a future issue of Rail East. PL/CB

Brandon

In the awards for Station Adopters, Brandon came away with the award for the Best Medium Station, which was quite an achievement. The prizes were a plaque and £250, for spending on plants, so a subsequent meeting decided. More trains calling at the station has definitely been reflected in passengers travelling: from 23,556 in 2004-5 to 35,656 in 2006-7 according to the Office of Rail Regulation. Taxi drivers agreed that they had certainly noticed an increase in journeys to and from the station. All very encouraging news.

Plans for platform shelters were bedevilled with vandalism fears: Andrew Goodrun, National Express East Anglia, Business Director, said he would make

installation of CCTV a priority. Many other purposeful contacts are being made, and to good effect. See www.brandonstationfriends.com/ for fuller details of a very effective group of Station Adopters. CB

LETTERS (and other things):

Finally, a very big "thank you" to those of you who wrote in with letters and news. It was very encouraging and I had hoped to include some of the letters in this issue, but space has precluded this. But the intention still very much remains, so do not fail to write, whether Royal Mail or email. They are great to read, critical or otherwise.

And if you are changing your contact details, please, please, do let Clara Zilahi, our esteemed Membership Officer know. Her details are below. CB

As our next issue will precede the Annual General Meeting in Bury St Edmunds, may I take this opportunity to wish you an enjoyable Christmas and fulfilling 2009. Your support during 2008 was greatly appreciated and valued PW/CB

And here's where to write with all that news and comment, adverse or otherwise: Editor, Chris Burton, / cfb79ten@googlemail.com or Nick Dibben, see details below. Either of us would love to hear from you, especially you Eastern East Anglians! Deadline for next issue is Monday 3 November 2008

Dates for your Diary

BRANCH MEETING

CAMBRIDGE 29 November
at 14.15: Labour Party HQ,
Norfolk Street, Cambridge

BURY ST EDMUNDS: 28
February 2009 at 14.00:
Central Library, Sergeants
Walk, St Andrews St, IP33
1TZ (*The AGM*)

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Home Close, Bracebridge
Heath, Lincoln LN4 2LP***

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BRANCH OFFICERS

Chairman: Peter Wakefield

7 Hollymount, St Matthews Street, Cambridge CB1 1QD
01223 352364

petawake@yahoo.com

Vice Chairman: Peter Lawrence

3 Hellesdon Road, Norwich NR6 5EB
01603 627217

pandwlawrence@waitrose.com

Secretary: Nick Dibben

24 Bure Close, St Ives PE27 3FE

Tel: 01480495101,

nick.dibben@btinternet.com

Treasurer: Lewis Buckingham

25 Drury Road, Colchester CO2 7UY Tel: 01206 571734

Membership Secretary: Clara Zilahi

31 Wimsbotsham Road, Downham Market PE38 9PE

01366 383954 clara.zilahi2@btinternet.com

Chris Burton (new address, please note)

**2 Stone Terrace,
Cambridge, CB1 2PN**

01223 352327 cfb79ten@googlemail.com

