

# South Cambridgeshire District Council – Harston & Comberton Ward

Comprising Barton, Coton, Comberton, Grantchester, Harlton,  
Harston, Haslingfield, Hauxton, and South Trumpington

## District Councillors' Annual Report – May 2023

### Contact details

If you have any questions or concerns relating to SCDC services please contact us using the details below. These are housing need, housing repairs for council tenants, planning, benefits, council tax, bin collection, environmental health issues etc.

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### Council composition

This was the first year of a four-year term for the District Council. Following several by-elections, the current composition of the council is:

- Liberal Democrat 35
- Conservative 9
- Independent 1

The Liberal Democrats, of which we are a part, have formed the administration of the Council with a Leader and Cabinet from within that party. During this time, Cllr Atkins has served as Chair of the Audit and Corporate Governance committee, Cllr Cahn has served on Planning committee and Climate and Environment Advisory committee, and I have served on Licensing committee and Climate and Environment Advisory committee.

### Cost-of-living crisis

The impacts of the current economic climate have affected many (if not most) of our residents. The Council supplied over 300 residents who were 'just about managing' with free electric blankets and slow cookers, on top of an expanded provision of discretionary housing payments, council tax payments, and the creation of community warm hubs. A further £200k has been allocated for new schemes; the warm hubs are now transitioning to Community Wellbeing hubs with a wider range of support on offer.

#### Homes for Ukraine

SCDC has been highly active in the local administration of the government's Home for Ukraine scheme. Communication with hosts and guests has been key and the Council have issued a weekly community update for hosts and, recently, one for guests. Throughout the scheme, South Cambs has remained one of the local authorities with the highest number of Ukrainian arrivals which shows how keen South Cambridgeshire residents have been to support and provide homes for Ukrainian refugees. For the year ending March 2023, 408 hosts have welcomed 787 Ukrainian guests into their homes, 914 DBS checks have been completed, and 405 welfare visits made.

The council is now heavily engaged in the next phase of the Homes for Ukraine scheme. Whilst many guests will remain with their hosts, some will want, or need, to move on and the council is helping these people to find a new host, apply for social housing, or to rent privately. The council is still looking for potential hosts, so if you feel you can help, please contact [duty.communities@scambs.gov.uk](mailto:duty.communities@scambs.gov.uk)

### Council housing

Our Council housing stock has been reduced significantly over many years as Council houses were sold without being replaced, and this has led to a shortage of Council housing. This year the Council turned a corner by more than doubling its rate of council house building to 70 per year to boost our stock to around 5,500 houses.

The Council successfully bid for £4.5m in January from the Government's Local Authority Housing Fund which will allow us to acquire an additional 30 homes, and for £1.7m in March from the Government's Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund to upgrade the energy efficiency of our housing stock.

## **Green to our core**

One of the Council's ongoing Business Plan objectives is to be "Green to Our Core" and the Council has delivered a number of initiatives in the last year. Two electric refuse collection vehicles are now operating in the district, a third is on order and a fourth will follow soon. These will replace diesel vehicles. Plans are also being developed for a large solar array at the Waterbeach depot to charge them. Following earlier successful initiatives, our '6 Free Trees' project was introduced to increase tree cover on parish council land, enhancing biodiversity and carbon capture. The Council has been working with community partners to provide equipment and information kits to encourage greater recycling and minimise waste at community events. More information can be found here: <https://www.scambbs.gov.uk/climate-emergency-and-nature/>

## **Growth and the Local Plan**

Economic growth in the Greater Cambridge area is one of the main drivers of the decisions the Council is making. Companies of all kinds want to move to the Cambridge area, creating jobs and the prosperity that goes with them, alongside higher demand for housing, transport and public services. This is the reason that the government requires local planning authorities (including the Council) to plan for greater numbers of houses and the infrastructure (schools, medical facilities, roads) to go with them. One of the consequences of our growth locally is an exceptionally high cost of housing, making home ownership impossible for many people, and leading to people choosing to live in areas further away from Cambridge that have lower rents and house prices. Many then commute to their workplaces in Cambridge, leading to greater congestion, poorer air quality and higher energy use.

The government requires that all planning authorities produce a Local Plan and expects them to have a clear understanding of the 'objectively assessed' needs for housing and jobs. Planning authorities that deliver the number of houses that the government agrees are needed are permitted to have control over development planning; those that do not, can lose the ability to decide what is built and where. Prior to 2018 the Council's development plans were judged as insufficient and consequently the Council lost control over the location of several housing developments.

SCDC is currently working to the Local Plan that the Council inherited from the previous administration and discussions are being held as to how the government's growth requirements can be delivered (especially given the potentially serious consequences for water supply in the area). Meanwhile, work on the next Local Plan is ongoing: the First Proposals have been published, with a clear focus on large, key sites (Cambourne, Northstowe, Waterbeach, Biomedical Campus) with good transport connectivity, and a very limited impact on rural villages. The next Local Plan will be consulted on later in the year.

## **Business support**

The Business Support & Development Team has provided support and advice for over 100 local businesses in the past year, and has established an up-to-date list of business premises to help local start-ups. They have also worked with traders, communities and businesses to help establish and expand local markets within the District. The Council created a specific Market Toolkit guide for anyone considering beginning a market in their village. The online Trader Directory is designed to list the talented marketeers across the district whilst promoting shopping and supporting local businesses. The Council's annual Christmas Market was held again this year in Cambourne. In September, our Visit South Cambs tourism directory celebrated its first year of operation, having promoted around 200 local venues and over 230 local events within the year.

## **Looking ahead**

Looking ahead to the coming year, the Council's key goals for residents include reducing fly tipping, bringing in Civil Parking Enforcement, introducing a new Mobile Warden scheme for elderly residents, support for local projects focusing on health and wellbeing, and to build at least 75 more energy-efficient Council Houses. Our business support goals will focus on more tailored business support, help for greener businesses, and more work in building up local markets. Our environmental goals are to address water scarcity while safeguarding our natural rivers and streams, boost local Zero Carbon projects, provide greener waste collection, and push ahead with our refurbishment of Council houses