

South Cambridgeshire District Council – Harston & Comberton Ward

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

District Councillors' Monthly Report – July 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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Cost of living information

Visit <https://www.scambs.gov.uk/cost-of-living-support/> for information on: where to turn for advice; benefits, money and debt advice; help with energy and water bills; help for parents and families; help with food and health costs; help with phone bills; help with making your home warmer; Age UK handyman service and; support if you are in distress.

Mobile Food Hub

A new Mobile Food Hub, funded by the Council and run by not-for-profit organisation, Hope CIC, is being launched to further support communities during the cost-of-living crisis. Fresh produce and essential items – some of which will be free and others at below retail price – will be brought directly to villages around South Cambridgeshire to help people with rising food prices. It is the first service of its kind in the district.

The Mobile Food Hub will visit Willingham, Papworth, Linton, Fulbourn, Orchard Park and Duxford, weekly. The villages have been selected based on Census deprivation data, mapped against where current foodbanks and food hubs operate from.

Any resident struggling with increasing costs, including those who live outside of these villages, can access this Mobile Food Hub by turning up on the day. No vouchers or referrals are needed. The van will be easily identifiable via the Mobile Food Hub logo and the Council is encouraging any resident who feels they may benefit from it, whether once or regularly, to make full use of the service.

If you would like to know more or how to volunteer or donate, please visit:

<https://hopeagainst.org/hope-cic-mobile-food-hub>

Cambridgeshire Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme 2023

Children in receipt of benefits-related free school meals can access a holiday scheme for up to 64 hours over the summer. The County Council have registered 145 participating schemes, who are offering enriching experiences, a daily meal and physical activity to over 3,000 children and young people. Ukrainian and other refugee families are also eligible to attend as well as families struggling financially.

Details are available at: <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/council/communities/support-with-the-cost-of-living/holiday-activities-and-food-programme/haf-provider-directory>

Comberton and Grantchester Community Hubs

Visit a safe and friendly environment to enjoy free refreshments and social activities, obtain information and advice, and share the company of others. Local Community Hubs include:

- Comberton Baptist Church, Green End, Comberton, Cambridge, CB23 7DY.
Opening times: Monday, 3pm – 5 pm
- Grantchester Communal Hall, Tabrum Close, Grantchester, Cambridge, CB3 9NW
Opening time: Friday, 10am – 12pm

Information on other venues can be found at

<https://www.cambsacre.org.uk/projects/cambridgeshire-community-hubs-network/>

Upcoming EWR events

Following the May announcement from EWR Co. confirming the route of the new East West Railway through this area, several engagement sessions are planned. These include:

- Cambridge Belfry Hotel, Back Lane, Cambourne, CB23 6BW
Tuesday 11th July, 2 pm – 8 pm
- Graduate Cambridge, Granta Place, Mill Lane, CB2 1RT
Monday 17th July, 2 pm – 8 pm

Design work that will affect how great the impacts of the railway are on our area is currently ongoing, including the heights of embankments and viaducts, whether roads and public rights of way remain open, and measures to mitigate the visual and other impacts. These meetings are a chance to continue to let EWR Co. know about your concerns as well as to push for improvements and benefits to village communities, especially those impacted who are unlikely to benefit directly from using the railway line.

More information on the announcement and events is available at: [East West Rail | Route Update Announcement](#).

Haslingfield Greenway – should it go through Grantchester?

A consultation has been launched to focus on the new designs for the Grantchester section of the Haslingfield Greenway. Please share your views to help decide whether the Greenway should go through Grantchester. If you have an opinion on this, please take part.

The consultation runs until midday Friday 28th July 2023.

The documents and online survey are available at:

<https://consultcambs.uk.engagementhq.com/gcp-haslingfield-greenway-2023>.

Harston & District Village Warden Trust – Status Update

The Harston and District Village Warden Trust has merged with the Melbourn Mobile Warden Scheme (MMWS), which currently covers Melbourn, Meldreth, Shepreth, Harston, Hauxton, Barrington, Grantchester and potentially Orwell villages.

Information about MMWS can be found on their website: [Melbourn Mobile Warden Scheme – Helping people to remain independent in their own home since 1996 \(mmws.org.uk\)](#) and their telephone is: 07808 735066.

Homes Upgrade Grants

Cambridgeshire has been awarded £11.5 million over two years to improve energy efficiency in homes which are not on mains gas. More information, including eligibility criteria, is available at: <https://www.actiononenergycambs.org/>

SCDC grants supporting physical activity

The Council is offering grants worth more than £22,000 to help encourage residents to stay fit and healthy. These include:

- Grants of up to £2,000 (total of £13,000) aimed at supporting residents with chronic health problems that will be available to groups and organisations who provide physical activity programmes for people with health conditions such as Parkinson's, diabetes, or dementia.
- Grants of up to £1,000 (total of £9,000) for sports centres to restart fitness classes that may have stopped during Covid.

Please visit <https://www.scambs.gov.uk/community-safety-and-health/grants/> to apply from July 2023.

The Council is also developing a **free**, 12-week physical activity programme for adults with a BMI of 25 plus, called Exercise4Fun. Once people attend their first class, they also get a 90-day free pass to use at their local leisure centre. This has been made possible with funds from the Public Health 'Healthy Weight' grant from Cambridgeshire County Council.

River Mel restoration work

A joint initiative between the Wild Trout Trust, Cambridge Water, South Cambridgeshire District Council and Melbourn Parish Council has worked to restore the riverbed of the River Mel, a small chalk stream that supports brown trout and water voles, as well as water crowfoot and starwort. Kingfishers occasionally use the river too.

The river has become degraded through low flows, over-shading, and pressure from people in recent years. The River Mel Restoration Group (RMRG) has carried out a great deal of improvement and restoration work during the last decade but in places have found it challenging to maintain all that they have done.

Following scrub and bramble removal in late winter when birds were not nesting to open-up the river, recent work under the supervision of the Wild Trout Trust in Melbourn has seen the careful restoration of the riverbed using a blend of gravel and chalk. The bed now smoothly rises and falls, helping the river to flow at different rates - which increases the range of habitats.

Cambridge Water's PEBBLE Fund, which was created to encourage and enhance biodiversity in the local environment, funded the purchase of approximately 200 tonnes of gravel. Melbourn Parish Council also provided a generous grant for the work. South Cambridgeshire District Council's Awarded Watercourses team provided equipment, such as excavators and trailers, and staff, to place the mix of stone sensitively along the riverbed. In particular, the use of the Council's trailer allowed the gravel to be brought to site as and when required – avoiding the need for it to be stockpiled at Melbourn Recreation Ground. This also kept large lorries away from local schools.

Read more at: <https://www.scambs.gov.uk/teamwork-to-restore-the-river-mel/>

South Cambridgeshire District Council supports Rural Housing Week

The District Council supported Rural Housing Week (3rd–7th July) to raise awareness of how it helps local people either rent or get onto the property ladder with affordable housing.

The Council's Rural Exception Site policy has enabled registered providers to build 458 affordable homes across South Cambridgeshire since 2009. In addition, more than 30 new homes are due to be completed on rural exception sites in the district in the next two years.

The Rural Exception Sites policy allows sites which are outside the development framework to be developed as an exception to planning policy. The scheme works via Cambridgeshire ACRE with the support of both the district and parish council. First, a survey is carried out to find out how many people in the village have a housing need. Once a housing need is

identified the registered provider, along with the parish council, look at finding a suitable area of land to be developed as a rural exception site, for example by approaching local landowners and farmers. The ensuing process includes a site feasibility study, applying for planning permission and public consultation before building work begins in conjunction with a housing provider.

The District Council is also proud of its development programme, building new council homes. A total of 321 Council homes have been built for rent and shared ownership since 2018, enabling local people to stay living in their local communities.

Read more at: <https://www.scambs.gov.uk/south-cambridgeshire-district-council-supports-rural-housing-week/>

Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Development Management Service has successfully received a quality management accreditation (ISO 9001:2015 Quality Management Standard)

Over the last few months, the Development Management service set up a quality group consisting of team members from across the service to collaborate and capture our business processes and procedures for development management and compliance. These were reviewed to ensure they meet and exceed the requirements of our service users and stakeholders, and included other areas such as performance, complaints and contracts.

The external ISO 9001 auditor spent several days with the team, reviewing everything from processes, performance, internal audits to leadership and we have successfully achieved the standard without any need for additional work. As far as we know, we are the only Planning Service to have achieved this accreditation. The next step will be to create a business development opportunity by providing a toolkit and support to other councils. Finally, we aim to achieve this standard for the rest of the service by 2024, meeting our ethos of continual improvement. Well done to the team.

Transformation update – customer experience in GCSPS

The Transformation team and the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service have been working closely together both to improve the customer experience, and ensure we are making the best of available technology. If you would like to know more about some of the work, just watch the following video on the SCDC Youtube channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bMUHJHfY6WM>

4-day week trial update

This initiative by South Cambridgeshire District Council has generated intense national press interest, positive and negative. Some inaccurate information has been perpetuated. The following is intended as a helpful summary. Please do read the reports on the SCDC website at <https://www.scambs.gov.uk/your-council-and-democracy/four-day-working-week-trial/>, which includes the independent assessment of the trial by the Bennet Institute at Cambridge University, for an interesting and fuller picture.

The 4-day-week has been trialled quite extensively in the private sector; SCDC was the first local authority in the country to undertake a trial. This occurred between January–March 2023. In May, due to the positive results of the trial, which indicated no negative impact on productivity and staff in better health, it was decided to extend the trial for a 12-month period to allow in-depth understanding of its potential benefits for the people of South Cambs.

The key impetus for the study was a stubborn difficulty in recruiting to posts and reliance on more costly agency staff to fill vacancies. This cost to the public purse has been substantial, at a time when public sector budgets are under enormous strain. Some areas of council, for example planning, are especially prone to losing newly trained local authority staff to higher

paid private sector jobs. Councils can't match private sector pay, but they can offer different ways of working.

The premise of the 4-day week is that productivity must not be adversely affected and that a healthier and more rested workforce can perform in a more focused and productive way, making up that 'lost' time. The world really has changed and many factors have had a profound impact on the local authority workplace – not just Covid but also technology, the impacts of the 2008 financial crisis and ensuing austerity and deep cuts to public services, changes in the overseas workforce since departure from the EU, and a general decline in the health of the general population.

Disruption of staff turnover is something that people may recognize through their own experience in interaction with the council: multiple successive planning officers for example mean lost institutional memory in dealing with a planning application. Training new staff is expensive, and when staff don't remain in post for long that training cost is lost. This is public money. Public sector workforce recruitment difficulties are widespread. Jobs are often more stressful than before the pandemic, for many reasons including because services might still be in recovery mode. This can cause understandable public frustration, as well as days lost to staff illness. Workforce retention and recruitment are a key risk to council services.

Prior to the announcement of the 4-day week trial at South Cambs, a survey was undertaken to gauge staff health and wellbeing. When the trial concluded, results showed that health and wellbeing improved, while productivity was unaffected. Although the trial was not intended to measure improvement to recruitment, there was evidence of improvement with strong applications to a particularly hard-to-fill post. On this basis, it was decided to further the trial to a 12-month period, which will allow time to measure impacts on recruitment.