

South Cambridgeshire District Council – Harston & Comberton Ward

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

District Councillors' Monthly Report – March 2024

District Councillor 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.

Michael Atkins:	Cllr.Atkins@scambs.gov.uk	07968 264637
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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 handy person service and; support if you are in distress.

Community Hubs

Community Hubs offer residents somewhere to socialise, take part in new activities and to receive information on cost-of-living support such as how to reduce bills and access financial support, as well as how to stay healthy and well.

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

A full list of Community Hubs can be found at:

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

Easter bin collections – no changes in Haslingfield

Only bin collections that would have been on Good Friday will be affected by the upcoming Easter bank holidays, so there will be no changes in Haslingfield.

Housing

Home adaptations

Last year Cambridgeshire Home Improvement Agency (Cambs HIA) helped more than a hundred families in the district access grants such as Disabled Facilities Grants and Special Purpose Grants to undertake adaptations and repairs in their homes. Adaptations in homes can help prevent accidents, assist people with long term health conditions and help people live comfortably and independently.

Cambs HIA is strategic partnership between South Cambridgeshire District Council, Cambridge City Council and Huntingdonshire District Council dedicated to enhancing the living conditions of residents, particularly focusing on older adults, individuals with disabilities, and those with limited incomes. Please use this link to find out more:

<https://www.cambshia.org/>.

Awareness Campaign launched to bring empty homes back into use in South Cambridgeshire

An awareness campaign has been launched to help bring empty private properties back into use and help get families living in suitable homes.

The campaign, launched in [Empty Homes Week 2024](#), is urging private property owners to turn empty properties into homes through sale or rental.

Renting an empty property is easier than people think, thanks to Shire Homes, the District Council's private sector leasing scheme, a complete management service and worry-free way of renting.

Shire Homes can take on a property for three or more years and provides guaranteed rental payments every month, with no management fees, regular property visits, full management service and day to day maintenance.

All rental homes must be safe and in rental condition. Shire Homes also offers a 'Homes for Ukraine' option where owners could potentially receive funding for up to £570 per home towards PAT testing, Gas Safety Check Certificate, EPC and Smoke Alarms to get their property ready for rental to a Ukrainian resident.

Private homeowners can support the campaign by speaking to the Empty homes Officer who can offer help, advice and visit your property if required.

A recent example of how the Council can support bringing empty homes back into use is a house where the owner died with no known relatives. Empty since 2020, the property has experienced burst pipes and flooding to the downstairs causing issues to neighbours, with no prospect of being sold. The District Council Empty Homes officer worked with a genealogy company to trace two distant relatives in France who have agreed to commence probate and sell the property.

How to spot an empty property?

In summer it will be more apparent due to gardens growing wild, but lookout for burst pipes and leaks from neighbouring properties, or unused refuse bins. They also attract a higher insurance premium, as well as being an eyesore to communities. Bringing an empty property back into use can provide owners with a regular rental income, a heated property in winter or significant income from a sale.

How to get an empty property back into use?

There are many reasons why a property could be empty. The Council works with Auction Houses, Genealogy and Probate companies to progress probate or trace owners and estate agents - the Council can be a keyholder if property owners live some distance away. Also [Cambs HIA](#), a home improvement agency and not-for-profit shared service team within the council, can arrange low-level building works on a private paid-for basis. They have surveyors, approved builders and contractors who work for them and arrange site meetings, Building Control, Planning and can complete technical drawings and schedules of work.

The 'Doer Upper' option

It is popular for people to take on an empty property in need of TLC to make it their home. If completing building work yourself, maintenance and improvements are usually charged at the standard rate of 20% VAT. If you are thinking about or have recently purchased a property that has sat empty for two plus years, the Council's Empty Homes Officer can provide you with a letter free of charge to pay just 5% VAT on renovation work when using a registered builder.

If you are a private homeowner and would like further help and support, please contact Anna Nightingale Empty Homes Officer on: anna.nightingale@scambs.gov.uk.

Full Council

South Cambridgeshire District Council budget

Full Council recently voted to approve the Budgets and Business Plan for the next 12 months. SCDC council tax will increase by £5 for the average band D home, equivalent to a below inflation rise of around 3% and around 10 p per week. This increases the yearly charge for a band D home to £170.31. This rise continues to maintain the Council's position in the lowest 25% of taxing District Councils in the country.

Commercial investments bring in around £7 million per year, which helps to mitigate the cuts in Government support in recent years. If it were not for the expectation of a future redistribution of business tax revenue (via the Government's Fair Funding Review), then SCDC would have a projected surplus to 2029.

The Council Tax relief threshold has been increased in line with inflation so that people on the lowest incomes can continue to claim. SCDC is one of the few councils offering up to 100% relief for those residents most in need.

Council rent increases of 7.7% were also agreed to allow continued upgrading of council housing stock to make it more energy efficient and therefore cheaper to live in. The plan is to deliver 75 new council homes for rent and shared ownership, as well as continue to improve the insulation and heating for existing council housing.

You can find out more and access the reports via: [Agenda for Council on Tuesday, 27 February 2024, 2.00 p.m. \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#).

Care experience will be treated as a protected characteristic

SCDC passed a motion where it will now treat care experience as a protected characteristic – meaning that when the council makes decisions moving forward, as part of its Equality Impact Assessments, it will now also assess the impact on care leavers. At the meeting, Council heard how care-experienced people face significant barriers that impact them throughout their lives, including discrimination and stigma across housing, health, education, relationships, employment and in the criminal justice system. This is a positive step towards treating care leavers more inclusively in society and was agreed unanimously by district councillors. The County Council, Combined Authority, Peterborough City Council and Cambridge City Council have all passed similar motions.

Support of the White Ribbon Campaign

SCDC also passed a motion in support of the White Ribbon Campaign, after a decision was taken to seek accreditation with them. White Ribbon are a domestic abuse advocacy organisation who work to provide education against domestic abuse, in particular violence against women. This motion was also agreed unanimously.

Planning

Biodiversity net gain requirements

The legal requirement for developers to deliver at least a 10% biodiversity net gain on new major housing developments came into effect on the 12th February 2024. For smaller sites of between 1 and 9 dwellings, biodiversity net gain comes into effect on the 2nd April. Biodiversity net gain is a pivotal component of the 2021 Environment Act, which allowed a two-year transition before coming into law.

Greater Cambridge Shared Planning has taken proactive measures in anticipation of this significant new environmental legislation. These include rewriting local guidance on biodiversity, expanding our Ecology Team, and working with neighbouring councils.

The importance of biodiversity and our natural environment are steadily emerging as central topics in environmental discussions, mirroring the heightened awareness surrounding carbon emissions. There is a growing consensus among residents and policy makers on the critical need to protect and enrich our natural habitats.

Alarming statistics reveal that the UK has witnessed a staggering 60% decline in biodiversity over the past five decades, according to the Environment Bank. This loss has not only impacted humans but has also led to habitat degradation and a decline in animal populations. Cambridgeshire faces challenges with its historically low amount of land dedicated to nature, primarily dominated by monoculture arable farming, which has resulted in poor biodiversity levels.

Under these new regulations, developers will be required to demonstrate a minimum of 10% biodiversity net gain above the baseline lost due to their developments. Strict guidelines have been established to ensure accurate submission and verification of evidence. Developers found to provide incorrect data on existing biodiversity could face fines of up to £5,000.

The Built and Natural Environment Team in the shared planning service has put two new measures in place to help applicants: a) a technical guidance note and b) a bespoke pre-application advice service. More details can be found at:

<https://greatercambridgeplanning.org/planning-applications/pre-application-advice-service/biodiversity-net-gain-advice/>

Greater Cambridge Shared Planning secures funding to improve digital planning services and biodiversity

Greater Cambridge Shared Planning has successfully secured funding totalling £375,000 from the Department for Levelling Up, Homes and Communities (DLUHC) in its latest PropTech funding round.

This funding will be used to streamline the planning process, improve the way planning proposals are assessed and managed, and provide clearer information about proposed developments identified in the emerging Local Plan. Through these digital tools, Greater Cambridge Shared Planning aims to make Local Plan consultations easier to understand and visualise, foster greater transparency, and boost environmental enhancement efforts across Greater Cambridge.

The first project, allocated £225,000 and dedicated to the 'Local Plan Site Assessment Process,' will see the integration of 3D modelling technology into the Local Plan process. Developers will be able to submit their proposals in 3D, allowing site assessors to better understand potential impacts to determine whether the proposal would be suitable based on the local context and sensitivities like Conservation Areas, listed buildings, and important viewpoints. For the sites put forward in the new Local Plan, residents would be able to view these proposals in 3D images, showing how the development could look. It is hoped that this will bring this part of the Local Plan to life for residents and in turn be able to make better informed comments on the proposals.

The second project granted £150,000 and dedicated to 'Biodiversity Net Gain' underscores Greater Cambridge Shared Planning's commitment to environmental sustainability and conservation. With the recent national requirements for biodiversity to be enhanced because of a new development, the funding will allow the councils to accurately monitor how this is being achieved across the Greater Cambridge area. The Greater Cambridge Shared Planning's Ecology team will be able to import, manage, verify, report on, and monitor biodiversity data to ensure that new development makes a lasting positive impact on local biodiversity habitats and species.

Fly tipping at Girton lands resident with a fine

A resident who dumped building waste on land at the back of a Council house in Girton has been handed a £400 Fixed Penalty Notice for fly tipping. This followed from a member of the public making a complaint and a visit by a South Cambridgeshire District Council Environmental Crimes Officer. Photographs of the fly-tipped waste were gathered and a witness statement taken, before formally interviewing a local resident who admitted placing the waste - soil, boards, bags, and other building materials - at the location.

The District Council takes the crime of fly tipping seriously and is reinforcing the team with an additional two Environmental Crimes officers to conduct active patrols, checks and targeted actions against known hotspots within South Cambridgeshire.

You can report fly tipping incidents using this [online web form](#), or if you are witnessing a fly tip in action, please call 999.

If you have bulky waste for collection, details of the Council's service are here: <https://www.scambs.gov.uk/recycling-and-bins/bulky-item-collection-service/>.

4 day working week trial

SCDC received a Bronze Award at the [iESE Public Sector Transformation Awards 2024](#) in the Efficiency and Effectiveness category for the four-day week trial. The final was held on the 6th March in London. [The judges said](#): "This organisation has harnessed the real potential in their organisation, delivering elevated performance and creating efficiencies." The iESE Award was one of two awards the Council has been shortlisted for - alongside the [upcoming LGC Awards](#) where the nomination is in the 'Innovation' category.

The trial of the 4-day working week model ends at the end of March. The next steps were approved by Cabinet on the 12th March. These included:

- Continue with four-day week working arrangements for desk-based colleagues (pro rata for part time colleagues) until:
 - (i) information is provided by the Government regarding potential future financial levers they might impose on Councils using this working practice, as announced in their Local Government Financial Settlement consultation in December 2023, and
 - (ii) a subsequent consultation is conducted by the Council, analysed, and all trial data is presented to Full Council for a final decision.
- Continue with four-day week working arrangements for the Waste service operational colleagues (the crews) (pro rata for part time colleagues) until:
 - (i) information is provided by the Government regarding potential future financial levers they might impose on Councils using this working practice, as announced in their Local Government Financial Settlement consultation in December 2023, and
 - (ii) a subsequent consultation is conducted by the Council, analysed, and all trial data is presented to Full Council for a final decision, noting that with a seasonal service, ideally a full year's data is required.
- Undertake a consultation on the four-day week, once the financial implications of the Government's Local Government Financial Settlement consultation are confirmed and all implications of considering adoption of a four-day week permanently are understood.
- Harmonise working hours at 32 hours per week (pro rata for part time colleagues) from 1 April 2024 (this is to make working hours the same for desk-based and operational colleagues)

- An update report will be provided to Employment & Staffing Committee, Cabinet and Full Council and Cambridge City council committees, no later than the end of July 2024, with data on the trial periods (desk-based and waste), up until the end of March 2024, and information about the ongoing effectiveness, including recruitment and retention, costs and savings of a four-day week working model.

The report is available at:

<https://scams.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=293&MId=9761&Ver=4>

Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Local Plan – Timetable Update

A timetable update for producing the Greater Cambridge Local Plan – a key planning document which would ensure that growth in Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire is delivered in a sustainable way for people and the environment – has been published for consideration by councillors in the coming weeks. It was approved by SCDC’s cabinet on the 12th March and will be considered by Cambridge City Council’s Planning and Transport Scrutiny Committee on the 19th March.

This timetable update sets out the planning service’s best estimate that the Local Plan may enter the Government’s new (not yet introduced) 30-month plan timeframe by autumn/winter 2025.

Factors affecting the progress of the Local Plan include uncertainty about:

- **Water supply:** an issue which the Greater Cambridge Planning Service warned in January 2023 could delay existing plans for housebuilding if not addressed by Government. Government has now established a Cambridge Water Scarcity Group and allocated funding to help address the issue, but work is in the early stages.
- **Transport:** next steps to enable a sustainable transport strategy that can support the Plan, addressing issues raised by the decision by the Greater Cambridge Partnership not to take forward the Making Connections proposal and to pause the Cambridge South East Transport Scheme. Local partners now need to collaborate to address these issues via the forthcoming Greater Cambridge Transport Strategy.
- **Waste Water Treatment Plant:** Anglian Water’s Development Consent Order process to seek to relocate its Waste Water Treatment Plant is ongoing, with a decision due towards the end of 2024. If approved, this would unlock land for a new North East Cambridge development which would be a major site in the emerging Plan.
- **National planning reforms:** expected to be introduced in autumn 2024. While the intention of the reforms is to speed-up plan making, GCSP planners do not yet know what additional work may be required to update work already done as part of the emerging Plan to meet new requirements. Overall, the reforms may not impact the timeline, but planners cannot be certain at this stage.

A further key uncertainty is that the Government announced its intention to significantly increase levels of development in Cambridge beyond the levels the councils have outlined in the emerging Local Plan as being needed. Government said in December its vision for Cambridge includes proposals for “northwards” of 150,000 new homes as part of a major new expansion of the city. The councils’ own evidence had previously suggested the need to provide for 50,000 new homes, to support 66,000 new jobs anticipated in the area between now and 2041. The councils are seeking to understand how and in what way the Government’s ambitions will interact with, and impact on, the Local Plan process.

The full report considered at Cabinet is available at: [Agenda for Cabinet on Tuesday, 12 March 2024, 10.00 a.m. \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#).

“Case for Cambridge” update published alongside Spring Budget

Jeremy Hunt MP said in his budget address:

“...I am pleased to announce the next steps for Cambridge to reach its potential to be the world’s leading scientific powerhouse. I confirm there will be a long-term funding settlement for the future Development Corporation in Cambridge at the next Spending Review, with over £10m invested in the coming year to unlock delivery of crucial local transport and health infrastructure.”

You can read the joint news releases from Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council here: <https://www.cambridgenetwork.co.uk/news/council-leaders-react-case-cambridge-update-published-alongside-spring-budget>

If you are interested in the details available, here are the links to the supporting documents:

- [The case for Cambridge - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/614247/case-for-cambridge-2020.pdf)
- [Addressing water scarcity in Greater Cambridge: update on government measures - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/614248/addressing-water-scarcity-in-greater-cambridge-update-on-government-measures-2020.pdf)
- [Joint statement on addressing water scarcity in Greater Cambridge - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/614249/joint-statement-on-addressing-water-scarcity-in-greater-cambridge-2020.pdf)