

South Cambridgeshire District Council – Harston & Comberton Ward

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

District Councillors' Annual Report – May 2024

District Councillors

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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Committee roles

Over the past year 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, Climate and Environment Advisory committee and have also joined Planning committee.

Budget

The Council remains on a sound financial footing due to investment income and strong business rate collections. It remains in the lowest 25% of District Councils for council tax.

The government is planning to redistribute business tax revenue in the near future (via the Fair Funding Review), which would likely remove significant income from the authority. Because council tax rises are carefully limited, it is prudent for the Council to make use of the rises available now to ensure that its funding is resilient to these expected changes. The Council continues to offer up to 100% relief from council tax for those residents in most need.

Council priorities

Growing local businesses and economies

The Business Support & Development Team has been continuing to support local businesses through the Visit South Cambs website, with an average of 1,874 monthly visitors in the year up to Dec 2023, alongside newsletters and webinars, and promotion of the new Green Business Impact Programme resulting in the first sign ups.

The Council's commercial premises were 95% occupied as of Dec 2023, providing both space for companies and income for the Council, and additional commercial space is currently being created on the ground floor of South Cambs Hall.

Continued support for markets and market traders is highlighted by the Council's annual Christmas Market at Cambourne with 72 traders, 5 food vans and 1,500 visitors. A number of other markets across the district are also supported.

Truly affordable housing

The Council owns and maintains around 5,600 council homes and has been working to increase the number by building or acquiring more than are sold through right to buy. For 2023/2024 around 46 new homes for rent or shared ownership were delivered, along with 66 homes for refugees, which will enter general stock when they are no longer needed for this purpose. The Council is also working with The Hill Group via the South Cambridgeshire Investment Partnership to deliver 256 new low-carbon homes in Cambourne, including 72 for affordable rent (built according to Passivhaus principles) and 30 for shared ownership.

For existing council housing, stock condition surveys have been completed to inform retrofit plans for the next 5, 10 and 15 years. In addition to ongoing work to improve properties and reduce bills for tenants, the council is currently using grant funding from the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund to bring 250 properties to EPC Band C.

Green to our core

Efforts have continued to reduce the Council's emissions through works at South Cambs Hall, council home improvements, and work to reduce emissions from waste collection – the Council now has 3 electric refuse trucks and one more on order, 14 vehicles running on hydrotreated vegetable oil (HVO), and preliminary works have been completed to deliver a solar panel array at Waterbeach in 2024/25 to allow the operation of more electric vehicles.

Efforts have also been made to improve biodiversity in the district. On the Council's estate, 35 trees have been planted across two sites and wildflower areas have been created on four sites. The 6 Free Trees scheme was continued, with participation from 46 Parish Councils and the Awarded Watercourse Team has delivered a project with the Wild Trout Trust to improve biodiversity in the river Shep and river Mel.

In terms of community engagement, the Council ran its first Climate Conference in November 2023. It was well attended by over 70 people from 10 parishes. It also awarded £125,000 of Zero Carbon Communities funding to 10 projects with the aim of either reducing carbon emissions or community engagement on climate and nature. At the end of Dec 2023, £15,000 of grant funding had been awarded for community electric vehicle chargers.

The 2024/25 budget includes significant investment in the council's recycling and waste collection service, funding for new staff to prosecute fly tippers and clear fly tipping incidents more effectively, and the expansion of the Zero Carbon Communities scheme.

A modern and caring council

Throughout 2023/24 the Council has continued to support 12 community hubs (including one at Comberton and one at Grantchester), sent out nearly 500 electric blankets in winter as part of the Council's cost-of-living support package, supported a Mobile Food hub that services 6 villages, and ran a winter advertising campaign to encourage people to claim support they are entitled to. Also, the Council is working to support Mobile Warden Schemes, has provided funding to support activities that benefit the health and wellbeing of our residents, and has rolled out and promoted a network of Domestic Abuse Champions across the organisation. The Council will continue to support asylum seekers and refugees, including those from Ukraine and has received £897,000 from government to support Ukrainian guests.

The Council has worked with partners to launch the civil parking enforcement scheme in South Cambridgeshire. Enforcement has been live since February.

The Council is undergoing significant transformation work to improve services for residents and use resources efficiently and effectively. This includes updating the website to make it easier to access both information and services online.

Cambridge 2050

Michael Gove announced his plans for 'Cambridge 2040' in July 2023. Since then, we have had little clarity, but the figure of 250,000 homes was revised down to 150,000 homes and 2040 was pushed back to 2050. In March 2024 a 'growth corporation' was announced which will direct a lot of the initial work. Unfortunately, local authorities are not on the board so will not have a vote or decision-making powers. They will be on an advisory council alongside businesses and industry partners. There is a lot we still don't know about Cambridge 2050, and we'll keep you informed as we learn more.

Our administration has been clear about the importance of having local voices involved in planning decisions, as well as the need for new transport, new schools, and new health services. It has also been clear on the issue of the environment and water scarcity. This is why there has been some movement from government to help unlock developments such as Bourn Airfield and Waterbeach. However, this work is not sufficient to realise the significant level of growth envisaged in Cambridge 2050.