

# South Cambridgeshire District Council – Harston & Comberton Ward

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

## District Councillors' Monthly Report – November 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.

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### Cost-of-living information

Visit <https://www.scambs.gov.uk/cost-of-living-support/> for information on: 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 handyperson 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 and 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

Find out more at: <https://www.scambs.gov.uk/cost-of-living-support/community-hubs>

### **£1 bus fares for under 25s with the Tiger pass**

Under 25s can apply for a free Tiger bus pass at: <https://cambridgeshirepeterborough-ca.gov.uk/onepoundbusfare/> to pay a reduced £1 fare. This initiative is part of the Combined Authority's efforts to revamp public transport in the region.

### **Winter Fuel Payments and Pension Credit**

Pension Credit is worth, on average, £3,900 per year and unlocks other support including the Winter Fuel Payment, help with Council Tax, NHS dental care and a free TV licence for those over 75. Eligible individuals can apply and have the claim backdated by up to three months. This means that the latest date to apply and still qualify for a Winter Fuel Payment is 21 December 2024. Find out more at: <https://www.gov.uk/pension-credit/how-to-claim>.

### **Tackling period poverty**

SCDC is joining the fight to end period poverty by providing free menstrual products for up to 700 residents. Councillors unanimously agreed to champion the cause, to ensure dignity for all, by offering free sanitary products which are also kind to the environment.

A funding pot of £12,000 has been agreed for the project, which will offer residents a choice of one of three period product packs - either washable pads, period pants or reusable period cups. Hey Girls, a UK-wide social enterprise, will be distributing the packs. Residents can apply at: <https://www.heygirls.co.uk/south-cambridgeshire-home-packs/>. The scheme will run on a 'first come, first served' basis.

## **New Net Zero Village Grant coming soon**

SCDC has been awarded an allocation of £402,831.00 by the CPCA under the Net Zero Villages programme and is preparing to open the grant scheme in December 2024.

The fund is for capital projects on community assets, for example projects relating to buildings, land, indoor or outdoor equipment or other capital-related expenditure intended for community use. This includes upgrading, extending, or improving facilities or purchasing capital items for community use spaces and places. The three project categories are:

- Tackling energy use and/or supporting energy efficiency or generation retrofit to community buildings.
- Enabling access to public transport or access to local services through low carbon transport.
- Nature based solutions to tackle overheating of community buildings.

<https://scams.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=1096&MId=10056&Ver=4>

## **Community offer event – 28<sup>th</sup> November, 6-8pm, online**

This is an event to highlight how the SCDC's Communities team works with parish councils and community groups to meet local ambitions and develop resilient communities. It will cover 3 topic areas – Vibrant Communities (cost-of-living support, community safety and health and wellbeing), Community Action (grants, responding to communities, climate and environment projects) and Supporting Community Growth. There will also be guest speakers who have developed projects locally with the support of the Communities Team and a Q&A.

If you'd like to attend, please sign up through Eventbrite: [Communities Offer Webinar Tickets, Thu, Nov 28, 2024 at 6:00 PM | Eventbrite](#)

## **Christmas Market – 7<sup>th</sup> December**

SCDC are once again hosting the South Cambridgeshire Christmas Market this winter. It will be held at Cambourne Village College on Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> December 2024, and will be open from 11:00am – 3:00pm.

Over 100 traders from across our district will trade across 3 halls along with a Mrs Claus workshop and additional food trucks outside. The stalls will range from artisan and handmade crafts to floristry, edible gifts to artwork, and much, much more.

## **South Cambs Connect**

Regional businesses, entrepreneurs, community groups and charities are being invited to Cambourne to try a new collaborative working space - free of charge until the new year! SCDC has redesigned its head office ground floor with a collaborative workspace for use by business professionals. Called [South Cambs Connect](#), the space has comfortable workstations, high-speed Wi-Fi, meeting pods and bookable meeting rooms which offer a productive spot to work, a meeting venue, and a chance to network with other local professionals. There is plenty of free car parking available including EV charging. For more details email [southcambsconnect@scams.gov.uk](mailto:southcambsconnect@scams.gov.uk).

## **AI to improve Planning performance**

Greater Cambridge Shared Planning, a shared service between SCDC and Cambridge City Council, is pioneering the development of a new AI tool to improve how public feedback on planning policies is reviewed and analysed. Funded through the Government's PropTech Innovation Fund, this project aims to use AI to transform the way communities engage in the planning system. Developed in partnership with the University of Liverpool, the AI tool – known as a Large Language Model (LLM) – is being specifically designed to process and summarise the thousands of comments that residents, community groups and other stakeholders submit during consultations.

## Empty properties

SCDC's Cabinet has approved a new policy on Council Tax for empty properties. This is to encourage owners to get empty homes back into use. The area covered by SCDC is estimated to have about 3,000 empty properties.

The new policy is that from April 2026 (with exemptions e.g. probate, in residential care, homes being actively marketed, undergoing major work) council tax would be:

- 100% for homes empty up to 1 year
- 200% for homes empty 1-5 years
- 300% for homes empty 5-10 years
- 400% for homes empty over 10 years.

One year of notice would be given of an increase.

<https://www.scambs.gov.uk/news/council-tax-may-be-doubled-on-second-and-empty-properties-in-south-cambridgeshire>

## Best Value Notice removed

SCDC received a 6-month Best Value Notice from the then Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities in November 2023 for its 4-day week working arrangements., which was extended for another 6 months in May 2024.

On 8<sup>th</sup> November, the Government's Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) informed SCDC that the Notice will not be reissued. The letter states:

We recognise the Council's constructive engagement with the department throughout the period of the Notices, including your cooperation with the request for data about the impacts of the four-day working week trial. As the Deputy Prime Minister set out in her letter to local authority leaders on 16 July and reiterated on 24 October at the Local Government Association conference, this Government is committed to working as partners in power, with mutual respect underpinning our approach. This means an end to micromanaging local authorities.

## Public consultations

### ***East West Rail – Non-statutory consultation from 14<sup>th</sup> November to 24<sup>th</sup> January 2025***

Funding for EWR was confirmed in the recent budget announcement, and subsequently EWR Co. has announced the dates for a non-statutory consultation which begins 14<sup>th</sup> November and closes 24<sup>th</sup> January 2025.

Local in-person events include:

- Shelford Rugby Club, Great Shelford, 22 November 2024, 2-7 pm
- Cambridge Belfry, Cambourne, 3 December 2024, 2-7 pm
- Comberton Village Hall, 10 January 2025, 2-7 pm
- The Clayton Hotel, Cambridge, 18 January 2025, 2-7 pm

### ***Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) bus franchising***

The Mayoral Combined Authority (which is our Local Transport Authority) is consulting on a new framework of public control for bus services. The consultation closes on Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> November and compares Franchising with an Enhanced Partnership approach.

You can find out more about the proposals and provide your views at: <https://cpca-yourvoice.co.uk/bus-franchising-consultation/>.