

South Cambridgeshire District councillors' annual report to March '24

Shelford ward

South Cambridgeshire District Council celebrates its 50th anniversary on 1st April 2024.

The occasion was marked with a civic ceremony on 20th March, preceded by the planting of a Laburnum tree by Deputy Lieutenant for Cambridgeshire Jeremy Newsum.

Cllr Peter Fane, **Chair of South Cambridgeshire District Council**, said: "The 50th anniversary is an opportunity to pay our thanks to the unwavering dedication and commitment of all those who have served on and worked for the council over the years as well as the continued support of our residents and stakeholders."

State of the District and annual Business Plan review:

A "State of the District" Review was published in January 2024¹. The Local Government Association review at the end of 2023 described South Cambridgeshire District Council as being in a positive financial position – with a comprehensive and innovative response to the cost-of-living crisis².

The South Cambs Scrutiny committee in June '23 considered the Business Plan Progress Report, a year-end report covering the Council's four key areas of growing local businesses and economies, affordable housing, being green to the core and being a modern and caring Council³.

Delay in developing new local plan for Greater Cambridge to 2041:

The **Greater Cambridge Local Plan (GCLP)** process has been delayed due to factors outside the control of the two councils. The Local Plan timetable (or Local Development Scheme) sets out the expected timings for the production of the documents which are intended to replace the 2018 Local Plans to become the planning policy framework for Greater Cambridge.

The latest timetable was agreed by the Councils in 2022. However, continuing uncertainties relating to **water availability** and **transport strategy** mean this timetable can no longer be met, and a revised timetable cannot be confirmed.

¹ <https://www.scambs.gov.uk/media/0tlljrvr/state-of-the-district-south-cambridgeshire.pdf>

South Cambridgeshire is a rural district of 350 square miles surrounding Cambridge City, with a population of just over 162,000 (2021). The District is home to world-leading centres of science and technology such as Granta Park, the Babraham Institute and the Genome Campus at Hinxton, as well as over 8,000 businesses. The District is hosting the development of some of the largest new towns in the country, in Cambourne, Northstowe and Waterbeach. Greater Cambridge has seen 19,000 new homes in the two years to March 2023.

² LGA Peer Review of South Cambs DC: <https://www.scambs.gov.uk/corporate-peer-challenge-report-published/>

³ Annual report to Scrutiny Committee: <https://www.scambs.gov.uk/successful-performance-for-south-cambridgeshire-district-council/>

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Greater Cambridgeshire Shared Planning Service (GCSPS) is continuing to engage with the Government's recently established "**Cambridge Delivery Group**", pressing for resolution of the critical water supply challenges⁴.

Other planning matters:

During the year, 472 new affordable homes were completed in South Cambridgeshire⁵. The draft Housing Strategy sets a target of at least 375 new council homes during the next five years⁶.

The legal requirement for developers to deliver at least a 10% bio-diversity net gain on new developments came into effect on 12 February. DLUHC has now published detailed guidance for LPAs and others⁷.

The shared planning service will be enhancing its web services and online guidance and extending its support for Parish Councils on planning matters and continuing its commitment to community engagement.

The new **Statement of Community Involvement (SCI)**⁸ was formally adopted by both Councils in late March, following consultation in Autumn '23. This is intended by the GCSPS to strengthen community engagement in planning matters.

Grants:

The Zero Carbon Communities grant scheme is now in its sixth year, and opens for applications again on Tuesday 2 April⁹. It is intended to encourage residents, community groups and parish councils to find ways to reduce carbon emissions and raise awareness to meet the climate challenge.

Projects are invited under two themes:

- Reducing carbon emissions or locking up carbon.

⁴ A separate report is available, summarising the Secretary of State's proposals for "**Cambridge 2040**" (now Cambridge 2050), which are being developed by the Cambridge Development Group Chaired by Peter Freeman. The Government's intention now is to develop over 150,00 additional houses in Greater Cambridge – that is, approximately three times the number of houses being proposed in the First Draft of the joint local plan – subject to water and other constraints being resolved. This would be done under the auspices of a Development Corporation, but the boundary (or red line) for this has yet to be defined.

⁵ Annual Monitoring Report to 31st March 2023. <https://www.scams.gov.uk/report-shows-increase-in-building-sustainable-and-affordable-homes/>

⁶ Draft Housing Strategy, March '24: <https://www.scams.gov.uk/have-your-say-on-the-future-of-local-housing/> In his response, Peter Fane called for a strengthening of the rural exception sites provision and a number of measures to encourage and greatly increase the provision of affordable housing on RESs in the rural villages, including the smaller villages like Little Shelford. He suggested that renewing / extending park home sites could be a good way of meeting affordable housing need in some villages, including in Gt Shelford.

⁷ Further Information on biodiversity net gain: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/biodiversity-net-gain>

⁸ <https://www.scams.gov.uk/statement-of-community-involvement-formally-adopted/>

⁹ <https://www.scams.gov.uk/zero-carbon-communities-grant-scheme-launches-for-2024/>

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- Community engagement around climate change.

Grants of between £2,000 and £15,000 are available to parish councils and community groups in the District, with a total pot of £125,000 available.

South Cambridgeshire communities received grants totalling over £500,000 from the District Council last year (2023), awarded through nine grant schemes focused on promoting community well-being, environmental sustainability, and inclusive participation.

The South Cambs grant scheme as part of the **Rural England Prosperity Fund** (REPF) will be launched in April '24, and take the form of capital grants to support local businesses and rural communities¹⁰. South Cambridgeshire District Council has been allocated £1,168,135 to distribute.

However, both Great Shelford and Stapleford have been excluded from the scheme, since the Department does not classify the parishes as Rural for this purpose.

Energy saving grants:

The District Council is urging residents to make use of energy-saving support that they are entitled to, including support for making their homes more energy efficient. See <https://www.entitledto.co.uk/>

The Council is part of the Action on Energy partnership which provides advice, guidance, and support on reducing carbon emissions and increasing home energy efficiency - ultimately helping people save money on their fuel bills¹¹.

The Council's Economic Development & Investments Team offers continuing support to local markets, and is committed to a **Local Markets Programme** which provides trading opportunities to both market organisers and stallholders.

¹⁰

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1101590/Rural_England_Prosperty_Fund_interventions__objectives__outputs_and_outcomes_list.pdf

¹¹ **Action on Energy** is a partnership made up of the six councils across Cambridgeshire, helping to support people to create more energy efficient homes, making them cheaper to heat and more comfortable to live in.

The partnership coordinates, and offers advice on a number of grants including:

- The Home Upgrade Grant 2 can provide home energy efficiency improvements for people on low incomes with properties not heated by gas. The funding aims to make the poorest performing homes more efficient by installing improvements like insulation, solar panels, and heat pumps.
- **Boiler upgrade** Grants are available from government to replace gas boilers with cleaner heating systems.
- The **ECO4** and **Great British Insulation** schemes.

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Trial of four-day week working:

A report in March '24 outlines how the four-day week trial has led to a reduction of over £430,000 spent on agency staff covering hard to fill roles.

This has been achieved by filling 10 permanent roles that the Council previously struggled to recruit to - particularly in the Planning Service, where the private sector pays more. This has led to the reduction in spending because directly employing staff in permanent roles is much more cost effective than hiring agency staff that the Council was relying on.

Under a four-day week, officers are expected to carry out 100% of their work, in 80% of the time, for 100% of the pay. The Council's opening hours have been maintained so that they have been at least what they were before the trial – and have been extended on Wednesdays.

The results of the trial will be put a public consultation (once new government measures have been announced) and the decision will be referred to full Council in July to decide whether to maintain 4-day week working.

Full Council

At its February '24 meeting, full Council made the following decisions for the year ahead ¹²:

Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024-29. The estimated balance of reserves is £36.132 million.

It was agreed that **additional funding be made available Ermine Street Ltd**, allowing the company additional borrowing from the Council of up to £20 million to take advantage of new investment opportunities, and to allow ESH to purchase single person properties for homeless people to prevent the use of expensive temporary accommodation. This would be a 'spend to save' investment, providing savings to homelessness budgets.

Council reviewed the **detailed budgets**, showing an estimated General Fund Gross Operating Expenditure for 2024/2025 of £76.887 million.

Council approved the **2024/2025 General Fund Revenue Budget**, and set the **Council Tax Requirement for 2024/2025 at £11,688,648**, meaning an increase in the District element of the Council Tax of £5 per annum, giving an average Band D Council Tax of £170.31 per household.

Council approved an **increase in rents** for all social rented properties of 7.7% ¹³.

¹² <https://www.scambs.gov.uk/council-backs-budget-and-business-plan/>

¹³ ie. CPI inflation at September 2023, plus 1% results in an increase in rents of 7.7%.

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Council approved the updated **Pay Policy Statement**. Also the report of the Independent Remuneration Panel, setting out the **Members' Allowances Scheme 2023/24**, including an increase in the Basic Allowance to £5,800 pa (equivalent to a 5.44% increase).