

PLANNING APPROVAL FOR INTERIM COMMUNITY CENTRE IN NORTHSTOWE

I was happy to attend online, and speak to, the planning application that was submitted to the March Planning Committee for the approval of [Construction of temporary community centre on land north of Pathfinder Way, Northstowe](#). As you all know, this has been approved and will be a useful and accessible facility for communities across the Ward.

COST OF LIVING CRISIS

The cost-of-living crisis continues to have a major impact on us all and SCDC has responded with considerable support to residents in South Cambs. There is plenty of evidence to show that there is a need, not only to continue to act, but to reinforce the measures: Cambridge City Foodbank, which serves part of the district, supported 13,580 people in 2022 – an increase of 40% over 2021. Over the same period, Citizens Advice saw an 87% increase in requests for energy support advice and a 29% increase in crisis support. SCDC's Income Maximisation Officer has received 56 referrals in the first two months of 2023, which is double the average for any two-month period and the Communities Team reported over 4 times the amount of people asking for help.

A cost-of-living crisis response strategy has been developed to build on the work already ongoing. Apart from the continuation of the offer of low energy cooking and heating, the council will work in collaboration with Parishes, Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) groups, Cambridgeshire County Council's Think Communities Team, and the NHS Integrated Care System (ICS). Activities will include Roadshows giving cost-of-living talks, the evolution of Warm Hubs into Community Wellbeing Hubs offering a wide range of services. A campaign will also be conducted to increase uptake of the Council Tax reduction scheme.

Parish Councils will be contacted in due course to discuss if or how they wish to participate in the campaign.

Energy Bills Support Scheme Alternative Funding scheme launched

On 27 February, the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) announced that households across England, Scotland and Wales will benefit from the government's £400 help with energy bills, as an online application portal opens. Households without a direct relationship to an electricity supplier, such as those living in park homes and care homes, can now apply via a secure online portal to receive the support as a one-off, non-repayable lump sum under the 'alternative funding' route of the government's Energy Bills Support Scheme. For those without online access, a dedicated customer helpline is available to assist eligible customers.

The government is urging all eligible households to apply as soon as possible for their support, whilst also warning households to stay alert to potential scams and report them to relevant authorities where they are suspected. The government will never provide any links to the application portal, or directly ask individuals to apply for the £400 support. Once customers have applied to receive energy support and their applications have been processed and verified, eligible customers' details will be shared with councils across England, Scotland and Wales, who will deliver the support. The payment will be provided directly into people's bank accounts. DESNZ has made resources available to help councils with their local communications which can be found linked below. The government also announced today that the £600 help with energy bills is on course to reach households across Northern Ireland.

Announcement:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/900000-more-households-to-benefit-from-400-of-government-energy-bill-support>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/thousands-more-households-in-northern-ireland-on-course-to-benefit-from-600-government-help-with-energy-bills>

Resources:

<https://beis.frontify.com/d/XnaTkXURf8Ck/government-support-for-household-energy-bills#/energy-bills/introduction>

Report internet scams and phishing:

<https://www.gov.uk/report-suspicious-emails-websites-phishing>

COUNCIL TAX RISE

Council voted to increase the SCDC portion of council tax by 3.1%. This represents an increase of £5 per year (or 10p per week) for a Band D property. This increase is regrettable, but inflation affects the council's budget as it does that of every other organisation and personal budget and it is currently running at around 10%, with wage inflation at 6% (the council has to pay around 600 employees). Council Tax delivers around £11 million and Business Rates £18 million. Government grants have been reducing for a number of years and are now around £3 million. We have an ongoing transformation programme to improve the productivity of the council which is projected to bring savings of £2 million over the next two years and returns on our investments are at around £7 million.

The opposition advocated the freezing of council tax, which would be ideal and sounds easy, but it has to be remembered that this would not only affect the council's budget for the coming financial year, but it would have a compound effect on the projected budget over the coming years and council services would be badly affected.

SCDC sets only a small proportion of the Council Tax bill – on our personal bill last year it was around 8% of the total. The other precepts are set by the County Council (including for social care), the police and fire authorities and (of course) parish councils. SCDC is the collecting authority.

COUNCIL HOUSE RENTS

Another regrettable consequence of the rise in inflation is the need to increase council house rents by 7%, which was also approved by Council. Although this is below the current rate of inflation the council recognises that this, together with other price rises, will be a worry for many people and it is not a decision that the council takes lightly. However, the council is part-way through ambitious plans to increase and improve its housing stock.

The council is building new social housing at a rate not seen for many years and plans to build another 75 over the next two years, after which it is hoped that the target will be higher still. Improvements to the thermal efficiency of existing council housing stock is also a priority and the plan is to improve all SCDC houses so that they are at an EPC rating of 'C' or above by 2025. The costs attached to such improvements are high (and rising substantially), but it means that the modernised homes are significantly more affordable for council tenants to live in – something that the many tenants who have benefited so far are very positive about.

CAMBRIDGE AND PETERBOUROUGH COMBINED AUTHORITY (CPCA) PRECEPT – RURAL BUSES

Council was advised that the CPCA recently voted for a £12 per annum (23p/week) precept to fund some rural bus services that would otherwise be lost following business decisions taken by Stagecoach.

SCDC BUSINESS PLAN

The Council's revised Business Plan was considered and approved by Council. <https://tinyurl.com/2s8dk75e> It restates that SCDC will be a green, modern and caring Council which helps local businesses to grow and provides housing that is affordable for everyone to live in. This is the plan on which I and our administration was re-elected only nine months ago and which we have a duty to strive to deliver.

COUNCILLORS' ALLOWANCES

Like MPs, councillors in local authorities have to set their own allowances, which is unwelcome and far from ideal. In common with many local authorities, SCDC engages an Independent Review Panel (IRP) to determine what the allowances should be and, this year, they recommended that allowances rise by 4.25%. To put this into context, SCDC councillors are expected to provide their own phones, calls and internet services on both council business and for casework and fuel costs are only covered (at the HMRC rate) when attending formal council meetings, courses etc. The accepted IRP recommended will take the allowance for an 'ordinary' councillor to £5,501 (gross) per annum.

INTIMIDATION AND ABUSE IN PUBLIC LIFE

At the last SCDC full Council meeting a motion was submitted jointly by the Leader of the Council and the Leader of the Opposition. The motion read 'The intimidation and abuse of councillors, in person or otherwise, undermines democracy; preventing elected members from representing the communities they serve, deterring individuals from standing for election, and undermining public life in democratic processes. This council notes that increasing levels of toxicity in public and political discourse is having a detrimental impact on local democracy and that prevention, support and responses to abuse and intimidation of local politicians must improve to ensure councillors feel safe and able to continue representing their residents.' The text of the motion went on to say that the council should take a zero-tolerance approach to abuse of councillors and officers and listed a number of actions. The motion was carried unanimously. Alas, a motion on honesty and truthfulness in public life is for another day.

ASYLUM SEEKERS – BAR HILL

The hotel at Bar Hill had been contracted by the Home Office to provide accommodation for asylum seekers. Some councillors have contacted the officer team working on the project as local residents have asked about donating clothes and other support they can offer. At this stage the team at the Council is working very closely with Cllr Buntly Waters as the local member, Bar Hill Parish Council and emerging community support groups in the village to put plans in place. This includes appealing for clothes donations in Bar Hill initially. The team want to ensure we are not overwhelmed by donations so at this stage the clothing appeal will only be in Bar Hill only. The Parish Council are supporting the coordination of this. Once we understand the level of demand for clothes, and the amount being donated from people in Bar Hill, we will see if further support is required from a wider area and get back in touch.

The website information covers most of the common questions about the scheme. However, please contact duty.communities@scambs.gov.uk if you, or your communities, have any further questions.

ENVIRONMENT

Businesses urged to get ready for reforms to cut packaging waste

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has announced today (28 February) that reporting requirements for the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) scheme for packaging come into force today. Extended Producer Responsibility for packaging will make firms that supply household packaging responsible for the costs of dealing with packaging waste. Producers will be required to pay an EPR fee towards the costs of collecting and managing household packaging waste, currently borne by councils. From today, all obligated packaging producers in England, Northern Ireland and Scotland must also collect information on the amount and type of packaging they have supplied during 2023. Wales will follow shortly. Producers with a turnover of greater than £2 million and who handle more than 50 tonnes of packaging each year must report this information to the Environment Agency twice a year. The first reports must be submitted from 1 October. Councils are encouraged to share this information with businesses in their area.

Announcement:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/businesses-urged-to-get-ready-for-reforms-to-cut-packaging-waste>
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/deposit-return-scheme-for-drinks-containers-moves-a-step-closer>

Guidance:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/how-to-collect-your-packaging-data-for-extended-producer-responsibility>
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/packaging-waste-prepare-for-extended-producer-responsibility>

COUNCILS, RESPONSIBILITIES AND KEY GOVERNMENT FUNDED ORGANISATIONS

If you have a problem or concern do not worry too much about who can solve it just ask the question and we will endeavour to signpost to the right person. The organisational structure of Cambridgeshire is complex, but it is important to identify where responsibility lies.

<p>County Council</p> <p>Responsibilities: Education, Transport, Highways, Heritage, Social care, Libraries, Trading standards, - Waste management, Maintaining their estate.</p> <p>Some of these services are shared between Peterborough City Council and Cambridgeshire County Council but any concerns should be directed to the county council.</p>
<p>District Council</p> <p>Responsibilities: Council tax payments and benefits, Household bin collections, Housing and housing benefits, Council leisure facilities, Environmental health, Residential planning.</p>
<p>Parish/ Town Council</p> <p>Responsibilities: Looking after community buildings, Open spaces, Allotments, Play Areas, Bus shelters.</p>
<p>Greater Cambridge Partnership (GCP)</p> <p>'The local delivery body for a City Deal with central Government worth up to £500 million over 15 years, to vital improvements in infrastructure (decarbonising transport), supporting and accelerating the creation of 44,000 new jobs, 33,500 new homes and 420 additional apprenticeships.'</p> <p>Partnership between Cambridge City Council, Cambridgeshire County Council, South Cambridgeshire District Council, University of Cambridge.</p>
<p>The Combined Authority, Cambridge and Peterborough, our elected Mayor</p> <p>'A combined authority (CA) is a legal body set up using national legislation that enables a group of two or more councils to collaborate and take collective decisions across council boundaries.'</p> <p>What our mayor does – Business support, skills, housing, transport, environment, international, digital connectivity, resilience, research, and strategy. New homes.</p>
<p>Police and Crime Commissioner, Cambridge and Peterborough</p> <p>To support and challenge the Chief Constable to provide effective and efficient policing services for the area.</p>
<p>Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority</p> <p>The Fire Authority is the governing body responsible for delivering a fire and rescue service to Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. It is made up of Cambridgeshire County Councillors and Peterborough City Councillors.</p>

CONTACT DETAILS

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions about the above, or any other matters.

Cllr Natalie Warren-Green for Longstanton Ward including Longstanton, Northstowe, and Oakington & Westwick

Email: cllr.warrengreen@scambs.gov.uk

For those on social media we have a highly active Facebook group:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/2066298150052161/> - Longstanton, Oakington and Northstowe