

District Councillor's Report May 28th 2024 - Cllr Tom Bygott

Northstowe's first Midsummer Festival to be held in June

Northstowe Hub CIO and Northstowe Arts CIC have been awarded over £7,000 to help deliver the inaugural Midsummer Festival in Northstowe. The free community celebration is set to take place on Saturday 22 June 2024. Northstowe Hub CIO and Northstowe Arts CIC are the first organisations to be named recipients of the Community Activation Fund, which is designed to support projects that help organisations to promote community cohesion and enhance the quality of life in the emerging town. South Cambridgeshire District Council (SCDC) is administering the fund on behalf of Homes England. The total figure awarded to support the Midsummer Festival was £7,786. More information about the Northstowe Community Activation Fund can be found at: www.northstowe.com/community-activation-fund

The Midsummer Festival will bring together community groups, organisations, friends, and neighbours from across Northstowe through an uplifting day of activities and entertainment around the Green and the Cabin, Northstowe's temporary community centre. The day will be a diverse celebration of dance, music, heritage, games, food, and fun, with full details of the programme to be announced in the coming weeks. Aligned with the ethos of the Community Activation Fund, the Midsummer Festival will help to promote the use of community facilities, improve access to arts and cultural activities in Northstowe, and support the health and wellbeing of residents. The funding will also go some way to supporting the local economy, with services subcontracted to different local businesses to help deliver a safe, inclusive, and engaging event.

Second Best Value Notice for the Four Day Week

South Cambridgeshire District Council has been put under a second Best Value Notice over concerns that the four-day week is still not giving residents value for money. The current administration began the four days' work for five days' pay trial in January 2023 for council staff. In November 2023, the council was issued with a Best Value Notice and the council's ruling group chose to continue with the four-day week trial by providing performance data to the government.

The four-day week trial officially ended in March 2024 – yet council staff continue to work part-time hours for full-time pay. At the council's annual meeting on 23rd May, the administration unanimously voted down my group's amendment to stop the four-day week in June.

Even though the trial has ended, the four day week continues to operate in defiance of warnings from the government, and we have not had the vote in Council that we were promised.

More than 750 saplings have been planted in South Cambs in the Six Free Trees project

The District Council's Six Free Trees project offers parish councils the opportunity to plant new trees in their village. I added a tree planting project to the council's Three As list of priorities in 2011 that later became the Three Free Trees project. In its current form, the Six Free Trees project was launched four years ago and has seen 758 saplings planted in South Cambridgeshire.

In the most recent round, 146 new native saplings were planted by 45 parishes. The aim is to provide homes and food for wildlife and help combat climate change. It is one of a range of initiatives by the Council to support its ambitions to double nature and get the district to net zero carbon by 2050.

Parish councils are given the choice of one larger potted tree or six smaller whips. Trees may be chosen from a selection of native varieties including silver birch, wild cherry and English oak. Parish councils are responsible for undertaking the planting and supporting the young trees by watering them for the first three years.

Rail and Ale Trail launched around South Cambridgeshire

A Rail and Ale trail - which puts a spotlight on using local trains and the walks you can take to the village pubs in South Cambridgeshire - has been published by the District Council alongside the Meldreth, Shepreth and Foxton Community Rail Partnership.

The trail booklet was launched on Friday 24 May at The Tickell Arms Beer Festival – one of the pubs featured in the guide, based in Whittlesford. The guide features five stations in South Cambridgeshire including Foxton, Shepreth, Meldreth, Shelford and Whittlesford Parkway. The trail highlights 16 village pubs, all within a 35-minute walk from the stations.

The booklet details short, picturesque walks you can take from the railway stations to the local pubs within the area and what is on offer. The booklet will be available at all the local pubs included in the guide. The booklet can be accessed online via the District Council's Visit South Cambs website and the Meldreth, Shepreth and Foxton Community Rail Partnership website.

The Rail and Ale trail is part of over 80 community-led activities and events that took place across Britain during Community Rail Week, from the 20th to 26th May. The week showcases the innovative projects and inspiring initiatives from across the community rail movement around the theme of 'More Than A Railway'. The idea behind the theme is to showcase the inspiring work that goes on in community rail, bringing people together and creating more inclusive communities and mobility, as well as the wider socio-economic benefit that the railways deliver.

Community rail is a grassroots national movement supported by hundreds of community partnerships, groups, and volunteers to improve travel confidence, increase access to opportunities, tackle social isolation, give communities a voice, and put railways and stations at the heart of community life, while supporting a shift to sustainable, more social forms of travel, including rail.

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