

District Councillor's Report June 24th 2025 - Cllr Tom Bygott

Annual council

The Council had its AGM on 22 May and our group nominated councillor for committees. As we enter this new municipal year, our Group Leader delivered an annual statement as Leader of the Opposition to reflect on this past year. It reflected on our achievements as a council, which have included supporting residents with the cost of living, protecting ancient trees like those in Coton Orchard and committing to supporting rural communities, farmers and businesses.

Special scrutiny meeting on council's 4-day week confirmed

A special scrutiny meeting on South Cambridgeshire District Council's 4-day working week has been confirmed after Conservative councillors intervened.

South Cambridgeshire District Council has been paying staff 37 hours for 32 hours since March 2024 – with staff previously working just 30 hours per week for full pay since January 2023.

The council ran a so-called consultation on its controversial 4-day week in January 2025, asking respondents whether they would like to work a 4-day week as an employee but failing to ask respondents whether they support the council running one. Councillors are set to make a decision on whether the 4-day week should be made permanent in July.

However, the council's political administration appears to be trying to escape the usual process of scrutinising proposals before they are finalised, which is done by the council's Scrutiny & Overview committee. They only agreed to send the 4-day week results to a special scrutiny meeting after Conservative councillors intervened and argued for the proper process to be followed.

Local government reorganisation

Regarding local government reorganisation, we called for unity to ensure we get the best possible outcome for residents. While one large council instead of multiple smaller ones as we have now will have more resources to tackle problems like adult social care and special educational needs and disabilities, we fear we may lose local representation with fewer councillors representing thousands more people. Any new boundaries drawn should reflect the natural geography of community ties and have historical legitimacy, rather than being gerrymandered to suit the interests of political parties.

£318,816 has been allocated in development funding from Government's £7.6 million programme to support reorganisation proposal development in our area, to be shared equally between up to three councils. To date two pieces of research have been commissioned (both related to finance), which have cost about £25k in total (split between all authorities).

The Government expects councils to work collaboratively with neighbouring authorities to develop a shared evidence base for any proposals. This is already being done through the councils' CEO data and finance workstream. The government has indicated that they would like to see a single, coordinated submission for our area.

My group is continuing to ask for the same access to information as the council's political administration to ensure all residents can be properly represented in this huge change to local democracy.

£100,000 Allotment Improvement Grant

It is pleasing to see the council is supporting local communities' growing projects with the £100,000 Allotment Improvement Grant fund. We would encourage anyone involved in an allotment to take a look at the council's webpage for more information. The grant can be used to improve water access, install pest control measures or improve facilities. The webpage can be found at:

www.scambs.gov.uk/news/100000-available-to-help-south-cambridgeshire-allotments-thrive

Streamlined regulations for electric vehicle chargers

The Department for Transport (DfT) has confirmed that from 29 May, more drivers and businesses will no longer need to submit a planning application to install public or private electric vehicle (EV) sockets. By cutting down on paperwork, more EV owners with a driveway will find it easier, quicker and cheaper to install a private chargepoint and power up their EVs at home. With planning changes also applying to workplace and public chargepoints, businesses will be able to install new sockets faster and for less, helping increase the number of public chargepoints so that EV owners can charge more easily, wherever they live and drive. More information can be found at:

www.gov.uk/government/news/less-paperwork-more-chargepoints-government-cuts-red-tape-to-make-it-easier-quicker-and-cheaper-to-switch-to-evs

This comes on top of already significant discounts from government to help drivers install chargepoints outside their house. Government support currently allows people renting or owning a flat and those with on-street parking to receive up to £350 off the cost of installing a home charger. Grants can be applied for via: www.gov.uk/guidance/electric-vehicle-chargepoint-grants.

The Government needs to do a lot more work in this area because anyone who has used a public EV charger recently knows that the charge points from most networks are highly unreliable and are often out of order. There are a vast number of operators and most require users to pay by downloading and registering via a mobile app. This process can take up to half an hour before the charge can begin and is sometimes not possible if there is no mobile phone coverage at that location. The previous government had an initiative to require all operators to accept payment by tapping a credit card, but progress on this initiative has been incredibly slow.

Grants for community groups and parish councils

If you are from a local community group or parish council, we are encouraging you to make the most of the council's available grant schemes. The GrantGrabber service helps you search for available grants – all in one place. This service can be found at:

<https://funding.idoxopen4community.co.uk/supportteams>

For further information on receiving a grant for a community project from the council, please visit the grants webpage at: www.scambs.gov.uk/grants-and-funding

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