

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL (SCDC)

ANNUAL REPORT TO ANNUAL MEETINGS IN LONGSTANTON WARD:

OAKINGTON & WESTWICK PARISH (22.04.24)

LONGSTANTON PARISH (09.05.24)

NORTHSTOWE TOWN (30.04.24)

DISTRICT COUNCILLOR NATALIE WARREN-GREEN

It's a pleasure to share my report to for the Annual Meetings in Oakington & Westwick, Longstanton, and Northstowe covering activity across South Cambridgeshire including Longstanton Ward.

2024/25 is the sixth year of the Liberal Democrat administration of South Cambridgeshire District Council since May 2018. As with each year we've been working on delivering for our residents.

The last 12 months have been super busy and productive, dealing with a wide range of issues. There has been a great deal of progress in which I am proud to have played a small part as a District Councillor, and as a member of the Skills Committee, the Climate & Environment Advisory Committee (CEAC), and the Northstowe Delivery Group.

Firstly, I thought it would be useful to remind everyone of the main (statutory) services that SCDC provides:

SCDC Services

- Benefits
- Business support and development
- Council tax collection and support
- Environmental Health
- Housing
- Licensing (pubs, taxis)
- Planning Services (a shared service with Cambridge City Council)
- Waste collection and recycling (a shared service with Cambridge City Council)

You can find more details here: [Home - South Cambs District Council \(scamborough.gov.uk\)](https://www.scamborough.gov.uk)

And now, here's some information about what we've been achieving against clear strategic pillars:

2024/25 Budget

In February, we passed our budget for the 2024/25 financial year which included a whole range of ways we're investing in improving the lives of our residents.

South Cambridgeshire District Council is in a strong financial position – something increasingly rare amongst local authorities, many of whom have faced stinging budget cuts or bankruptcy this year (and many more who will face bankruptcy over the next twelve months).

Rather than making short-term, politically easy choices like freezing Council Tax, we gave thought to the long-term wellbeing of South Cambridgeshire's residents, making sure we are in a position to continue to fund services in the long term. Because of the rampant inflation we've seen under years of the Conservative government's financial mismanagement, real-terms Council funds are shrinking faster and faster and traditional funding methods for council funding can't keep up.

Thankfully, the Lib Dems have made sensible financial investments over the past 6 years in administration. Because of this, the Council brings in £7 million thanks to its commercial investments. Without these investments, South Cambs wouldn't so easily be able to continue to provide the high-quality services we do and wouldn't be in the strong financial position we are in.

Council Tax and Council Tax Support

The District Council's increase in Council Tax represents an extra 42p per month for a band D household. The rise in Council Tax is below inflation. Inflation has been at record levels and is still at 4.1% (which is lower than it has been recently but is still far higher than it should be). This means that the Council is facing a real term budget cut.

We are increasing the thresholds for support offered under the Council Tax Support Scheme in line with inflation, making sure people currently able to claim don't lose out.

This scheme means that the poorest in our communities get up to 100% relief on their council tax bills. The brunt of Council Tax should not fall on the poorest in our society.

Across Cambridgeshire, South Cambs, Huntingdonshire and Cambridge City offer up to 100% relief whereas East Cambs offers up to 91.5%, Fenland 80% and Peterborough 70%.

2024/25 Business Plan

We also agreed our 2024/25 Business Plan. Our work for the next financial year will be focussed on the council's 4 priority areas: (1) Growing Local Businesses and Economies, (2) Delivering Truly Affordable Housing, (3) Being Green to Our Core, and (4) Being a Modern and Caring Council.

1. Growing Local Businesses and Economies

Our work helping businesses (specifically SMEs) grow will help local communities thrive, bringing jobs and opportunities into our villages. Access to high quality jobs is essential to make sure everyone can live their life how they want to. Helping local businesses transition to net-zero means they will be more resilient to the impact of climate change and help the district at large in its efforts to be more sustainable. Our work to support local highstreets and markets will directly benefit communities and will help residents shop locally and help them support local businesses.

2. Truly Affordable Housing

Our work as a council to ensure that housing is truly affordable for all is essential to giving residents the freedom to live their life how they want. We recognise that everyone deserves a high-quality, safe, and affordable place to live and therefore our plans are ambitious and will make sure that the South Cambridgeshire continues to be a leader when it comes to building homes.

We have a proven track record of delivery - delivering more and more affordable housing (more than the city each year) since we've taken control of the administration.

There have been over 1,000 housing completions every year in South Cambs since 2018, up to 1,500 completions in the most recent year we have data for (2022/23). Each year (except for a slight dip in 2020) we have increased the number of affordable homes being built in the district. This is consistently higher than what the city are building. (2022/23: City – 322; Scambs – 472). The amount of market-rate housing built has consistently been double that of the City for the entire duration we've been in power in South Cambridgeshire. In 2017/18 the Conservatives oversaw 736 completions (only 180 of those affordable). In 2022/23 we oversaw 1500 completions (472 of those affordable).

This is part of our work to address the skyrocketing house prices at the root cause of the problem. We recognise that giving people access to an affordable home to live in is one the best way to tackle the structural inequalities we face and to give people the agency to make decisions in their lives. We are an unambiguously 'YIMBY' Council.

We are working to ensure housing across the district is built to the highest possible standards of energy efficiency and are working to bring existing housing up to scratch. This will help our residents who are facing rising energy costs and is part of our work to combat the devastating impacts of climate change.

3. Green to Our Core

Climate change is the single biggest issues facing the world. This is not some far away problem we can ignore and bury our head in the sand, it is affecting South Cambs. Our water scarcity crisis, air quality problems, extreme weather, flooding, and heat waves are all direct consequences of the climate crisis. That being green to our core is a lynchpin of all the work we do as a Council demonstrates how fundamentally serious, we are about tackling climate change.

Our work on 20% biodiversity net gain has pre-empted and gone further than Government goals and our contributions to the upcoming Local Area Energy Plan will help Cambridgeshire set forth how it will reach net zero.

Further, we are actively engaging with Government, the water industry, Cambridge City and other partners to find solutions the water scarcity crisis we are facing.

Our Waterbeach Renewable Energy Network Project will help reduce the Council's carbon emissions and is a landmark project being watched by other authorities up and down the country.

Over the next year we will continue to improve the energy performance of our commercial buildings and other assets owned by the council, following on from the Greening of South Cambs Hall.

Alongside this we are, through the Zero Carbon Communities Scheme, EV Charging Point Scheme and other community engagement programmes, helping local communities take steps on the path to reducing emissions, ensuring they can be resilient to the effects of climate change and that all residents are able to benefit from the transition to net zero.

We are giving more staff support for the Zero Carbon Communities Fund. Over the past 4 years we have given out £500k in support of projects to help local communities. This year £125,000 will be available through the scheme.

Through schemes such as repair cafés, food waste redistribution schemes and cooperation with other authorities across the county, we are helping reduce household waste and encourage recycling and the development of a circular economy.

We have this year employed two new Environmental Enforcement Officers. These roles are in place specifically to address the issue of fly tipping – so that the council can more effectively prosecute fly tippers. Also included in the budget is more support for the cleaning team, so that incidents of fly tipping can be addressed more quickly. The capital budget also includes funding for a new vehicle for these officers, meaning we are giving officers the resources they need to do their jobs effectively.

Fly tipping is a stain on the countryside and as a rural area, South Cambs is particularly vulnerable to it. This proposal amounts to a significant investment into our ability to combat fly tipping and to make sure offenders are brought to justice.

We are creating two new posts, bringing in house our litter picking along highways rather than contracting it out. This will save the Council approx. £25k a year - giving us a more reliable and cost-efficient service.

4. Modern and Caring Council

The council is undergoing significant transformation work. Our transformation work, unlike in other councils, is not just about saving money but is about finding ways of improving our services

for residents and using the resources we have efficiently and effectively to the most impact. We are making more and more of our services available online and are updating our website to make them more easily accessible to residents. Our commercial investments are successfully bringing increasing income to the Council and we're working to tackle income tax and business rates fraud. The Council is creating a member development plan, making sure Councillors have the skills and knowledge needed to best support their residents and effectively work to improve the district together.

Safe & Secure Homes

We are making sure we provide tenants with safe and secure homes – undertaking all landlord safety checks and provided targeted health and wellbeing support for vulnerable residents. Part of this is making sure our staff have the training to respond appropriately to safeguarding issues. Further we are working to do all we can to support asylum seekers and refugees, including those from Ukraine, who are settled across the district.

Homes for Ukraine Scheme

Continuing Russian aggression in Ukraine means that this scheme is still very active. The council is going to spend £897,000 on support for Ukrainian guests, this is funded by central government. How this money gets spent and what exact support we provide is up to the Council.

Currently, South Cambs supports one of the largest numbers of Ukrainian guests of any district and the council provides support such as funding for hosts, employment support for guests, and small grants for activities to help guests to integrate. The latest initiative is to provide support for guests moving on from hosts into independent accommodation via our landlord incentive scheme which encourages private landlords to accept Ukrainian guests as tenants. The council determines the priorities for the scheme but continues to receive financial support from the government to provide them.

Neighbourhood Plans

We are working to develop new neighbourhood plans so that local communities can take a leading role in determining their future development. In Northstowe, this past year saw the opening of The Cabin (temporary community centre), and Western Park Sports Pavilion, and we will in the next year be building the permanent Community Centre and we are advancing our plans for a Civic Hub and the Phase 2 Sports Pavilion.

On a cross-party basis, we passed a motion meaning the Council will treat care experience as though it is a protected characteristic. The Council also agreed on a cross-party basis to work towards White Ribbon accreditation, a charity that seeks to tackle domestic abuse and gender-based violence.

Cambridge 2050

Michael Gove announced his plans for 'Cambridge 2040' in July 2023. Since then, we have had little clarity from the government. The figure of 250,000 homes has been revised down to 150,000 homes and 2040 has been pushed back to 2050.

In March 2024 a 'growth corporation' was announced, which will direct a lot of the initial work. We had hoped that as the local planning authority we would have a seat on the board of this to try and direct the new development. Unfortunately, local authorities will only sit on an advisory council alongside businesses and industry partners, meaning we won't have a vote or decision-making powers. There is a lot we still don't know about Cambridge 2050, and your district councillors will keep parish councils informed as we learn more. As an administration we have been clear about the importance of having local voices involved in local planning decisions, as well as the need for new transport, new schools, and new health services.

We've also been firm on the issue of the environment and water scarcity. This is why we have seen movement from the government to help us unlock developments such as at Bourn Airfield, Waterbeach and the Cancer Research Hospital. This has been a good first few steps but significantly more work on water scarcity will be needed to realise the scale of growth within our own local plan let alone Michael Gove's plans.

Four-Day Week Trial

As many will be aware, due to the media coverage of this groundbreaking initiative, SCDC has been trialling a desk-based four-day week since January 2023. This included an initial three-month trial and in May 2023, following independent assessment of performance data, Cabinet extended the trial by 12 months, meaning the trial period ended March 2024. Separately, a three-month trial for waste crews was approved in May 2023. This followed the initial desk-based trial due to the complexities of reorganising bin collection rounds for around 128,000 households across Greater Cambridge.

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 undertook the trials because of the acute recruitment and retention issues it was facing, which is amplified in Greater Cambridge due to the high cost of housing. Similar trials are taking place across the UK, Ireland, and US, as outlined by the 4 Day Week Global Campaign, notably both the Scottish and Welsh Governments are considering such trials.

During the trials, the Council has spent £434,000 less on agency staff covering roles that were previously identified as hard to fill. Initial results suggest there has been no statistically significant negative impact on services but rather in some areas, the Council's services have improved. Further, health and wellbeing surveys of council staff show there has been a significant positive impact on both mental and physical health.

In November 2023, the government issued a 'best value notice' to the council, stating its opposition to the four-day week. This notice asked the council to submit significant amounts of data to the government.

In December 2023, the Government published a four-week consultation on the Local Government Finance Settlement, setting expectations around local authority funding in future years. The Government reiterated that they do not support a four-day week for local authorities and asked for views about the use of financial levers in future settlements to disincentivise the practice. The results of this consultation were overwhelmingly against the imposition of financial levers although the government appear to be ignoring this result.

The Council had expected, subject to data showing performance had been maintained or improved and a member decision, to consult on a four-day week shortly after the end of the formal trial. We cannot do that until the government tells us what financial levers it would use, as we would not be able to explain the full financial impact on the Council. Whilst we wait for the government to tell us what they will do so we can consult, staff are continuing to use a four-day working pattern.

Once a consultation has been carried out, and once all the evidence has been independently analysed, councillors will at full council decide whether, or not, to keep the four-day week permanently. This decision will be based on the evidence put before councillors and has not already been made. We believe in evidenced based decision-making and have not pre-judged the outcome of the trial.

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

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

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