

South Cambridgeshire District Councillor's Monthly Report

April 2013

1. SCDC Local Development Plan - Update

The Planning Policy and Localism Portfolio Holder held a meeting on March 2013, and considered three draft chapters of the new draft planning policy. These were Chapter 6 – Climate change, Chapter 7 – Delivering High Quality Places and Chapter 8 – Protecting and Enhancing the Natural and Historic Environment. These chapters will go before the Cabinet next week, to consider and approve for inclusion in the draft local plan – which will be consulted on in Summer 2013.

The portfolio holder also considered the service support grants it gives to non-profit organisations that run Community transport schemes, and to include parish councils as being eligible to apply. This will help with those who might be considering applying for grants to run schemes under the proposed Demand responsive transport scheme.

2. Finance – Welfare Reform and Council Tax

Unfortunately, the news does not get any better. As I reported last month, the Council tax has gone up for all of us, as shown by the Band D figures in the table below.

	Parish Precept	County/District/Fire/Police Precept
Caldecote	£120.84	£1583.56
Kingston	£70.85	£1533.57
Toft	£71.43	£1534.15

The average parish precept in the district is £73.55, and the average council tax is £1,536.27. The Caldecote figures are surprisingly the highest in the district.

On top of this, the welfare reform kicked in on 1st April 2013, and this means that a number of people will be hit hard in their pockets. SCDC expects that over 3,000 residents in the district will be affected as three measures kick in namely (i) localised council tax where those of working age will see a reduction of about 8.5% in their council tax benefit (1300 residents affected) (ii) the so called bedroom tax for under-occupation of social rented property where the housing benefit is reduced by 14% for one underused bedroom and 25% for two underused bedrooms (632 families) and finally (iii) the benefit cap limiting benefits received to £350 for single adults and £500 for couples (about 30 families).

SCDC has also changed the rules for council tax relief for properties. Anyone with an empty property will now pay 100% council tax for even one day. If a property is empty for more than two years, then it becomes liable for 150% of council tax, so landlords and second home owners are being fined for leaving their properties empty for any reason whatsoever Over 1,300 homes are affected by these changes.

The local authority is writing to each household affected to let them know what it will mean for them and to advise what information and support is available.

Overall, not a good year for our pockets in South Cambridgeshire!

3. SCDC Business Support Service and Fund

This service ended on 29 March 2013, and according to SCDC records was very successful as it claims over 150 businesses have given it a thumbs up! The free workshops were available to small and medium sized businesses in the district and provided the knowledge and support they needed to develop business skills that they could apply to grow their businesses. There is no indication that this will ever be available again.

4. SCDC Standards

South Cambridgeshire District Council is inviting applications from impartial and dedicated people to step forward to help the Council keep standards high. The localism act abolished the Standards body, and in its place is a new scheme that involves the appointment of an “independent person” and a deputy, to fulfil the role of helping to ensure all councillors behave to the highest standards.

There is an allowance of £1000 per year, in addition to travel and subsistence expenses. The closing date for applications is Friday 19 April 2013. For further details, including an application pack, please visit the Council's website: www.scams.gov.uk/content/independentperson. Further information is also available by contacting the Council's legal team on 03450 450 500.

5. Broadband – Race to Infinity

I have upped my game in making lots of noise about the lack of progress with the rollout for Caldecote. I wrote a question for the County which Cllr Fiona Whelan asked at the County full council meeting just before Easter. We've also involved the technical press, who have gone sniffing out information from BT. On Tuesday this week, having had information that BT's Partnership director would be attending the Cambourne Parish Council meeting, I invited myself to the meeting with my two placards and asked to be heard (got pictures as well...).

Good news is that Annette Thorpe will be at the Annual Parish meeting on 17th April 2013, 8pm at the Village Hall, to explain what is going on with BT, the real reasons for the delay in giving us superfast broadband, and what the new timetable for rollout is going to be. So, come and hear it directly from BT!

6. Broadband – Connecting Cambridgeshire

Cambridgeshire County signed the contract for this project with BT on 8 March 2013. Rollout planning is expected to start soon. There is a planned event for the Digital Champions on 17th April 2013 at Alconbury which should give more information on how BT plans to rollout faster broadband to the county by 2015.

7. Local Issues

Parish Plan – SCDC Grant Application: The application by Toft for £863 from the Community Chest fund has been turned down. This was to go toward printing the parish plan. This decision is a disappointment, and I have found out that the Leader of the Council took the decision which is a change in policy, outside of any formal public meeting, contrary to normal procedure.

Our group leader and I will be taking the matter further with the Leader. In the meantime, officers have assured me that they are now looking at ways of helping to print the plan internally.

Toft Peoples Hall: It is good to see that the project to extend the hall is nearing completion. The external frontage is looking impressive. I must commend the team on a job well done.

County Council Elections: A reminder that the county elections are taking place on **Thursday 2nd May 2013**. Please exercise your right and use your vote.

8. Casework

Your Councillor is here to help you. Please do feel free to contact me with comments, questions, problems, reports, suggestions or complaints. I can be contacted by phone, email or via my website. I hope I can help but even if I can't, then it's highly likely that I know someone who can!

9. Councillor Drop-in surgery

Thank you to those who have dropped into talk to us at the councillor drop-in surgeries. The next surgeries will take place as follows

Caldecote Village Hall: first Thursdays of the month, next on 9th May 2013 7pm – 8pm

Kingston Village Hall: second Thursdays of every other month, next on 16th May 2013, 7pm – 8pm

Toft People's Hall: first Mondays of every month, next 13th May 2013, 6pm – 7pm

10. Dates for your diary

17 April 2013	8pm	Annual Parish meeting of Caldecote Parish. BT Director Annette Thorpe attending to give update on rollout of Superfast broadband for Caldecote and rest of Madingley Exchange
19 April 2013	5pm	Closing date for applications for independent person and deputy
1 May 2013	10 am	Planning Committee meeting
2 May 2013	7am-10pm	County Council elections
2 May 2013	7pm-8pm	Councillor Surgery, Pavilion
9 May 2013	7pm-8pm	Councillor Surgery, Kingston Village Hall
13 May 2013	6pm-7pm	Councillor Surgery, Toft People's Hall
16 May 2013	8pm	Annual Meeting of Caldecote Parish Council
16 May 2013	8pm	Annual Parish Meeting of Kingston Parish
21 May 2013	7pm	Annual Parish Meeting of Toft Parish

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8-April-13

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