

South Cambridgeshire District Council – Caldecote Ward Councillor's Annual Report – April/May 2019

Caldecote Ward comprising the Parishes of Caldecote, Childerley, Bourn,
Kingston, Longstowe & Little Gransden



1. Introduction

I want to thank all the Parish Councils for their support throughout the 2018/19 municipal year. Caldecote Ward changed in May 2018, losing Toft, but gaining Bourn, Longstowe and Little Gransden. I am slowly getting to know the new villages and thank everyone for the warm welcome.

2. Governance

District Council – The political landscape changed in May 2018 when the Liberal Democrats won control of the Council. The administration is now a 30-strong group of LibDems (from 14). The others are Conservatives 11 (24.4%), Independent 2 (4.4%), Labour 2 (4.4%). Total of 45 councillors, down from 57. It is more work for us, but lower cost to residents.

The 7-strong cabinet is made up of 4 women and 3 men. I am the Lead Cabinet Member for Planning. In the spirit of co-operation, we appointed an Independent Councillor as Council Chairman, and for good governance, appointed a Conservative as Chairman of the Scrutiny Group.

3. Business/Service Plan

We have created a very ambitious 5-year business plan for 2019 to 2024. Handy versions are available online and in hard copy. The four key priority areas for us are:

- **Growing local businesses and economies** – We will support businesses of all sizes, to help create new jobs and opportunities near to where people live.
- **Housing that is affordable for everyone to live in** – We will build vibrant communities in locations where people have good access to facilities and transport links, so they can genuinely afford to lead a happy and healthy life.
- **Being green to our core** – We will create a cleaner, greener and zero-carbon future for our communities..
- **A modern and caring Council** – We will provide our customers with high-quality services, strive to reduce costs, build on what we are good at to generate our own income and make decisions in a transparent, open and inclusive way.

Green to our Core

Our administration has pledged to become a zero-carbon district by 2050. We stopped the use of single-use plastics at South Cambs office. A working group of members and officers is preparing a high-level business case for a set of energy conservation measures (such as EV charging points, solar panels over our car park etc.) that are intended to make our Cambourne offices a showcase for a Zero Carbon Council and an exemplar to our residents.

A modern Council

To assist with customer service, the “My South Cambs Portal” web-based customer portal has gone live. It will enable residents access council services easily and quickly, enabling us to save money on printing papers and postage. We are also working on a “cultural change” program to promote cross functional working in the council, so that we think in a joined-up way.

The organisational structure of the Council had not been reviewed for a number of years. We realised that it was not working efficiently and would not be able to deliver the policies and priorities our administration has set. We contracted Specialist consultants to review the structure and propose a new one that is modern and fit for purpose, which we will use for the reorganisation, starting with the top 2 tiers.

We are also working on improving the remuneration package offered by the Council to be more competitive, to enable us to attract and retain staff.

A caring Council

Our administration has pledged to find homes in our district for 5 refugee families fleeing warfare in the middle east. Two years ago, the Home Office asked the council to help with the rehoming of refugees and as the Lib Dem Group was minority opposition, our motion to full Council proposing this was rejected by the Conservative majority. The current Home Office scheme runs until December 2019, and we are pleased we have the opportunity to work with a resettlement team at Cambridge City Council (who have already resettled over 100 refugees), to provide support workers to assist the families to settle into their new communities in our district.

4. Finance

Accounts & Budget

The budget that we inherited from the previous Conservative administration for the 2018/19 year had a £450,000 hole in it. In addition, it transpired that the Authority had not published audited accounts for 2017/18 by the statutory deadline, this being the third year in a row it had failed to do so. We have been able to fill that hole, turning it into a £1m surplus that has gone into the General Fund as the council no longer receives any funding from central government, so has to raise its own funding to provide services. We appointed an Interim Head of Finance who has been working hard with Auditors and our Lead Cabinet Member for Finance to close the late account and prepare the 2018/19 accounts on time.

In summary, in our new budget the total service expenditure for 2019/20 is projected to be £20.2 million, of which £9.1 million will be raised from council tax. Average Band D is £145.31 up by £5 (3%) from last year. The rest will come from a combination of sources including but not limited to Retained Business rates, New Homes bonus, Rural Services grant, interest on reserve balances, Income from other sources including Ermine Street.

New Investment Strategy

The previous administration did not have an investment strategy against which to judge commercial opportunities to ensure they are sound. We have now created one for the first time and as a result, cancelled three proposed schemes we inherited because they were too risky.

We will use the strategy to consider a wide range of investments necessary to generate an income of around £5million/year by 2024. As a first step on from setting up the strategy, we have recently completed on the purchase of a prime office building at the Science Park, with a yield of 5.6%.

We have installed solar PV panels on the roof of the recycling depot at Waterbeach and taken delivery of the first electric van which will be powered from the energy generated from the PV panels.

Grants

We have restructured the grants scheme so it is now administered by a cross-party committee, making it more responsive to the needs across the district. We have increased funding for the mobile wardens scheme, and the Community Chest grants.

5. Housing and Planning

Housing

Housing and the cost of it continues to be a challenge. We are aiming to meet this by building 70 new council houses per year, and more where possible. We have drafted a new Housing Strategy, looking at provision of variety of types of housing including for downsizing, single people etc. as well as delivering high quality homes that are affordable to run, energy efficient and well served by transport links, including walking and cycling.

Greater Cambridge Planning Service

The planning services of SCDC and Cambridge City were merged on 1st April 2018 into a shared service. The re-organisation is now in the second phase and will see one organisation structure and a common working process. It will provide a career path for planners especially in the light of the growth that the district is going to experience in the next decade or more. The new software for the new service should be ready for launch in the summer. All of this is geared to making sure the Council can deal efficiently with the high levels of planning applications it receives more efficiently, in cooperation with communities to deliver great places to live, work and play.

Village Design Guide and Neighbourhood Plan

We introduced the Village Design Guide (VDG) with money from government to assist 8 villages, including Caldecote, to create their guides, identifying unique features of the villages that they want developers to carry into any new developments. The VDGs will carry legal weight in determining planning applications for the villages that have created them.

We also adopted the first Neighbourhood Plan in the district (Great Abington). A second one (Cottenham) has gone through the public consultation phase. We are continuing to encourage communities to consider creating their own Neighbourhood plans

Local Plan

The Local Plan that was submitted by the previous administration in March 2014 for public examination was finally passed as sound by the Planning Inspector and was adopted by the Council in October 2018. Up to then, the Council was in the untenable position of its planning policies being considered out of date because it did not have a current local plan. In addition to that, the Council's lack of 5-year housing land supply led to thousands of speculative planning applications being given approval, a significant number through appeals process by the Planning Inspectorate.

We have now begun the process of developing a new joint local plan with Cambridge City, as stipulated by the Planning Inspector's decision notice. The process of creating a local plan takes a number of years, but we hope to submit the new one by 2022 for examination.

We are working collaboratively with partner organisations to encourage them to deliver the infrastructure for transport, health, education etc., for the new developments that need to be built out in the coming years.

Design Award

The Council's planning service together with Mole Architects, won the National Urban Design Awards 2019 for the Cohousing development Marmalade Lane at Orchard Park. This is a great example of what can be achieved by communities working together in collaboration with the planning service.

Our administration is keen to bring forward more award-winning developments!

6. Community Issues

I continue to assist residents with issues either as individuals or a community group on issues including housing, planning, waste collection, benefits, grants application support.

I am pleased for Little Gransden Village Hall securing a grant funding of £50,000 for improvements.

Threeways continues to be a challenge but we are hoping to get a better handle on what needs to be done to be able to issue an Empty Dwelling Management Order on it.

I was able to speak for Little Gransden and surrounding communities at the planning committee when the very contentious application to increase gliding activities at the flying club, resulting in request for unlimited tows being amended to a fixed number. The case also highlighted long standing communications (or lack thereof) issues and reporting process which I hope the club owners will take improve going forward.

The other big issues are to do with Bourn Airfield Development (BAD), where the developers Countryside submitted a planning application before the Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) was created. The draft SPD is well advanced now. Transport is still a major factor and the Council is liaising with Highways England with respect to finding alternative route onto the A428.

The other significant development is the 140 houses Linden Homes site (former Gladmans site in Caldecote). The build out of the 71 homes CALA site in Caldecote is well advanced.

The -home site in Caldecote for the self-builders got approval and two have now submitted their planning applications to the Council. This type of development is the first of its kind in the district.

I am continuing to get to know the new villages in the expanded Caldecote Ward – Bourn, Longstowe and Little Gransden. I attend parish council meeting where I give a monthly report on current issues at SCDC. I have also attended other events, quiz nights, summer fetes, open gardens, jazz evenings, Christmas services/carol singing, licensing of new church minister for the Gransdens etc. I am passionate about supporting all my communities and I look forward to meeting many more residents this coming year.

7. Casework/Councillor Drop-in surgery

If you need my assistance at any time in the interim, I am always available to you, so please contact me in one of the usual ways.

Tumi

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15 April 2019

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