

South Cambridgeshire District Council – Caldecote Ward

(comprises the Parishes of Caldecote, Childerley, Kingston, Bourn, Longstowe & Little Gransden)

Councillor's Monthly Report – March 2023

This report of previous month events is for all the Ward, so please be aware that some of the content may not be relevant to your particular Parish.

General

Please contact me with comments, questions, problems, reports, suggestions or complaints to do with SCDC services. These are housing need, housing repairs for council tenants, planning, benefits, council tax, bin collection, environmental health issues etc. Don't fight on your own. I am available to help you to get the best outcome possible for your situation.

Check out articles on my facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/itsCouncillorTumi> and my blog <http://www.TumiHawkins.org.uk>. What I post on there is my view and not LibDem or South Cambs official policy unless I state that it is.

Planning

NPPF Consultation

The latest consultation has been launched and includes plans to increase planning fees etc which has long been called for by all parties. It's not all good news though.

In summary, the government is proposing to:

- increase planning fees by 35% for major applications and 25% for all other applications
- introduce additional fees for bespoke or 'fast track' services
- make an annual inflation-related adjustment to planning fees
- ring-fence additional fees income
- introduce double fees for retrospective applications
- remove the 'free go' for repeat applications
- reduce the Planning Guarantee from 26 weeks to 16 weeks for non-major applications
- build planning capacity and capability within local authorities, including challenges in recruitment and retention, and how these can be addressed
- introduce a prior approval fee for the permitted development right allowing the Crown to develop sites within the perimeter of a closed defence site

Finance

District Council

The Council voted to increase the SCDC portion of council tax by 3.1%. This represents an increase of £5 per year (or 10p per week) for a Band D property. This increase is regrettable, but inflation affects the council's budget as it does that of every other organisation and personal budget and it is currently running at around 10%, with wage inflation at 6% (the council has to pay around 600 employees). Council Tax delivers around £11 million and Business Rates £18 million. Government grants have been reducing for a number of years and are now around £3 million. We have an ongoing transformation programme to improve the productivity of the council which is projected to bring savings of £2 million over the next two years and returns on our investments are at around £7 million.

The opposition advocated the freezing of council tax, which would be ideal and sounds easy, but it has to be remembered that this would not only affect the council's budget for the coming financial year, but it would have a compound effect on the projected budget over the coming years and council services would be badly affected.

SCDC sets only a small proportion of the Council Tax. The other precepts are set by the County Council (including for social care and education), the Police and Fire authorities, Parish Councils and now the Combined Authority (Mayor). SCDC is the collecting authority and passes on the relevant shares to these other organisations..

Cambridgeshire County Council

The council set its 2023/24 budget at its Full Council meeting in February. All four political group leaders on the County Council have also written to Rt. Hon Michael Gove MP Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to press for progress with funding reforms for local government which currently penalises Cambridgeshire and its residents. Among other points made to him was that Cambridgeshire County Council has seen its core government funding cut from £143m in 2013/14 to just £68m in 2023/24, a real terms reduction of 70%.

In 2023/24, Cambridgeshire's core spending power per head will be £746. The average of our statistical neighbours is £831 per head – if Cambridgeshire received this average instead, we would have around £58m of additional funding available to us – to fill potholes, for example. And we do need it because between the 2011 and 2021 census points, the population of Cambridgeshire grew by more than 9 times the rate for England.

Transport

Luton Airport Flight Path and Airspace Deployment (AD6) change

Meeting on 23rd February went well with over 150 people in the hall and 57 on zoom. RELAS team gave a presentation (available on the RELAS Facebook group), Anthony Browne MP sent a pre-recorded message, Jonathan Djanogly gave his speech via zoom, and I spoke on behalf of South Cambs.

The Post Implementation Consultation period is now extended till end of September

Anyone being affected by the airplane noise should continue to report it to Luton. Send an email to noise@ltn.aero or noise.enquiries@ltn.aero, stating your name and address, the date and time of the flight and effect it had on you. Where possible make a video or audio recording on your phone of the flight event that caused the disturbance as part of your record keeping. Copy the MP in and the RELAS team info@relas.uk for the record. There is still a chance to make a change by reporting the impact AD6 is having on everyday life of everyday people. RELAS group is at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/relas.ad6>

EWR

The government is still intending to go ahead with this. We expect to hear more about this later in the year. The Transport Secretary Mark Harper has said it will only go ahead if it fully stacks up. But the question is how is the stacking up assessment done, and who decides? Apparently EWR is still analysing all the feedback from its non-statutory consultation in 2021!!

The SCDC Leader together with some parishes wrote to the Rail Minister Huw Merriman expressing our concerns about EWR and inviting him to visit to see for himself some of the villages that will be most impacted. He declined and said he was here in February though no one seems to know anything about that visit. Makes one wonder!

20 MPH schemes

The Highways & Transport Committee approved the changes to the Council's policy on 20MPH speed limits. The proposed timetable for applications for funding for new 20MPH speed limits is as follows: Go 'live' with application process on-line for new schemes in February 2023 with applications between February and April 2023. Prioritization of the submitted schemes will take place in May to June 2023 with Committee report for approval in July 2023 and thereafter programming and delivery of schemes from August.

Housing

Council Rents

Another regrettable consequence of the rise in inflation is the need to increase council house rents by 7%, which was also approved by Council. Although this is below the current rate of inflation the council recognises that this, together with other price rises, will be a worry for many people and it is not a decision that the council takes lightly. The council is building new social housing at a rate not seen for many years and plans to build another 75 over the next two years, after which it is hoped that the target will be higher target still. Improvements to the thermal efficiency of existing council housing stock is also a priority and the plan is to improve all houses so that they are at an EPC rating of 'C' or above by 2025. The costs attached to such improvements are high (and rising substantially), but it means that the modernised homes are significantly more affordable for council tenants to live in – something that the many tenants who have benefited so far are very positive about.

Community and Wellbeing

Motion: Intimidation and Abuse in Public Life

This motion was submitted jointly by the Leader of the Council and the Leader of the Opposition. The motion read 'The intimidation and abuse of councillors, in person or otherwise, undermines democracy; preventing elected members from representing the communities they serve, deterring individuals from standing for election, and undermining public life in democratic processes. This council notes that increasing levels of toxicity in public and political discourse is having a detrimental impact on local democracy and that prevention, support and responses to abuse and intimidation of local politicians must improve to ensure councillors feel safe and able to continue representing their residents.'

The text of the motion went on to say that the council should take a zero-tolerance approach to abuse of councillors and officers and listed a number of actions. The motion was carried unanimously. Alas, a motion on honesty and truthfulness in public life is for another day.

Councillors Allowances

Like MPs, councillors in local authorities have to set their own allowances, which is unwelcome and far from ideal. In common with many local authorities, SCDC employs an Independent Review Panel (IRP) to determine what the allowances should be and, this year, they recommended that allowances rise by 4.25%. To put this into context, councillors are expected to provide their own phones, calls and internet services on both council business and for casework. Fuel costs are only covered (at the HMRC rate) when attending formal council meetings, courses etc. The Council accepted IRP recommended will take the allowance for an 'ordinary' councillor to £5,501 per annum and special responsibility allowance of a cabinet member to £8,402.

Cost of Living - financial support

From Council tax support to heat, food and free holiday activities, there is loads of useful information on financial support from a variety of organizations collated by South Cambs District Council, here: <https://www.scams.gov.uk/cost-of-living-support/>

Fuel Payment for Oil Users

The Alternative Fuel Payments scheme is intended to deliver a one-off payment of £200 to UK households who are not on the mains gas grid and therefore use alternative fuels, such as heating oil, to heat their homes. The scheme not through the Councils but is now open via GOV.uk website at <https://www.gov.uk/get-help-energy-bills/alternative-fuels>

Ukraine – new hosts for guests needed

Cambridge and South Cambs have between them about 500 hosts for Ukraine guests. With the war in Ukraine continuing, the six-month hosting arrangements have needed to be renewed, though not all hosts are in a position to do so. Anyone who might be able to provide a spare room for a guest from Ukraine is asked to get in touch with SCDC, or please contact any of us and we'll point you in the right direction.

Asylum Seekers in Bar Hill Hotel

The Hotel at Bar Hill has been contracted by the Home Office to provide accommodation for asylum seekers. This information is now available on our website at

<https://www.scams.gov.uk/home-office-use-bar-hill-hotel-to-house-asylum-seekers/>

Some councillors have contacted the officer team working on the project as local residents have asked about donating clothes and other support they can offer. At this stage the team at the Council is working very closely with Cllr Bunty Waters as the local member, Bar Hill Parish Council and emerging community support groups in the village to put plans in place. This includes appealing for clothes donations in Bar Hill initially. The team want to ensure we are not overwhelmed by donations so at this stage the clothing appeal will only be in Bar Hill only. The Parish Council are supporting the coordination of this.

Once we understand the level of demand for clothes, and the amount being donated from people in Bar Hill, we will see if further support is required from a wider area and get back in touch.

The website information covers most of the common questions about the scheme. However, please contact duty.communities@scams.gov.uk if you, or your communities, have any further questions.

The Government housing asylum seekers in hotels is being replicated throughout the country as part of the Refugee Dispersal Scheme

Action for Happiness

The Action for Happiness theme for this month at <https://www.actionforhappiness.org/calendar>. is **Mindful March**. This month's focus is "Let's take action to be Happier and Kinder Together"

Casework

Please do feel free to contact me with comments, questions, problems, reports, suggestions or complaints to do with SCDC services. I will help as best I can

You will find the current and past reports on my blog at <https://tumihawkins.org.uk/caldecote-ward/reports/monthly-reports/2022-23-monthly-reports/>. Feel free to read, share and/or download.

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12 March 2023

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