

South Cambridgeshire District Council – Caldecote Ward Councillor’s Annual Report – April 2024

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



1. Introduction

This municipal year 2023/24 has been quite a busy one and this report covers the last 12 months of activities by South Cambridgeshire District Council (SCDC) and Councillors which I hope will be useful for you.

2. Governance

Thank you to all who have continued to support me in this role as your Ward Councillor. It’s been my pleasure to serve you and will continue to do so to the best of my ability. A lot of my time is taken up by the related responsibility as the Cabinet Member for Planning Policy, Development Management and Strategic Sites. (SCDC hosts the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning service) Building control, (a 3Cs shared service) also comes under my remit. I served as a member of the Climate and Environment Advisory Committee and the Planning Committee.

District Council – South Cambs District Council is in LibDem administration. The statutory services provided are: Waste Collection & Recycling, Planning (these two are shared services with Cambridge City but we host them), Housing, Environmental Health, Licensing, Council Tax Collection, Benefits and Business Development & Support.

We continued to build upon our ambitious 5-year business plan for 2019 to 2024 in the four key priority areas we identified:

- **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.

50th Anniversary

South Cambs marked its 50th anniversary with a civic ceremony at South Cambs Hall in March. That was preceded by the planting of a tree by Deputy Lieutenant for Cambridgeshire Jeremy Newsum. SCDC was created in 1974 by combining what was then Chesterton Rural District Council and South Cambridgeshire Rural District Council. It was an opportunity to pay thanks to the unwavering dedication and commitment of all those who have served on and worked for the council over the years as well as the continued support of our residents and stakeholders.

3. Housing and Planning

Truly Affordable Housing

We recognise that everyone deserves a high-quality, safe, and affordable place to live.

Affordable housing is generally delivered by housing associations, often through S106 schemes especially on major sites. However, SCDC also acquires social affordable housing in significant numbers and have delivered 109 council homes this year.

We are well into a programme of upgrading the thermal efficiency of our existing council housing stock using grant funding from Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund to bring them up to EPC Band C which will result in a significant reduction in energy running costs for tenants.

The Council formed a housebuilding partnership with The Hill Group through the South Cambridgeshire Investment Partnership (SCIP). SCIP now has planning permission to build 256 new low-carbon Passivhaus principles homes in Cambourne (area opposite/next to South Cambs Hall). 40% will be affordable comprising 72 for rent and 30 for shared ownership.

We continue to support the liaison meetings in villages that are seeing a lot of building out, and community forums in Northstowe, Waterbeach, North-West Cambridge, Cambridge East, North-East Cambridge and Bourn Airfield and Cambourne (which I chair).

Homes for Ukraine

The continuing Russian aggression in Ukraine means that this scheme is still very active. 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.

Planning and Emerging Joint Local Plan

We continue the work on the emerging joint local plan with Cambridge City that will determine how our district is developed over the period 2020-2041. This work has slowed down due to the issue of water supply for which Cambridge Water is responsible and Transport (due to Making Connections proposal by the Greater Cambridge Partnership falling aside). The Government has established a Water Scarcity Group (WSG) to work with all partners/stakeholders to resolve this challenge. The Council is engaging with the WSG.

By February 2024, we had adopted 8 adopted neighbourhood plans and a further 17 areas have been designated indicating their intention to prepare a neighbourhood plan. The Planning service has also created a Neighbourhood Planning Toolkit to assist the communities preparing theirs.

The joint Five-Year Housing Land Supply (with Cambridge City) is 6.5 years for the 2024-29 five year period. This is good news as it means we are currently exceeding the minimum 5 years set by government for all local authorities.

The Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service (GCSPS) is fully staffed for the first time in over a decade. The 4DW has helped in bringing in more and highly qualified professionals. Also range of building projects is more varied than elsewhere in the country.

The Service has also won industry awards, including for Youth Engagement and this month been shortlisted as one of 5 finalists for the prestigious Planning Awards 2024 “Local authority planning team of the year”. This is testament to the positive journey and transformation the service has undergone since May 2018 when we took over control of the council. The merging of South Cambs and City planning staff had just been implemented in the April so there was plenty to do.

The GCSPS has also won £250,000 of Government Prop Tech funding & Digital Planning Improvement fund for work on our digital transformation in planning to make it easier for residents and businesses to access and for the applications to be processed more quickly.

Michael Gove Cambridge 2050 Plan

Michael Gove announced his plans for ‘Cambridge 2040’ in July 2023 but, since then, details have been slow to emerge. Gove’s original figure of 250,000 homes (which he denied at one point) has since been revised down to 150,000 PLUS (it’s a matter of words) and the date pushed back to 2050. He refuses to speak to us Local Authorities directly about his plans and just “announces”. Last month, the government announced that it intends to set up a ‘growth corporation’. The administration had hoped and assumed that, as the local planning authority, it would have a seat on the board of this organisation and bring to it significant local knowledge and experience but it seems that local authorities will only sit on an advisory council alongside businesses and industry partners and without a vote or decision-making powers. So much for Localism.

There is still a great deal that is unknown about the government’s Cambridge 2050 plans. Even if there is a Labour government after the upcoming general election, the government policy may not change much because of the growth of the Life Science sector (medical research, bioscience and medical sciences). It is therefore vital that the local authorities use any power that the government allows to make sure that the infrastructure needed for such growth is in place. One of those is plans for a sustainable transport system, which is badly needed to prevent our roads from grinding to a halt due to increasing congestion and to reduce the decline in air quality levels. New schools and health facilities are going to be needed, water scarcity issues are critical and environmental protections must be put in place. Affordable housing is going to be absolutely vital.

4. Growing local businesses and economies

The Business team is doing a lot of work to support local businesses (specifically SMEs) to grow, which 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. The team is also helping local businesses transition to net-zero means so 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 in supporting local high streets and markets is directly benefitting communities and helping residents shop locally and support local businesses. The [VisitSouthCams](#) website we created is proving popular with small businesses advertising.

5. A Modern and Caring Council

Being a modern council means we are continuing to undergo significant transformation work. It’s 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. 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 residents in their communities.

We are also providing targeted health and wellbeing support for vulnerable residents and ensuring our staff have the training to respond appropriately to safeguarding issues. On a cross-party basis, the Council agreed to work towards White Ribbon accreditation, a charity that seeks to tackle domestic abuse and gender-based violence.

Cost of Living support

We continue to provide support for those having difficulty in the ongoing cost-of-living crisis. affects everyone and SCDC has been supporting residents through the winter. The Council is supporting a Mobile Food hub that visits 6 villages and gave out about 500 electric blankets in winter.

Four Day Week (4DW) Trial

The 4DW is where council officers are expected to carry out 100% of their work in 80% (four days) of the work week but keep their full pay. This was introduced in a bid to get more experienced staff to come and work here especially in the hard to fill areas like Planning and Waste. This is an expensive place to live and we needed to come up with a creative benefit as we local government cannot compete with the private sector on pay.

It's interesting that both the Scottish and Welsh Governments are considering this 4DW scheme though the British Government is doing its best to stop the trial. It has issued a Best Value Notice and threatened the Council with unspecified financial penalties if the scheme continues. Any decision on making it permanent can only be taken when the Government comes out clean on details of its punishing financial intentions. Once we have clarity from the government, we will conduct appropriate consultation and the trial data will be independently analysed. Then Councillors can debate at full council and come to decision whether to make it permanent or not. Until then, the council officers continue to operate a four-day working pattern.

So far the trial is working, as the Council has spent £434,000 less on expensive agency staff to cover the roles that were hard to fill. There is no significant negative impact on services and in some areas, the Council's services have improved. Health and wellbeing surveys of staff show a significant positive impact on both their mental and physical health, and sickness level has decreased too. The Planning development management team is fully staffed for the first time in recent memory!

Financial Position and Budget

South Cambridgeshire District Council is in a strong financial position – something increasingly rare amongst local authorities. The accounts have been published as required by government and are fully up to date. In February, we passed our budget for the 2024/25 financial year which includes a whole range of ways we're investing in improving the lives of our residents.

In common with all other local authorities, SCDC has seen its government funding cut significantly in recent years. We have made successful commercial investments that has brought in £7million which is being used to make up the shortfall of withdrawn government funding and enable us to continue to provide services to residents. The district is still one of the lowest council tax local authorities in the country. The council tax rise was below inflation and equated to 42p per month for a Band D property. We have council tax relief offering up to 100% relief from council tax for those residents who need it most.

Grants

The strong financial position means we continue to be able to offer grants to our communities. These include the following:

- Community chest (small community projects) - £80K
- Service support grants (for the voluntary and community sector) £174K
- Long-term health - £13K
- Leisure Centre support (post-Covid) - £5K

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- Council tenant community grants - £6K
 - 6 Free Trees Scheme - £5K
 - EV charge-points for local charities - £15K
 - Zero carbon (larger grants to encourage carbon reduction) - £126K see below.

6. Green To Our Core

We continue to take big strides in reducing the Council's carbon footprint, greening South Cambs Hall and reducing the energy consumption of our commercial buildings and other assets owned by the council including the council house portfolio. The Waste Service is operating 3 electric refuse lorries, and some vehicles that run on Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil. Our Waterbeach Renewable Energy Network Project will help reduce the Council's carbon emissions as more solar panels will be installed and is a landmark project being watched by other authorities up and down the country.

The Council carried out its very first Climate Conference last November 2023, and it was a full house (I was there too), as over 70 people from across the district attended.

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

We have employed two new Environmental Enforcement Officers specifically to address the issue of fly tipping more efficiently and bring offenders to book more quickly.

Zero Carbon Communities grant scheme 2024

Zero Carbon Communities grant scheme is very popular and been running for six years. Grants of between £2,000 and £15,000 are available to parish councils and community groups in the district. Since its inception, more than half a million pounds has been given to schemes across the district under two main themes: to lock-up carbon or reduce emissions and to increase community engagement on any matters related to climate change. The current scheme with a pot of £125,000 is open now. Further information, help and advice is available on the council website.

SCDC Allotments toolkit

We appreciate the health and wellbeing benefits of garden allotments and are trying to promote them by offering grant funding and signposting to advice which is on the council website. There are also small grants in the pipeline to encourage new community growing clubs look out for further details soon.

7. Community Issues

I continue to assist residents with issues to do with South Cambs services either as individuals or a community group on matters such as housing, planning, waste collection, benefits, grants application support.

I also raise your concerns on large infrastructure or national significant projects such as the Luton Airport Airspace Deployment AD6 and East West Rail (EWR).

On EWR, I am on 3 local representative groups representing Caldecote community, raising concerns about the impact the proposed route alignment will have on the area and requesting very loudly for mitigation and benefits. The result of this is that EWR have stated the section from north of Cambourne will cross the A428 dual carriageway and Caldecote underground, and working on

how they do that and have mentioned cuttings. EWR is a project that the Government is committed to building out due to the economic growth in this region fuelled by the Life Sciences. It needs permission from Government to build so is now working on that Development Consent Order process. The next phase is the statutory consultation that EWR is proposing to hold in two stages starting in June 2024 to engage the local communities.

On Luton AD6, the post implementation review period ended in September 2023. I worked with RELAS and contributed to the reports of the noisy effects that residents in many villages in our ward experienced during that period. I also submitted a response to the separate DCO application that Luton submitted to expand the airport from 18million to 32 million passengers a year.

I chaired the quarterly Caldecote Liaison Meetings held with the developers, planning officers, parish council and Grafton Management for the two sites developments of Linden and Balfour. The sites are now built out, but there are still outstanding issues that we are resolving. Thanks to the village representatives who continue to engage and help.

8. Casework

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, details in the box below. If you are on facebook, I strongly recommend liking my page at <https://www.facebook.com/itsCouncillorTumi/> to get information and updates quickly.

Tumi

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25 April 2024

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