

# South Cambridgeshire District Council – Caldecote Ward

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

## Councillor's Monthly Report – March 2021

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.

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### 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.

If you have time to spare – check out articles on 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.

### IMPORTANT REMINDERS

These are items in my previous reports that require action due to time limitations.

#### 1. Green Homes Grant scheme

Government funding to make homes more energy efficient to help you saving money on household bills. **The scheme closes on 31 March 2021.** It could up to two thirds to full cost of improvements, from £5000 to £10,000 depending on your circumstances. Find out more if you are eligible at <https://greenhomesgrant.campaign.gov.uk/?> and <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/apply-for-the-green-homes-grant-scheme>.

#### 2. Broadband Voucher Scheme

Those that are suffering from low broadband speeds (less than 30 Mbps) can still take advantage of the Government's Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme

<https://www.connectingcambridgeshire.co.uk/funding-schemes/rural-gigabit-voucher-scheme/>.

The Voucher is worth up to £3500 for small businesses and £1500 for residential premises. It remains **open till 31 March 2021** or until the funds run out. The funds can then be used to commission service from suppliers such a BT or others. Also Connecting Cambridgeshire has secured £500,000 extra **“top-up” funding from the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority** to provide an additional “top-up” of £1,500 per premise.

Check out my comments here <https://tumihawkins.org.uk/broadband-for-rural-communities/>

#### 3. Business Grants for Lockdown

Further news, on 22 February the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) updated the guidance on the Local Restrictions Support Grant (LRSB) which had closed and confirmed an extension until the end of March. The grant supports businesses that were required to close due to the current national lockdown#3. The Council will issue this as a **repeat payment to those in receipt of the LRSB closed scheme** as per BEIS guidance, rather than any new application process

Information on grants is at <https://www.scamb.gov.uk/businessgrant>. The Closing date is still 31 March 2021 and final payments expected to be made by 30 April 2021.

#### 4. Other Grants for Lockdown

The charity Cambridge Online is running a grant scheme on behalf of South Cambs to provide computer devices and data for those in need of it. Contact them by email using [help@cambridgeonline.org.uk](mailto:help@cambridgeonline.org.uk) or call the Cambridge Online helpline on 01223 300407, quoting ‘South Cambs Winter Support Grant’. Their website is at <http://cambridgeonline.org.uk/>

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## COVID19 UPDATE

**Good news:** Government has announced and published a road map out of Lockdown#3. It outlines four steps with four tests to be carried out after each step is taken to ensure that it is safe to take the next step. I've put up a short-ish summary in my blog at <https://tumihawkins.org.uk/roadmap-out-of-lockdown-3-depends-on-four-key-tests/>. The key dates are not set in stone. They are:

Step 1 – 8 and 29 March, Step 2 – not before 12 April, Step 3 – not before 17 May, Step 4 – not before 21 June. Whilst Step 1 is certain to start on 8 March, there is no guarantee the others will do so when indicated. So keep watching out for the news updates.

You will find full details at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-response-spring-2021/covid-19-response-spring-2021-summary>

If you need a rapid test, then remember a Rapid Testing Centre opened on Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2021 at The Hub, High Street, Cambourne, CB23 6GW, 8am-8pm, Mon-Sat. It is for key workers and people who are unable to work from home who are showing no symptoms to get tested if they are worried. You can book test at <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/rapidtesting>

**Businesses** in South Cambridgeshire which have not yet benefitted from Government grants to help them through the Covid lockdowns are urged to get in touch with the District Council.

The District Council has now paid out **£7,347,509** in financial support to **3,257** businesses for the recent lockdowns running from November 2020 onwards, and it will be paying out further sums over coming weeks. To date, Government grants awarded by the Council from March last year is over £31million in 11 months.

### Winter Support Payments

Small one-off grants to help South Cambridgeshire individuals and families in acute need as a direct result of Covid19 can now be made by some of our Council officers and other partner organisations across the county such as Citizens Advice and Age UK. These will be in the form of direct payments under the Winter Support Family Fund. A payment of up to £25 for an individual, and up to £50 payment for a couple or family is available to go towards food and fuel.

This is a countywide scheme that ends on 31 March 2021 which is when funding for Winter Support is expected to end. Residents can apply by email to [duty.communities@scambs.gov.uk](mailto:duty.communities@scambs.gov.uk) and an officer will be in touch with the resident to understand their situation, offer further advice, and make the award if needed. If you know of residents who may benefit from this small grant, please give them this information and help them with sending the email if needed or let me know.

### Vaccinations

- A cumulative total doses of 215,034 have been administered in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough (based on data up to 14 February 2021)
- More than 90% of residents aged 70 and above in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough have received their first dose
- Anyone aged 65 and over, or Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (previously on the shielding list), who hasn't yet had their first dose should now make an appointment by phoning 119 or online at [www.nhs.uk/covidvaccination](http://www.nhs.uk/covidvaccination)
- Carers are included in cohort 6 for vaccination if they fit the definition of "adult carers", which is defined as "Those who are eligible for a carer's allowance, or those who are the sole or primary carer of an elderly or disabled person who is at increased risk of COVID-19 mortality and therefore clinically vulnerable."
- A list of adult carers is being compiled. When finished, those who are eligible will be contacted via the National Booking System (NBS) with an invitation to book vaccination through Vaccination Centres, Community Pharmacies or Hospital Hubs.

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- If an individual has been added to the Shielded Patient List as part of the new QCovid model, the NHS will contact them to offer the vaccine as soon as appointments become available. The NHS may contact patients via text message, letter or a phone call to offer an appointment.

In the meantime, we must all continue to **stay at home** and observe lockdown guidelines found here <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-lockdown-stay-at-home#summary-what-you-can-and-cannot-do-during-the-national-lockdown> .

## **FINANCE –**

### **The Medium Term Financial Strategy**

The five year General Fund Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) delivers our Business Plan for South Cambridgeshire and its four principal objectives namely (i) Growing Local Businesses and Economies, (ii) Housing that is Affordable for Everyone to Live In, (iii) Being Green to Our Core and delivering (iv) A Modern and Caring Council. The MTFS is reviewed and refreshed every six months. At its February 2021 meeting the Full Council refreshed the MTFS to incorporate an updated financial forecast of the risks associated with Covid 19 and of the changes made and intending to be made by the Government in its financial support for local government, including the changes to the Public Works Loan Board rules.

In order to deliver the Business Plan and our statutory duties the Council must take a proactive approach to managing its resources effectively. Our four-year Service Transformation Programme introduced during 2019/20 together with our commercial investments are delivering savings and additional revenue and are at the centre of this. As a result of the MTFS refresh, despite the challenges we now face we forecast we will need to find £5 million in savings and additional income over the coming five years which is about the same as it was this time last year. We have a healthy General Reserve balance of around £16.5 million to deal with unforeseen problems.

We are still expecting the Government to carry out a major review of local government finance next year and we use our best guess of the worst-case scenario for us in our forward planning.

### **South Cambs District Council Budget for 2021/22**

The SCDC budget for 2021/22 was debated and adopted at full council on 23 February 2021. Every year the council sets its budget, the funding plan for achieving its priorities and goals as set out in the corporate plan. The council is expected to generate whatever income it needs to meet its own projected expenditure from Council Tax and other sources such as the Retained Business Rates (RBR) - the proportion of the business rates collected that we retain, New Homes Bonus (NHB) for each new home that is built, Rural Services Grant and investments.

The council no longer receives The Revenue Support Grant (RSG) from Government (last one given in 2018). As a result, we drew up an Investment Strategy that is now used as a basis to determine what capital projects to invest in to obtain recurring income to be used for providing services to residents of the district.

The heart of the General Fund Revenue Budget is the Covid 19 business and social recovery in South Cambridgeshire and about continuing to give support to our residents and businesses to help them recover from the pandemic in the coming financial year. This budget also recognised the Government's local government financial settlement for the coming financial year - which the Local Government Association (LGA) explained is dependent on councils increasing council tax bills.

The net expenditure for 2021/22 to be met from the Government Grants, Business Rates and Local Taxpayers as above is estimated at nearly £21.7 million pounds. Council Tax payers are being asked to pay an extra 10 pence a week for the average Band D property, bringing South Cambs

council tax bill to £155.31p. (Less for lower bands and higher for higher bands). Not applying this small increase would require us to use money from reserves, which could be building up trouble for the future. Nevertheless the Council Tax bill from South Cambridgeshire District Council will continue to be in the lowest 25 per cent of all district council taxes. The Council operates a Local Council Tax Support Scheme for those on low incomes as well as having discretionary powers to help council taxpayers as we have done during the past year.

The tables in Appendix A give the figures of the precepts for all the parishes in Caldecote Ward for the 2021/22 municipal year. The table below shows the proportion of each of the components of the council tax and the difference from the 2020/21 precepts (example below is for Caldecote).

	£ Band D		£ difference
Cambridgeshire County Council	1399.77	70.6%	£40.59
Police & Crime Commissioner	247.59	12.5%	£14.94
South Cambs District Council	155.31	7.8%	£5.00
Cambridgeshire Fire Service	73.53	3.7%	£1.44
Parish Council (Caldecote)	106.18	5.4%	£1.65
<b>Total</b>	<b>1982.38</b>		

The SCDC precept is only 7.8% of the council tax residents will pay. The lion share of 70.6% is required by the Cambridgeshire County Council. SCDC collects all these precepts on behalf of the precepting authorities and passes it on to them.

There has been a hit on Business Rate income and there are concerns that the long term effects of Covid 19 in terms of business failures and property devaluation may impact on the Business Rate growth in this coming financial year. Against this background of less income from Business Rates and grants, the council is not just relying on more money from council tax payers.

### **Service Transformation**

We have embarked on an ambitious 4 year plan to transform council service quality, better realign our financial resources to business plan priorities and improve customer service. This will achieve a reduction in net expenditure compared to 2020/21 of over £2.1 million. Helping our communities and businesses fight back in these difficult circumstances is essential. Therefore some of the savings achieved have gone to pay for additional support. For Covid 19 we have set aside a revenue contingency of £250,000 and there is a two-year post for a Welfare and Visiting Advisor to support and enhance the work of the Housing Benefits team during this difficult time for our residents. There is more funding for homelessness at this time of economic hardship and for land drainage when we are seeing record breaking rainfall due to climate change.

We also have staffing support to maximise our investment opportunities, which is key to retain our financial resilience to deliver place making and income. South Cambridgeshire District Council with a General Fund reserve of £16.5 million is in a sound financial position and this budget gives us the financial stability to proceed into the next council year and beyond.

### **Housing Revenue Account (HRA)**

The Housing Revenue Account budget is focused on delivering more council housing and improving the service to Council tenants. The HRA budget continues to be set in the context of a 30- year business plan. The HRA cannot be subsidised by local tax and it has to support a housing debt of £205m pounds taken out by the previous Conservative administration to “buy out” and retain our council rents from the Government.

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With respect to the council house building programme we have external funding from Section 106 commuted sums, retained right to buy receipts. The way the Council uses these funds is set out in the Housing Capital Investment Plan.

Since April 2018 we have completed 105 rented and shared ownership properties and have 248 in the pipeline. We have also sold off 8 plots for self-build, generating income for the HRA. We estimate the HRA balance at the end of this financial year will be just over £2.5 million which is adequate for HRA purposes. To ensure it does not fall much below that figure and to maintain our drive to improve the customer service to our tenants and grow our social housing stock, there is no alternative to increasing council rent levels.

Rents will increase by 1.5 per cent in line with Government policy and this means that the average social rent will increase to £106.02 per week. And in line with rent legislation our affordable rents will continue to be no more than 80% of the market rent. The average affordable rent is currently £148.18.

We are acutely aware that some of our tenants are having financial problems and offer assistance and advice as appropriate. The HRA budget also includes support for tenants some of whom are receiving Universal Credit.

## **PLANNING**

Further to my report last month, I am pleased to report that our MP, Mr Anthony Browne has taken up the invitation to a briefing with Senior Planning Officers to find out the process for creating Local Plans and the requirements that the Government of which he is a part, is placing on all Local Authorities. This briefing took place last week, together with the South East Cambs MP, Lucy Fraser. I can only hope that we will now see a more constructive engagement with the District Council on planning matters.

### **Bourn Airfield New Village S/3440/18/OL**

This outline application was approved by the South Cambridgeshire District Council planning committee on Friday 19th February 2021. There will be further planning stages called “reserved matters applications” where the detailed planning phases will be submitted for approval. So residents will still have opportunities to comment as the site gets built out.

Bourn Parish Council and Caldecote Parish Council sent representatives to speak on their behalf. On this occasion, I spoke only as the District Councillor. I had stepped down from the Planning Committee itself to avoid opening up the Council to legal challenge. I had to do this because of the “conflict of interest” that Countryside Properties levelled at me and their complaint to the new LibDem administration when I became the Lead Cabinet Member for Planning in May 2018. This was due to my supporting Caldecote PC and residents, and StopBAD in opposing the site when it was selected by the previous Conservative administration to be in the Local Plan submitted to the Planning Inspectorate in March 2014 and found sound in August 2018. I have previously written about this and you can find it on my blog at <https://tumihawkins.org.uk/countryside-properties-gag-attempts-on-bourn-airfield-development/>.

The debate was exhaustive and the vote was close, 6 in favour and 5 against. The sticking point, as expected was the issue of the Cambourne to Cambridge (C2C) Busway, which underpins the delivery of the site and is the only transport solution that the Cambridgeshire County Council proposed for it back in 2013. Again, I have written about this before and you can find it at <https://tumihawkins.org.uk/new-transport-strategy-for-cambridge-and-south-cambridgeshire/>

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The battle for inclusion in the local plan was lost in August 2018 when the Planning Inspectors announced the plan was sound. That sealed its fate for being built on and nothing would change that. The question then was whether the outline proposals that Countryside had submitted would provide sufficient mitigation against the planning harm that building out the site would cause. This is the planning balance that the committee had to strike. I prepared a statement for the committee and you will find the full text on my blog at <https://tumihawkins.org.uk/bourn-airfield-outline-planning-application-going-to-committee/> and you can read what happened at committee at <https://tumihawkins.org.uk/bourn-airfield-gains-outline-planning-approval-at-committee/>

In the end, Condition 13.(ii) was removed, which means no more than 500 houses will be built until there is visible progress on the delivery of the C2C busway. As I said to the committee, we inherited a lemon, but we can try and make the best lemonade possible with it.

## Transport

**Cambourne to Cambridge busway** – The GCP schedule initially set 2024 as the completion date for the C2C, until the intervention of the Conservative Mayor James Palmer threw a spanner in the works. The GCP has now agreed to and appointed auditor to undertake an Independent Audit Review of the scheme, and to report to the Board in July 2021. Depending on the outcome the proposed delivery date could still be 2024 or it could push out to 2026.

**Girton Interchange** – There is some propaganda going round that this may be upgraded thanks to campaigning by some recently appointed people. Considering that many others including former MPs, councillors including me ([see my 2013 blog article on it](#)), Council leaders, [Smarter Cambridge Transport](#), A428/A421 alliance (I was a member), C2C Local Liaison Forum, The Coalition of Parish Councils, and many more had been campaigning before then seems to have been forgotten. In fact we raised the profile so much, in its application for the Development Consent Order (DCO), Highways England presented a plan showing how the interchange could be laid out to accommodate the extra flows (Document [HE/A14/EX/32, Question 1.59 on page 21 and Figure 1.3 on page 22](#)). We had been informed in 2017 at the end of the A428/421 alliance project that funding for it would need to be considered in the next but one of the Highways England 5-year rolling programs – which so happens to be the 2025-30 period. I am glad to hear it is being looked at for that period, but as we know, it is not guaranteed for an upgrade until the funds are allocated! Fingers crossed.

## Casework

Irrespective of the current Covid19 lockdown, 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.

Please remember - The maxim **Hands – Face – Space** still very much the rule. Stay safe.

*Tumi*

Tumi Hawkins  
3 March 2021

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