

## South Cambridgeshire District Council – Caxton and Papworth Ward

### District Councillor's Monthly Report – February 2023

#### **Buses**

The Combined Authority (the Mayor's office) will levy a special precept within next year's council tax bill, to continue subsidising rural bus services. These include the services it rescued at the end of last year and also several lightly used services such as the Myall service which links Papworth Everard, Elsworth, Knapwell, Conington and Boxworth to Bar Hill Tesco and Cambridge. The additional amount will be £12 per year for a Band D property.

Some of the subsidised services have been reported as unreliable, either not running to timetable or not arriving. If you are aware of problems with local bus services, you can complain directly to the Combined Authority on <https://cambridgeshirepeterborough-ca.gov.uk/contact-us/>. You can also email me and I will pass the details along to the CA's management.

Longer term, the Greater Cambridge Partnership's (GCP) "Making Connections" consultation on improved bus services funded by a congestion charge received an over-whelming response. Over 23,000 responses were received from organisations and individuals, together with more than 100,000 written comments. Obviously, it's going to take some time for the GCP to analyse all that data and identify what changes are necessary to the original proposals. They still expect to have a final plan for the County Council (the body responsible for our roads) to vote on in the summer.

#### **Roads and Potholes**

Our county roads have been in a state of managed decline for the last 10 years. This year's hot summer, followed by a wet autumn and then a cold spell in December were the final straw for many roads. Potholes and other surface damage appeared all over the county. My contacts in the County Council Highways department say they are trying to fix potholes that present a safety hazard as soon as they are reported. Other serious potholes should be fixed within 10 days – those are painted yellow for identification. A few roads suffered subsidence during the hot summer and now have very uneven surfaces. The cost of fixing such roads is astronomical as they will have to be totally relaid. Safety on such roads will be managed with reduced speed limits until such time as budget is available for a permanent fix.

You should continue to report highways issues on <https://highwaysreporting.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/>. When your report is marked as closed, this may simply indicate the work has been assigned to a contractor, not that the work has been finished. Note that problems with the A428, A14 and M11 are the responsibility of National Highways, not the county. Report issues with them here: <https://report.nationalhighways.co.uk/>

#### **Development and the Local Plan**

Several residents have asked me about misleading headlines suggesting 57,000 new houses are going to be built in the Greater Cambridge area. The number of residences needed was determined by a government algorithm which estimates the jobs and population growth of the area by 2041, and deduces the number of dwellings required for the additional residents. We had already reached the number of jobs previously expected to be created by 2031 by the end of last year! Consequently, the latest revision of the Local Plan estimates that 5,000 additional dwellings will be required, on top of the 52,000 identified in the last draft plan. These numbers include the 37,000 dwellings proposed in the 2018 Local Plan, some have already been built, for example, in West Cambourne, and many others have been assigned to active sites.

There are several caveats around these numbers.

- The local councils will not permit large scale developments until the water supply issue is resolved. A new reservoir is planned in Fenland as is a major new pipeline from Grafham Water. However these sources are at least 5 years away from coming on stream.
- Most of the new dwellings are planned for three strategic areas on the outskirts of Cambridge. These are North East Cambridge (the waterworks site), Cambridge Airport and the Biomedical Campus. Rural villages with no or poor public transport links are not considered good locations for large developments.
- These are long term plans and the numbers may change over time.

## **Voter ID**

You may have seen publicity about the need to present voter ID when you vote in person. As South Cambridgeshire does not have local elections this year, we will not be affected immediately. If you don't have another form of picture ID such as a passport or driving license, you can beat the rush and apply now to the District Council for a free voter ID certificate online here:

<https://www.scambs.gov.uk/your-council-and-democracy/elections/voter-id/>

For further information about voter ID requirements (including acceptable forms of ID) and the Elections Act 2022, you can visit the Electoral Commission Website on

<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter/voter-id>

## **Oxford-Cambridge Pan Regional Partnership**

Many of you will be aware that the government scraped the ARC, which was the body responsible for managing development along the Oxford-Cambridge corridor. It has now been revived as a “pan regional partnership”, responsible for economic development and the environment. Significantly, unlike the ARC, it will have no influence over house-building.

Bridget Smith, leader of South Cambs District Council, will be the board member responsible for environmental issues. The Environment Working Group is moving forward with work to support Local Nature Recovery Schemes, the rolling out of the RSPB's work on restoring wetlands, and work on strategic water and energy supplies. More details will be published in the coming months.

## **Homes for Ukraine: Hosts still needed for guests already in South Cambs**

Hosts are still desperately needed across South Cambs to support families who have already arrived from Ukraine, with hosts eligible to receive up to £500 a month as a thank you payment. Around 770 people from Ukraine have already arrived in South Cambs and, with the war continuing, there is an ongoing demand to provide them with a safe place to stay. Under the Homes for Ukraine scheme, hosts sign up to provide a home for guests for a minimum of six months. However, around 20% of current hosts are not able to continue past that initial six-month period. Guests who have been staying with them would benefit from alternative accommodation locally, so they can continue to build on the relationships and community connections they have already been able to make.

Hosts receive comprehensive support from the District Council, along with a £350 monthly Government 'Thank you' payment. The District Council also offers an additional opt-in monthly payment to hosts of £150. This takes the total host payment to £500 per month. Anyone who can offer a spare room and warm welcome is being asked to text ROOM to 88802. The Council will support applicants through the process and match hosts to guests who have already started to settle in the local area.

## **Key Amnesty**

South Cambs District Council is running a Key Amnesty campaign throughout February. People who are misusing council properties are being offered a one-off opportunity to #DoTheRightThing and return their keys without facing criminal proceedings. It gives tenants the opportunity to voluntarily hand in their keys, for a limited time, with no further action taken. Situations where tenants should hand in keys include where properties have been left empty or are illegally sub-let. For more information, email [fraud@scambs.gov.uk](mailto:fraud@scambs.gov.uk) or call the Housing department.

## **Budget**

South Cambs District Council is proposing to increase its council tax precept by £5, rather than the alternative of 2.99%. As South Cambs also collects council tax on behalf of the county council, parish councils, and the police and fire authorities, residents bills will increase by more than £5 from April. Until those other organisations have decided their increases, the new charge cannot be published. South Cambs will confirm its increase at Full Council later this month.

In round numbers, South Cambs expects to spend £84 million in the coming year on providing services. It will receive approximately £52 million income, leaving the remaining £32 million to be provided by council taxes, business rates and draw-downs from reserves. In addition, a New Homes Grant of £2.8 million will be received from central government, towards the cost of servicing new housing in the district. The intention is to achieve a break-even budget.

Business property rate revaluations will come into effect this year, resulting in an estimated increase of £23 million received from this source. However, business rates are shared with central government, the county council and the fire service, so not all that amount will come to South Cambs. The business team will be contacting business rate payers during the year to ensure they are claiming all the reliefs they are entitled to, hopefully softening the impact of the increase. In addition, there will be transitional arrangements in place for the first year.

## **Bins**

A reminder that bin collections are now on their winter schedule and the green bin will only be emptied once every four weeks. It will revert to fortnightly collections from mid-March.

Please encourage residents to report missed bin collections online within 24 hours. The Shared Waste Service will then schedule a return visit two working days later. Reporting missed bins online helps the supervisors track issues and identify problem areas or crews.

<https://www.scambs.gov.uk/recycling-and-bins/report-a-missed-household-collection/>

## **Batteries**

You can now recycle batteries by putting them in a plastic bag and tying the bag to the handle of any bin. Previously you could only recycle batteries with the blue bin. Please do not throw old batteries into the grey bin, as this presents a fire hazard. Recently one of our bin lorries caught fire in Cambridge due to burning batteries and the lorry was only saved by the quick action of the driver who dumped his load into the street!

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