

# South Cambridgeshire District Council – Caxton and Papworth Ward

## District Councillor’s Monthly Report – March 2024

Apologies this report is later in the month than usual. Some of the following information was embargoed until after the Budget on 6<sup>th</sup> March.

### **Easter Bin Collections**

The changes to the bin collection arrangements made last autumn minimises the need to change the collection days after Bank Holiday Mondays. However, a change will be necessary due to the Good Friday holiday later this month. Bins in our villages will *not* be collected on Friday 29<sup>th</sup> March; instead the collection day has been moved *4 days earlier* to Monday 25<sup>th</sup> March. The exception to this change is Caxton, where the bins will be collected on Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> March, that is, on their usual day.

### **Cambridge 2040 (2050?) and the Budget**

Chancellor Jeremy Hunt’s Spring Budget contributed some more information towards our understanding of Michael Gove’s Cambridge 2040 vision. It includes:

- A proposed development corporation to oversee the building of new houses and lab space in Greater Cambridge. There are several models of “DevCo” and the government has not yet decided on one.
- An additional £10.2 million investment in the Biomedical Campus, of which £7.2 million will be for local transport improvements and the remainder will be given directly to the Cambridge University NHS trust. Discussion is going on as to whether £7.2 million is sufficient to “un-pause” the CSET busway.
- £260 million now towards building more homes across the entire country. Funding specific to Cambridge will be included in the next Spending Review.
- A statement that the government plans to deliver new housing for Cambridge by 2050, a decade later than previously announced. The current number of new houses is “upward” of 150,000, a number which includes those already in our current Local Plan.
- A commitment to improve rail timetables to reduce journey times, deliver better performance and better connect the Cambridge Biomedical Campus when the new Cambridge South station opens in 2025.
- The Chancellor announced that AstraZeneca will invest £650 million in the UK to expand its footprint on the Biomedical Campus and for the building of a vaccine manufacturing hub in Liverpool. Additional expansion of the Biomedical Campus will probably require the sacrifice of part of the Green Belt.

To coincide with the Budget, the government published a brochure called “The Case for Cambridge”, which sets out Gove’s vision in slightly more detail. It’s worth a read and you can download a copy here: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65e865a05b6524001af21a7c/The\\_Case\\_for\\_Cambridge.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65e865a05b6524001af21a7c/The_Case_for_Cambridge.pdf)

It’s noticeable that, while they acknowledge the water shortage constraints, they don’t offer sustainable solutions (more water meters and fixing leaks isn’t going to provide water for 150,000 new houses!) Previously published plans for two new reservoirs remain on the table.

## Greater Cambridge Local Plan Update

The government's proposals obviously have a significant impact on the delivery of our Local Plan, as do other factors beyond our control. The Shared Planning Service has provided an update on the timetable for the Local Plan as follows:

“Councils are required to maintain up-to-date timelines for their plan-making processes. As the existing timetable for the Local Plan can no longer be met, owing to multiple external factors which need to be addressed before it can be completed, this timetable update sets out the planning service's best estimate for the Local Plan's next steps.

Both councils have existing Local Plans which were adopted (individually) in 2018. Work on the emerging Greater Cambridge Local Plan – the first joint Local Plan for Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire – has been ongoing since 2019, with public consultations taking place in 2020, and late 2021, ahead of both councils agreeing the 'Development Strategy Update' in early 2023. Current evidence in the emerging Greater Cambridge Local Plan identifies a need for a further 14,500 homes between 2020 and 2041, in addition to the 37,200 homes already provided for by the 2018 Plans, reflecting jobs forecasts for the area.

Factors affecting the progress of the Local Plan include uncertainty about:

- Water supply, an issue which the Greater Cambridge Planning Service warned in January 2023 could delay existing plans for housebuilding if not addressed by Government. Government has now established a Cambridge Water Scarcity Group and allocated funding to help address the issue, but work is in the early stages.
- Transport. Next steps to enable a sustainable transport strategy that can support the Plan, addressing issues raised by the decision by the Greater Cambridge Partnership (GCP) not to take forward the Making Connections proposal and to pause the Cambridge South East Transport Scheme. Local partners now need to collaborate to address these issues via the forthcoming Greater Cambridge Transport Strategy
- Waste Water Treatment Plant: Anglian Water's Development Consent Order (DCO) process to seek to relocate its Waste Water Treatment Plant is underway, with a decision due towards the end of 2024. If approved, this relocation would unlock land for a new North East Cambridge development which would be a major site in the emerging Local Plan.
- National planning reforms: expected to be introduced in autumn 2024. While the intention of the reforms is to speed-up plan making, GCSP planners do not yet know what additional work may be required to update work already done as part of the emerging Plan, in order to meet new requirements. Overall, the reforms may not impact the timeline, but planners cannot be certain at this stage.

A further key uncertainty is that the Government announced its intention to significantly increase levels of development in Cambridge beyond the levels the councils have outlined in the emerging Local Plan as being needed. Government said in December its vision for Cambridge includes proposals for “northwards” of 150,000 new homes as part of a major new expansion of the city. The councils' own evidence had previously suggested the need to provide for 50,000 new homes, to support 66,000 new jobs anticipated in the area between now and 2041. The councils are seeking to understand how and in what way the Government's ambitions will interact with, and impact on, the Local Plan process.

South Cambridgeshire District Council's Lead Cabinet Member for Planning, Cllr Dr. Tumi Hawkins, said: “We have long said that water supply is a deal-breaker when it comes to the future of development in and around South Cambridgeshire. With that in mind, we welcome the recent

Government remarks around addressing the area’s water scarcity challenges – but these crucial issues are not yet fully resolved. Clearly before we can outline how we think Greater Cambridge could change in the years ahead, we simply must understand how these challenges will be met.”

### **Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)**

Another significant change to planning rules is the introduction of 10% mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain for all major planning applications after 12th Feb 2024 and all minor applications from 2nd April 2024. The Shared Planning Service has provided a technical guidance note and a bespoke pre-application advice service to help applicants. More information on the GCSP web site here: <https://greatercambridgeplanning.org/planning-applications/pre-application-advice-service/biodiversity-net-gain-advice/>

### **Shared Planning secures funding boost to improve digital planning services and biodiversity**

Still with planning matters, Greater Cambridge Shared Planning (GCSP) has successfully secured funding totalling £375,000 from the Department for Levelling Up, Homes and Communities (DLUHC) in its latest PropTech funding round.

This financial boost paves the way for the adoption of cutting-edge digital solutions aimed at enhancing the planning process for residents. Through digital tools, GCSP aims to make Local Plan consultations easier to understand and visualise, foster greater transparency, and boost environmental enhancement efforts.

The first project, allocated £225,000 and dedicated to the 'Local Plan Site Assessment Process,' will see the integration of 3D modelling technology into the Local Plan process. Developers will be able to submit their proposals in 3D, allowing site assessors to better understand potential impacts, for example, determine whether the proposal would be suitable in the local context and sensitivities like Conservation Areas, listed buildings and important viewpoints. For the sites put forward in the new Local Plan, residents would be able to view these proposals in 3D images, showing how the development could look. It is hoped that this will bring this part of the Local Plan to life for residents and allow them to make better informed comments on the proposals.

The second project granted £150,000 and dedicated to 'Biodiversity Net Gain' underscores GCSP's commitment to environmental sustainability and conservation. With the recent national requirements for biodiversity to be enhanced as a result of a new development, the funding will allow the councils to accurately monitor how this is being achieved. The GCSP’s Ecology team will be able to import, manage, verify, report on, and monitor biodiversity data to ensure that a new development makes a lasting positive impact on local biodiversity habitats and species.

### **East West Rail (EWR)**

Many of you will have received EWR’s latest communication concerning their consultation process. If not, they say:

“We are continuing to develop our proposals, and I am pleased to share that in the first half of this year we will be ready to launch a statutory consultation on the proposals for East West Rail (EWR).

We have decided to split our statutory consultation into two stages to maximise the opportunity for your communities to influence our proposals during the development stage of the design process.

This approach will help us develop a better solution, more fully informed by the people living and working in the communities EWR will serve.

During the first phase of the statutory consultation, we will share our updated designs, as well as new information on design areas. We will also provide an overview of potential environmental impacts and mitigations. Our proposals will be presented in more detail than in previous rounds of non-statutory consultations and will again seek feedback from the public.

We will then analyse and consider all submissions to finalise a single proposal for the entire route, which will be presented in the second stage of the statutory consultation.”

Questions have been asked as to whether EWR and National Highways (A428 project team) could work together to minimise disruption and impact to the environment. National Highways seem to be forging ahead along the full length of the new road, something EWR seemed to be unaware of at the recent local representatives’ forum. I assume the answer is therefore “no”...

More information on the DCO and consultation process on the EWR web site here:

<https://eastwestrail.co.uk/news/latest-stories/preparing-for-dco>

The Spring Budget didn’t mention funding for the section of line between Bedford and Cambridge, although funding for the section between Milton Keynes and Bedford is being accelerated.

### **South Cambridgeshire District Council Budget 2024-2025**

In my previous report, I explained the finance measures that were being put forward for 2024-2025. Full Council duly voted to approve the administration’s Budget and Business Plan for the next 12 months in a marathon meeting lasting almost 6 hours. The budget is balanced and, unlike many other councils, no cuts in services are planned.

When it comes to Council Tax, South Cambs remains one of the lowest taxing authorities in the country, with a £5 per year increase – 42p a month - for the average band D home, equivalent to a below inflation rise of around 3%. In fact, three parish or town councils in the district have a bigger council precept than South Cambs.

The Council Tax relief threshold has been increased in line with inflation so that residents on the lowest incomes can continue to claim relief. SCDC is one of the few councils offering up to 100% relief for those residents in most need.

What are residents getting for the additional £5? Some examples:

- South Cambs will employ two additional Enforcement Officers to deal with fly tipping, with their own dedicated vehicle.
- Enhanced funding for zero carbon and environmental projects, including more staff support to the Zero Carbon Communities Grant scheme. Details to follow.
- Enhancements to IT, allowing more transactions to be completed online. Artificial Intelligence will be deployed to help residents navigate through processes.

## **Other News from Full Council**

South Cambs also passed a motion in support of the White Ribbon Campaign, after a decision was taken to seek accreditation with them. White Ribbon is a domestic abuse advocacy organisation who work to provide education about domestic abuse, in particular violence against women. This motion was also agreed unanimously.

Full Council also passed a motion to treat care experience as a protected characteristic. When the council makes decisions moving forward, as part of its Equality Impact Assessments, it will now also assess the impact on care leavers. This is a positive step towards treating care leavers more inclusively in society and was agreed unanimously by district councillors. The County Council, Combined Authority, Peterborough City Council and Cambridge City Council have all passed similar motions. Part of the motion was to call on town and parish councils to also take a similar step in support of care leavers.

### **Four Day Week Trial**

South Cambs 4-day working week trial for office based staff is due to finish at the end of March. The Council undertook the trial because of the acute recruitment and retention issues it faces, which is amplified in Greater Cambridge by the high cost of housing. A full report assessing how well the 4-day week has gone will be compiled after the end of the trial. However it will not be possible to complete the financial analysis until there is clarity as to whether the Government will carry out its threat to “pull financial levers” in their bid to stop South Cambs this approach to improve services. It is still intended to consult residents before any decision is made to make 4-day working permanent. Note that the 4-day week trial in Waste Service started later than the office based trial and will continue into the autumn.

### **Mobile Warden Scheme Financial Difficulties**

South Cambs subsidises Age UK Cambs and Peterborough to deliver Mobile and Community Warden Services ( MWS) in the district. The council has been made aware they are experiencing significant financial pressures which, if left unaddressed, could result in the loss of some of their 11 schemes across the district, possibly including one that supports elderly residents in our ward.

This information was brought to South Cambs after the Council’s budget was set and the Lead Member for Resources, Cllr John Williams, has been looking at options for how we might be able to support Age UK during 2024-25. This period is vital in the context of a review South Cambs is already undertaking with Rose Regeneration of such things as the value-for-money of the schemes, how they evidence the benefit of their help for people to live independently in their own homes for longer, the preventive nature of their service, the cost saving they offer to the system of ‘care’ for older people, and how they support expeditious hospital discharge.

Some staff at Age UK are now in a consultation period and are ‘at risk of redundancy’, including the wardens. South Cambs will continue to work with Age UK to provide reassurance to those affected, and is hoping to provide additional support for the immediate future, while it reviews its own MWS grant funding scheme for 2025 and beyond.

## **Cambridgeshire Home Improvement Agency**

Cambridgeshire Home Improvement Agency (HIA) is a strategic partnership between South Cambs, Cambridge City Council and Huntingdonshire District Council which is dedicated to enhancing the living conditions of residents, particularly focusing on older adults, individuals with disabilities, and those with limited incomes. Last year it helped more than a hundred families in South Cambs to access grants such as Disabled Facilities Grants and Special Purpose Grants to undertake adaptations and repairs in their homes to help prevent accidents, assist people to cope with long term health conditions and to live comfortably and independently. Staff will come out and do a free home hazard assessment, making suggestions for improvements. For information, email [hia@cambshia.org](mailto:hia@cambshia.org) or call 01954 713330 or 01954 713347.

## **CPCA Skills Bootcamps**

Skills Bootcamps are a fast and effective way for residents to get the skills they need for new careers and supporting employers to improve their workforce. Skills Bootcamps are focused courses lasting up to 16 weeks, giving learners the skills they need to find new jobs or advance in a career. Individuals can apply for free, and employers can get up to 90% off the cost of Skills Bootcamps to upskill their staff.

Skills Bootcamps are funded by the Department for Education and developed locally by the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA - the Mayor's office), working with colleges and training providers. The Combined Authority is working with employers in the region to understand their skills needs, tailoring the Skills Bootcamps to ensure learners have the best possible opportunity to secure good jobs in the local economy at the end of it. One such example is CPCA's recent collaboration with Howden Turbo and Baker Perkins to deliver an Introduction to Engineering Skills Bootcamp, to support learners into apprenticeship roles. You can find out more about available courses and dates here:

<https://cambridgeshirepeterborough-ca.gov.uk/what-we-deliver/skills/skills-bootcamps/>

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