

District Councillors' 'Milton and Waterbeach' Ward Annual Report 2023

This report covers the last 12 months of activity by District Councillors Anna Bradnam, Judith Rippeth and Paul Bearpark and the Liberal Democrat-led District Council.

May election

One of the first things to happen in the past year, in May 2022, was district council elections. We were delighted to have been elected to represent our ward until 2026.

Homes for Ukraine

SCDC has been highly active in the local administration of the government's Homes for Ukraine scheme. Communication with both hosts and guests has been key and we have issued a weekly community update for hosts and, recently, one for guests. Throughout the scheme, South Cambridgeshire has remained one of the local authorities with the highest number of Ukrainian arrivals which shows how keen South Cambridgeshire residents have been to support and provide homes for Ukrainian refugees. The key statistics for the district at year ending March 2023 were that 408 hosts have welcomed 787 Ukrainian guests into their homes, 914 DBS checks have been completed and 405 welfare visits made.

The council is now heavily engaged in the next phase of the Homes for Ukraine scheme. Whilst many guests will remain with their hosts, some will want, or need, to move on and the council is helping these people to find a new host, apply for social housing, or to rent privately.

The council is still looking for potential hosts, so if you feel you can help, please contact duty.communities@scambs.gov.uk

Cost of living support

The cost-of-living crisis affects everyone and SCDC has been supporting residents throughout, providing a package of support to help South Cambridgeshire residents through the winter. We supplied more than 300 residents who are 'just about managing' with free electric blankets and slow cookers - low-cost methods of staying warm and cooking food. Extra funding was provided to support an extra 100 eligible families with housing costs through Discretionary Housing Payments, Discretionary Council Tax discounts and a Warm Hubs programme. A further £200,000 has recently been allocated for further support. Amongst other initiatives, a series of roadshows are planned, giving cost-of-living talks designed to highlight the support available to the most vulnerable. It is hoped that this will improve the reach and uptake of grants and other support services that many people do not know are available to them. We plan to evolve the successful Warm Hubs into Community Wellbeing Hubs, offering more services.

Please continue to keep an eye on the South Cambs District Council home page where a great variety of schemes are kept updated – this includes government funding dispersed via the County Council and to local level and the Holiday Food and Activities programme for children and young people.

There are two sections: what help is available, and offering support to others.

<https://www.scambs.gov.uk/cost-of-living-support/>

Domestic Abuse Housing Accreditation

Two years ago, following a Lib Dem motion brought to Full Council with wide support, the Council signed up to complete its Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation. The accreditation was not limited to Housing Services but covered the whole organisation and involved a thorough review of policies and procedures for staff and customers. More importantly, the accreditation was part of the Council's goal to change the culture around domestic abuse and embed a survivor led approach. This included training for staff and members, publicity and awareness campaigns and the introduction of Domestic Abuse Support Champions within teams. Cllr Judith Rippeth as the lead local member worked closely with the officer team and led on local-member training on identifying when such abuse arises and how we can respond, especially in regards to casework.

At the start of December, the Council was officially assessed against the DAHA standards, passed and is now officially accredited. The Assessor's report states:

"All involved should be incredibly proud of this achievement as it is evident that a great deal of work and commitment has gone into adopting and embedding the standards across the relevant departments, and indeed, wider across the organisation. We are very proud to have awarded South Cambs District Council DAHA Accreditation, thank you for such a positive assessment process and experience – it was a joy to meet with so many passionate and dedicated people doing such great work."

C3R – Cambridge Re-signalling, Re-lock and Re-control project

The stated aim the Cambridge Re-signalling Relock & Recontrol Project is to upgrade the re-signalling system to a 35-year life and improve the reliability and performance of the signalling system in the Cambridge interlocking area, and thereby improve the performance and reliability of the network. The project includes the re-signalling of the Cambridge station interlocking area and the upgrade of the relevant level crossings, and any other works and operations incidental or ancillary to such works. In our ward it impacts the crossings on Station Rd, Waterbeach and Fen Rd, Milton.

The Transport and Works Act Order application has been submitted to the Secretary of State for Transport to determine. South Cambridgeshire District Council is a statutory consultee and was invited to submit representations to the Secretary of State by 23 September 2022.

ClIr Bearpark reviewed the traffic modelling that had been done and responded to the request by officers for councillor input into the SCDC response. He expressed concern about the extended periods for which the upgraded barriers would be down and the impact this would have on traffic queuing through the village and the impact on station users and pedestrians and cyclists using the crossing. His comments were included in the response to the Secretary of State.

With the wider community in Waterbeach since November 2021 we have been lobbying Network Rail to keep access open as a minimum for non-motorised users of the crossing at Burgess Road. At the end of March Network Rail improved the crossing by installing a separate NMU gates. We will continue to campaign to retain this access to the allotments and the countryside beyond.

Waterbeach Greenway

Earlier this year the GCP has stated that the work on the Waterbeach Greenway would be paused briefly for a review. The recent GCP Joint Assembly report stated “The Waterbeach Greenway alignment was originally agreed by the Executive Board in February 2020. Since that time, a number of changes in the area including the development of the Urban & Civic Mere Way proposals, A10 footpath widening, the decision to relocate the Waterbeach Rail Station and the emerging Waterbeach Busway proposals. These interventions require a review of the Waterbeach Greenway proposals to ensure that a comprehensive network is delivered.”

The delivery of the Waterbeach Greenway is now stated as 2025 rather than 2024. The delay in the Greenway is disappointing and we have requested that the GCP examine how the Greenway timeframe can be returned to its original schedule given that first occupation of Waterbeach New Town will be early 2023.

ClIrs Bradnam, Bearpark and Rippeth are meeting regularly with GCP officers to understand how the plans for the Greenway are developing.

“Green to our Core”

One of the Council’s ongoing Business Plan objectives is to be “Green to Our Core” and we have delivered a number of initiatives in the last year. Two electric refuse collection vehicles are now operating in the district, a third is on order and a fourth will follow soon. These will replace diesel vehicles and plans are being developed for a large solar array at the Waterbeach depot to charge them. Following earlier successful initiatives, our ‘6 Free Trees’ project was introduced to increase tree cover on parish council land, enhancing biodiversity and carbon capture. We have been working with community partners to provide equipment and information kits to encourage greater recycling and minimise waste at community events. More information can be found here: <https://www.scambs.gov.uk/climate-emergency-and-nature/>

Growth in the Greater Cambridge area and the Local Plan

Economic growth in the Greater Cambridge area is one of the main drivers of the GCP’s “Making Connections” proposals. Companies of all kinds want to move to the Cambridge area, creating jobs of all kinds and the prosperity that goes with them. These companies need people, and those people have to have somewhere to live. This is the reason that the government requires local planning authorities (like SCDC and the County Council) to plan for greater numbers of houses and the infrastructure (schools, medical facilities, roads) to go with them. As we all know, one of the consequences of growth is an exceptionally high cost of living, making home ownership impossible for many people and leading to people choosing to live in areas further away from the city that have lower rents and house prices. Many then commute to their workplaces in Cambridge, leading to greater congestion, poorer air quality and higher energy use.

You may ask why we need to accept the projected growth, but this is not a decision that local authorities like SCDC can take. The government requires that all planning authorities produce a Local Plan and expects them have a clear understanding of the 'objectively assessed' needs for housing and jobs. A 'carrot and stick' approach is adopted; local authorities that deliver the number of houses that the government agrees are needed continue to have control over development planning whereas, those that do not, can lose the ability to decide what is built and where. This was the case prior to 2018, which resulted in hundreds of houses being approved or built in Waterbeach outside of the agreed village limits.

SCDC is currently working to the Local Plan that we inherited from the previous (Conservative) administration and discussions are currently being held as to how the government's growth requirements can be delivered (especially given the potentially serious consequences for water supply in the area) without leaving us exposed to the 'stick' described above. Meanwhile, work on the next Local Plan is ongoing and the all-important draft plan consultation is due in autumn 2023.

Greater Cambridge Planning – Planning Compliance

As part of the review of the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service (GCSPS) officers reviewed the part of the service relating to ensuring compliance with planning controls. The rise in the number of complaints received reflects a national trend and it is important to respond efficiently and effectively whilst keeping people informed. The Council's strategy is to promote a proactive approach to responding to breaches of planning regulations with appropriate interventions. Therefore, we have moved to the use of the term compliance. During 2022 work was undertaken to examine existing processes, to streamline them, adopt new IT systems to aid reporting, and to improve the information available on these matters.

From 2 August 2022 all the information on compliance with planning regulations has been updated and consolidated onto the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service website (<https://www.greatercambridgeplanning.org/http://greatercambridgeplanning.orghttps://www.greatercambridgeplanning.org/> with links available from the Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire District Councils websites. There is written guidance on what is (and what is not) a breach of planning control. Where it appears that there is a breach of planning control complaints can now be submitted using an e-form. This allows any documents and/or photographs to be uploaded which will help the compliance team with their investigations.

We hope that this will enable residents and others to understand the issues involved in securing compliance with planning regulations. We continue to seek improvements to the way we respond to complaints about unauthorised developments with the development of a new Enforcement Plan and restructuring of the Compliance Team.

Business Support

SCDC has a highly effective Business Support Team which provides advice and support, especially for small and medium-sized businesses and start-ups. The street-trading sector has been targeted for support. A new and improved policy was implemented to support the street trading sector across South Cambridgeshire. This policy will ensure high levels of safety compliance and enable the sector to thrive through the introduction of flexible trading models.

The Business Support Team supported over 100 businesses, is expanding the Visit South Cambridgeshire brand and provides space for growing small businesses or shared workspace for start-ups or micro businesses.

Appendix: District Council progress on actions relating to the Council's four key themes.

Housing that is Affordable to Live In

Actions completed from 2022-23:

- Produced a report assessing feedback provided by local people from the first Local Plan consultation. This will inform the next steps in the Local Plan process.
- Produced an Asset Management Plan. This will improve the energy efficiency of existing Council housing to reduce carbon impact and running costs.
- Delivered 88 new affordable homes.
- Implemented new maintenance contract for all council housing stock. • Adopted an Empty Homes Strategy.
- We have installed solar Photovoltaic Systems on 60 Properties.

Actions on target to be completed 2022-23:

- 74 New Homes Completed (acquired or built) this year.
- Continue to support the liaison meetings in Cottenham, Sawston, Hardwick, Caldecote, Swavesey and Barrington and community forums in Northstowe, Waterbeach, North-West Cambridge, Cambridge East, North-East Cambridge and Bourn Airfield and Cambourne.
- Approve a work programme for insulation measures over the next four years to narrow the gap on the zero-carbon target.

Green to Our Core

Actions completed from 2022-23:

- Provided equipment and information kits to minimise waste and separate recycling at community events.
- Reviewed the impact and outcomes of the existing food waste collection trial and the future of the scheme including budget requirements.
- 2 electric refuse collection vehicles to replace the diesel versions have been received. • Annual Statutory Status report for air quality has been submitted to DEFRA and accepted. Actions on target to be completed 2022-23:
- Review community rooms and other small sites to identify and deliver opportunities for carbon reduction.
- Develop planning policies consistent with zero carbon by 2050 for adoption in the Greater Cambridge Local Plan, in partnership with Cambridge City Council.
- Identify and deliver opportunities to invest in publicly accessible electric vehicle charge points in priority locations in the district, working with partners - pilot installations of fast EV Chargers at Sheltered Housing Schemes for public use, and install one rapid charger for public use.
- Identify and deliver new opportunities to plant trees, establish wildflower strips and in other ways enhance nature on our own estate, in consultation with residents.
- Work to ensure that development in South Cambridgeshire contributes to the goal of doubling nature by developing planning policies for adoption in the Greater Cambridge Local Plan, and by adopting a new Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Document in partnership with Cambridge City Council.
- Work with partners to develop landscape-scale habitat creation projects.

- Deliver '6 Free Trees' initiative to increase the amount of tree cover of parish council land, enhancing biodiversity and carbon capture.
- Define and implement required improvements at the depot to prepare for further electric refuse collection vehicle (eRCV) charging.

Actions on target to be completed 2022-23:

- Procure up to 3 electric refuse collection vehicles to replace diesel version.
- Develop outline business case for on-site solar PV energy generation with partners to aid the charging of vehicles.
- Deliver fourth round of funding through our Zero Carbon Communities grant scheme, awarding grants totalling £100,000 to community-based projects.
- Continue to strengthen the Zero Carbon Parish and Community Network through our programme of workshops, web-based resources and e-bulletins for community-based zero carbon and nature recovery initiatives - at least 6 workshops to be delivered.
- Submit annual statutory reporting to DEFRA on-time; monitor air quality in at least 6 targeted areas utilising portable equipment; compile report following each monitoring period and publish this on the council's website.
- Provide required technical inputs to consultations on major developments to ensure good air quality is experienced.
- Subject to air quality monitoring results, explore the feasibility of creating a Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) specifically targeting idling vehicles.
- Develop campaigns to improve recycling based on the outcomes of the waste composition analyses.
 - Reporting of all sites (existing and new) that take up recycling / food bins & note our increased volumes / tonnes collected with associated savings.
- Install cameras at 6 locations and monitor numbers of visits required at those sites to establish a baseline to minimise fly tipping.
- Deliver targeted educational campaign in the area about fly tipping and increase awareness of responsible methods for disposal. To include the delivery of at least 12,000 leaflets.

Modern and Caring Council

Actions completed from 2022-23:

- Complete and analyse a staff satisfaction survey.
- Introduced hybrid working arrangements further increasing our attractiveness as an employer.
- Introduced a modular management skills program for middle managers.
- Completed a survey of all council tenants to better understand their priorities and to be able to compare satisfaction with other organisations.
- Refresh caravan site licencing policy, fees and charges. The new policy will ensure that caravan sites are inspected periodically and that residents have suitable housing provision.

Actions on target to be completed 2022-23:

- Use the Council's Community Led Plan toolkit to support local communities identify, plan and address the issues they identify in their communities.
- Support 150 new clients through the housing department's visiting support service.
- Spend £500,000 in total in the form of disabled facilities grant and repairs grant to allow people to live independently and safely in their homes.
- Prevent homelessness for at least 50% of the people who approach us who are at risk of becoming homeless throughout the year and offer support to those who are homeless.
- Continue the proactive working relationship with the job centre in delivering mentoring circles plus upskilling and cross training initiatives throughout the year.
 - 100% compliance with landlord safety checks to council housing including, electrical safety, gas installations and where appropriate fire risk assessments and water safety tests.

Business Support

Actions completed from 2022-23:

- Implemented a new and improved policy to support the street trading sector across South Cambridgeshire. This policy will ensure high levels of safety compliance and enable the sector to thrive through the introduction of flexible trading models.
- Created an SCDC specific operational/implementation plan based on the Nov 2021 refreshed CPCA Employment and Skill Strategy.
- Provided business support advice to over 100 businesses.
- Completed a feasibility study looking at how South Cambs Hall could be used to provide workspace for businesses, including start-ups.
- Established an up-to-date list of Business Premises for start-ups.

Actions on target to be completed by end of 2022-23:

- Expand our Visit South Cambridgeshire brand alongside wider collaboration with Cambridgeshire and Peterborough partners, to support local businesses.
- Deliver at least 8 Sector specific events/webinars/support initiatives as part of an ongoing engagement programme.
- Provide a new space for growing small businesses or shared workspace for start-ups or micro businesses.
- Appraise our own commercial inventory (including South Cambs Hall) and investigate meanwhile/partial let use for start-ups during void periods and/or designate space specifically for this purpose.