

South Cambridgeshire District Council – Caxton and Papworth Ward

District Councillor's Monthly Report – March 2025

Pre-election period

Ahead of the County Council and Combined Authority Mayor elections in May, SCDC will enter the usual pre-election "quiet" period. The pre-election period starts on Tuesday 25 March and runs until the close of polls on Thursday 1 May. As with all pre-election periods, there is no impact to business-as-usual activities, such as bin collection. However any activity which might be considered "political" will be deferred until after the elections.

SCDC Budget

South Cambridgeshire DC agreed its Budget for 2025/26 which see the Council continue as one of the lowest taxing authorities in the country. A below inflation increase of 2.99% or less than 10p a week for a band D home will bring the charge for this band to £175.40 for the SCDC part of the Council Tax bill. The total cost of running the council in 2025/26 is £84 million, the net cost of providing services is £28 million and SCDC will need £33.5 million from taxation. These figures are broadly the same as this financial year despite the increase in costs. This neutral position has been accomplished by productivity improvements including the use of AI, while improving or maintaining service delivery.

Council Tax will bring in £12 million, the other sources being £18 million from Business Rates and £3 million in Government grants. In addition, the council is expecting to receive nearly £8 million in commercial rent and interest from loans in addition to fees and charges mainly from large scale planning applications. Surplus income from taxation enables a transfer of £3.5 million into reserves to meet a predicted deficit in coming years. SCDC has £31.5 million earmarked for various projects ranging from a fund to support renewable projects to support net zero communities grants schemes to providing support for homelessness.

For capital expenditure, the council expects to spend some £29 million in 2025/26 including the building of the Northstowe Phase One Community Centre, named the "Unity Centre" by the local community. This is expected to open in early 2026, featuring a spacious multi-use hall, a playful messy room, meeting rooms, provision for a cafe and a landscape courtyard.

SCDC will also be buying an extra vehicle and employing another member of staff to support the Council's Enviro-Crime team as it tackles fly-tipping. There will also be additional resource to combat and raise awareness of fraud, plus further support to strengthen ties with parish and town councils.

Housing at SCDC

Part of the Budget process at SCDC includes setting the Housing Revenue Account. The cost of repairing, improving, and building new council homes cannot by law be subsidised by Council Tax or Business Rates. So, the cost of this work (apart from Right to Buy receipts, S106 funding from housing developers and Government grants) is shouldered by council tenants through their rents or others renting housing assets such as council garages.

SCDC has over 2,000 families on the housing waiting list so building more council homes for rent is a priority and the council has a target of delivering at least 75 new homes a year. SCDC has 5,815 council homes, up from 5,705 last year. The Council also wants to improve the standard of existing homes, particularly their energy efficiency.

In 2025/26, SCDC also has a £205 million loan to repay on top of the £12 million borrowing to build more homes, taken out in 2012 to pay the then Government to keep all council house rents for the council. This loan has to be repaid by council tenants. So the Council had to increase council rents by 2.7%, bringing the average rent to £129.98 a week. This brings in an income of £38 million. Some 40% of tenants receive Housing Benefit.

Empty homes

Anyone who is looking to turn an old, neglected property into a home may be able to save thousands of pounds in VAT on renovation costs, just by contacting South Cambridgeshire District Council's Empty Homes Officer.

Home maintenance and improvements are usually charged at the standard rate of 20% VAT. However, the Government offers a 5% VAT rate on renovations for properties that have been unoccupied for more than two years but were lived in beforehand.

Anyone who has recently purchased, or is about to buy, an empty property which meets these criteria should contact the council. The Empty Homes Officer can then provide the paperwork needed to confirm the house was unoccupied, triggering a substantial saving.

For example, the Empty Homes Officer provided paperwork to the owner of a recently purchased bungalow in Hardwick that needed renovating. The bungalow has since been transformed into a family home.

To see if you qualify, email env.health@scambs.gov.uk and provide as much information as possible on the property you have recently purchased or are looking to purchase.

Other steps the District Council has recently taken to bring empty homes back into use include:

- Ensuring several severely overgrown and neglected empty homes were issued with Community Protection Warnings, with those ignoring them issued with legally-enforceable Community Protection Notices.
- Supporting the owners of two properties that have been empty since 2004 and 2008 to sell them at auction. The first was sold to a builder who is going to turn the property into a family home. The second was sold to a carpenter who will use his skills to turn it into his family home.
- Working with a Probate Genealogist to successfully trace ownership in several complex cases.

Empty properties have an increased likelihood of arson, theft, damage, squatting and fly tipping. Overgrown brambles, trees, foliage and ivy can cause damage to shared fencing, roofs and gardens. Rodent and vermin infestation is also a risk, particularly if there is a readily available food source.

Meanwhile, the owner of the empty home is losing potential rental revenue and will have to pay costs for rubbish and garden clearance, graffiti removal or boarding up the home. They will also pay increased insurance for an empty or dilapidated property.

Council Tax on empty homes

As part of other efforts to bring local empty homes back into use, [Council Tax will be doubled](#) on long-term vacant and second properties in South Cambridgeshire from April 2026.

The aim is to encourage people to sell or rent their properties to tackle the national housing shortfall, which is particularly acute in South Cambridgeshire. Council estimates suggest there are around 2,640 empty homes in the district, and a further 360 second home properties.

New SCDC Website

SCDC will be launching a new website on Tuesday 25 March. The website will have new features including localisation - residents can put in their postcode and find information relevant to the area they live, such as their local councillors and the bin schedule, planning applications close by and the local events happening in their area.

The website will be soft launched on Tuesday 11 March, when users will have access to both the current website and the new website. You will be able to switch between the sites using a 'toggle' button. Please share your feedback about the new website using the 'leave feedback' button on the top banner of the new website. The official website will be launched on Tuesday 25 March.

Greater Cambridge Five Year Housing Land Supply Position Update

- Local Planning Authorities are required by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) to demonstrate a minimum of five years' worth of housing land supply against their housing requirement.
- The Government published an updated NPPF and revised Standard Method for identifying local housing needs in December 2024. The provisions for both applied immediately. This increased the housing need figure for Greater Cambridge (South Cambs and Cambridge City) from 1,726 dwellings per year to 2,309.
- Measured against this new requirement Greater Cambridge went from having a supply of 6.5 years to 4.6 years for the 2024 to 2029 period.
- This triggers a "tilted balance" in favour of granting planning permission for sustainable development. The December 2024 NPPF introduces new caveats to ensure this supports only applies to high quality development in sustainable locations. This will be a consideration in planning applications and any future appeals.
- The gap in five-year supply is relatively small. The Shared Planning Service will be exploring with partners how development can be speeded up, and whether new sites can be identified. It will also be exploring if there are other sites which can be added to the "Brownfield Register" that can be demonstrated to be deliverable within the five-year period, including through each of the councils' own building programmes.
- The next update to the housing trajectory will be published in April 2025.

4 Day Week Consultation

You can share your views on SCDC's services during the trial of a four-day working week, until the consultation closes at 23.59pm on Sunday 23 March.

Parish and Town Councils were emailed a specific link to respond to the consultation. If you would like to share the consultation with residents or businesses to complete, please use this link:

www.scambs.gov.uk/4dw

Community Growing Grant

Grants of up to £500 are available to parish councils, schools, and community groups to create a small allotment, community vegetable patch, or transform unused space into a thriving garden. The funding can go towards raised beds, gardening equipment, soil, and seeds.

The fund is available until 31 March 2025, or until funds are exhausted. For more information and to submit an application, visit

<https://www.scambs.gov.uk/community-safety-and-health/grants/community-growing-grant>

Stargoose Solar Farm

Starkraft has informed councillors that initial enabling works will commence at the Stargoose Solar Farm site in Childerley during March 2025.

The scope of work includes the construction of an access from the private farm track into the site. The anticipated duration of these works is approximately 3 days and HGV vehicle movements on the local road network will be around 1-2 per day.

As part of the planning requirements for the construction of Stargoose Solar Farm, a public right of way diversion has been agreed with the PRow Officers. Footpath 48/2 will be temporarily diverted around Childerley Farm. Copies of the diversion map to be displayed at both ends of Footpath 48/2 are attached for information.

Starkraft will provide a further construction update in due course.

Update from Cambridgeshire County Council on Household Support Fund

The County Council Household Support Fund Scheme is running until the end of March and households can claim cost of living support potentially worth hundreds of pounds. Cambridgeshire County Council are raising awareness to those who may be eligible for this support but have either never claimed or have not put in an application for this round. Households still have time to sign up to receive financial support from the Household Support Fund before 31 March 2025.

Residents can find out if they are eligible here:

<https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/council/communities/support-with-the-cost-of-living/household-support-fund>

Corporate Plan

SCDC has confirmed its vision for the years ahead - one for a 'fairer, kinder and greener' place 'where all residents will be equal partners in their communities'. At February's Full Council meeting, District Councillors voted to agree a new Corporate Plan up to 2030. This sets out a high-level vision for the next five years, as well as priorities for achieving it. The headline aspiration is to 'create a better district to the benefit of everyone in our communities' whilst recognising 'the many challenges that face the district and will continue to work to overcome these'.

Agreement at the meeting means that the Council's new priorities, shaped by hundreds of responses during a consultation last year, will be:

- **Healthy and Supported Communities** - Supporting and engaging with our communities is key to tackling the challenges we face as a district. Our diversity is our strength and helping everyone live freely and independently is essential to promoting healthy and supported communities.
- **Sustainable Homes and Vibrant Places** - A home is more than a roof over your head, it is the foundation on which people build their lives. An affordable home is essential for people to live happy, fulfilling lives. In light of the housing crisis, we are committed to strengthening our communities by delivering sustainable, affordable homes and vibrant places to live.
- **Being Green to our Core** - Being green is at the heart of everything we do. We're tackling the climate and ecological crises head-on, ensuring our district is ready for the challenges of climate change.
- **Helping Businesses to Thrive in South Cambridgeshire** - Already recognised as a nationally significant area for development, helping local businesses thrive is key to the development of our district - bringing new jobs and opportunities into people's communities.
- **Financially Secure and Fit for the Future** - We have a duty to provide high quality cost-efficient services. Being open, transparent, and inclusive and letting evidence guide our decisions is critical to putting residents first.

The Corporate Plan will now be finalised, but you can [read the version discussed at Full Council here](#):

<https://scambs.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s138435/Appendix%20A%20-%20SCDC%20Corporate%20Plan%202025-2030.pdf>.

It's been designed as a document that can be easily viewed online, but if you would like copies of the final version printed off, email communications@scambs.gov.uk letting them know how many you'd like and where to send them.

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