

Cambridgeshire County Council – Papworth and Swavesey Division

South Cambridgeshire District Council – Caxton and Papworth Ward

County and District Councillors' Monthly Report – April 2026

Local Government Reorganisation

The Government has now announced its decision on Local Government Reorganisation for Essex, Norfolk, Suffolk, and Hampshire. In all cases it has chosen new unitary councils which are smaller than their proposed 500,000 minimum population, and in the case of Norfolk and Suffolk it has chosen to split districts, something it originally indicated would be unusual.

It has also announced that none of the unitary options submitted by local authorities for Sussex are acceptable. Further submissions have been requested.

With the Government apparently throwing all its criteria out of the window, we wait with interest for the Government's announcement for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough which is expected in early summer.

News from the District Council

Local Elections – Quiet Period

Local elections are preceded by a quiet period, sometimes referred to as “purdah”. This year, the pre-election period for District Council elections started on Monday 30 March and runs until the close of polls on Thursday 7 May. During this period, routine business-as-usual council activities continue but anything which may be considered “political” will be postponed. As a result, this report is shorter than usual!

South Cambs Climate and Nature Strategy Approved

A new five-year plan sets out how the District Council will reduce emissions, protect nature and create a cleaner, healthier environment. The plan for how South Cambridgeshire will be protected and improved over the next five years has been launched following an extensive consultation.

The launch of the new strategy comes after residents, community groups, businesses and partners contributed ideas for the vision - a district that leads boldly with a clear pathway for climate action, biodiversity recovery, and community resilience.

Feedback to last year's consultation into the proposed strategy showed strong public backing for the Council's environmental ambitions and for the strategy's eight focus areas. Respondents also broadly supported all four of the long-term targets:

- Doubling the land managed for nature across the district by 2050, with support for meadow creation, enhanced waterways, and connected wildlife corridors.
- Reaching Net Zero district-wide by 2050, with significant interest in renewable energy, low carbon transport, and home retrofit.

- Reducing the Council's operational emissions by 75% by 2030, being an important leadership example for the district. The new solar farm at the Council's Greater Cambridge Shared Waste Waterbeach depot to fuel electric bin lorries is part of this vision.
- Ensuring communities are resilient to at least a 2°C rise in global temperatures, with feedback emphasising flood resilience, heat adaptation and community preparedness.

Residents said they valued the balanced approach across the strategy's eight themes with a range of positive comments and suggestions received including:

- Transport - Respondents supported lower carbon transport-friendly design, improving cycle routes and supporting affordable public transport.
- Nature and water - This theme received some of the strongest engagement, with people keen to see more tree planting, healthier rivers, and protection of water systems and wildlife.
- Energy and retrofit - Respondents were keen for clear guidance on grants, home insulation, and community energy opportunities.
- Sustainable food - Feedback highlighted interest in allotments, farmers' markets, community orchards and affordable fresh produce.
- Waste minimisation - Many residents supported expanding reuse and repair initiatives, alongside improved recycling communications.
- Adaptation and resilience - Residents welcomed a plan for clear community resources, early warnings of extreme weather, and targeted support for vulnerable groups.
- Community support and behaviour change - Respondents welcome simple tools and advice so that everyone can contribute to climate action in whatever capacity they are able.
- Business, supply chain and finance - Businesses expressed interest in support to reduce emissions, improve efficiency, and increase nature-positive activity.

After listening to people's feedback, the Council made the Strategy easier to understand and incorporated new ideas where possible. It also spells out, in simple terms, how each part of the plan will happen - by working with local communities, using proven ideas, and taking practical action in real life.

The new Climate and Nature Strategy was adopted at the Full Council meeting and will now guide work across the district through to 2030. You can read the detailed strategy here:

<https://www.scambs.gov.uk/climate-and-environment/climate-and-nature-strategy>

Extraordinary Council meeting hears objections to losing planning powers to new Development Corporation

South Cambridgeshire District Councillors have voiced their strong opposition to Government proposals for a Greater Cambridge Urban Development Corporation ("DevCo"). An Extraordinary Full Council meeting discussed the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's (MHCLG) plans to establish a centrally led Development Corporation for Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire. It would be run by a board with most of its members appointed by Government, rather than elected. Councillors also made clear they were strongly opposed to MHCLG's plans to

remove key elements of the Council's planning powers and pass them to the new organisation for 25 years.

MHCLG is currently consulting on their proposals, which would create the largest corporation of its type to "enable a transformational long-term approach to delivering high-quality sustainable growth." Councillors challenged whether the plans are the best way to deal with the area's growth challenges. They discussed how there is already approved or proposed development in Greater Cambridge's pipeline for over 100,000 new jobs and up to 77,000 new homes.

Councillors suggested Government should focus on bringing forward these new homes and offices first in partnership with local councils. They said the main barriers to meeting current commitments are the lack of funding and slow delivery of transport and utility improvements. They stressed these problems do not come from the local planning system, but from wider infrastructure challenges and national regulations.

MHCLG are proposing that the new Development Corporation would become the local planning authority for major planning decisions above a certain threshold, as well as on larger development sites, removing that responsibility from the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning (GCSP) service which South Cambridgeshire District and Cambridge City councils share.

It would also replace the councils' role in preparing Local Plans after the conclusion of the current emerging Joint Local Plan. This would mean that, in future, decisions about where new homes and jobs come forward across Greater Cambridge would be made by the Development Corporation, rather than by local communities through the councils.

Councillors also disagreed with suggestions the transfer of planning powers for 25 years was necessary, noting that late last year GCSP was named national Planning Authority of the Year at the prestigious Royal Town Planning Institute Awards for Planning Excellence.

The final response to Government was approved by SCDC's Cabinet and submitted by Stephen Kelly, Director of the GCSP.

Full Council meeting: budgets and business plans

SCDC's Full Council also approved its business plan and budget for the coming financial year. SCDC continues to deliver high quality services in the face of sustained cuts by central government, including recent reductions to the amount of Business Rates that local authorities can retain. A £5.24 per year increase in Council Tax for the average Band D home was agreed, which is a below-inflation rise. It means the average Band D charge for South Cambridgeshire District Council will be £180.64 per year from 1 April. (SCDC collects taxes for other authorities such as the County Council, so the final bill will be higher than that figure.)

Funding for AI ‘proof of concept’ projects

SCDC has successfully secured funding through the AI@Cam Local Government AI Accelerator programme. Five of six proposals submitted in partnership with academics from the University of Cambridge have been awarded funding. These projects will explore how artificial intelligence (AI) can support councils to improve services, better understand local issues and make more effective use of data.

The objective within the next 12 months is to deliver a proof of concept for each project, as opposed to something that is operationally active, in partnership with the University of Cambridge. The five projects are:

- Predictive Risk Intelligence for Social Housing Maintenance (PRISM) – Housing.
- Human orientated AI - Design Framework for reaching vulnerable tenants – Housing.
- Map Automation for Planning and Local Efficiency (MAPLE) – Planning.
- AI Enabled surveys - Planning.
- Automatic Fly-Tipping Detection using Refuse Collection Vehicle cameras – Waste.

News from the County Council

Highways & Transport

Road conditions

Highways & Transport Committee chair Cllr Alex Beckett has written a very informative article which is well worth a read at:

<https://notesfromalex.substack.com/p/why-are-the-roads-so-bad-right-now>

Children & Young People

Holiday voucher values

Following the Government's withdrawal of the Household Support Fund, Holiday Period replaced by the Crisis & Resilience Fund with lower levels of funding, the council has agreed holiday voucher values as follows for the coming holidays.

Holiday Period	Weekly Voucher Value	Total Voucher Value
Easter (30 March - 10 April)	£10	£20
May Half Term (25 - 29 May)	£10	£10
Summer (21 July - 1 September)	£10	£60

The Crisis & Resilience Fund is expected to support all those facing 'financial shocks', not just children eligible for free school meals.

Two new special schools for Cambridgeshire

The Government has confirmed that it will be delivering two new special schools in Cambridgeshire—Greensands Academy in Gamlingay, and Lime Academy in March. Between them, the two schools are expected to provide 270 new special school places in Cambridgeshire. Demand for in-county special school spaces has grown significantly year on year, in line with national trends, since these schools were first planned. In Cambridgeshire the number of children with an Education Health & Care Plan grew by 71 per cent from 2020 to 2025.

Environment & Green Investment

Help shape new Community Nature Recovery Plans

Cambridgeshire County Council is calling on residents across the county to play an active role in restoring local nature as part of the 'Nature Recovery - From the Ground Up' project—a new initiative supporting parishes and community groups to design their own Community Nature Recovery Plans.

A Community Nature Recovery Plan is a locally created blueprint that sets out priorities for improving nature and wildlife at a parish level. These plans help communities to shape a vision for nature locally and identify steps to bring about the changes. The plans will support the wider goals of Cambridgeshire's Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). Key actions include:

- Restoring habitats.
- Creating nature corridors and stepping-stones for wildlife.
- Increasing areas managed for wildlife.

As part of the project, all Cambridgeshire parishes will have free access to the online mapping software Parish Online until March 2027. This will allow parish councils and community groups acting on their behalf to map out proposed projects relative to LNRS priorities, explore cross parish projects, and contribute to collaborative maps (for example showing swift boxes across the county).

Cambridgeshire is one of the counties with the least nature-rich land in England, and the LNRS sets out an ambitious plan to “double nature” locally, expanding nature-rich land from eight per cent to the national average of sixteen per cent. The first phase of the project runs from July 2025 to March 2027, focusing on Cambridge and twenty parishes across East Cambridgeshire, Fenland, Huntingdonshire, and South Cambridgeshire. Other parishes are invited to use the project resources and mapping software and register interest for future phases of the project.

The project is funded by Cambridgeshire County Council’s Just Transition Fund and delivered in partnership with Natural Cambridgeshire.

<https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/climate-change-energy-and-environment/improving-the-natural-environment/nature-recovery-from-the-ground-up>

News from the Combined Authority

Water resources plan

Water Resources East is responsible for producing a regional water resources plan for eastern England including Cambridgeshire. This is a combination of infrastructure investment and demand management. Cambridgeshire will increasingly rely on water resources transferred from other parts of the region, and increased water storage, improved transfer and sharing of water between regions, and reduced demand will all be important.

Youth employment strategy

The Combined Authority has approved the development of a Youth Employment / NEET* Strategy for 14-25 year olds and recommend it to the Combined Authority Board.

*NEET: Not in Education, Employment or Training

Local visitor economy partnership

The Combined Authority has agreed to submit an application to Visit England for accreditation as a Local Visitor Economy Partnership for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. Rural tourism will be a key focus of this.

Electric vehicles

A two-phase trial will take place shortly across Cambridgeshire to install channels in pavements to carry cables for on-street charging of electric vehicles. This will be a very small trial, consisting of just ten dwellings in each district in Phase 1 between April and September, and a further forty in each district in Phase 2 later in the year. Further details will be forthcoming soon.

Peter Sandford and Chris Poulton

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Email: cllr.sandford@scamb.gov.uk (Peter) or Chris.Poulton@cambridgeshire.gov.uk (Chris)

Mobiles: 07985 425414 (Peter) or 07971 594037 (Chris)