

Cambridgeshire County Council – Papworth and Swavesey Division

South Cambridgeshire District Council – Caxton and Papworth Ward

County and District Councillors' Monthly Report – October 2026

Local Government Reorganisation

Secretary of State Angela Rayner announced a 'pause and review' of local government reorganisation in some areas, including Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. She said, "In light of legal advice, I want to satisfy myself that the right process is in place that is robust and of course complies with the law."

We do not know how long the pause will be, or what exactly the review will consider. We have been told that some district elections will now take place in May 2027 after all, on existing ward boundaries. Existing work was carried out at enormous cost to councils and taxpayers, and the Cambridgeshire councils have indicated they will sue the government for the return of the wasted expenditure.

Elections for unitary councils will not take place in 2027 but more likely will happen in 2028. Any elections that had been due in 2027 will take place on existing council boundaries, for example in East Cambridgeshire, Fenland and Cambridge City. No elections were planned for South Cambridgeshire or Cambridgeshire County Council, so we should have no elections next year.

Details of the way forward are currently lacking but we will keep you informed as things become clearer.

News from the District Council

Full Council 8th October

Peter chaired a rather lively Full Council on 8th October. Among the topics discussed were:

- A group of local residents presented a petition requesting the council demand East West Rail's business plan be published. It seems reasonable for taxpayers to know how their money is being spent, so this request was agreed. (SCDC has previously submitted the same request without a response.)
- A researcher from Jodrell Bank asked if SCDC could lobby the government to continue funding the e-MERLIN radio astronomy project. The Lord's Bridge site in South Cambs is involved in this project, hence the relevance to our area. The council will write to the government, more in hope than expectation.
- A local resident asked why "shiny commercial buildings" were popping up all over the Cambridge Biomedical Campus while the NHS buildings have reached the end of their life. She did not attend in person, so will be receiving a written response.
- The Opposition tabled a motion demanding the Council opposes road charging in Cambridgeshire. As any local road charging would be the responsibility of the Major, the motion was voted down. (The Congestion Charge proposed a few years ago is unlikely to ever resurface.)
- A motion regarding the lack of progress on water saving measures was approved unanimously.
- A motion asking for better facilities in the Rosie Maternity for mothers who have lost babies. Currently they are co-located with expectant mothers and ones who have already given birth. Again this was passed unanimously.

Planning Updates

Significant national changes

There have been major changes to the national planning system (the NPPF or National Planning Policy Framework) which will affect planning decisions in South Cambridgeshire.

The Government has strengthened the presumption in favour of sustainable development, meaning that development within existing settlements should generally be approved unless its benefits are substantially outweighed by adverse effects. There is also greater support for certain development outside settlements, including agricultural and farm diversification and sport and recreation.

The new rules also place greater emphasis on development close to well-connected railway stations and transport hubs, including locations within the Greater Cambridge area. There is increased support for higher-density development, including development in existing urban areas, extensions and some development within residential gardens.

Other changes include stronger national protection for community facilities such as public houses, continued support for brownfield redevelopment, and stronger support for telecommunications and infrastructure.

The new framework places particular emphasis on tackling climate change, including energy

efficiency, renewable and decentralised energy, electric vehicle charging, walking, cycling, public transport, green infrastructure and nature-based solutions.

These changes will inevitably affect how planning applications are considered, both new applications and ones already in progress. Local planning officers are applying the new national framework with immediate effect, alongside other policies and requirements that remain in force.

National Scheme of Delegation

Possibly the biggest impact to residents is the introduction of new mandatory measures coming into effect from 1st November 2026 that will impact upon the way that the Council determines planning and related applications. The following explanation was provided by Stephen Kelly, Director of Planning.

“Earlier in the year, the Government consulted on proposals to mandate that certain types of planning decisions must be made by planning officers rather than planning committees. Our Councils responded to that consultation, advising that our existing “call in” and assessment processes made such arrangements unnecessary, particularly given the strong track record of delivery that exists in Greater Cambridge through the constructive engagement between members and officers at Committee.

Notwithstanding the Councils comments, on 15 July 2026 the Government introduced the Town and Country Planning (Discharge of Local Planning Authority Functions) (England) Regulations 2026. These regulations will come into effect on 31st October 2026. From that date, these Regulations require that a number of specific types of planning applications, even where there are objections or member/parish call in, must be determined by planning officers under delegated powers. The list of mandatory “delegated” applications includes all householder applications, minor residential applications (up to 9 homes), most reserved matters applications (following outline planning permission), discharge of conditions, prior approvals (such as for telecoms, barn or office conversions) and non-material amendments. These will be known as “Schedule 1” applications.

There is a further category of applications (called “Schedule 2” applications) which are required to be referred to a “gateway meeting” comprising senior officers and the “nominated member(s).” Similar in format to our existing delegated panel meeting, the gateway meeting will consider whether the application needs to be considered by the Committee. The regulations include a presumption that decisions are delegated to officers unless the gateway meeting concludes that the proposals meet at least one or more “significance criteria.”

These significance criteria are identified as:

- *Where the application raises an economic, social or environmental issue of significance to the local area.*
- *Where the application raises a significant planning matter having regard to the development plan and any other material considerations.*

Whilst noting that while each case will depend upon its specific circumstances, the Government's guidance includes the following examples of what, under criteria A may be a "significant" economic, social or environmental issue.

- An application for outline planning permission for a large multi-phase residential development allocated in the local plan.
- An application for planning permission for change of use of a community shop in a rural area.
- An application for planning permission or listed building consent for changes to a notable listed building in a town centre.

The Guidance also outlines, for the purpose of criterion B, circumstances that are unlikely to raise a significant planning matter:

- Where the application for development broadly complies with a detailed site allocation and other relevant policies set out in a local or neighbourhood plan and national decision making policies set out in the National Planning Policy Framework. Significant planning matters may arise if new material considerations are raised by the application.
- Where a specific planning matter (e.g. highways or flood risk) was initially raised by a statutory consultee as a concern, but the development proposal has been modified to make it acceptable in the view of the statutory consultee (unless the nominated officer has compelling reasons to consider otherwise).

Further specific guidance applies to circumstances where the applicant for permission is an Officer or Member of the Council or the Council itself. Where the regulations do not prescribe in either schedule 1 or 2 the route for a decision, the Local Planning Authority is entitled to determine via its scheme of delegation the appropriate process for decision making.

These changes will impact upon longstanding (and well known) practice familiar to local residents, amenity groups and where relevant Parishes Councils. In the weeks ahead, GCPS will be seeking to communicate these changes via their website and the various forums the Council and Planning Service participate in. Reports and presentations are also being made to the Planning Committee's through October. Adjustments to internal governance processes, including officer schemes of delegation and making arrangements for the holding of the new "gateway" meetings with Planning Committee Chairs or Vice-Chairs, will also be undertaken.

The government has also published guidance on the proposals here ([Planning Committees and the National Scheme of Delegation of Planning Functions: Guidance for local planning authorities in England – GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/planning-committees-and-the-national-scheme-of-delegation-of-planning-functions-guidance-for-local-planning-authorities-in-england)):

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Five Year Housing Land Supply

Councils are required to maintain a five year land bank for approved housing developments. If this falls below five years, a council will lose its powers to block speculative, inappropriate applications. Until now, South Cambs and Cambridge's land supply was considered together and was only slightly above five years. A decision has been taken to separate the two councils, giving a

land supply in South Cambs of over seven years and providing a significant buffer against speculative development. The remaining Cambridge land supply is less than three years but the City is considered less at risk from speculative development.

The Development Corporation

Progress is being made on the establishment of the Development Corporation despite the CEO who had been appointed deciding to stay in his role at DEFRA and the Planning Director also changing his mind. These roles are unlikely to be re-advertised until November.

There is work underway to clarify the size of a 'strategic site'. This is after the consultation showed that most respondents believed the suggested number of 250 dwellings was far too low. The Statutory Instrument to be laid in parliament in November will include such detail, so a decision is needed soon. Obviously the number chosen has major implications for the planning department. The latest NPPF defines a strategic site as 1500 so it is unclear why the Development Corporation would choose a different number.

Negotiations are underway between the Planning Service and MHCLG about how planning will work. It is clear that if over 50% of a person's work is Development Corporation work, then TUPE applies. This could involve the transfer of a considerable number of planners involved in strategic sites and in the creation of the next local plan, for which the Development Corporation will have to find a budget. The risk is that they will choose just to outsource all this work to commercial agents and essentially just be a commissioning body.

We should be aware the Development Corporation will be taking over future development around the three stations associated with EWR. This has implications for the parish councils to the north of Cambourne who have been co-designing the landscaping and some of the design. Bridget has made this point strongly to the Development Corporation.

The Development Corporation is also creating master plans for the Southern Cluster and the Eastern and Western Corridors. Their main focus at the moment is the Marshalls Airport land and the expansion of the CBC (Addenbrookes) site.

The Development Corporation is also doing feasibility work, described as the South Levels IDB Option. It essentially captures winter water which would have discharged into The Wash and stores it in a network of farm reservoirs to be fed back into the system when needed. They estimate that this could provide sufficient water for 85,000 to 100,000 houses. They claim that smaller reservoirs have 'less impact'. However, this is not going to be a quick or total solution.

New online tool helps residents judge whether they need planning permission

Residents across Greater Cambridge can now access an online tool to help them decide if they are likely to need planning permission before carrying out building works or making changes to a property.

Greater Cambridge Shared Planning (GCSP) has launched the "Do I Need Planning Permission?" service, a free online service that guides users through a series of questions about their proposed project and provides tailored guidance based on planning legislation and local property constraints.

Planning permission may be required for a wide range of developments, but some proposals can be carried out under permitted development rights without the need for a formal planning application. The new service has been introduced to help residents access clear guidance before starting a project, at a time that suits them.

“Do I Need Planning Permission?” will help householders and those considering small-scale developments understand whether planning permission may be needed for their building works or change of use. It can also identify planning restrictions that may affect a property, such as whether it is a listed building or located within a conservation area.

To use the service, residents simply need the address of the property and details of the changes they are considering. Through a series of structured questions, the tool then provides guidance based on the answers given. Results are for guidance only and do not constitute an official planning decision or legal advice, and users are advised to apply for a Lawful Development Certificate before starting work.

The new "Do I Need Planning Permission?" service is available now at www.greatercambridgeplanning.org/check-if-i-need-planning-permission.

If you require a formal decision as to whether changes of use or building works, proposed or existing, are lawful you should apply for a Lawful Development Certificate at www.planningportal.co.uk/applications.

Local Climate Action Conference 2026

South Cambs is hosting its fourth annual Local Climate Action Conference on 6 November from 11am - 5pm at Storey's Field Centre, Eddington.

This year's theme, "Local Climate Action - Adapting Together", explores how communities can respond to the challenges of a changing climate by sharing ideas, learning from one another and taking practical action locally. The conference will bring together parish councils, community groups, charities, local organisations and residents from across the district for an afternoon of inspiration, discussion and networking. Attendees will hear about successful local projects, discover new opportunities to get involved, and explore ways to build more resilient, sustainable communities.

A plant-based lunch and refreshments will be provided. Please RSVP via this link: <https://forms.cloud.microsoft/e/rp0TY9WkJx>

Food Waste Collections

Food waste caddies have now been distributed to all our villages and weekly collections have begun. If you didn't receive a caddy or it isn't being emptied, you can submit a report online: <https://forms.scambs.gov.uk/GCSWREQUESTBIN/launch>
<https://forms.scambs.gov.uk/MISSEDBIN>

Parish councils invited to claim Six Free Trees

Parish councils across South Cambridgeshire are being encouraged to help increase local tree cover by taking part in the latest [Six Free Trees scheme](https://www.scambs.gov.uk/grants-and-funding/six-free-trees-open): <https://www.scambs.gov.uk/grants-and-funding/six-free-trees-open>

Since the scheme began in 2019, South Cambridgeshire District Council has given out over 950 trees that have been planted across the district, helping to support biodiversity, enhance green spaces and contribute to local climate action efforts.

The popular initiative is returning for its sixth year, offering parish and town councils the opportunity to claim either six small trees (whips) or one larger pot-grown tree from a selection of native species.

The trees are supplied with stakes, ties and biodegradable tree spirals to help them establish successfully. Additionally, this year a mulch mat will be added to every order, and an optional watering system for bigger trees to help them stay hydrated in dry and hot conditions.

Participating councils will be responsible for planting and caring for the trees once they have been delivered. This year, trees will be delivered earlier than in previous years to give the planted trees more time to establish over the winter months, improving their chances of thriving and coping with dry conditions during the summer.

Schools interested in planting trees are encouraged to contact their local parish council, which can submit an application on their behalf. Other publicly accessible planting locations will also be considered. Residents with ideas for suitable tree planting sites in their community are encouraged to contact their parish or town council.

Parish councils interested in applying can find further information and application details on the Council's [Six Free Trees webpage](https://www.scambs.gov.uk/grants-and-funding/six-free-trees-open) (<https://www.scambs.gov.uk/grants-and-funding/six-free-trees-open>). The deadline for applications is 31 October 2026.

Looking to do larger scale planting? Apply for the [Woodland Trust's free tree packs for schools and communities](#), which offers tree packs of 15, 30, 105 or 420 saplings.

An extra £20,000 to boost Community Chest grants

An additional £20,000 is set to be invested in South Cambridgeshire District Council's popular Community Chest grant scheme, helping more local groups deliver projects that benefit people across the district. The confirmation comes as demand for the Council's Community Chest funding continues to grow.

The scheme supports voluntary and community organisations, charities and public sector bodies with grants of up to £2,000 each for projects that benefit local residents. This year, the Community Chest budget was initially set at £64,890, with a further £11,010 ring-fenced for biodiversity projects. The biodiversity fund has now been fully allocated, while the main Community Chest fund has seen consistently strong demand.

At the [Grants Advisory Committee meeting on 24 September](#), councillors approved five more Community Chest applications seeking a total of £9,021. This left just under £14,000 in the Community Chest budget for the rest of the financial year. The meeting therefore heard that the Council is allocating an additional £20,000 towards its Community Chest to boost the grants available and help ensure more worthwhile community projects receive funding through to 31 March 2027.

Community organisations interested in applying for funding can find more information, including eligibility criteria and application guidance, on the South Cambridgeshire District Council [website](https://www.scambs.gov.uk/grants-and-funding/community-chest-grants-open): <https://www.scambs.gov.uk/grants-and-funding/community-chest-grants-open>

It would be prudent to submit your application as soon as possible!

Empty Homes

South Cambs is launching a new policy on the purchase of homes that have been empty for a long time and have consequently incurred debt. The first place this will be implemented is in Barrington, where a derelict, listed cottage will be sold and restored. The council has about 100 empty homes on its books and expect between 7 and 10 to reach this stage of ‘enforced sale’.

Homes for Ukraine

The government has now reduced the payment to hosts of Ukrainian guests to £100 from £350 per week and the initial payment to £3300 from £5900. This means that some hosts can no longer afford to continue to be hosts. The rather brilliant solution to this is that we are encouraging people to move onto ‘lodging agreements’ which is a government scheme (Rent a Room) that allows people to rent out a room and to receive up to £7500 per annum tax free. Lodgers will be able to claim up to £625 per month housing benefit if they are not working. This is already proving popular and there is good legal support to hosts available.

News from the County Council

Strategy, Resources & Performance

Quality of life and happiness remain high across Cambridgeshire

Cambridgeshire residents continue to experience high levels of happiness, with fewer people suffering from loneliness or mental health challenges, according to the results of Cambridgeshire County Council's fourth Quality of Life survey.

This year, 6,912 residents shared their views on living in the county. 5,501 residents took part in the sample survey, approximately 1,100 in each of the five districts providing a representative view across the county.

An additional 1,411 completed the online survey, enabling any resident to take part. These additional results will be analysed and published separately.

The responses received provide valuable insights into residents' wellbeing, how they feel about the communities they live in, and the public services around them, including those provided by the County Council. Although concerns around the cost of living, climate change, and access to jobs remain high, many residents were more satisfied with services and reported feeling better informed by the County Council.

Key findings

- 84 per cent of residents say they feel happy—this figure has remained consistent over four years.
- 24 per cent say they often feel lonely, and 26 per cent reported struggling with their mental health—this is lower than last year but still having the greatest impact on younger residents.
- 87 per cent of residents reporting that they personally feel concerned about the cost of living—the same as last year—with over half (56 per cent) reporting having taken action in the last year as a result of cost-of-living increases.
- 60 per cent of residents say that the council keeps them well informed about the services it provides, representing a significant increase from 50 per cent in 2025.
- Residents continue to be very satisfied with registration and library services (both 87 per cent), followed by waste management (81 per cent), park and ride and guided busway services (80 per cent), and street lighting (78 per cent).
- 55 per cent of residents trust the council to make decisions about local services—higher than the national benchmark of 49 per cent.
- 49 per cent believe the council provides value for money—up from 47 per cent last year and 41 per cent in 2024.
- Satisfaction with roads and pavements has risen for a second consecutive year to 32 per cent, up from 21 per cent in 2024.

The County Council's upcoming #BeWinterWise campaign for 2026 will help raise awareness around issues of isolation, mental health and wellbeing, loneliness and the cost of living—all of which can worsen during the darker months. The campaign will also signpost people to support available across Cambridgeshire.

The County Council carried out the survey in partnership with Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority and Cambridge Ahead. The results provide valuable insight and evidence to support the council's business planning processes.

<https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/council/quality-of-life-survey>

Council budget

Every year, the council must set a legal budget which balances spending needs against income from council tax and other sources. With a growing population and rising demand for services, particularly in children's social care and special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), the council continues to face difficult decisions about how to balance priorities at a time when costs continue to rise.

The majority of day-to-day spending is required to support children's and adult social care, education and SEND, and with the remainder the council has to maintain the highways network and deliver valued community-based services including libraries and registration services. The council also faces ongoing uncertainty about the Government's plans for local government reorganisation.

The council's budget proposals for 2027/28 will be debated at the full council meeting in February. Ahead of this, Cambridgeshire County Council has launched a public engagement survey to ask for residents' opinions on where it should prioritise spending and savings in the years ahead. The recent Quality of Life Survey will also provide helpful insights into residents' views.

The survey closes on Sunday 15 November, and can be found at <https://yourvoice.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/business-planning/27-28-phase-1-engagement/>

Adults & Health

Tackling obesity

The County Council's Adults and Health Committee heard last month that although obesity rates in Cambridgeshire are below the national average for both children and adults, they are still too high, particularly in children and young people, and in groups with lower income.

Obesity rates remain higher in some communities across Cambridgeshire, particularly in Fenland, where higher rates of obesity are found amongst both children and adults. There continues to be a strong link between obesity and deprivation. Figures show that 28 per cent of Year 6 children in the most deprived areas of Cambridgeshire are living with obesity, compared to just 13.2 per cent in the least deprived areas.

Councils, the NHS, schools, community groups and other partners are working together to tackling obesity. This work recognises that maintaining a healthy weight is influenced by a wide range of factors, including access to healthy food, opportunities for physical activity, education, employment, the built environment and wider social and economic circumstances. unpaid carers, people with lived experience, local organisations and others with an interest in supporting carers to design future Adult Carers Support Services.

The council is keen to hear from people who provide care for family members, friends or neighbours, as well as young adult carers and others with experience of caring. Their insights will help ensure future services reflect the needs of carers and the people they support.

A series of workshops will take place between September 2026 and March 2027, giving participants the opportunity to help develop future service priorities, shape how services are delivered and contribute to wider commissioning plans. There is no expectation that people attend every session, with all involvement welcomed based on individual availability and interests.

The workshops will build on feedback already shared by carers and provide another opportunity for people to influence how support is delivered in future.

Anyone interested in taking part, or who would like more information, can contact Commissioning.FPTeam@cambridgeshire.gov.uk

Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion

Council shares partnership award

South Cambridgeshire District Council and Cambridgeshire County Council have won the award for Excellence in Partnership Working (The Fight Against Poverty) from the Institute of Revenues, Ratings and Valuation.

This award is for our joint free school meal take up campaign within the district, using the Local Income Family Tracker (LIFT) system. The project resulted in 81 children now receiving free school meals, worth over £300,000 to their families over the lifetime of their education, and over £1 million to local schools in additional Pupil Premium funding. This work is being extended across other districts including East Cambridgeshire—see below.

Unclaimed pension credit cashback campaign

Cambridgeshire County Council is working with district and city councils to contact families identified as eligible to receive currently unclaimed Pension Credit, aiming to put up to £2M per year back into residents' pockets.

Over 700 households across Cambridgeshire will be contacted by letter, email and phone. Each household will be advised of their eligibility and provided with support to help them apply for their unclaimed benefit.

This is the county council's first targeted campaign to increase residents' income since approval of the procurement of the Low-Income Family Tracker (LIFT) software platform was approved at a meeting of the County Council's Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee in February.

LIFT has been purchased for district and city councils in Cambridgeshire by the County Council, using funding from the UK Government's Crisis and Resilience Fund via the DWP, as part of a campaign of income maximisation, intended to help build financial security for low-income families.

Identified residents will be contacted directly by their District Council. The campaign targets households eligible for the two elements of Pension Credit—Guarantee Credit and Savings Credit. Households may be eligible for both.

Based on an average Pension Credit claim of £4,300 a year, the five hundred households identified as eligible for Pension Credit Guarantee would have a total income gain of over £2M per year, ongoing, and should all apply.

Under-age sales

Trading Standards officers have found two Cambridgeshire businesses selling age-restricted products to children during a series of test purchasing operations carried out across the county. The exercises were conducted over the summer by the County Council's Trading Standards team, working alongside Volunteer Police Cadets in Cambridgeshire aged between 14 and 16, and licensing teams from district councils.

Trading Standards encourages retailers to review their age verification policies and ensure staff consistently challenge anyone who appears under 25.

Concerns about young people accessing alcohol can be reported to Cambridgeshire Police online. Information about shops selling vapes or tobacco products to children under the age of 18 can be reported to Trading Standards' advice partner, Citizens Advice Consumer Service, on 0808 223 1133 Monday to Friday or via the Citizens Advice Consumer Service online form over the weekend. Reports may be made anonymously if wished.

The Library Presents

Chosen by residents, the autumn season of The Library Presents (16 October to 12 December) has a line-up of different events including music, comedy, theatre and workshops in art, craft and dance. Hosted in twenty-three Cambridgeshire Libraries, there will be something for everyone.

New offer: The Library Presents Level Up courses

New *Level Up* courses now offer the chance to dive deeper into specific artforms such as ceramics. The ticket price of the new course covers the costs of the artist and materials, and is not for profit. The service's regular two-hour workshops continue as normal with their subsidised pricing. Cambridgeshire is one of a small number of library authorities able to bring high-quality arts programmes to local communities, thanks to continued funding from Arts Council England.

<https://www.library.live/the-library-presents>

Peter Sandford and Chris Poulton

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

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