

## **Report of Councillor Carla Hofman and Councillor John Williams to Parish Councils for April 2024.**

*This report contains factual information which we hope will be of use and of interest to the parish council and to the wider community of the parish.*

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### **Golden Anniversary for South Cambridgeshire District Council**

Fifty years of serving local communities has been marked by South Cambridgeshire District Council as it celebrates its golden anniversary. Officially established in April 1974, the District Council has been at the forefront of shaping vibrant communities across 104 parishes and two towns.

Currently the council has 45 councillors led by a Cabinet of eight councillors, representing over 157,000 people and a workforce of over 660, which includes all those employed in the planning and waste services which are shared with Cambridge City council.

For 2024/25 the council will spend nearly £81.5m, of which £37m will be met from local taxpayers (including business rates) and Government grants. The council will also receive £7.5m from investments and nearly £40m from fees and charges.

### **Financial Accounts 2022/23**

We are pleased to report that the 22/23 accounts have been finalised and published on our website at

[www.scambs.gov.uk/your-council-and-democracy/finance-and-budget/council-accounts-and-annual-governance-statement/](http://www.scambs.gov.uk/your-council-and-democracy/finance-and-budget/council-accounts-and-annual-governance-statement/)

As reported before the government has introduced transitional arrangements for all councils' outstanding audits, and we await the final decision from government about how our 2021/22 and 2022/23 accounts will be externally audited. However, in terms of our own position in preparing the accounts, we are now up to date.

### **Council leaders react to Government's 'Case for Cambridge'**

The leaders of Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire District councils have said communities need far more detail – and their say – on Government plans for a major expansion of the city.

Alongside the Chancellor's Spring Budget, Michael Gove MP, Levelling-Up, Housing and Communities Secretary, unveiled a 'Case for Cambridge'. The document provides further information about his vision for building up to 150,000 new homes in and around Cambridge by 2050, which he claims are necessary "to supercharge this scientific and economic supercluster".

Cllrs Mike Davey and Bridget Smith have called on Government for far more detail around what housing growth is being proposed, and where – and to ensure both councils and their communities are closely involved and can have their say.

They have welcomed the Government's proposals to help tackle the critical water supply issues which are already impacting development, including taking forward the Fens Reservoir as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project, accelerating transfers from Grafham Water, promoting Nature Based Solutions, and trialling a water credits system.

However, they say many important questions remain unanswered - and add that the Government has not yet made the case for the use of a Development Corporation or evidenced their aspirations for 150,000 more homes.

### **Zero Carbon Communities 2024 grant scheme**

Community groups are being empowered to act on climate change through a grant scheme encouraging local sustainability initiatives. The popular Zero Carbon Communities grant scheme by South Cambridgeshire District Council is into its sixth year and opens for applications on Tuesday 2 April 2024.

Last year, the total given through the grant since the scheme began topped more than half a million pounds.

Grants of between £2,000 and £15,000 are available to parish councils and community groups in the district, with a total pot of £125,000 available. Previous projects have included community building retrofits, food waste and climate-friendly cooking education, as well as e-bike rental schemes.

Anyone interested in applying is encouraged to attend an online application support workshop on Wednesday 24 April from 7 to 8:30pm. Sign up via Eventbrite. Tickets available from 2 April.

All applicants should consult the updated application guidance and criteria when making an application. Applications can be made via the eform on the South Cambridgeshire District Council website. The form goes live from 2 April.  
[www.scambs.gov.uk/climate-emergency-and-nature/zero-carbon-communities/zero-carbon-communities-grant](http://www.scambs.gov.uk/climate-emergency-and-nature/zero-carbon-communities/zero-carbon-communities-grant)

### **Allotment toolkit launch**

We are pleased to launch a new 'allotment toolkit' that has been created by South Cambridgeshire District Council to support the provision of good quality allotments across the district. The toolkit includes advice on areas such as governance, pest control, and community engagement, and finishes with a case study on Swavesey Allotment. The full allotment toolkit can be found at  
<https://www.scambs.gov.uk/community-safety-and-health/community-action/allotment-toolkit/>

### **'Find a Grant' digital service – free trial offer for local government**

In March 2023, the Cabinet Office launched a 'Find a Grant' digital service, a single place for eligible individuals and organisations to find and apply for government grants. The Cabinet Office is offering councils, and grant administrator colleagues in any local government organisation, access to use 'Find a Grant' on a free trial basis until at least March 2025, for the administration of your grants. To give councils a flavour of 'Find a Grant', the Cabinet Office has created a short video. And, if you'd

be interested in a further demonstration of the service, please contact:  
[findagrant@cabinetoffice.gov.uk](mailto:findagrant@cabinetoffice.gov.uk)

### **Awareness Campaign launched to bring empty homes back into use**

An awareness campaign has been launched to bring empty properties back into use and help get families living in suitable homes. South Cambridgeshire District Council is addressing an urgent need to get empty private properties back into circulation so as many people as possible can live in a property that is fit for their needs.

Renting an empty property is easier than people think, thanks to Shire Homes, the District Council's private sector leasing scheme, a complete management service and worry-free way of renting. Shire Homes can take on a property for three or more years and provides guaranteed rental payments every month, with no management fees, regular property visits, full management service and day to day maintenance.

Shire Homes also offers a 'Homes for Ukraine' option where owners could potentially receive funding for up to £570 per home towards PAT testing, Gas Safety Check Certificate, EPC and Smoke Alarms to get their property ready for rental to a Ukrainian resident. Private homeowners can support the campaign by speaking to the Empty homes Officer who can offer help, advice and visit your property if required.

A recent example of how the Council can support bringing empty homes back into use is a house where the owner died with no known relatives. Empty since 2020, the property has experienced burst pipes and flooding to the downstairs causing issues to neighbours, with no prospect of being sold. The District Council Empty Homes officer worked with a genealogy company to trace two distant relatives in France who have agreed to commence probate and sell the property.

If you are a private homeowner and would like further help and support, please contact Anna Nightingale Empty Homes Officer on: [nightingale@scams.gov.uk](mailto:nightingale@scams.gov.uk)

### **Greater Cambridge Shared Planning secures funding for digital software to improve planning processes**

Greater Cambridge Shared Planning has secured £100,000 of funding from the Department of Levelling Up, Homes and Communities (DLUHC) in the latest Digital Planning Improvement round. This financial boost represents a significant step forward for Greater Cambridge Shared Planning (GCSP), which is a partnership between South Cambridgeshire and Cambridge City Councils, in its journey towards embracing digital transformation to improve planning services for residents.

The funding will enhance GCSP's digital capabilities and development management software, facilitating smoother operations and better integration of planning data. These upgrades will make planning processes faster and more efficient, which will directly benefit residents and developers. Moreover, it will enable GCSP to prepare for forthcoming legislation, ensuring compliance and readiness for future regulatory changes.

**Carla & John**