

## **Parish AGM Report 2023 The Mordens Ward**

My report includes some updates from the council over the municipal year, if you would like any further information on these topics or anything else to do with the district council then please do get in touch via the contact details at the end of my report.

I would like to thank all parish councillors, Chairmans and residents once again for making me feel so welcome at parish meetings.

### **Financial position of the SCDC**

The District Council's 2019/2020 accounts were approved on 21<sup>st</sup> February this year. It has been a continuing concern raised by the Audit and Corporate Governance committee. It has been incredibly frustrating and while communication between the council and the External Auditors has improved I do feel that if this could be fully addressed then the audit process could really speed up. The 2019 external audit fees were being negotiated and councillors have been informed that there has been a very slight reduction but below are the latest publicly available figures that have been made available. Given the District Council is also paying for interim officers to help catch up with previous years accounts this has led me to question at times the value for money that the council is providing residents in regards to this matter.

	Planned fee 2019/20 (£)	Final Fee 2018/19 (£)
Scale Fee – Code work	40,021	40,021
<b>Additional risks and areas of focus (Note 1)</b>		
Additional audit overruns & delays (Note 2)	0	106,500
Risk - Group accounts	4,000 - 5,000	5,000
Risk - Presentation and disclosure of accounting items and Impact of 50% performance materiality & higher risk factors	10,000 - 20,000	20,000
Risk - Data migration relating to new Fixed Asset Register (FAR)	0	152,000
Risk - New financial management system	0	7,500
Risk - Going concern	1,500 - 3,500	3,500
Risk - New accounting standards	0	1,250
Risk - Capital Accounting Entries	5,000 - 20,000	0
Risk - Valuation of Investment Properties	3,000 - 6,000	0
Risk - Non-domestic rate (NDR) appeals provision - change in management expert	2,000 - 5,000	0
VFM - qualification in relation to Council's weaknesses in meeting financial reporting duties for publishing draft and audited accounts	0 - 3,500	3,500
<b>Total audit</b>	<b>65,521 - 103,021</b>	<b>339,271</b>
<b>Non-audit services:</b>		
Housing Benefits (Note 3)	14,995	14,815
<b>Total other non-audit services</b>	<b>14,995</b>	<b>14,815</b>
<b>Total fees</b>	<b>80,516 - 118,016</b>	<b>354,086</b>

The District Council set its budget for the forthcoming year in February just gone. I have provided a table below showing the overall movements in department funding. The council has agreed an Authorised Limit for total external debt of £447.673m and forecasts external borrowing to be £315.1m by March 2026. The budget has a significant gap with £2.79m of savings/income identified. Council tax is to be increased by the maximum, unfortunately the amendment I proposed to freeze council tax was voted down. I raised concerns over the

increased borrowing and council tax rises along side the potential reduction of service quality as a result of the amount of savings made, I did not support the budget.

	Increased Resource £'s	Decreased Resource £'s
<b>Resources</b>		
Council Tax	511,000	
Business Rates	6,980,000	
Funding Guarantee Allocation	1,070,000	
Rural Services Grant/Services Grant/RSG	56,000	
New Homes Bonus		868,000
<b>Net Increase in Resources</b>	<b>8,617,000</b>	<b>868,000</b>

	Reduced Spending/ Funding changes £'s	Increased Spending £'s
<b>Spending</b>		
Chief Executive	442,000	
Climate, Environment and Waste Services		881,000
Finance Service		4,637,000
Housing Services		438,000
Planning Services	952,000	
Transformation, HR & Corporate Services		1,206,000
Interest Payable		1,713,000
Investment Income	1,548,000	
Other Levies & Contributions		333,000
Capital Financing & MRP	2,100,000	
Contribution to Earmarked Reserves		4,227,000
Contribution to General Fund	644,000	
<b>Change in budget requirement between 2022/2023 and 2023/2024</b>	<b>5,686,000</b>	<b>13,435,000</b>

In relation to the councils housing budget which is dealt with separately, I was pleased to support the council's plan to increase the amount of council housing stock across the district. There was also a review of the Council house rents and shared ownership properties rates. The Council has decided to increase the rents and charges by 7%, this is the highest increase possible as the government has set a 7% cap. This is something that I did not support especially in the current climate with rising costs.

To see the budget papers in full you can do so via the link below:

[Agenda for Council on Tuesday, 21 February 2023, 2.00 p.m. \(moderngov.co.uk\)](https://www.moderngov.co.uk/2023/02/21/agenda-for-council-on-tuesday-21-february-2023-2-00-p-m)

## **Cost of living support**

Given inflation as it is and energy costs rising, the Government has set up a website called Money Helper with huge amounts of information on all things money related. Such as:

- Benefits
- Family and care
- Money troubles
- Savings
- Everyday money
- Homes
- Pensions and Retirement
- Work

The website is really easy to use and has lots of links to other organisations and applications for benefits grants etc. It also has calculators, helplines and a live chat functions on the website. If you are aware of anyone that this would help please do pass this on. A link is provided below.

[Free and impartial help with money, backed by the government | MoneyHelper](#)

Councillors in October recommended that the Community Chest Grant criteria be expanded to allow bids that include contributions for any project that has a positive impact for communities related to the cost-of-living crisis. If anyone would like to apply for a grant they can do so via the link below. <https://www.scambs.gov.uk/communitychest>

The district council also has helpful advice on the cost of living support available and grants etc that can be accessed via the link below.

[Cost of living support - South Cambs District Council \(scambs.gov.uk\)](https://www.scambs.gov.uk/cost-of-living-support)

If you become aware of anyone struggling please do encourage them to get in touch with the council or myself – everything is kept completely confidential.

## **Environment & Waste services**

Recycling small electricals like toasters, phones and hairdryers can now be done at drop-off points. Eight new pink collection banks for small electrical items at recycling points, have been installed.

In the Greater Cambridge area, figures from the RECAP waste partnership show that an average of 450 tonnes of small electrical equipment is disposed of in black bins every year, ending up in landfill where it will never break down and harms the environment.

New recycling banks for small electricals are:

- Gwydir Street car park, Cambridge
- Lammas Land car park, Cambridge
- Abbey Pool car park, Cambridge
- Chesterton Road public toilets, Cambridge

- Morrisons car park, Cambourne
- Tesco car park, Bar Hill
- Village car park, High Street, Melbourn
- Tesco car park, Fulbourn

There are existing banks at Glebe Farm Drive, Fawcett Road and Hawkey Road in Cambridge, as well as Milton and Thriplow Household Recycling Centres. Small appliances can also be handed in for recycling in-store at Curry's on Newmarket Road in Cambridge.

Anything up to 29cm in its largest dimension, which has a plug, battery or cable is classed as a small electrical item. If batteries are removeable, please take these out and recycle them separately. Some examples of suitable items include:

- Kettles, toasters, sandwich toasters, stick blenders
- Games consoles, DVD players
- Hand-held vacuum cleaners, electric toothbrushes
- Mobile phones, tablets and smart devices
- Cables and headphones
- Printers and scanners
- Laptops, keyboards and IT accessories

Please note that smoke detectors, light bulbs, e-cigarettes, batteries, paints, chemicals or aerosols are not accepted in these banks.

In regards to battery collection there have been changes to how the waste collectors will deal with batteries. Adjustments to the bin lorries mean that batteries can be collected every collection not just on blue bin days. All residents need to do is simply place a sealed or tied up plastic bag on top of any the green, black or blue wheelie bins.

In my last report I spoke highly of the separate food waste collection trial that was happening in part of the ward. I'm sorry to write in this year's report that this has been stopped. This means residents must go back to using paper bags and putting these into the green bins. Paper bags are available from the district council but I am also able to act as a go between and will get them to you from the council.

A new grant is now available called The Electric Vehicle (EV) Charge Point Grant. It is to fund the installation of Electric Vehicle Charge Points (EVCPs) for use by the public in the car parks of community buildings and village halls within South Cambridgeshire. I would like to congratulate once again Steeple Morden Parish Council for their successful bid.

<https://www.scambs.gov.uk/climate-emergency-and-nature/grants-funding-and-community-support/electric-vehicle-charge-point-grant/>

## **Planning**

The way in which planning enforcement queries can be made has changed recently. Residents are now asked to submit an online form rather than emailing the compliance team. A link to the form is below.

<https://forms.scambs.gov.uk/REPORTABREACHOFPLANNINGCONTROL/launch>

Planning Enforcement action has been a matter of debate at both planning committee and full council. There is real frustration from councillors like myself that not enough resource and priority is given to enforcing planning consents. Council officers can only act within the parameters that councillors set for them. I believe that enforcement is important as a deterrent to stop people who deliberately seek to over step the mark of what they can and cannot do but also to give residents confidence in the system as a whole.

There has been an announcement by the District Council that the next local plan will be planning for even more houses than previously thought. This means that with a buffer in place around 57,000 houses will be allocated for development in the next local plan. I have provided a link to the documents that went before the Scrutiny and Overview Committee. I have challenged the wisdom of increasing housing figures given the pressures that our local services that already exists. Around 8,000 of the houses within this new number are unallocated. I have raised concerns that villages will become under more pressure of development. While assurances have been given that the current spatial strategy is being continued that does allow for further development in villages. I tried to get information as to what sites have been promoted and publish the works which hasn't been updated since the Summer, I await a decision as to when the Council will update it Below is an extract of Appendix D of the Scrutiny papers:

"This option would deliver a substantial amount of housing development within Cambridge city, particularly at North East Cambridge and densification of consented development at North West Cambridge and the Cambridge urban area. It also includes a substantial amount of housing development at Cambridge Airport and around Cambourne, with additional development within the 'southern cluster' and villages. This option also includes faster delivery rates at Northstowe and Waterbeach. This option focuses employment development at North East Cambridge, Cambridge Airport, Cambridge Biomedical Campus and Cambourne, although the majority of this is expected to come forward beyond the plan period. Additional rural employment locations are identified at Babraham and on the A14 corridor in vicinity of Swavesey Junction, as well as in the southern cluster and villages."

<https://scambs.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=417&MId=9693&Ver=4>

### **Four day week working week for Council officers**

At Cabinet in September a decision was made to trial officers working four days instead of five days a week. Officers will be expected to do the same amount of work but within four days and will receive 100% of their current pay. This trial started in January and was agreed

by Cabinet to carry on in March for the full 12 month trial. This has applied to desk based staff like planning but not to services such as waste bin collection so far but the Council is looking to extend these to all staff soon. South Cambs will be the first local council to trial this scheme. The reasons for trying this has been given by Cabinet to increase productivity and help with recruitment. Currently the Council has only been able to fill around eight out of every ten (or fewer) of its vacancies. Between January and March 2022, only around half were filled. There are currently 23 agency staff covering office-based roles, which should ideally be filled by people in permanent positions. I have previously raised recruitment and staff moral issues at the council and normally been dismissed so one positive is that the council is recognising that there is a problem. However, I am not positive about the proposed trial. The report to Cabinet refers to potential benefits but would require hard working, already stretched employees to get 100% of their work done in 80% of the time. I simply don't believe that that our officers are wasting 20% of their time, and if they are it is an admission of poor oversight by the administration. To be reducing man hours at a time where the administration are struggling to finalise accounts on time and have planning back logs is in my mind absurd. We need more officers, more collective working hours, and more support for our staff – not cuts. At the Cabinet meeting I raised a series of questions, some of which were answered but I have strongly raised my objection to this decision being made by Council alone as this means on an issue that affects all residents that only 8 out of 45 councillors have had a say in this, meaning that the residents of 37 councillors have had no fair say in this decision. I have also expressed my unhappiness that the national press was briefed about this proposal before staff at the Council whom this affects and residents who are paying for this. Time will tell if this will work, but to be making such an experiment with taxpayers' money at this time seems wholly inappropriate.

### **Congestion charging in Cambridge**

The Greater Cambridge Partnership (GCP) Board have completed their consultation on the introduction of a charging zone in Cambridge City and areas of South Cambridgeshire. During this process many have been asking how and who makes the decision as to whether or not a charge is introduced. It has been clarified that while the Greater Cambridge Partnership that has promoted and performed the consultation the decision will have to ultimately be made by Cambridgeshire County Council.

I brought a motion to full council in November (as is below) trying to get the District Council to respond to the consultation and raise the concerns many have raised with myself. Unfortunately this was not successful. I had hoped that even if the reasons for refusal were not agreed that the Council would still respond to the consultation however the District Council has made no response.

“18a Standing in the name of Councillor Heather Williams

This council notes the concerns raised by many residents across South Cambridgeshire about the introduction of a 'Sustainable travel zone' that would charge people to enter the zone via motor vehicle. This council will formally respond to the Greater Cambridge Partnerships consultation relaying these concerns on behalf of the residents we serve. This council, as part of the consultation, will raise opposition to the introduction of said charge



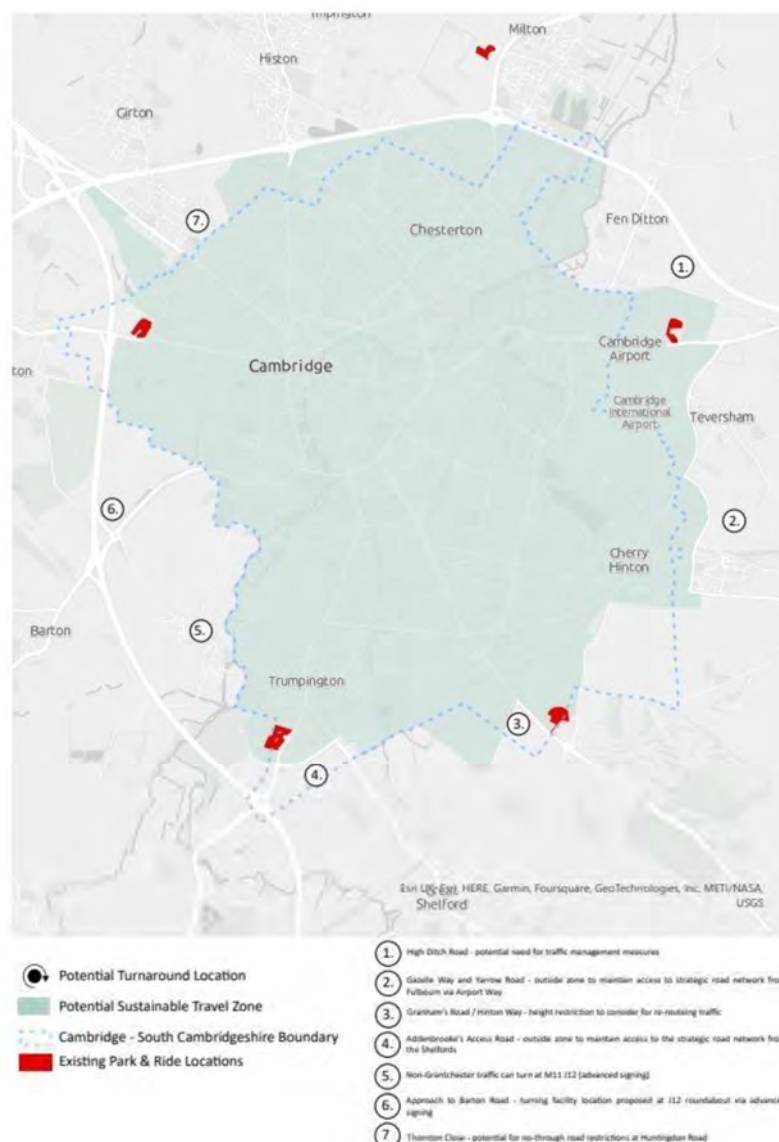
and cite the inclusion of Addenbrooke's and Royal Papworth Hospital as absolutely unacceptable.

Decision:

Council Rejected this Motion.” Link to the full agenda, mins and recording is [Agenda for Council on Thursday, 24 November 2022, 2.00 p.m. \(moderngov.co.uk\)](#)

A few weeks ago I proposed a motion that the District Council write a letter of support for a referendum on charging ahead of any decision to charge took place. This was also voted down by the majority of councillors.

For reference below is a map of the proposed charging zone.



## **Support for Ukrainian Families**

The war in Ukraine has shown us the worst but also the best of humanity. In South Cambs I am pleased to say we are supporting Ukrainian families displaced due to this awful conflict. Many Ukrainian families are now living in South Cambs but as the war continues there is inevitably more that needs to be done. The District Council along with Cambridge City Council are running a campaign to recruit extra hosts. Anyone who can offer a spare room and warm welcome is being asked to text ROOM to 88802 so that the councils can support them through the process and match hosts to guests who have already started to settle in the local area.

## **Policing**

A new Safer Communities Fund has been launched by the Police and Crime Commissioner Darryl Preston where Community Safety Partnerships in the county will be able to bid for up to £5000 for initiatives which will provide swift responses to crimes such as fly-tipping, bike theft, road safety and anti-social behaviour.

The Community payback scheme is encouraging members of the public to nominate potential projects for the community payback scheme. The Government's scheme allows members of the public to suggest what unpaid work is carried out by offenders in their area. "Community payback is a punishment that is visible to the public. It is designed to rehabilitate people on probation while giving back to the local area harmed by their crime. In my Police and Crime Plan I pledged to work with partners to tackle re-offending and the community payback scheme does that. I am keen that the unpaid work carried out by offenders benefits our community. Nobody knows the needs of the area more than local people and I am therefore appealing to you to propose local projects." Quote from Darryl Preston – Police and Crime Commissioner

Courts will order an individual to carry out community payback in cases whereby the offender can be better rehabilitated in the community. This can include first time offenders or where health issues have been an influencing factor.

To be considered the work must benefit the local community, not take paid work away from others and not make a profit. Nominations can be made on the link below:

<https://www.gov.uk/nominate-community-payback-project>

## **As your councillor**

As your district councillor I am on the following committees:

- Audit & Corporate Governance Committee
- Civic Affairs Committee
- Climate & Environment Advisory Group (Substitute)
- Full Council
- Employment & Staffing Committee
- Grants Advisory Committee (Substitute)
- Licensing Committee (Substitute)



- Planning Committee
- Scrutiny and Overview Committee (Substitute)

I also have responsibilities as the Major Opposition Group Leader and I sit on the Greater Cambridge Partnership Assembly.

### **Political Balance of South Cambs District Council**

Liberal Democrats	35
Conservative	9
Independent	1

### **Cllr Heather Williams**

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