

Gamlingay Division Councillors Report – South Cambridgeshire District Council & Cambridgeshire County Council – March 2025

The Gamlingay Division comprises the Parishes of Abington Pigotts, Arrington, Barrington, Croydon, Gamlingay, Guilden Morden, Litlington, Hatley, Orwell, Shingay-cum-Wendy, Steeple Morden, Tadlow & Wimpole. This report is for all Division Parish Councils but please be aware that it will include items that may have little or no relevance to your particular Parish. Apologies in advance!

Your Councillors are always ready to help. Please do not hesitate to contact County Councillor Sebastian Kindersley on 01767 651982 or skindersley@hotmail.com or write to the Manor Barn, East Hatley, SG19 3JA or District Councillor for The Mordens Heather Williams: cllr.williamsh@scambs.gov.uk / 07885 774 775.

Council Budgets

Cambridgeshire County Council met to agree the Budget for the County Council for 2025/26 in February and after a somewhat protracted meeting did agree the Budget; prioritizing investment in highways maintenance as well as in children who become looked-after and building new schools.

The county council had to close a gap of £35.1m with 73% of the Council's net spend now being funded from Council Tax and - based on resident feedback - prioritised key areas, which are aligned to our vision to make Cambridgeshire greener, fairer and more caring. These included investment of more than £56m in highways maintenance to tackle the significant backlog of repairs, day-to-day management of the highway and £20m in planned maintenance including roads, pavements, drainage, bridges, safety barriers, traffic lights, public rights of way and cycleways.

Turning to adults and children's social care £3m was added to cover inflation for local care providers and an extra £8m for the 5% increase in the Real Living Wage. An additional £9m for children who become looked-after, £4.7m to support home to school transport services and £920,000 investment in capacity in SEND services. The council continues to support vulnerable communities, with an estimated £6m of Household Support Fund that will be delivered to support those most in need alongside investment in further improvements in our libraries through £1.3m already committed to the Libraries Plus programme.

It was agreed to increase Council Tax by 4.99% (2% of which is for Adult Social Services) – raising £20m of local income to help maintain and protect critical services for the most vulnerable communities. For most of our residents in Band A-D properties that will mean between an extra £1.04 pence to £1.55 a week. The meeting is available to watch on YouTube (not recommended).

Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Fire Authority also met to agree the 2025/26 Budget which was a significantly nicer meeting where we agreed an increase of £4.95 for the next financial year. For a Band D household, this increase will make the annual contribution to the fire service of £87.21. This works out to be

a monthly cost of roughly £7.27, or around £1.68 a week. Part of the funding gap we face comes from the decision by Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service to end the very successful, 14 year-long partnership of delivering a combined fire control function, taking 999 calls and mobilising fire engines and other resources across both counties. The collaboration was established to save each fire service money, which it has with more than £12 million saved in the time it has been operating. We will now have to find an additional £1million per year, just to break even.

And lastly South Cambridgeshire agreed its Budget for 2025/26 which see the Council continue as one of the lowest taxing authorities in the country, with a below inflation increase of 2.99% or less than 10p a week for a band D home, bringing the charge for this band to £175.40 for the SCDC part of your 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 we 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 our net zero communities grants schemes to providing support for homelessness.

Turning to 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 - 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. We 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 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 (apart from Right to Buy receipts, S106 funding from housing developers and

Government grants) is shouldered by our council tenants through their rents or others renting other 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 we have a target of delivering at least 75 new homes a year. We have 5,815 council homes, up from 5,705 last year. We also want to improve the standard of our existing homes, particularly their energy efficiency. In 2025/26 we also have 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 we have had to increase council rents by 2.7% bringing the average rent to £129.98 a week bringing an income of £38 million. Some 40% of our tenants receive Housing Benefit.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

All principal local authorities in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough need to respond to the Government no later than Friday 21 March to outline what they are considering for new, larger, unitary councils for our area. The criteria continue to include an expectation that the new councils will cover populations of at least 500,000 unless there are special circumstances; and that existing district council boundaries will be the building blocks, again unless a strong argument can be made against this. A further submission will need to be made to the Government in the autumn. There will be advantages to moving to a unitary council system, not least more clarity and accountability over who is responsible for services such as street lights or waste. But it's clear that the Government is wanting a 'quick and dirty' solution, rather than taking the time—and consultation—to do it properly.

North Lane Gamlingay

Bunds have now been placed to prevent vehicles using the end of North Lane. Residents who continue to use heavy machinery to break through should be reminded that if they live in North or East Lane they are SCDC tenants and by these actions would be in breach of the tenancy agreement.

Hare Coursing

The Police have advised that following the dreadful hare coursing events on January 25th there have been 20 arrests so far - residents of Spalding, Slough and other far-flung places - but nobody from Cambridgeshire yet. They have all been bailed with very strict conditions relating to dogs, cars, the countryside etc and anyone with any information and footage that could assist in identifying those involved is asked to email OpCalluna@cambs.police.uk or contact Crimestoppers, anonymously, by calling 0800 555111 or [online](#).

Surviving Domestic Violence

Cambridgeshire County Council has renewed the Target hardening project – sometimes known as a ‘sanctuary scheme’ – which enables survivors of domestic abuse to remain in their own homes by providing additional security measures which can delay or prevent a perpetrator from entering a property. Between April 2023 and March 2024, 525 survivors across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough received target hardening measures. Measures offered depend on the level of risk, and may include window alarms, additional bolts, lock changes, security advice, video doorbells, dummy cameras and response lights. The service is available for all types of housing, whether owned, privately rented or social housing. The service is key to the delivery of Cambridgeshire’s Safe Accommodation Strategy, and Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Strategy, and is provided in conjunction with working with a domestic abuse specialist. The survivor is given a bespoke safety and support plan focused on their individual needs.

Failure of gas supply

Gamlingay residents were understandably extremely concerned to find the gas supply from Cadent was weak or failing over several weeks in February. Cadent advise work continues to restore full gas pressure in the Gamlingay area caused by an issue with a pipe on the outskirts of Gamlingay that they believe caused the significant drop in pressure at peak usage time. The PC and Cadent have been keeping residents up to date and the EcoHub has been made available to those who needed a warm space. Cadent advise, however, that if you smell gas, do not assume it is related to this work. Act immediately and call the national gas emergency service on **0800 111 999**, day or night.

Ukraine 3 year anniversary

Bridget was invited to speak at a demonstration in Cambridge to mark the 3rd anniversary of the Russian Invasion of Ukraine as Leader of SCDC: “We are proud in South Cambs to have welcomed more guests from Ukraine into than any other District in the Country. 953 guests in total hosted by a total of 545 of our residents. I am also very proud of the enormous efforts of our officer teams at South Cambs who I know have at times worked day and night to support all of our guests and their hosts and I thank those people who have taken the trouble to write to me to say how well supported they have been. It has been an especial privilege to get to know the guests living in my own village of Gamlingay and to experience their generous hospitality.

I hope that we have made you all very welcome and cared for you very well. I hope that when you return to your country that you will remember your years in South Cambridgeshire positively. We will certainly remember all of you and thank you for what you have given to us.”

Dog Poo

It was very disappointing a few Saturdays ago to see the organisers of the football club having to scoop up huge piles of dog poo from the playing field before it was fit to be played on. This is just disgusting and the people letting their dogs foul the recreation area should think about how they would feel if it was their children risking their health. It was also disappointing to see parents taking their dogs into the playground despite the very clear signage not to do so. Dog poo is a serious health hazard to children and in the most extreme cases can cause blindness.

Update from Cambridgeshire County Council on Household Support Fund

The Household Support Fund Scheme is running until the end of March and thousands of households can claim cost of living support potentially worth hundreds of pounds. Over the next few weeks, 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 this round with a "Are you struggling to pay for food or bills?" headline - see CCC website for more.

Grant Funding Opportunity - Increased grant Funding for Electric Vehicle chargers

Funding available from the Council's Electric Vehicle charging grant has increased from £5,000, to up to £12,000 per project. This grant is open to parish councils, community groups and charities for public EV chargers in car parks associated with community buildings and village halls. Funding is available on a first-come, first-served basis and is open for the remainder of the 2024/25 financial year. We cannot guarantee the funding will be available into next financial year, so encourage those interested in applying to get in touch soon. For more information about this grant, please visit the website. If you would like to know about community EV charging more generally, please visit Electric vehicle charging - South Cambs District Council, where you can find a video by Steeple Morden Parish Council which explains how they installed their EVCP. You can also contact the Council on evcp.grant@scambs.gov.uk

Waste Service Update - Blue bin recycling contract

Following a thorough public sector procurement process, Greater Cambridge Shared Waste Service (GCSWS) is finalising a new contract for blue bin recycling processing. From March 3rd, a new provider - Re-Gen Waste Management Ltd - will take over the processing of our recyclable materials.

Importantly, residents will experience no changes to their recycling service. The same items can continue to be placed in blue bins, and collections will remain unchanged. While the materials will now be processed at Re-Gen's facility in Northern Ireland rather than locally at Waterbeach, this decision was made after careful evaluation of all options, with Re-Gen offering the best combination of cost-effectiveness, processing quality, and environmental compliance. The new arrangement includes several positive features. Re-Gen's state-of-the-art facility uses advanced robotics technology that can achieve a 99% recycling rate - higher than current levels. The company has committed to sustainable practices, including plans to use more environmentally friendly fuels and establish a new facility in the Midlands during the contract term. To minimise environmental impact, they will coordinate transport with their existing operations, using return journeys of vehicles already delivering materials across the UK.

Most recyclable materials will continue to be processed within the UK - currently 82% overall and 100% for plastics - maintaining our commitment to domestic recycling. Materials will initially be consolidated at a Waterbeach transfer station before transport to Northern Ireland, where they will be sorted and sold to established UK-based processors and manufacturers.

In the course of the Procurement process it became clear the incumbent (Thalia) had submitted a non-compliant bid and so was eliminated from the process. This means that continuing to send materials to the Waterbeach site would not be possible without breaking public procurement rules. The successful bidder, ReGen Waste, is appropriately licenced, authorised and regulated by the relevant UK authorities, to undertake the operations and activities required by the RECAP contract.

COUNCIL SHORTLISTED FOR FOUR NATIONAL AWARDS

Cambridgeshire County Council has been shortlisted as a finalist in four categories of the Local Government Chronicle Awards.

- Community involvement: two projects from the Fenland Youth Work Network supporting young people aged 11-18 who are at risk of serious violence, exploitation, and involvement in county lines.
- Health and social care: Cambridgeshire Shared Lives Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse Project, working with survivors of domestic abuse with learning disabilities and/or autism.
- Future places: innovative connectivity projects including a private 5G Open Radio Access Network (RAN), development of an augmented reality experience, and enhanced mobile coverage analysis.
- Innovation: Cambridgeshire's 'Dig Once' policy, integrating fibre ducting into new transport infrastructure projects, resulting in a large CO2 reduction and significantly less disruption to road users.

Old Shire Hall

The sale of (old) Shire Hall in Cambridge is on the agenda of the Assets & Procurement Committee. The premises was put back on the market for disposal in February 2024, and attracted fifteen bids. Following evaluation this number was reduced to a shortlist of four. An exclusivity period with Bidder A ended in October 2024 without a sale being completed. Subsequent discussions took place with the other bidders on the shortlist. An unconditional long leasehold bid from Bidder E has been recommended for acceptance, together with draft Heads of Terms. Pending Committee approval, the Heads of Terms will be agreed, and an exclusivity period will be entered with Bidder E, with a view to exchange contracts within this three-month period.

Highways procurement

The current highways contract in place with Milestone Infrastructure is set to expire on 30 June 2027, with an option for up to five years extension dependent on performance. The contract has not delivered the efficiencies and service levels expected or required by the Council. The current model of sub-contracting under the contract does not enable value for money to be easily demonstrated and there is a lack of contract options and investment in skills, processes and systems. CDM [Construction (Design & Management)] and health and safety compliance has been poor in the past but is improving. Response times and quality of work are continued concerns. Based on an assessment of options for the future post-2027 council officers have recommended a mixed economy model which would include:

- In-house delivery for Asset Management, Design, Commercial Management, Client Management, routine maintenance works
- Contract(s) for reactive/cyclical works, emergencies, winter maintenance
- A Professional Services Contract
- Use of Frameworks to deliver planned maintenance and major schemes.

Your Councillors are here to help you. Please do feel free to contact us with comments, questions, problems or complaints. We hope we can help but if we can't we are likely to know someone who can! *****