

Gamlingay Division Councillors Report – South Cambridgeshire District Council & Cambridgeshire County Council – April 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.

Goodbye!

As previously advised Sebastian is not standing for re-election on May 1st. He says “As I leave after representing Gamlingay Division Parishes on South Cambridgeshire and Cambridgeshire County Councils for 26 years all told I would like to thank everyone who has been kind and supportive of my job as a Councillor. It has been a tremendous privilege to serve you.”

Being a councillor is a privilege but it is also a very important job and people benefit from having a really good local councillor who can make a significant difference to lives especially during hard times. It is easy to talk about the big issues such as potholes and parking but the majority of the work is to do with people and their problems and of course these issues must remain confidential but they include planning issues, mental health support, homelessness, education and transport for SEND children, care for the elderly, sick and disabled to so much more. So if you are interested in public service please talk to us or to the parish council which has a few vacancies at the moment - being a parish councillor is a very good way to dip your toe into the world of local government.

By a quirk of the Local Government Act 1972 although he won't be a Councillor Sebastian will continue as Chair of the County Council until it meets for the first time on May 20th.

Access for Gamlingay Fire Station

We have heard very concerning reports of the firefighters not being able to get to the fire station or to get the engine out when they receive a call during school pick up or drop off time. This problem results in vital minutes being lost in response to a fire or road traffic accident. It is up to all of us to help avoid making this situation more difficult. If you can walk or cycle please do so and if you can't please think carefully about where you are parking.

Council Tax Fraud

Fraud officers have clawed back £360,000 in false claims for council tax discounts, with the money set to be invested back into public services across

South Cambridgeshire. The money has been returned to District Council budgets after staff uncovered hundreds of false claims by comparing data records. Called the Cambridgeshire County Council Fraud Initiative, the project continues to identify single person discount fraud and error, since launching in July 2023. It works by comparing data held by the local authority with other information such as the electoral register or credit reference data. Where there is a debt identified, it is recovered through the normal Council Tax billing process, with the income used to fund public services. Data gathered as part of the initiative indicates that around two in 10 claims reviewed by the authority, were being claimed incorrectly.

Local Government Reorganisation

An Extraordinary meeting of South Cambridgeshire District Council agreed to send a letter to the Local Government minister Jim McMahon clarifying that we are working productively with the other councils in Cambridgeshire to design new Unitary Councils. This will mean that the County Council is broken up and its responsibilities will go to either 2 or 3 new councils which will be amalgamations of the current district councils. We have until the autumn to submit the detail of the boundaries of these new authorities.

Meanwhile Leaders of S Cambs, City and County and Mayor Johnson have had a meeting with Lord Patrick Valance to hear about his plans for the Oxford Cambridge Corridor. He has been appointed by the chancellor and said that his aim is to get some stuff done this year. Council leaders pushed him for early solutions to the problems of water scarcity and waste water disposal.

Warmer Council Homes

More than £8 million in Government funding has been awarded to South Cambridgeshire District Council to improve the energy efficiency of Council homes. The idea is to upgrade thousands of social homes across the country which are currently below the standard of Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) C. Improvements to South Cambridgeshire's Council homes could include insulation, ventilation, heating controls, double glazing, solar panels, and heat pumps - cutting bills and tackling fuel poverty.

South Cambridgeshire District Council will now work to allocate funding to properties with priority given to those most in need of energy efficiency improvements. Council tenants will be contacted direct if their home is able to benefit – with the aim for the Council to have as many of its 5,500 properties above an EPC rating of C in the next four years.

The funding from the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero is part of the national Warm Homes Plan. A total of £8,280,376 is being provided for South Cambridgeshire under the latest wave of the Warm Homes: Social Housing Fund scheme. South Cambridgeshire District Council will contribute

£10 million from its Housing Revenue Account – consisting of Council house rents – to the improvements too.

Empty Properties

During 2023/24 – 28 South Cambridgeshire properties that were sat un-used and vacant were bought back into use by the District Council. A similar number of turnarounds is expected by the end of the current financial year. Anyone who is looking to turn an old, neglected property into a home may be able to save thousands of pounds in VAT on renovation costs - just by contacting South Cambridgeshire District Council's Empty Homes Officer.

Home maintenance and improvements are usually charged at the standard rate of 20% VAT. However, the Government offers a 5% VAT rate on renovations for properties that have been unoccupied for more than two years – but were lived in beforehand. Anyone who has recently purchased, or is about to buy, an empty property which meets these criteria simply needs to contact the Council. The Empty Homes Officer can then provide paperwork needed to confirm the house was unoccupied - triggering a substantial saving. To see if you qualify, email env.health@scambs.gov.uk and provide as much information as possible on the property you have recently purchased or are looking to purchase.

Council Tax on empty homes

As part of other efforts to bring local empty homes back into use - Council Tax will be doubled on longterm vacant and second homes in the District. The aim is to encourage people to sell or rent their properties to tackle the national housing shortfall - which is particularly acute in South Cambridgeshire. Council estimates suggest there are around 2,640 empty homes in the district, and a further 360 second properties.

Healthy Start Vouchers

Parents of children under the age of four years old are being encouraged to check if they are eligible for free Healthy Start vouchers to help buy food and milk. The Healthy Start vouchers are offered by the NHS to parents receiving certain benefits but are estimated to go unclaimed by more than a third (38%) of eligible parents in South Cambridgeshire.

This results in almost £88,000 of unclaimed funds each year in the district, largely due to a lack of awareness of the scheme.

In our latest campaign to support residents with the cost of living, we have used our new and innovative IT package, called the Low-Income Family Tracker (LIFT), to identify 377 households who are likely to be eligible for Healthy Start vouchers.

All these households have been contacted by letter and text where possible to encourage them to apply for Healthy Start vouchers if they have not done so already.

Parents are eligible for Healthy Start vouchers if they have a child under the age of four and are on certain benefits. If eligible, parents will receive a Healthy Start card that can be used in most UK supermarkets, similar to a debit card. The card will be pre-loaded with £8.50 a week for children aged under one, and £4.25 a week for children aged between one and four years old.

Net Zero Villages Awards

Nine local organisations are celebrating grant awards, as South Cambridgeshire District Council announces those successful in their bids to receive a share of more than £360,000 available through the Net Zero Villages scheme. The funding for the scheme was provided by the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, with supplementary funds contributed by the District Council.

In line with the District Council's 'Green to our Core' commitment, the scheme empowers voluntary groups, parish councils and community-minded businesses to tackle climate change by reducing the carbon emissions from community assets, such as village halls, and using nature-based solutions to adapt these buildings for a future with more extreme weather patterns. The grant also welcomed proposals for low carbon transport schemes, such as e-bikes or community shuttle buses.

Security support for domestic abuse survivors

CCCI has renewed a scheme which helps survivors of domestic abuse to feel safer and more secure in their own homes. The scheme provides additional security measures which can delay or prevent a perpetrator from entering a property. It supported 525 people across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough between April 2023 and March 2024. 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 contract will be funded by a Safe Accommodation grant from the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), enabling the council to carry out its statutory duty.

New South Cambs website

Please take a look at the new SCDC website – scambs.gov.uk – which has lots of new features including localisation: people can put their postcode in and find information purely relevant to the area they live, such as their local councillors

and the bin schedule, planning applications close by and the local events happening in their area.

Local Plan update

Development of the emerging Local Plan for the 2030s has been on hold for over a year due to uncertainties over water supply and transport provision. However, Greater Cambridge Shared Planning has announced that sufficient progress has been made to allow a draft Local Plan to be produced this year, for review by the council and for public consultation. There is a huge lead-up time in plan making and these are only steps in a very long process.

State of the roads and pavements

Significant additional resource has been allocated to Highways for the coming financial year via the new business plan, which should help. However, it is important to note that what is needed to bring the network into a decent state of repair is estimated at a sobering £600M. Nevertheless, more resource is allocated this year than last. Thank you very much to all who have taken the trouble to report on the County website. Please don't hesitate to send us any reporting reference numbers that need chasing.

Fancy becoming a farmer?

Cambridgeshire County Council is offering five initial tenancies of 10 years to allow development of a rural business on one of Cambridgeshire's leasehold farms. Our Farms Estate is the largest in England and Wales and covers over 13,400 hectares, supporting over 160 tenants with 45 new entrants in the last 10 years.

We are seeking to continue our long track record of helping establish new farming businesses in the county. With five initial tenancies of 10 years currently available from October 2025, successful applicants will have the opportunity to join the Estate's community and exercise their entrepreneurial abilities to develop a rural business on one of the leasehold farms listed below.

Recent new tenants have included businesses that seek to address the climate change challenge, with some exploring regenerative farming, which benefits carbon capture and biodiversity.

The properties come fully equipped with a house and various outbuildings, offering potential for cereal and root crop farming, as well as other diversified uses. Council Farm, Little Wilbraham; Larkhall & Block Farm, Fordham; Whitehall Farm, Littleport; Fen Bridge Farm, Cottenham and Chancel Farm, Wicken are the farms in question.

Community Navigators service renewed

The renewal of a service which helps residents remain independent and stay living in their own communities has been approved by Cambridgeshire County Council's Adults and Health Committee. 'Community Navigators', which has been running since 2012, provides personalised support to older people, residents aged 18 and over with disabilities, and their carers. A dedicated team of staff and volunteers from Care Network, which currently runs the service on behalf of the council, connects individuals to services, activities, and interventions in their local communities.

The support provided includes informing people about, and referring them to, relevant activities and services; helping people access information to answer questions and enable them to do things for themselves; supporting people to access activities that enable them to remain independent, safe, and well and reaching out to communities to engage with people who may be eligible for Adult Social Care services.

Service users can choose to receive support either in the community, at home, or over the phone. Over the last three years, Community Navigators has received nearly 9,000 referrals via the NHS, community and voluntary sector, and the county council's adult social care service. A further two-year contract is due to start on 1 October. <https://care-network.org.uk/community-navigators/>

Learning Disability Support

County Councillors have confirmed their commitment to ensuring ongoing support for people with learning disabilities and their families, following changes to how the council works with the NHS in Cambridgeshire. The Learning Disability Partnership (LDP), which has provided integrated health and social care support for adults with learning disabilities in Cambridgeshire, has been formally dissolved from 1 April 2025. Councillors are calling on local health partners to fully share information about the arrangements for NHS funded support from this month and to ensure complete continuity of care from the NHS for people currently receiving services, to match those commitments already made by the council.

The Council and the Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Integrated Care Board (ICB) are continuing discussions on how to work together to maintain services across the county. However, discussions are ongoing about payments owed for the services provided by the council, including historical debts. There still remains an opportunity to reach an agreement before entering formal legal mediation, and the council hopes for a constructive resolution that benefits all involved, particularly those who rely on these important services. County councillors have raised concerns about this service separation and the associated financial issues, which has been formally escalated as a corporate risk by the council. The council continues to press for a resolution.

Council of Sanctuary

Cambridgeshire County Council has received Council of Sanctuary status, reaffirming the council's commitment to creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for people seeking sanctuary in Cambridgeshire. The council is amongst one of the first county councils in the UK to receive this national award, which celebrates local authorities that work hard to demonstrate hospitality and a warm welcome to new arrivals in the area. The title was awarded by City of Sanctuary UK, a nationally coordinated network of organisations and services that support refugees and people seeking asylum. Cambridgeshire's wider commitment to being a place of welcome and inclusion.

Tree & Woodland Strategy

The County Council has adopted a Tree and Woodland Strategy and Action Plan. It has also approved the introduction of a 'woodland pledge' to increase canopy cover and safeguard existing woodland across the council's own landholdings. A target to increase woodland canopy to 13 per cent, and to increase the hedgerows to 323km, will be included in the Council's performance management framework and in the Climate Change and Environment Strategy.

Biodiversity Strategy

The Council has also adopted a Biodiversity Strategy with objectives and Action Plan. The key performance indicators within the action plan will form part of the Council's performance management framework. The objectives of the strategy are based on the Making Space for Nature review led by Sir John Lawton in 2010 which sets out the key principles for rebuilding nature in the UK and make it bigger, better, and more connected.

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! *****