

# South Cambridgeshire District Council – Harston & Comberton Ward

Comprising Barton, Coton, Comberton, Grantchester, Harlton,  
Harston, Haslingfield, Hauxton, and South Trumpington

## District Councillors' Monthly Report – July 2025

### District Councillor contact details

If you have any questions or concerns relating to SCDC services, please contact us using the details below. These are housing need, housing repairs for council tenants, planning, benefits, council tax, bin collection, environmental health issues etc.

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### Cost-of-living information

Visit <https://www.scambs.gov.uk/cost-of-living-support/> for information on: benefits, money and debt advice; help with energy and water bills; help for parents and families; help with food and health costs; help with phone bills; help with making your home warmer; Age UK handyperson service and; support if you are in distress.

### Community Hubs

Community Hubs offer residents somewhere to socialise, take part in new activities and to receive information on cost-of-living support and how to stay healthy and well.

Local Community Hubs include:

- Grantchester Communal Hall, Tabrum Close, Grantchester, Cambridge, CB3 9NW  
Opens: Friday, 10am – 12pm
- Toft Community Hub – Toft Methodist Chapel, High Street, Toft, Cambridge, CB23 2RL  
Opens: Monday, 10am – 12pm.

Find out more at: <https://www.scambs.gov.uk/cost-of-living-support/community-hubs>

### ***District Council helps residents secure benefits not being claimed***

South Cambridgeshire District Council has helped residents on lower incomes secure up to £3.6 million in benefits they're entitled to – but weren't claiming. The Council's innovative Low-Income Family Tracker (LIFT) software identifies households likely to be eligible for benefits but not claiming them. They are then sent a letter or text encouraging them to apply – with follow-up phone calls also made.

For example, the Council has helped over 110 households who were eligible for Pension Credit but weren't claiming it. Pension Credit is a benefit for people over State Pension age (currently 66) with low incomes. It provides extra money for living costs and can lead to other support. If they remain eligible for the rest of their lives, these households will receive up to £3.2 million in Pension Credit between them.

Households that applied for Pension Credit before last Christmas were also eligible for the Winter Fuel Payment following a change in eligibility criteria last year. This is a payment of either £200 or £300, depending on a person's age. The projected extra income this Winter Fuel Payment will bring new claimants across South Cambridgeshire, as long as they remain eligible for it, is just over £229,000.

You can find out more about this at <https://www.scambs.gov.uk/news/district-council-helps-residents-secure-millions-of-pounds-in-benefits-not-being-claimed>.

## **Expiry of postal votes**

Following a change to the law as part of the Elections Act, postal votes no longer apply indefinitely. They now expire after a period of three years.

Due to the timing of the reapplication legislation, around 15,000 South Cambridgeshire postal votes are due to expire at the end of January 2026.

The South Cambs Elections Team has started the process of contacting those residents whose postal vote will be expiring. They will explain to those voters that to keep their postal vote in place they will need to make a fresh application. They may contact affected electors via email, post or text message (or via a combination of means) to raise awareness of the changes and to ensure they have sufficient time to make a new application if they want to before next year's elections.

## **Housing**

### ***Energy boost for hundreds of South Cambridgeshire Council homes***

More than 600 Council homes in South Cambridgeshire are set to benefit from major energy efficiency upgrades – cutting tenants' energy bills. The project is part of a wider investment programme of around £19 million being delivered by South Cambridgeshire District Council in partnership with Mears. Almost half of the [funding is from the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero](#) under the Government's national Warm Homes Plan and South Cambridgeshire District Council will contribute £10 million from its Housing Revenue Account – consisting of Council house rents – to the improvements too.

A total of 610 properties will be upgraded with more than 2,300 individual energy efficiency measures. These include:

- **Cavity Wall Insulation:** 576 homes
- **Loft Insulation:** 397 homes
- **Air Source Heat Pumps:** 356 homes
- **Solar PV Panels:** 388 homes
- **Ventilation Improvements:** 596 homes
- **External Wall Insulation:** 14 homes

The upgrades aim to bring every home involved in the programme up to at least an EPC (Energy Performance Certificate) rating of C, helping tenants reduce their energy usage and lower their bills by over £200 a year.

Tenants whose homes are included in the programme will be contacted directly, once priority and location-based assessments and verification surveys have been completed. This phased approach will ensure the best value for money and the most efficient delivery of the improvements.

### ***Disabled residents in South Cambridgeshire set to benefit from increased funding for home adaptations***

Disabled residents and people with long-term health conditions can now access more support to live independently at home, thanks to increased funding. Some residents will be eligible for up to double the funding available compared to last year to make their homes safer and more comfortable with essential adaptations like ramps, hoists, or showers.

The changes were approved by the District Council as part of an update to the adaptations and repairs policy for Cambs Home Improvement Agency. The new policy includes enhanced assistance for low-income households to improve home energy efficiency.

Key changes include:

- Doubling funding available to an individual as a top up grant or loan from £15,000 to £30,000. The maximum available under a Disabled Facility Grant is £30,000, so for those with complex needs, this will increase the amount available to meet a person's assessed needs to a maximum of £60,000.
- Increasing the amount for repairs grants or loans to low-income homeowners from £10,000 to £15,000 enabling residents, with the support of Cambs HIA, to make their homes more energy efficient and improve any major disrepair. For homes which are assessed as failing the housing, health and safety rating system, this sum will increase to £25,000.
- Supporting those who need to self-fund adaptations to their homes in a comparable way to those eligible for the grants in recognition of the needs that people face irrespective of tenure.

The changes have been made possible with extra funding from the government, bringing the total available for home adaptations to more than £1.02 million for the coming year.

[Cambs HIA](#) is a strategic council partnership operating across South Cambridgeshire, Cambridge City and Huntingdonshire for thirteen years. Its primary role is to work collaboratively with occupational therapists to design and support adaptations that enable people with long term health conditions to safely and, as independently as possible, remain in their own home. The increased support is outlined in the District Council's [Adaptations and Repairs Policy](#). To find out more or apply, visit [www.cambshia.org](http://www.cambshia.org) call 01954 713330 or email [hia@cambshia.org](mailto:hia@cambshia.org)

## Local Government Reorganisation

### ***Three options for new unitary councils announced***

Council leaders have announced three preferred options for creating new unitary councils across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. This is in response to a national government requirement to replace the current district, county and city councils with simpler unitary councils, instead of two tiers of local government.

From April 2028, rather than dealing with separate county, city, and district authorities, residents will access all services—from road maintenance and bin collections to education, planning, social housing, social care, and support with benefits—through a unitary council.

Parish and town councils will not be affected and will continue to operate as they do now, serving your local communities.

In a joint statement, the leaders of Cambridgeshire County Council, Peterborough City Council, Cambridge City Council, East Cambridgeshire District Council, Fenland District Council, Huntingdonshire District Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council. have said: "As Council leaders we are working collaboratively in the best interest of residents and businesses across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. The Government's reorganisation agenda has raised some challenging issues for us all which we have been working through collectively over the last few months. We still have outstanding questions and issues which have yet to be resolved.

"However, we agree that there are currently three options that appear to be the most financially viable based on the Government's criteria. These options are based on existing authority boundaries and are being further developed to be submitted to Government by late November. The three options each contain two new unitary councils that would in future cover the entire Cambridgeshire and Peterborough area and replace all existing local authorities:

- **Proposal A - A North-West/South-East Option**  
Unitary 1: Peterborough City Council, Huntingdonshire and Fenland District Councils - along with County Council functions.  
Unitary 2: Cambridge City Council, East Cambridgeshire and South Cambridgeshire District Councils - along with County Council functions.
- **Proposal B - A North/South Option**  
Unitary 1: Peterborough City Council, East Cambridgeshire, Fenland and Huntingdonshire District Councils - along with County Council functions.  
Unitary 2: Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District - along with County Council functions.
- **Proposal C - An East/West Option**  
Unitary 1: Peterborough City Council, East Cambridgeshire and Fenland District Councils - along with County Council functions.  
Unitary 2: Cambridge City Council, Huntingdonshire and South Cambridgeshire District Councils- along with County Council functions.

"We recognise each option has different strengths and different implications for services, our local communities, and businesses. We are taking an evidence-based approach, inevitably the different needs and local identities of our areas will have a significant impact on the preference of our own councils, and we must respect that. We encourage residents, our partner agencies and businesses to feed into this process by sharing what matters most to them through an engagement exercise being launched next week.

"We also want to take this opportunity to reassure residents that services will not be affected, and to praise the collective local government workforce across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough for their continued efforts on behalf of our communities during this period of change. We appreciate that reorganisation may create some uncertainty for them which we will work with Government to do our best to mitigate."

***Have your say on plans for the future of local councils***

Communities across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough are being given an opportunity to have their say on a once in a generation opportunity to shape the future of local government.

An [engagement survey](#) was launched on Thursday 19th June and focus groups are being run in June and July so people can help inform the biggest shake-up of local government since the 1970s.

Council leaders want to hear the views of residents, businesses and local stakeholders like Town and Parish councils and community groups, to inform the business cases being developed for each of these proposals. Those business cases will then be submitted to the government in November. The final decisions on which new local government structures are put into place in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough will ultimately be made by national government.

The engagement focuses on the connections that people feel they have to different areas; where they work, socialise or get healthcare, for example. It also covers what priorities they think new unitary authorities should have and what is important to them when it comes to dealing with local government.

The survey closes at the end of Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> July. Hard copies will be available at council offices and in all libraries.

## Planning

### ***Greater Cambridge Shared Planning celebrates win for biodiversity innovation***

Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service (GCSP) has been awarded the 'Planning for the Natural Environment Award' at the national Planning Awards 2025. The award celebrates its approach to reversing biodiversity loss caused through development.

In 2022, GCSP's Natural Environment Team recognised the imminent need to provide reliable solutions for developers to offset environmental damage through development. They updated the guidance in their Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) in June 2022, which included the emerging Environment Act legislation changes requiring any new developments to improve nature in the area by at least 10%. The changes ensured new projects actively benefitted local wildlife and green spaces through the planning system. In 2023/24, GCSP took this further by enabling the creation of a network of new Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) habitat banks across the Greater Cambridge area. They worked in partnership with Cambridgeshire County Council, The Wildlife Trust, Cambridge Past, Present and Future, and others, to identify sites where habitats could be created or enhanced. This leap of faith placed Greater Cambridge ahead of the curve nationally and positioned them as early adopters of BNG offsite initiatives.

Designated areas of land allow developers to offset the environmental impact of their projects in a way that benefits nature long-term. Instead of replacing lost biodiversity directly on the development site, which is often not possible, developers instead pay for the creation and maintenance of habitat elsewhere in the area. Each habitat bank must legally be monitored and managed over the next 30 years.

### ***Greater Cambridge Planning Service honoured for Excellence in Regional Planning***

The Greater Cambridge Shared Planning (GCSP) Service has been crowned Planning Authority of the Year – East of England at the prestigious Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) Awards for Planning Excellence. This recognition celebrates GCSP's outstanding commitment to innovation, inclusivity, and excellence in planning.

Formed in 2018 as a partnership between Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council, the team serve as the Local Planning Authority for the Greater Cambridge area. The service has 160 colleagues, of which 32 are Chartered RTPI members, and 21 are working towards Chartered membership. The service processes over 7,000 planning applications annually and has achieved an accreditation for its commitment to quality and continuous improvement.

Among the highlights of GCSP's award-winning work:

- Youth Engagement Service (YES): A nationally recognised programme giving young people a voice in planning and design, recently winning the Thornton Education Trust's Social Value Award.
- Biodiversity Net Gain Leadership: GCSP proactively secured over 200 hectares of habitat for biodiversity offsetting, ahead of national policy requirements. This project recently won the 'Planning for the Natural Environment Award' at the Planning Awards 2025.
- Inclusive Planning: Through initiatives like the Cambridge Neighbourhoods Design Code, GCSP is tackling inequality and improving access to green spaces in some of the region's most deprived areas.
- Apprenticeship and Talent Development: A structured programme supporting future planners through hands-on experience and academic study, ensuring a strong pipeline of planning professionals.

For more information about the awards, visit: [RTPI | East of England Awards for Planning Excellence](#).

### **Cambridgeshire Local Area Energy Plan**

The Cambridgeshire local authorities are developing a **Local Area Energy Plan (LAEP)** for our area. This will help ensure that the right energy infrastructure is in place to support Cambridgeshire's transition to a low carbon place to live, work and thrive. Between now and 14 July, they are seeking input from as many businesses, organisations, and community groups operating in Cambridgeshire as possible to ensure their voices are heard and their needs are met.

The LAEP will set out the energy infrastructure requirements for current and future growth across the County, and how we can deliver this growth in the lowest carbon way. The Plan will be used to ensure Cambridgeshire's businesses, communities, and organisations have a voice in influencing energy infrastructure investment in our area. Learn more, attend one of their webinars and complete the survey here: [www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/LAEP](http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/LAEP)

### **Future Homes Standard announced**

On 6th June the government announced the [publication of the Future Homes Standard this autumn and have confirmed that solar panels will be included](#), leading to installation on the vast majority of new build homes. Under proposed changes, new homes will also have low-carbon heating, such as heat pumps. To deliver these aims, the proposed Future Homes Standard would see building regulations amended to explicitly promote solar, subject to practical limits with flexibility in place for new homes surrounded by trees or with lots of shade overhead.

### **National consultation on proposals to modernise planning committees**

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) is currently consulting on its proposals to modernise planning committees. The key points under consideration are:

- Types of planning decisions that will be made by officers under delegated powers or made by planning committees.
  - The proposals include all minor commercial developments (up to 1000 square meters of floor space or a site of less than 1 hectare) and all minor residential developments (up to 9 dwellings) always being decided by officers. As part of the consultation the government is asking if there are exceptional circumstances where these minor types of developments might be brought to planning committee. They are also asking if there are circumstances where medium residential developments of 10 to 49 dwellings should always be decided by officers rather than sometimes by planning committee. These proposals are likely to reduce the number of applications that would be considered at planning committee.
  - The proposals include a gateway test for the chief planner and chair of the planning committee to decide if larger developments should be considered at planning committee and asks for views on it.
  - The government asks if some other types of applications should always be delegated to officers or have the option of consideration at planning committee meetings. These include tree preservation orders, listed building consent and advertisement control.
- Size and composition of planning committees
  - It is proposed to limit the size of planning committees to a maximum of 11 members (this is the size of the planning committee at South Cambridgeshire District Council; following local government reorganisation this would probably mean the same size committee covering proposals over a larger area so fewer councillors making those decisions). The government asks if this size seems right and if there should be a minimum size.

- Mandatory training for planning committee members
  - The government is considering either a national certification scheme which would be procured by MHCLG and involve an online test for certification or a local based approach where the local planning authority provides certification. (At South Cambridgeshire District Council all councillors must attend annual training to be able to take part in planning committee and there are regular briefings on particular relevant topics e.g. self and custom build housing and biodiversity net gain.)
- Reducing the threshold to assess quality of decision making
  - Currently planning authorities are expected to have no more than 10% of decisions overturned at appeal. The government is asking if that should be lowered to 5%.

You can read the full details of the proposals at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/reform-of-planning-committees-technical-consultation/reform-of-planning-committees-technical-consultation>. You can respond to the consultation up to the 23<sup>rd</sup> July at: <https://consult.communities.gov.uk/planning/reform-of-planning-committees-technical-consultati/>.

### ***National consultation on size thresholds of developments***

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) is currently consulting on its proposals to switch from defining minor and major development to minor, medium and major development. The key points under consideration are:

- Simplifying the planning process for minor residential development (up to 9 dwellings)
  - This could include a full exemption from biodiversity net gain requirements, retaining the exemption from affordable housing contributions, retaining the exemption from the proposed Building Safety Levy (BSL; fund to help the remediation of high-rise structures with fire safety defects), reducing validation requirements when submitting the planning application, requiring that all applications are decided by officers (see above), and reducing the number of statutory consultees during the consultation process.
  - Further streamline the planning process for very small sites of less than 0.1 hectare.
- Introducing a medium residential development category of 10-49 homes or up to 1 hectare and simplifying the planning process relative to major developments by:
  - Considering simplifying biodiversity net gain requirements, potentially exempting these sites from the BSL, exempting these sites from the government's proposed build out transparency proposals (aims to ensure developers build out at the rate they've agreed with the local authority), having some of these applications always decided by officers (see above), reducing validation requirements when submitting the planning application, reducing the number of statutory consultees during the consultation process, and allowing Permission in Principle applications.

You can read the proposals at: [Planning Reform Working Paper: Reforming Site Thresholds - GOV.UK](#). You can respond to the consultation up to the 9<sup>th</sup> July at: [Planning Reform Working Paper: Reforming Site Thresholds - Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government - Citizen Space](#).

## **Residents feature on council bin lorries to give recycling advice**

The 'Let's Waste Less' campaign launched by Greater Cambridge Shared Waste Service (GCSWS) aims to shine a light on good recycling habits including rinsing out tins or not putting non-recyclable items like polystyrene into recycling bins.

Nearly a dozen volunteers from Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire took part, attending photo-shoots and sharing the actions they take which help to reduce waste or aid recycling. As part of the campaign, volunteers have been featured on the side of nine new bin lorries to take their messages all around Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire.

Recent research on climate action shows that people usually underestimate how many other people care about environmental issues, and this affects how much action they are willing to take.

GCSWS is inviting all residents to get involved with the campaign to further highlight the role of collective action, with a chance to win a prize. Tell us what you do to waste less or make a pledge to take further action at [www.scambs.gov.uk/letswasteless](http://www.scambs.gov.uk/letswasteless) and you'll be entered into a prize draw to win one of three £50 vouchers for a supermarket, Cambridge Junction or Cambridge Corn Exchange.

## **Allotment Improvement Grant is open for applications**

The grant provides up to £10,000 in funding to support projects that enhance the productivity, sustainability, and social value of allotment spaces. Key priorities include:

- Improving water access through reliable connections and rainwater harvesting
- Implementing pest control measures, such as fencing
- Upgrading facilities such as waterless toilets
- Delivering measurable social benefits, such as promoting mental well-being, outdoor activity, and community engagement.

Other allotment improvements will also be considered, ensuring that allotments remain thriving, inclusive spaces for all. For more information, visit the <https://www.scambs.gov.uk/community-and-people/community-action/allotment-improvement-grant>.

## **District Council launches new grant to get South Cambridgeshire active**

New funding will support adults across South Cambridgeshire to lead more active and healthier lifestyles. The Let's Get South Cambridgeshire Active Grant aims to help kickstart new initiatives and increase opportunities for sports and physical activity, particularly within rural communities.

Up to £500 can be applied for to support the creation or expansion of physical activity sessions, sports clubs, or fitness classes. The funding can be used towards venue hire, staff training or qualifications, marketing, and equipment purchases.

Eligible applicants for this grant include small fitness businesses or entrepreneurs that can deliver physical activity sessions, or health and wellbeing sessions. Primary Care Networks, community and voluntary groups can also apply.

Applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis and the fund will remain open until all monies are allocated, but it is encouraged to get applications in promptly.

For more information on funding criteria and how to apply, visit:

<https://www.scambs.gov.uk/health-and-wellbeing/lets-get-south-cambridgeshire-active-grant> or contact Ben Truett, Physical Activity Locality Co-ordinator [Ben.Truett@scambs.gov.uk](mailto:Ben.Truett@scambs.gov.uk)