South Cambridgeshire District Council – Harston & Comberton Ward

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

District Councillors' Monthly Report – October 2026

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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Meeting to discuss community "asks" of EWR Co – Tues 10th November

EWR Co are continuing to develop their plans for East West Rail (EWR), and we know that their works will have a significant impact on our villages. Part of their requirements is to leave a legacy of community benefit, and we'd welcome the view of residents on what they can provide our communities. We'll be holding a community meeting at 8pm Tues 10th November at Haslingfield Village Hall to get your views on what EWR can fund for our communities.

- Do you have ideas that you'd like to put forward for the EWR Community Benefit Fund?
- Do you think that EWR Co. should provide compensation for its impacts for the community to decide how to use? If so, how could we use that funding?

We know that if it proceeds as planned, EWR is going to have huge impacts on Haslingfield and Harlton and that there has been a lot of work by many in the villages to try to stop EWR, change the route, and to make other changes to reduce the impacts. The aim of this meeting is to think about if there are any opportunities available to help offset the harms and bring some benefit to our villages. We would then work to put any ideas forward to EWR using all of the channels available to us.

We appreciate that there are numerous concerns about the EWR proposal and the impacts it will have during and after construction. We are very willing to hear those concerns, but would like to keep this meeting focused on what asks we can make of EWR for community benefit and ensure we make the most of their requirements around funding legacy projects.

We hope to see many of you there. If you have any questions, please feel free to get in touch with us ahead of the meeting.

Cost-of-living information

Visit https://www.scambs.gov.uk/cost-of-living-support/ for: advice and support with money; help with food costs; money and debt advice; help with energy and water bills; help with phone bill costs; employment support through Work Well; and information on foodbanks.

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.

Find out more at: https://www.scambs.gov.uk/community-and-people/community-hubs.

Northstowe Money Matters Café with Blossomify

A new weekly Money Matters Café at the Northstowe Unity Centre every Tuesday, 5pm–6pm. A relaxed, friendly space where parents, carers and residents can simply drop in, enjoy free tea, coffee and snacks, play a board game, meet others and pick up useful money-saving ideas along the way. Each week will have a different theme, with practical conversations around things like budgeting, smart shopping, meal planning, energy costs, saving and protecting yourself from fraud and scams.

Find out more at: https://blossomify.org/money-matters-cafe/.

Environment

6 Free Trees – Apply by 31st October 2026

The popular Six Free Trees initiative is returning for its sixth year, offering parish and town councils the opportunity to claim either six small trees (whips) or one larger pot-grown tree from a selection of native species.

The trees are supplied with stakes, ties and biodegradable tree spirals to help them establish successfully. Additionally, this year a mulch mat will be added to every order, and an optional watering system for bigger trees to help them stay hydrated in dry and hot conditions.

Parish and town councils interested in applying can find further information and application details on the Council's Six Free Trees webpage.

£1 Million Awarded Through Zero Carbon Communities Grants

This year's Zero Carbon Communities Grants have now been awarded, with £171,450 awarded across 14 local groups around the district, from a total of 35 applications. This means that, since the ZCC grant was established in 2019, it has provided a total of £1,026,608 to community groups that are working to tackle the climate and nature emergency on a local level.

The scheme was heavily oversubscribed and so, unfortunately, many high scoring projects did not receive funding this time. The total funding requested was £427,080.50, which far exceeded the total available of £152,000, even with one of the applicants (Cambridge Sustainable Food) funded separately as their project aligned with an action in SCDC's Climate and Nature Strategy. Individual, tailored feedback will be offered to all unsuccessful applicants to help with future grant applications.

This year's highest grant award went to Cambridge Sustainable Food CIC, which received £19,457 to establish a South Cambridgeshire Sustainable Food Partnership. The initiative will bring together organisations and communities to develop a climate-focused food action plan, promoting healthier and more sustainable food systems while encouraging long-term behaviour change.

Additional projects that have received funding this time are:

- **Cambridge Carbon Footprint (Repair Café) - £15,000**
  Cambridge Carbon Footprint will use the grant to strengthen and expand South Cambridgeshire's Repair Café network by supporting existing groups and helping establish new ones. The project will encourage repair and reuse, reduce waste and provide residents with opportunities to engage in wider sustainability initiatives.
- **Cambridge Carbon Footprint (Open Eco Homes) - £15,000**
  Cambridge Carbon Footprint will deliver its Open Eco Homes programme, featuring home tours, thermal imaging, community pilots and talks on topics including retrofit, energy efficiency and home improvements. The project aims to help residents make informed choices about reducing their carbon footprint at home.

- **The Liberation Cycle - £18,000**
  This Steeple Morden-based charity refurbishes unwanted and discarded bicycles and redistributes them to people experiencing transport poverty. The grant will support bike collections, refurbishments, maintenance training and repair workshops, helping more residents access sustainable, affordable transport.
- **Cam Valley Forum (CVF) - £6,000**
  The grant will fund an educational film to raise awareness of water conservation and local water challenges, and present practical solutions. The aim is to help protect the River Cam and its tributaries, for the benefit of the local community and the environment.
- **Cambridge Past, Present and Future - £11,900**
  The project will help create eight acres of new habitat at Coton Reserve as part of an innovative wetland project with Anglian Water. The scheme will improve water quality, support biodiversity and demonstrate nature-based solutions to environmental challenges.
- **Cambridge Retrofit Hub Charitable Community Benefit Society Ltd - £5,171.83**
  The grant will support retrofit plans for village halls, helping communities reduce energy use and carbon emissions.
- **Wysing Arts Centre - £15,000**
  Wysing Arts Centre, based near Bourn, will use the grant to improve the energy efficiency of its site by insulating and re-glazing three buildings used as artists' studios, learning spaces and a recording studio. The project will reduce carbon emissions and energy costs, helping the charity reinvest savings into free workshops, skills development opportunities and projects for local young people.

- **Fenland Squash Club, known as Swavesey Squash Club - £5,000**
  Swavesey Squash Club will install a solar panel system at its community sports facility, helping to reduce energy costs and carbon emissions. Savings will be reinvested into keeping the club affordable and accessible while supporting activities for members of all ages and abilities.
- **Cambourne Town Council - £15,550**
  Cambourne Town Council will install solar panels and battery storage at the Greenbank community building, which is being transformed into a hub for Scouts, Guides, community groups and residents.
- **Horningsea Parish Council - £5,540.17**
  The Parish Council will restore around 85 metres of community hedgerow, improving biodiversity, carbon storage and wildlife habitats.
- **Orchard Park Community Council - £18,000**
  The community centre will receive energy-efficiency upgrades, including low-carbon heating and ventilation systems to replace a gas fired boiler. This will improve usability and enable cost savings to be used for community activities.
- **Comberton Village Institute Trust - £9,338**
  The grant will fund solar panels and battery storage at Comberton Village Hall to reduce reliance on grid electricity.
- **Harston Village Hall Trust - £12,500**
  Harston Village Hall Trust will install solar panels and battery storage to generate renewable energy for the community hall. The project is expected to meet most of the building's electricity needs, helping keep the hall affordable and reducing its environmental impact.

Communities

Pension Credit campaign

156 letters have been sent to South Cambridgeshire residents who are eligible for, but not claiming, Pension Credit. This is part of South Cambridgeshire District Council's work to help tackle poverty using the Low-Income Family Tracker (also known as LIFT) to target help and support, including by letting people know when they are eligible for specific benefits.

The Pension Credit campaign is a countywide initiative. Following the success of South Cambridgeshire's LIFT Programme, Cambridgeshire County Council have funded a LIFT Programme across all five District and City Councils using the Crisis and Resilience Fund (CRF). This countywide Pension Credit campaign marks the first LIFT campaign run in unison across Cambridgeshire, with over 700 households contacted across the county.

This initiative has been covered by the BBC at: Hundreds in Cambridgeshire urged to take unclaimed pension credit - BBC News

National award recognises partnership work tackling poverty

Teams from South Cambridgeshire District Council and Cambridgeshire County Council are celebrating after winning a national award for their work helping residents access vital support. The councils were named winners of the Excellence in Partnership Working (The Fight Against Poverty) at the Institute of Revenues, Rating and Valuation (IRRV) Performance Awards 2026.

The award recognises the success of the joint initiative delivered through the Low-Income Family Tracker (LIFT) Programme, which uses data to identify residents who may be entitled to support but are not currently claiming it.

The project helped more than 80 children access free school meals that they were eligible for but had not previously been receiving. This secured £1 million of additional funding for local schools in the process. More details of the project can be found here.

Community Safety Partnership – New Operational Plan agreed

New proposals to keep South Cambridgeshire communities safe include work to prevent exploitation, improve support for those affected by domestic abuse, tackle anti-social behaviour and reduce shoplifting.

The priorities are all in the 2026-27 Operational Plan for the South Cambs Community Safety Partnership (CSP) which was agreed by Cabinet on 29th September.

While South Cambridgeshire is widely regarded as a safe place to live, partners are committed to ensuring residents feel even safer. The proposed plan includes:

- support for people affected by domestic abuse and sexual violence
- targeted work to prevent young people becoming involved in exploitation or serious violence
- action to address anti-social behaviour hotspots
- joint initiatives with retailers and police to reduce shoplifting
- awareness campaigns in schools and communities.

The plan also includes continued work to combat fraud, scams and cybercrime, reduce substance misuse and reoffending, support vulnerable residents, and help communities identify and respond to emerging local concerns before problems escalate.

The proposals have been informed by analysis of local crime and community safety data, alongside intelligence and insights from partners. Targeted work is expected in several areas where data suggests extra support may be needed, including Cambourne, Northstowe, Milton and Waterbeach, Histon and Impington, and Fen Ditton and Fulbourn.

The South Cambs Community Safety Partnership brings together partners responsible for community safety, including South Cambridgeshire District Council, the police, health services, probation, Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service, Cambridgeshire County Council and voluntary and community sector organisations. Together, they work to reduce crime, disorder, substance misuse and reoffending, while helping residents feel safe in their communities.

Recently, the CSP has worked to implement Public Space Protection Orders at the Milton and Babraham Road Park and Ride sites to combat anti-social driving issues. It also ran a series of court experience days to provide knife crime and criminal justice system awareness to year nine students – with 120 young people attending during the last year and more events planned this year. Elsewhere, following research into effective interventions for young people, the CSP partnered with Public Health to contribute funding to the Skill Mill project - which aims to support young people away from offending and into training or employment.

As the accountable body for the Partnership, South Cambridgeshire District Council plays a leading role in coordinating its work. It oversees governance arrangements, commissions an annual assessment to identify priorities, coordinates partnership activities and supports a dedicated Community Safety Partnership Project Officer, funded by Cambridgeshire's Police and Crime Commissioner, who works with residents and communities to address local concerns. The Council also helps ensure community safety considerations are reflected in wider work – such as helping design safer new communities as the district grows.

The operational plan is available as part of the agenda for the Cabinet meeting on Tuesday 29 September.

Council allocates £180,000 to help residents facing financial hardship

Plans to allocate £180,000 to help low-income households across South Cambridgeshire who are facing financial hardship have been agreed. The package of targeted support - which will also be used to help households build longer-term financial resilience - was outlined at the South Cambridgeshire District Council Cabinet meeting on 29th September.

The funding comes from the new Crisis and Resilience Fund, a national Government scheme through the Department for Work and Pensions and held locally by Cambridgeshire County Council. Through the programme, Cambridgeshire County Council allocated £180,000 to South Cambridgeshire District Council for local projects during 2026/27.

The funding will support a range of initiatives across South Cambridgeshire, including:

- Baby boxes containing essential items for newborns in low-income households.
- Emergency supermarket vouchers for residents facing crisis situations.
- Travel support to help people get to healthcare, employment, training and essential services.
- Debt reduction schemes linked to financial advice and income maximisation support.
- Specialist disability benefit advice appointments.
- Energy prepayment meter vouchers to help prevent households being cut off from their gas or electricity supply during winter.
- A savings incentive scheme to encourage residents to build financial resilience through the Government's Help to Save programme.

The plans were developed using local knowledge, experiences and evidence, including discussions with residents about the challenges faced by lower-income households across the district. Data held by the Council was also used, offering a further layer of insight to better target those who need it most. Further details about the schemes, including eligibility criteria and how residents can access support, will be confirmed soon.

Community policing engagement meeting
The South Cambs Neighbourhood Policing team run a three-monthly engagement meeting online. The next meeting is at 7-8 pm on Wednesday 4th November 2026. If you'd like to attend to hear about current work and priorities, as well as ask any questions, please register for the meeting at: https://events.teams.microsoft.com/event/53cbe591-63e5-4fcc-b792-57418819a8cd@a3c59d1b-b8f1-4299-9d6a-39ad8f570422?source=copyLinkLegacyShareLinkDialog

Future dates for this meeting are always advertised on the Police website in the South Cambridgeshire team's area, this also includes upcoming local meetings they are running, such as coffee with a cop. – South Cambridgeshire | Your area | Cambridgeshire Constabulary

Community Policing Survey
The Neighbourhood Policing team also have a continuous survey running, which helps feed into their local priority setting. This is not to share details of incidents or the request for police attendance, but to share any concerns you may have or may have heard.

The survey is available at: Community Policing Survey

Planning

New online tool helps residents judge whether they need planning permission
"Do I Need Planning Permission?" is an online tool to help householders and those considering small-scale developments understand whether planning permission may be needed for their building works or change of use. It can also identify planning restrictions that may affect a property, such as being a listed building or within a conservation area.

The tool provides guidance through a series of structured questions. Results are for guidance only and do not constitute an official planning decision or legal advice, and users are advised to apply for a Lawful Development Certificate before starting work.

If you require a formal decision as to whether changes of use or building works, proposed or existing, are lawful you should apply for a Lawful Development Certificate at www.planningportal.co.uk/applications.

Five-year housing land supply
A housing trajectory is used by Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire District councils to calculate their housing land supply and to demonstrate that anticipated housing delivery will meet or exceed their housing requirement.

The Greater Cambridge housing trajectory and housing land supply calculations are reviewed annually, and it is published in April. The Greater Cambridge Housing Trajectory and Housing Land Supply Report (April 2026) concluded that the two councils jointly had 5.6 years of housing land supply for the 2026-2031 period.

However, following the publication of the new National Planning Policy Framework and Housing Delivery Test results in August 2026, and in order to adopt a consistent approach to the monitoring of housing delivery in Greater Cambridge, the Greater Cambridge Planning Service has published an Addendum that calculates the five-year housing land supply for Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire individually.

The Addendum to the Greater Cambridge Housing Trajectory and Housing Land Supply Report (September 2026) concludes that:

- Cambridge has 2.72 years of housing land supply for 2026-2031, and
- South Cambridgeshire has 7.83 years of housing land supply for 2026-2031.

These figures will be applied when considering development proposals against the development plan and NPPF 2026 national decision-making policies.

Government changes to the planning process – from 31st October 2026

The government is bringing in a mandatory *National Scheme of Delegation* from the 31st October 2026, which means many more planning applications will be decided by officers and so conversely, many fewer planning applications will be decided by planning committee.

The key changes are:

- **End of Ward Call-Ins**: Powers for individual ward councillors and parish councils to "call in" applications to planning committee for determination will no longer be permissible.
- **Representation Triggers**: The threshold for consideration by the Delegation Panel for Planning Committee referral based on the number of representations received (currently 5 representations) will be removed.
- **Definition of Schedule 1 Applications**: These include householder applications, minor residential schemes (up to 9 dwellings), minor commercial development (Class E), discharge of conditions, certificates of lawfulness, non-material amendments and most prior approval applications. These must be delegated to planning officers for determination. The Planning Committee no longer has the authority to decide these cases.
- **Definition of Schedule 2 Applications**: These include major residential, major commercial, industrial and mixed-use development, and proposals affecting heritage assets and applications that raise significant policy, environmental or community considerations. The category also includes certain development proposals involving the local authority's own interests. These are considered to be more complex applications. There is still a presumption that these will be determined by officers, but they may be referred to the Planning Committee, if they pass the new 'Gateway Test'.

More information on this is available in the Planning Committee report at: https://scambs.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s144623/NSOD%20Committee%20report%201.pdf.

Nearly £12 million in efficiencies delivered

Almost £12 million in efficiencies has been delivered by South Cambridgeshire District Council while improving resident access to services and modernising the way it works. The savings have come from the Council's five-year Transformation Programme and includes 24/7 access to information and services through a redesigned website, online forms, and the development of SAM - the Council's AI assistant for webchat and telephone enquiries. There is also now a single 'Golden Number' for residents contacting the Council.

While new technology has played a key role in the programme, the Council has remained committed to ensuring services are accessible to everyone. Residents can still access high-quality support by telephone or in person - with the Contact Centre at South Cambs Hall in Cambourne remaining at the heart of customer service.

Cllr Natalie Warren Green, Lead Cabinet Member for Resources for South Cambridgeshire District Council, said: "We have delivered major improvements, including developing more than 200 online forms. More than 48,000 online forms were submitted by residents in the last nine months alone. The programme has modernised the way the Council works, made it easier for residents to access services and ensured we are making the best possible use of public money. Balance has been maintained for those who would rather not contact us online too, with residents who don't use the internet telling me that they are pleased to be able to phone the council and speak to a person, or to pop into the offices."

The Transformation Programme was established in 2021 to ensure the Council continued delivering high-quality services despite rising demand and reduced central Government funding. The recent report to Cabinet shows the programme has generated efficiencies worth around £11.9 million, with more than £8.2 million directly benefiting the District Council and the rest is shared with Cambridge City Council through some joint services. Financial benefits were also delivered via annual salary savings through automation and process redesign, and increased income from commercial waste services.

Bus franchising consultation – have your say before 27th October 2026

The Combined Authority has launched a supplementary consultation on proposed changes to how bus franchising would be introduced across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. The consultation focuses on a revised, phased approach to implementation, including changes to the proposed timetable, service contracts, and arrangements for buses and depots. The consultation will help the Combined Authority understand the potential impacts of the revised approach, including any risks, unintended consequences and implications for passengers and communities across the region.

The consultation is based on the changes to franchising proposed in the Mayor's Independent Review that was completed in late January 2026 and included the implications of the decision to freeze the Mayoral Precept. The report concluded that the original target date of launching franchised bus services in September 2027 was no longer considered practical, given affordability constraints, depot delivery timescales and data limitations. Instead, it proposed network stabilisation through direct awards and service permits from 2027 (enabled by the Bus Services Act 2025), with the first tendered franchise lot (focused on currently tendered/busway services) launching in early-to-mid 2028, a second procurement round following the Peterborough depot's readiness with a franchise lot launch in 2029, and the Cambridge lots following once a depot solution is secured, targeting full rollout by 2030.

The consultation closes at 5pm on Tuesday 27th October 2026. Further information and consultation documents are available at: https://cpca-yourvoice.co.uk/bus-franchising-consultation-2/.

Cambourne to Cambridge busway/active travel route approved by the Secretary of State

On the 8th September the Government approved the Cambourne to Cambridge busway and active travel route, intended to connect Cambourne, Bourn Airfield (recently renamed High Bourn), Hardwick, Coton and Cambridge. The scheme will also include a 2,000-space travel hub at Scotland Farm. The Secretary of State's decision letter, the habitats regulations assessment, the busway order and the inspectors' report are available at: Cambourne to Cambridge guided busway: Transport and Works Act order - GOV.UK

Following the Secretary of State's decision, Cambridgeshire County Council will begin the procurement process, with contractors expected to be appointed next year to complete the detailed design. During this time further engagement with parish councils, landowners and other key stakeholders will take place to help shape the final design of the scheme. Main construction will follow the detailed design phase although some preparatory works may begin earlier. The Greater Cambridge Partnership's news release is available at: https://www.greatercambridge.org.uk/news/cambourne-to-cambridge-route-approved.

Private Rented Housing – new requirement to register properties

A new national register will require landlords to record every rental property under the Renters' Rights Act. The scheme aims to improve transparency and strengthen local enforcement to help tackle poor housing conditions and support better outcomes for tenants.

In Cambridgeshire, registration is expected from 15th January 2027 to 14th April 2027, and will cost £65 per property annually. Landlords must provide tenancy, rent, and safety documentation, including gas, electrical, and EPC records.

The register will be managed nationally by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). Councils will have access to a dedicated system to verify landlord and property information and will be able to take enforcement action where registration requirements are not met. Penalties may be up to £7,000 for an initial breach and up to £40,000 or prosecution for repeat offences.

Hospitality Grant Scheme

On 2 September, the government announced that a new £10 million three-year Hospitality Grant Scheme has launched for applications. Funding will be invested into projects that help get new hospitality ventures off the ground, bring vacant premises into use, or support training programmes that help people develop their skills and confidence.

A third of the grant funding (£3 million) has been specifically earmarked to support Pub is The Hub – an independent non-profit organisation helping pubs in rural and deprived areas to diversify their services and activities. This includes adding village stores, community cafes, play areas and arts and crafts activities, enabling pubs to expand their role.

Guidance and registration are available on GOV.UK, with applications open until 13th October.

New reforms to bring more long-term empty homes back into use

On the 27th September, MHCLG announced reforms to Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMOs), supporting councils to bring long-term empty homes back into use and helping ensure existing housing stock is used more effectively. EDMOs allow councils to take over the management of long-term empty homes and return them to occupation for up to seven years while ownership remains with the property owner. The changes will reduce the period a property must be empty before it becomes eligible for an EDMO from two years to six months, allowing councils to act sooner where homes have been left vacant and preventing properties from falling into serious disrepair. The reforms will also streamline the application process by removing evidential requirements relating to issues such as anti-social behaviour or community support for intervention, making it simpler for local authorities to seek an EDMO through the Residential Property Tribunal. The government is also exploring further changes to strengthen the EDMO regime and support councils to use the powers more effectively.

Upcoming national resilience campaign

Later this year, the Government will launch a national campaign detailing practical steps households can take to prepare for everyday emergencies. This campaign builds on the existing 'Prepare' website, updating advice to make it highly visible and easy to follow. It will include simple, low cost and free actions, such as preparing basic household items or joining the Priority Services Register, which helps vulnerable households to get help quicker in the event of electricity, water or gas outages.

The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Local Resilience Forum will be coordinating the local response to the campaign and sharing it with all partner agencies.