**District Councillors’ Report for Dry Drayton Parish Council March 2024**

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**South Cambridgeshire District Council (SCDC) - Full Council Meeting on 27th February 2024**

Full Council met on Tuesday afternoon, 27th February 2024 for what turned out to be a marathon session of six hours. This is the annual budget meeting , so budget considerations took up most of the time, but there were also questions raised and three motions discussed and approved.

*Council voted to approve Budgets and Business Plan*

Unlike many other councils, SCDC is on a very sound financial footing. Well-targeted commercial investments bring in around £7M per year, which mitigates the huge cut in Government support that all councils have endured in recent years. If it were not for the threat of the Government’s Fair Funding Review, which threatens to strip district councils of business tax revenue and give it to bigger, unitary councils, SCDC would have a projected surplus all the way to 2029.

In regard to Council Tax, SCDC remains one of the lowest taxing authorities in the country, with a £5 per year increase – 42p a month - for the average band D home, equivalent to a below inflation rise of around 3%. There are three parish councils in South Cambs that have a bigger council precept than SCDC.

The Council Tax relief threshold has been increased in line with inflation so that people on the lowest incomes can continue to claim. SCDC is one of the few councils offering up to 100% relief for those residents in most need.

Two more Environmental Enforcement Officers (Envirocrime) are being employed to tackle the increasing problem of fly-tipping and two new posts created for highways litter-picking.

We’re also adding more staff support to the Zero Carbon Communities Grant scheme – so it should be easier than before for parishes to get support from SCDC on projects to help save energy or generate it.

*Other News*

SCDC passed a motion where it will now treat *care experience* as a protected characteristic – meaning that when the council makes decisions moving forward, as part of its Equality Impact Assessments, it will now also assess the impact on care leavers. This is a positive step towards treating care leavers more inclusively in society and was agreed unanimously by district councillors. The County Council, Combined Authority, Peterborough City Council and Cambridge City Council have all passed similar motions. *Part of the motion was to call on town and parish councils to also take a similar step in support of care leavers.*

SCDC also passed a motion in support of the White Ribbon Campaign, after a decision was taken to seek accreditation. White Ribbon is a domestic abuse advocacy organisation who work to provide education about domestic abuse, in particular violence against women. This motion was also agreed unanimously.

SCDC also approved all the parish council precepts at full council. We also approved an updated pay policy, which included the pay ratio between the highest and lowest paid workers at SCDC (1:6.1), this ratio is fairly typical for local government and is lower than that City Council’s ratio.

**Cambridgeshire Home Improvement Agency**

[Cambridgeshire Home Improvement Agency (Cambs HIA)](https://www.cambshia.org/) is a strategic partnership between SCDC, Cambridge City Council and Huntingdonshire District Council and is dedicated to enhancing the living conditions of residents, particularly focusing on older adults, individuals with disabilities, and those with limited incomes. Last year it helped more than a hundred families in South Cambs to access grants such as Disabled Facilities Grants and Special Purpose Grants to undertake adaptations and repairs in their homes to help prevent accidents, assist people to cope with long term health conditions and to live comfortably and independently. For further information, please email Frances Swann frances.swann@cambshia.org or call 01954 713456.

**Childcare Choices and the Do Something Big campaign resources**

This week (from 12 February), the Department for Education is promoting the [Childcare Choices campaign](https://www.childcarechoices.gov.uk/), which aims to raise awareness and understanding of the government childcare support for parents to help them with the cost of childcare. The [refreshed toolkit](https://www.childcarechoices.gov.uk/providers/guidance-and-resources/) includes information about existing and upcoming childcare support and includes resources for organisations to share.  Additionally, the [Do Something Big workforce recruitment campaign](https://earlyyearscareers.campaign.gov.uk/) aims to highlight careers available working in the early years and childcare sector. The campaigns website includes information on careers, job application advice and information on training and qualifications.  A downloadable [communications toolkit](https://earlyyearscareers.campaign.gov.uk/recruitment-resources/) has been produced containing information and resources to help councils communicate the campaign.

**Award shortlisting**

SCDC has been shortlisted as a finalist in the [iESE Public Sector Transformation Awards 2024](https://iese.org.uk/public-sector-transformation-awards-2024). The category is described as looking for an organisation that has “*harnessed the real potential in their organisation, delivering elevated performance, creating efficiencies, and delivering outstanding customer service with improved value to their residents. Above all, this organisation has shown its ability to adapt to a fast-paced and ever-changing environment, while achieving fantastic results in doing so*.” It is in the final along with Kent Police and Swindon Borough Council. The event, when we will find out if we will win, is due to be held on Wednesday 6 March 2024.

**Private sector housing Landlord Forum**

SCDC is hosting an online private sector housing Landlord Forum on Thursday 7 March from 6pm to 8pm. The agenda includes:

* Fire Prevention: Focus on e-bikes and e-scooters (Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service)
* Damp and mould in the private rented sector
* Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards
* A Q&A session

This is a free event - but you'll need to secure your place. To do so, just email env.health@scambs.gov.uk or Rory Cosgrove in Environmental Health.

**DLUHC updates**

*Consultation on changes to various permitted development rights opens today*

Yesterday DLUHC launched a [consultation seeking views on changes to several existing permitted development rights](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/changes-to-various-permitted-development-rights-consultation) that allow for householder development, building upwards to create new homes, the demolition of certain buildings and rebuild as homes, electric vehicle charge points and air source heat pumps. The consultation closes on 9 April 2024. If you have any questions, please contact PDRconsultation2024@levellingup.gov.uk Consultation:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/changes-to-various-permitted-development-rights-consultation/changes-to-various-permitted-development-rights-consultation>

*Addressing the local audit backlog in England: Consultation, joint statement and Code of Audit Practice consultation*

DLUHC has today launched a consultation and [joint statement on proposals to clear the backlog of local audits in England](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/addressing-the-local-audit-backlog-in-england-consultation/local-audit-delays-joint-statement-on-update-to-proposals-to-clear-the-backlog-and-embed-timely-audit). On 8 February, the National Audit Office launched [a consultation seeking views on changes to the Code of Audit Practice](https://www.nao.org.uk/code-of-audit-practice-consultation). The consultation closes on 7 March.  The Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 makes the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) responsible for the preparation and maintenance of the Code of Audit Practice. It gives the C&AG the power to issue guidance to auditors in support of the Code, to which auditors must have regard when carrying out their work.  Schedule 6 of the 2014 Act requires that the Code be reviewed, and revisions considered, at least every five years. The current Code came into effect on 1 April 2020.

*Biodiversity net gain requirements*

[The legal requirement for developers to deliver at least a 10% bio-diversity net gain on new developments came into effect on Monday (12 February)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-housing-developments-to-deliver-nature-boost-in-landmark-move?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications-topic&utm_source=1e0d45ae-dc4e-47fe-bb95-5b6fc604e085&utm_content=immediately).   DLUHC published [guidance giving further information including on the biodiversity net gain statutory framework, planning processes, exemptions and appeals](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/biodiversity-net-gain).  To help Local Planning Authorities integrate biodiversity net gain at a local level, £10.6 million of funding is being committed to help councils recruit and expand ecologist teams.  Further Information: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/biodiversity-net-gain>

*Reforms to social housing allocations consultation – reminder*

On 30 January 2024, DLUHC launched [a consultation on reforms to social housing allocations](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/consultation-on-reforms-to-social-housing-allocations/consultation-on-reforms-to-social-housing-allocations). The consultation seeks views from the public, councils, social housing tenants and providers on a range of reforms to how social housing is allocated in England, including to eligibility and qualification criteria, as well as proposals for the social housing waiting list and grounds for eviction.  The consultation will run for eight weeks and closes on 26 March. For any enquiries about the consultation, please contact socialhousingallocationsconsultation@levellingup.gov.uk  Announcement:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-social-housing-reforms-to-crack-down-on-rule-breakers>

*More good news on DLUCH funding*

Following a successful bid last year via the ‘PropTech’ DLUHC fund, the Shared Planning Service has been successful in a further bid for £200,000 from the DLUCH Planning Delivery Skills fund for 2024-25. Our bid focused on our aim for Greater Cambridge to not only thrive economically but for new development to be high-quality design, innovative, sustainable and respond to its local context. The monies will fund 3 fixed term posts: one in Planning Policy to focus on infrastructure and viability, and a landscape officer and designer in the Built and Natural Environment Team providing additional capacity for major applications, our strategic sites and to support our policy work.

**Have your say on creating Healthy Places**

Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Council’s joint Public Health team is inviting residents to have their say on how new and existing communities can be healthy, supportive and inclusive.

Work is currently underway to develop the Healthy Places Joint Strategic Needs Assessment for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, a piece of work which will support the development of healthier, easy to access, and inclusive communities. To inform this, the team has launched a survey asking for views on access to healthcare services, inclusive and accessible green spaces, opportunities for active travel and healthy play and leisure, and the provision of affordable healthy food options.

The survey is open until Monday 15 April at 5pm and can be found at <https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/WNC1CB/>

It will take around 10-15 minutes to fill in and may be completed on behalf of yourself or someone you care for. If you’d prefer to complete a paper copy of the survey, you can pick one up from your local library or New Shire Hall, Emery Crescent, Enterprise Campus, Alconbury Weald, Huntingdon PE28 4YE. If you have any questions about the survey or the Healthy Places Joint Strategic Needs Assessment for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, please email healthinallpolicies@cambridgeshire.gov.uk

*Corinne Garvie*

*Richard Stobart*

*4th March 2024*