

Councillors' Report for Dry Drayton Parish Council: April 2025

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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 (LGR)

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.

SCDC has just published an FAQ-style webpage for residents – trying to answer what we believe are likely to be some of their most common questions around local government reorganisation. You can [view the page on our new website](#). Meanwhile Leaders of South Cambs, City and County Councils 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.

As part of other efforts to bring local empty homes back into use - Council Tax will be doubled on long term 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. SCDC 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.

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.

Business News: New networking group

The Cambridge Connector is a fresh, new, informal networking group. Weekly meetings foster real relationships, not just one-off conversations. There's a fun and relaxed after work drinks vibe - no sales pitches or business card collecting. Follow them on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) or [Eventbrite](#) to see what's coming up.

Greater Cambridge Housing Trajectory and Housing Land Supply Report 2025 (5 year land supply)

The Greater Cambridge Shared Planning team have published a new report that includes a new Greater Cambridge housing trajectory and our latest housing land supply calculations. An updated assessment shows that in the five years from 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2030, a total of 13,383 homes are anticipated to be built in Greater Cambridge, giving a housing land supply of 5.5 years. As a result of this supply being restored to above five years, planning applications will again be assessed against all the councils' local policies – which include a clear plan for where homes should be built - as well as those set nationally. This means that Greater Cambridge will once again enjoy the full protection from unplanned and inappropriate development provided by its Local Plans.

*Corinne Garvie
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1st April 2025*