

## **District Councillor's Report for Girton Annual Parish Meeting**

Councillor Corinne Garvie, Councillor Richard Stobart

*District Councillors for the parishes of Girton, Dry Drayton and Madingley*

The past year has been the first of a newly-elected District Council during which there have been significant advances in the development of the Local Plan; the tide has been turned in rebuilding our Council House stock; the Council has provided extensive support to local businesses, and brought much-needed relief to those most severely affected by the cost-of-living crisis.

Both Councillors have District responsibilities: Corinne sits on the licensing appeals panel, is a substitute for the Joint Development Control Committee (JDCC) and is a District representative on the Adults and Health Committee, a scrutiny Committee. Richard is on the Scrutiny and Overview committee, the JDCC, Audit Committee and Staffing and Employment Committee and is an occasional substitute on the Planning Committee. JDCC is a planning committee that deals with developments that lie on the City – District boundary. JDCC is made up of City and District Councillors.

Our membership of JDCC allows us to be part of the scrutiny process for developments. It also gives us insights into the planning issues that may emerge for Parish Councils as they evaluate the impact of the bigger proposals. It remains our concern that Parish Councils are well equipped to comment on Planning applications and to clearly represent their communities' interests.

At the Parish Council level, we strive to have a good relationship with the three Councils so that we can help them achieve what they need to improve their communities. Here are a few examples of what we have been able to do over the past year:

- Supplied people and businesses with information about grants
- Dealt with planning inquiries and offered advice about compliance
- Discussed biodiversity issues with residents
- Dealt with fly tipping and stench from "bio" fertilisers
- Answered enquiries about signage including bus stop information
- Helped introduce Neighbourhood and Community-led plans
- Investigated the status of aircraft and helicopter noise and suggested how to complain effectively

Above all we work closely with Parish Councils and also in close collaboration with our Council Councillors, who also deal with roads, footpaths and cycleways. We also get called in by individuals to help with local questions and issues. We aim to do our best within the scope of what the Council can offer.

It is important to us that we have a good relationship with the council officers, and we are in communication with officers in planning, environment and community on a regular basis. While we can't guarantee an outcome, it is our intention to facilitate the connections between Residents and Officers and to make that the issue is understood and acted on.

In the following sections, we have listed and described some of the achievements of SCDC during 2022-2023, under the main lines of the Council's business plan: Helping Business to Grow, Building Homes that are truly affordable to live in, Being Green to our Core, and Being a Modern and Caring Council

## Helping Businesses to Grow

The Business Support & Development Team has provided support and advice for over 100 local businesses in the past year and has established an up-to-date list of business premises to help local start-ups. They have also worked with traders, communities and businesses to help establish and expand local markets within the District. We created a specific Market Toolkit guide for anyone considering beginning a market in their village. Our online Trader Directory is designed to list the talented marketeers across the district whilst promoting shopping and supporting local businesses. The Council's annual Christmas Market was held again this year in Cambourne. In September, our Visit South Cambs tourism directory celebrated its first year of operation, having promoted around 200 local venues and over 230 local events within the year. The web site has attracted thousands of visitors from around the world.

In December, the District Council was awarded money under the Government's Shared Prosperity Fund after a successful joint bid with other local authorities, receiving £1.76m towards improving our High Streets, business skills training, community green space improvements and funding for start-up companies.

At the annual Cllr Awards in October, our Cllr Peter McDonald (Duxford ward) won the Resilience and Recovery award, one of only six councillors in England and Wales to be recognised at this level. This was in recognition of his oversight of business grant funding which enabled Cambridgeshire's unique business growth fund, supporting 102 local businesses.

Actions already completed in 2022-2023 include:

- Implemented a new and improved policy to support the street trading sector across South Cambridgeshire. This policy will ensure high levels of safety compliance and enable the sector to thrive through the introduction of flexible trading models.
- Created an SCDC specific operational/implementation plan based on the Nov 2021 refreshed CPCA Employment and Skill Strategy.
- Provided business support advice to over 100 businesses.
- Completed a feasibility study looking at how South Cambs Hall could be used to provide workspace for businesses, including start-ups.
- Established an up-to-date list of Business Premises for start-ups.

Some actions that are on target to be completed by end of 2022-23:

- Expand our Visit South Cambridgeshire brand alongside wider collaboration with Cambridgeshire and Peterborough partners, to support local businesses.
- Deliver at least 8 Sector specific events/webinars/support initiatives as part of an ongoing engagement programme.
- Provide a new space for growing small businesses or shared workspace for start-ups or micro businesses.
- Appraise our own commercial inventory (including South Cambs Hall) and investigate meanwhile/partial let use for start-ups during void periods and/or designate space specifically for this purpose.

## **Building Homes that are truly affordable to live in**

Starting with the emerging Greater Cambridge Local Plan, in June the results were published from the consultation on the First Proposals, which had included a range of new policies to meet the environmental challenges facing the area – including tackling carbon emissions and increasing biodiversity. The results included more than 9000 responses. This was followed in the autumn by an objective assessment of housing need, as required by government planning law, which identified a requirement for some additional housing over the First Proposals. A report with an update on the development strategy was considered by the Council in January. The strategy from the First Proposals was confirmed, with its focus on delivering the required housing and infrastructure sustainably, on environmental protection, particularly with regard to water supply, and on retaining existing policies that protect our rural villages. Three key strategic sites were also confirmed in Northeast Cambridge, East Cambridge and near the Biomedical Campus. The next stage in the process is the draft Local Plan, which is expected to be released for consultation later this year, although this may now be postponed slightly by delays in developing the regional water strategy. As well as working on the Local Plan, the council has adopted three new Neighbourhood Plans for individual parishes in the past year, the highest number in a single year to date.

In the planning system, we introduced a new web site for reporting actual or suspected violations of Planning Permission with clear guidelines on the boundaries for compliance and ran a consultation on a new draft Planning Compliance Policy in January.

Our Council Housing stock has been reduced significantly over the years as Council Houses were sold without being replaced, and this has led to a shortage of Council Housing in the District. This year the council turned a corner by more than doubling its rate of council house building to 70 per year to boost our stock of around 5,500 houses. We successfully bid for £4.5m in January from the Government's Local Authority Housing Fund which will allow us to acquire an additional 30 homes, and for £1.7m in March from the Government's Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund to upgrade the energy efficiency of our housing stock. This year we also introduced a new, simple online form for requesting repairs to council properties.

Some of the actions completed in 2022-23:

- Produced a report assessing feedback provided by local people from the first Local Plan consultation. This will inform the next steps in the Local Plan process.
- Produced an Asset Management Plan. This will improve the energy efficiency of existing Council housing to reduce carbon impact and running costs.
- Delivered 53 new affordable homes.
- Implemented new maintenance contract for all council housing stock. - Adopted an Empty Homes Strategy.
- We have installed solar Photovoltaic Systems on 60 Properties. Actions on target to be completed 2022-23:
- 74 New Homes Completed (acquired or built) this year.
- Continue to support the liaison meetings in Cottenham, Sawston, Hardwick, Caldecote, Swavesey and Barrington and community forums in Northstowe, Waterbeach, North-West Cambridge, Cambridge East, North-East Cambridge and Bourn Airfield and Cambourne.

- Approve a work programme for insulation measures over the next four years to narrow the gap on the zero-carbon target.

### **Being Green to Our Core**

On the environment, the council has awarded £120,000 in grants to Parish Councils and other community organisations for projects to reduce carbon emissions or improve the natural environment. We have been working on the sustainability of our waste management, with a move to using electric bin lorries, the second of which was put into use in June. Plans have moved ahead this year for a solar farm at the waste depot at Waterbeach, which would provide electricity for 30 of the current 50 bin lorries in the Greater Cambridge Shared Waste fleet. We introduced used battery recycling with every bin collection and set up a new grant scheme to help provide more public charging points for electric vehicles (EV) at village halls and other community buildings.

For the third year running, the District Council offered Six Free Trees to every Parish Council in November. This has seen 390 trees planted across the district, providing homes and food for wildlife and helping to combat climate change. Dry Drayton opted for an oak tree which was due to be planted in early May.

Actions completed in 2022-23:

- Provided equipment and information kits to minimise waste and separate recycling at community events.
- Reviewed the impact and outcomes of the existing food waste collection trial and the future of the scheme including budget requirements.
- Two electric refuse collection vehicles to replace the diesel versions have been delivered.
- The annual Statutory Status report for air quality has been submitted to DEFRA and accepted. Actions on target to be completed 2022-23:
- Review community rooms and other small sites to identify and deliver opportunities for carbon reduction.
- Develop planning policies consistent with zero carbon by 2050 for adoption in the Greater Cambridge Local Plan, in partnership with Cambridge City Council.
- Identify and deliver opportunities to invest in publicly accessible electric vehicle charge points in priority locations in the district, working with partners - pilot installations of fast EV Chargers at Sheltered Housing Schemes for public use, and install one rapid charger for public use.
- Identify and deliver new opportunities to plant trees, establish wildflower strips and in other ways enhance nature on our own estate, in consultation with residents.
- Work to ensure that development in South Cambridgeshire contributes to the goal of doubling nature by developing planning policies for adoption in the Greater Cambridge Local Plan, and by adopting a new Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Document in partnership with Cambridge City Council.
- Work with partners to develop landscape-scale habitat creation projects.
- Define and implement required improvements at the depot to prepare for further electric refuse collection vehicle (eRCV) charging.
- Procure up to three more electric refuse collection vehicles to replace diesel powered vehicles.
- Develop an outline business case for on-site solar PV energy generation with partners to aid the charging of vehicles.
- Deliver fourth round of funding through our Zero Carbon Communities grant scheme, awarding grants totalling £100,000 to community-based projects.

- Continue to strengthen the Zero Carbon Parish and Community Network through our programme of workshops, web-based resources and e-bulletins for community-based zero carbon and nature recovery initiatives - at least 6 workshops to be delivered.
- Submit annual statutory reporting to DEFRA on-time; monitor air quality in at least 6 targeted areas utilising portable equipment; compile report following each monitoring period and publish this on the council's website.
- Provide required technical inputs to consultations on major developments to ensure air quality objectives are met.
- Subject to air quality monitoring results, explore the feasibility of creating a Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) specifically targeting idling vehicles.
- Develop campaigns to improve recycling based on the outcomes of the waste composition analyses.
- Reporting of all sites (existing and new) that take up recycling / food bins & note our increased volumes / tonnes collected with associated savings.
- Install cameras at six locations and monitor numbers of visits required at those sites to establish a baseline to minimise fly tipping.
- Deliver targeted educational campaign in the area about fly tipping and increase awareness of responsible methods for disposal. To include the delivery of at least 12,000 leaflets.

### **Being a Modern and Caring Council**

For many residents, the past year has been dominated by the cost-of-living crisis. At this time of increased need, the Council has focused more of its resources on support for those who are most severely affected by the crisis. In October, the first Warm Hubs opened up ready for the winter, and there is now a network of Warm Hubs across the district to support the most vulnerable members of our community. Warm Hubs are designed to offer warm, friendly and inclusive places with access to light refreshments. They provide somewhere to socialise, take part in activities and obtain help and advice on how to reduce bills, access financial support, and stay healthy and well.

In November, the Council agreed a support package worth £400,000, jointly with the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Integrated Care System, to help address the impact of the rising cost of energy and food bills on individuals, families, and businesses across the district. This was boosted with another £200,000 of support in February. We also set up a new emergency fund to provide help for those hit hardest and have given out cheaper products for cooking and staying warm, such as slow cookers and electric blankets. The range of support initiatives set up by the District Council also includes Housing Payments, Council Tax discounts, Warm Packs for Council tenants, and food parcels for those most in need. The council's information on cost-of-living support has been brought together on our web site, with a range of advice and information on different support options.

The War in Ukraine has rarely been out of the news this year, and residents of South Cambridgeshire have responded very generously to the need to host Ukrainian families, with our district hosting more guests than any other district in the country. Six months into the scheme, our district had received 720 guests. The District Council has managed many aspects of the government's *Homes For Ukraine* scheme locally continue and has helped families to settle into life in South Cambridgeshire thanks to a range of grant-funded activities organised by the District Council including day trips, English classes, free laptops, books and bikes. Local partnerships have provided laptops, mobile phones and SIM cards. The Council has worked to keep hosts and guests in South Cambridgeshire connected with regular bulletin updates, social media groups, an online welcome pack for new arrivals, and a dedicated web page offering extensive information.

Many small grants have been awarded to local groups for improvements to village amenities through the Community Chest scheme, such as new equipment for the bowls club in Girton and repair to the drainage at Madingley Children's playpark.

Actions completed from 2022-23:

- Complete and analyse a staff satisfaction survey.
- Introduced hybrid working arrangements further increasing our attractiveness as an employer.
- Introduced a modular management skills program for middle managers.
- Completed a survey of all council tenants to better understand their priorities and to be able to compare satisfaction with other organisations.
- Refresh caravan site licencing policy, fees and charges. The new policy will ensure that caravan sites are inspected periodically and that residents have suitable housing provision.

Actions on target to be completed 2022-23:

- Use the Council's Community Led Plan toolkit to support local communities identify, plan and address the issues they identify in their communities.
- Support 150 new clients through the housing department's visiting support service.
- Spend £500,000 in total in the form of disabled facilities grant and repairs grant to allow people to live independently and safely in their homes.
- Prevent homelessness for at least 50% of the people who approach us who are at risk of becoming homeless throughout the year and offer support to those who are homeless.
- Continue the proactive working relationship with the job centre in delivering mentoring circles plus upskilling and cross training initiatives throughout the year.
- Ensuring 100% compliance with landlord safety checks to council housing including, electrical safety, gas installations and where appropriate fire risk assessments and water safety tests.

## Looking ahead

Looking ahead to the coming year, the Council's key goals for residents include reducing fly tipping, bringing in Civil Parking Enforcement, introducing a new Mobile Warden scheme for elderly residents, support for local projects focusing on health and wellbeing, and to build at least 75 more energy-efficient Council Houses. Our business support goals will focus on more tailored business support, help for greener businesses, and more work in building up local markets. And our environmental goals are to address water scarcity while safeguarding our natural rivers and streams, boost local Zero Carbon projects, provide greener waste collection, and push ahead with our refurbishment of Council Houses.

A big change to our parliamentary constituencies is underway. This is the expected outcome: Girton, Dry Drayton and Madingley will all fall within a new constituency (*St Neots and Mid Cambridgeshire*) that extends from Cambridge to St Neots and includes Cambourne and Northstowe. The newly constituted *South Cambridgeshire* constituency lies to the south of the City and includes Queen Edith's – one of the City Council wards. The final consultations have taken place and the new boundaries will be submitted to Parliament in July 2023.

**Finally ....**

We are keen to help people in the Ward with the wide range of issues that relate to the District Council. We are always happy to hear from residents with questions or requests for help:

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