

Report of Councillor Carla Hofman and Councillor John Williams to Parish Councils for March 2024.

*This report contains factual information which we hope will be of use and of interest to the parish council and to the wider community of the parish.
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South Cambridgeshire Budget for 2024/25

South Cambridgeshire District Council's plans for the year ahead will see us remain as one of the lowest taxing authorities in the country.

In a meeting of Full Council on 27 February) members voted to back the Budgets and Business Plan for the upcoming 12 months and said the budget was being set against a challenging background of rising population, increasing costs due to inflation and a national homelessness crisis.

The plans retain the Council as one of the lowest taxing authorities in the country, with a below inflation £5 per year increase for the average band D home or less than 10p a week, equivalent to around 3%, bringing the charge for this band to £170.31. Incidentally this is lower than the precept for a Town Council and two Parish Councils. The Council only retains around 7.6% of the Council Tax it collects, with the rest being passed on to other organisations such as the County Council and Police. Council Tax will bring in over £11 million to South Cambs, and accounts for about half the taxation required to pay for council services – the other sources being Business Rates and a small grant from the Government.

In addition, the council is expecting to receive £7 million in commercial rent and interest from loans in addition to fees and charges mainly from large scale planning applications.

The budget includes more staff to deal with fly-tipping, the cost-of-living crisis and more waste collection rounds, as well as the managing the Zero Carbon Communities scheme. A budget of over half a million pounds was agreed for the Council's continued Digital Transformation work – which aims to make services even more accessible to residents in a way that works for them. This will fund the software and staffing costs. The Transformation project has already saved over £250,000 and further savings of £1.6 million are planned for the coming two years.

The budget does not take into account the 4-day week trial and its possible adoption. A decision on what happens after the trail of desk-based staff finishes at the end of March will be made at the cabinet meeting on 12 March 2024.

Government Funds Shared Planning Posts

Following a successful bid last year via the 'PropTech' Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities fund (DLUHC), the Shared Planning Service has been successful in a further bid for £200,000 from the DLUHC 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.

Biodiversity Net Gain Required for Planning Applications

With the introduction of 10% mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain (for all major planning applications from 12th Feb 2024 and all minor applications from 2nd April 2024), the Built and Natural Environment Team in our shared planning service has put two new measures in place to help applicants: a) a technical guidance note and b) a bespoke pre-application advice service. More details can be found on our website: Biodiversity Net Gain Advice (greatercambridgeplanning.org)

More Support for Ukraine Guests

Grants totalling more than £13,000 have been awarded for activities to help Ukraine guests settle into South Cambridgeshire and forge friendships. In addition, more than £102,000 has been given to support English tuition to help Ukraine guests develop communication skills.

The funding is part of a wider £500,000 package of support provided by South District Council since the Homes for Ukraine scheme began, including different forms of wrap around support to help guests achieve independent accommodation, a furniture package scheme and recently launched, a landlord incentive scheme.

The District Council has awarded 43 activities grants since the scheme started to help reduce isolation offer emotional support and support integration into the community. The small community grants have supported a wide range of events including:

- Art therapy workshops for children and adults
- Women's club meetings to forge friendships
- A party to bond, create fun and find new friends for traumatised children
- Funding trips to Woburn Safari Park
- A Candle making workshop for adults and children
- A colouring competition for children
- Flower making workshops to make flower emblems of Ukraine
- A traditional seaside coach trip including fish and chips
- A Ceilidh for Ukrainian guests, hosts and friends
- Group discussions and games for teenagers leading to further activities for the young people to get together

Funding comes from the Government tariff received for every guest who arrives in the area.

Half a Million Pounds Given in Grants in 2023

South Cambridgeshire communities benefited from grants totalling over £500,000 from the District Council last year (2023).

This funding was awarded through nine grant schemes with various focus areas such as promoting community well-being, environmental sustainability, and inclusive participation.

The grants were made up of the following:

£80,321 in Community Chest grants was awarded to 54 voluntary and community sector groups, charities and public sector bodies to help further improve quality of life of residents in the district.

Six grants amounting to £71,708 were given out through the Council's Mobile Warden Schemes which have been set up to support older people to live independently in their homes and stay in their community.

11 Service Support Grants worth £173,900 were granted to help the Voluntary and Community Sector provide services and support to local residents. This includes Care Network Cambridgeshire who received £8,000 for the development and support of Community Car Schemes to assist the elderly and vulnerable within South Cambridgeshire. Citizens Advice Cambridge & District also received £100,000 to provide free, independent and impartial advice to residents of South Cambridgeshire on their rights and responsibilities.

The Zero Carbon Communities grant scheme which helps communities to take action on climate change at a very local level awarded £125,901 to nine applicants, including Cambridge Carbon Footprint being awarded £15,000 to develop their network of repair cafes in the district.

49 parish councils received trees worth £4,973 through the six free trees scheme.

The District Council's Long Term Health grant is aimed at supporting residents with chronic health problems and will be available to groups and organisations who provide physical activity programmes for people with specific health conditions. £13,312 was awarded to 9 organisations with Active with Parkinson's Sawston receiving and the Body Toning class at Shelford Cancer centre both receiving £2,000 of this.

Five leisure centres received £4,698 to restart fitness classes that stopped during Covid.

An Electric vehicle Charge point grant gave £15,000 to 3 applicants. One of these was Cambridge Sports Lakes Trust which received £5,000 towards four EV chargers at Milton Country Park.

Tenant community grants help fund a project, by up to £1,000, that benefits the local community. £5,948 was given to 8 applicants.

The Ukraine Small Grant which promotes the integration of Ukrainian guests into the South Cambridgeshire community gave out £5,512 to 19 applicants.

Carla & John