

Oakington & Westwick Annual Parish Meeting

22 April 2024

Reports

- Transport Action Group (TAG)
- Environment Action Group/Flood Mitigation Group (EAG/FMG)
- Sustainable Oakington & Westwick (SOW)
- Oakington & Westwick Neighbours (OWN)
- Oakington & Westwick Community Association (CA)
- Oakington & Westwick Pavilion Management Committee
- Oakington Retirement Community
- Oakington & Westwick WI
- County Councillor's report
- District Councillor's report
- Reflections on first year as a parish councillor

Transport Action Group

Annual Parish Review

22nd April 2024

Jim Bryant

Background

- Jan 2015 – formal launch of the Oakington and Westwick Community Plan
- Transport Action Group was one of the 3 Action Groups formed.
- TAG currently meets bi-monthly
- Has representation from
 - PC
 - DC
 - CC
- Reports regularly in The Journal
- Would welcome new members

MVAS – speed monitor

- Current MVAS brought into service in Jan 2019
- Installed predominantly in either:
 - Cambridge Road (opposite allotments)
 - Water Lane (opposite School)
- Early results showed >50% drivers exceeded the 30MPH limit then in place.
- Since the introduction of 20MPH and traffic calming >60% drivers exceed 20MPH (Typically 26MPH)
- New batteries purchased this year last longer before recharging
- PC LHI for solar powered MVAS

A Bus Strategy for Oakington and Westwick

- Reason for preparing:
 - The current Stagecoach service is unsatisfactory, both by Citi6 and Busway in terms of frequency and reliability (Citi6) and accessibility (Busway) principally at rush hour. The following are possible solutions to the problems faced.
 1. Increase Citi6 service to every 30 minutes for whole day
 2. Reinstatement of Citi5 evening service to Bar Hill via Oakington crossroads
 3. Introduce hourly Cottenham to Bar Hill service via Oakington with stop at Garden Centre using 20-seater coaches. Cottenham PC to be consulted.
 4. It is planned to continue the Citi6 service to Northstowe via Station Road. Ideally, this would have an access road from Station Road close to Busway. That would allow interconnection of services there. It is estimated that this addition would add some 15 minutes to a single trip and mean 3 buses per hour to achieve this.

Ongoing Activity

The following items are always on our Agenda:

- Monitoring East West Railway Developments
 - For potential impact on our villages (Northern Route)
 - Formal consultation on the Southern Route due this year
- Possible Walking Routes
- Future Local Highways Initiatives

FINAL

EAG Report to the Annual Parish Meeting on Monday 22 April 2024

The EAG continues with 8 committee members, and another about to join (hopefully).

Flood Mitigation Group (FMG) – led by Andrew: We believe the Environment Agency's (EA) flood modelling is now available to Homes England (HE) to enable them to design the promised attenuation pond for the village.

FMG is now drawing attention to the condition of Beck Brook for 2 km downstream of Westwick, in particular its maintenance regime, and if the 2020/21 review of Cottenham Lode was ever carried out.

Open Spaces Project: We supported this Parish Council activity initiated by Geoffrey Butlin. We feel it has made a significant improvement to the facilities available at the Rec.

Nature Recovery Project: John Terry and James Heywood are driving this project. It is a joint project with SOW. SCDC aims to double nature by 2050.

Improvements to Village Appearance & Safety

Pond: We are pleased the green duckweed appears to be under control by the use of Byofix, an enzyme preparation that occurs naturally in barley straw.

Footpath Sweeping: Our pre-Christmas clear up of fallen leaves from footpaths and verges helps keep the village tidier and safer. It was marvellous to have more new volunteers than existing ones last Nov/Dec.

Litter Picking: This is undertaken periodically. On 19 March, we joined the Rotary Club Cambridge South to pick up some 500+ beer bottles on Dry Drayton Road verge nearly opposite the entrance to the Business Park. This is the second time bottles have been picked in the same area. An unproven theory is that people partying on the Business Park land throw the bottles out of cars as they leave. We have made a visit to the Business Park to alert them.

Flower Tubs: Very thanks to our volunteers who look after the flowers and to Philip from the Garden Centre who plants out the new flowers, and to the PC which finances them.

Information Boards - Joint Project with the History Society: Boards completed & erected at Sheeps Green (White Horse Pub), both community orchards, Memorial Board on the Pavilion wall at the Rec. The text and photographs for Stocks Green are done, but we have run out of material to make the board. The latter will be completed with five new boards which will be at: the Village Green, the post box verge (between Mead View & the shop), opposite the pond, bus stop on Cambridge Road (nearest the crossroads), and at Westwick. There has been, and continues to, a tremendous contribution to this project from Stephanie Smith, Chas Ashford-Hodges & Edgar Stearn. Nick Harrison provides information with proof reading from Jenny Prince.

EAG Finances: Geoffrey & Irené Butlin have kindly given 50% of takings from Christmas Tree sales to the EAG, in return for help with harvesting and selling the trees. Some £700 is available and the EAG is considering how to spend the money. Ideas welcome.

FINAL

Retirement Community Plans: Independently of the EAG, Geoffrey Butlin is pursuing plans for a retirement community. There have been discussions with HE about the siting of this. The location of the attenuation pond, which could also provide amenity value for the retirement community, has come into these discussions. No decisions have been made.

Environment Action Group (EAG).

22 April 2024

SOW Report

Annual Parish Meeting 22 April 2024

SOW

Sustainable Oakington and Westwick, known as SOW, started in 2021 and is now into its third year. It is a fantastic and friendly group set up to raise awareness as well as fight the twin burdens of climate change and ecological breakdown. The group is made up of passionate people who are keen to share their surprising breadth and depth of knowledge. The group is going from strength to strength. We now have an in house 'green library', thanks to Paul who regularly brings in a box of green and eco related titles. Many published only in the last few years. Anyone is free to borrow and return.

Earlier in the year, you may have heard of our Repair Café, which was a huge success. 41 Items were repaired preventing a whopping 89kg of waste and 907kg of Co2 from being emitted, but you saw from what we were doing, it was not just about preventing unnecessary waste. As well as being inspired from the repairers, people enjoyed the friendly community atmosphere.

In March we had Leo's ever popular fruit tree grafting workshop. We were let loose choosing to pick our own variety of apple and rootstock combination, guided by Leo's expertise, to get the best match for our gardens and flavour palette. A hands on, fun and practical session.

This week have a great session planned on 'Communicating about Climate Change' delivered by Cambridge Carbon Footprint. We've all had those frustrating conversations with people who resist doing anything about (even believing in) climate change. And the reality is that things can't improve if only a passionate minority are taking action. But how do you engage and persuade people? The answers might surprise you!

In the past, we have held sessions from insulating your home, bug and bird house building and even heat pumps. The sessions are held on the last Wednesday of every month in the church hall from 7.30pm. We tend to have a quick cup of tea and a chat before getting down to business. As more people are reporting feeling climate and eco dread, why not come and meet your neighbours, share ideas and plug into a network of like minded individuals.

OWN Annual Parish Meeting Report 2023-24

In this report I'm going to give a quick overview of OWN's main areas of activity over the past twelve months, talk about how the model originally proposed for OWN has evolved, and look at the future in the light of the survey we recently ran to see how OWN is perceived and valued.

Firstly, events which help people to connect and get to know each other. We have run or helped others to run twelve since the last Annual Parish Meeting, including the Coronation Big Lunch, carol singing, Tea and Jazz by the Lake, community apple pressing and wassailing with Blue Barrel Cider and an online safety workshop. Plus the monthly community walk.

OWN administers the village Hardship Fund, through a team of three who confidentially provide small grants and another team who provide scrutiny of the anonymised accounts. Since our AGM in November, four generous contributions totalling £1400 have been made so that the Fund currently stands at £2,270. Since November, 8 enablement payments totalling £875 have been made.

OWN volunteers provide a monthly minibus service to Bar Hill shops and last summer ran a trip to the seaside for older members of the community, which was much enjoyed.

Then there's OWN volunteering. Currently two OWN volunteers are regularly visiting residents who don't get out much. One volunteer helps mostly older residents with tech issues. Other one-off requests are mostly prescription collections.

When OWN was originally set up, it was this kind of volunteering we imagined we'd be busy with. But despite many years of promoting this, it has happened only fairly sporadically – with the big exception of Covid. We now have a relatively small pool of 25 volunteers, most of whom are committed to something specific such as minibus driving. What we'd like to do is increase the number of casual volunteers on the Village Volunteers WhatsApp group – that's people who are not committed to anything unless they see a request they are able to help with. [For some types of volunteering a DBS check is essential and we would arrange for these as and when required.] We want to have volunteers available if help is requested, but recognise that these requests are less frequent than you might think.

However, despite low actual levels of volunteering, the recent survey showed that people value very much the fact that OWN is there if people need it, and that it represents the neighbourliness which is present in our community. The activities seen as most important were the Hardship Fund, regular volunteering and community events, but all were valued. [It's recognised that community connection and reducing isolation leads to better quality of life for all.]

At the end of this year, several long-serving committee members are standing down, and so far we haven't identified replacements. The survey indicated that it is worth keeping OWN going as it is seen as an asset to the village. Thanks to the brilliant volunteers involved in activities like the Hardship Fund and the minibus trips, the committee's role has evolved into one of oversight, and of organising events, now often in conjunction with others. We really hope fresh blood can be found so that OWN does not fold.

Finally, don't forget the community Bring & Share Big Lunch on Sunday 2nd June!

Community Association Update for Parish Meeting, 22 April 2024

Elodie Cameron, Secretary

On behalf of the 2024 Community Association Committee

May we start by thanking the Journal Team and volunteers for their ongoing commitment in producing the high standard, bi-monthly Journal. We are very fortunate to have such a quality community magazine.

For anyone who doesn't know, the Journal Team works as an independent team under the Community Association, but it is dependent on the CA for all its banking and for underwriting any losses. In 2023 this was £413.00, while the year before there was a surplus of £76.00. The Journal is roughly self-funded, with printing costs of £3,900 covered by advertising income.

Last year the Community Association again put on the Village Day in June and the Bonfire Night in November. We very much appreciate the facilities of the Pavilion and Recreation Ground, ideal for these community activities. As in previous years the events were well attended, provided a lot of fun and raised funds towards future events.

We are grateful for the many residents who come forward to help. However, for some reason it is difficult to get people to join the organising team. Last year's events did not have a full team and only went ahead because of the personal commitment of the 2023 CA chair, Ranko Pinter. This, of course, is not tenable for future activities. We have therefore decided that events need an organising team of 8 to 10 people **ahead of an event**. And should we not have a full organising team in place, sadly events will have to be dropped.

The near collapse of the CA in January was a worrying moment, but after some urgent publicity and an Open Meeting a new committee emerged. Our current treasurer, Bernie Yates, has given notice to leave in January 2025, so we are looking for somebody to take over this crucial role. Without a treasurer the Journal may cease and we won't be able to organise a Village Day or Bonfire Night.

The new committee will continue to address some of the other issues raised at the Open Meeting.

Otherwise the financial overview of 2023 showed a net surplus of £639.08 (2022: £853.16). Reserves brought forward are £5,886.81.

Finally we would like to thank Ranko Pinter and Liz Davis who stepped down from the CA committee after serving as chair and membership secretary for four years.

Pavilion Report 2024 Parish Council AGM

Firstly, I must apologise again for not being with you in person, but I have a clash. I am at the Cambridge Federation Women's Institute Annual Council Meeting, as a Council Trustee, I need to be there!

The Pavilion continues to have a variety of bookings using the hall, to cover all ages and sporting interests, from Beavers, Cubs and Scouts yoga, Pilates, to mature fitness classes. Plus, a variety of social bookings. Do look out in the Oakington and Weswick Journal for the list of activities and events.

I would personally like to thank and acknowledge that I really appreciate the time and commitment Mark Darling as an outstanding Vice-Chair and who does so much to support the committee (a lot of the time behind the scenes doing things we have no knowledge of with Tony), but especially organising our Village Lottery.

Special thanks and appreciation must go to Laura Lawrence for all the extra work she undertakes as our Treasurer, especially gaining essential additional funding over the last two years. We are in challenging times our expenditure, especially fuel costs are breaking into our reserves.

I don't know how we as a committee would have coped without Tony in his roles as Administrator and Caretaker. continuing his daily tasks, but he carries on without complaint. He does an amazing amount of behind the scenes, additional to his employed working hours and for this I want to say a huge thank you.

Again, as I comment every year that the MUGA, the Lottery and private hiring of the building remain the key to making the Sports Pavilion sustainable. The Pavilion is of course part of the village, and we hope to continue to promote the pavilion for hired events over the next few months, mindful as always of the residents close by. I am so pleased that we have heard that we have finally achieved the bid for the 3G surface for the MUGA, which will be starting in the next few months.

As I thank all the Pavilion Committee for their time and dedication, I just want I just want to highlight that we are all volunteers in our roles, something I think people forget that we are in these positions as we care about the Community we live in!

We as a Committee need to thank our Parish Councillor representatives on the Committee David Reeves and Stephen Moore. Thank you to all the members of the Parish Council for their ongoing support to the Pavilion Committee.

The Pavilion Committee has very successfully managed this Sports Pavilion, both professionally and financially, that was the remit the Parish Council gave us when we opened the Pavilion, over 16 years ago. This is something we need to be proud of! We have a wonderful building, for the use of this village and surrounding villages too.

All we can hope for is that we continue the successes of the Pavilion in the next few months as we face the financial challenges ahead.

Elaine Bailey
Chair of the Pavilion Committee

Annual Parish Meeting

Oakington Retirement Community

The concept which we have been pursuing is to provide accommodation for those who need to move yet stay in the community such as us aging who want to downsize, those who lose their partner and need to move, or those needing full care. Also for those who want to bring their aging parents closer.

As I explained last year, we finally managed to get Homes England to engage with us in the idea of combining this retirement village with the long-awaited attenuation pond - they were offering this farm together with the field north of the business park.

Homes England told us over a year ago that they were waiting for the EA to decide how big this pond needed to be and for HE to clear the Tomato Farm. There seems to be progress with both but we are still waiting for HE to re-engage with us, well we are needling them from every direction we can think of.

As and when HE engage with us, we will re-enliven the ORC support group which we started to form a few years ago. And we are looking for the right kind of organisation who can develop the retirement village for us to suit our local need and interest.

Geoffrey Butlin

WI Report for AGM

We have had a very active year in Oakington and Westwick WI

As well as our monthly meetings with a wide range of speakers, we continue to offer our members additional outings, events, and workshops throughout the year.

Here are some of our highlights since our last AGM!

At our May meeting in 2023, we had Yvonne Pinchen, an Oakington resident as our special speaker, talking on the Arts and Craft movement in Cambridge. A fascinating talk, with so many examples of places in Cambridge that you can see the Arts and Craft movement. As some of us had recently visited the David Parr House in Gwydir Street, Cambridge, it fitted in well with the talk. Don't forget her book is now available.

In June we were joined by Alison Giles who gave us an insight into Molly Dancing. We had such fun dancing a few traditional moves!

July was our bring and share Summer Social. We started in the Vicarage Garden, all the food laid out ready.....when the rain came. We had just managed to get ourselves drinks! Just a few spots to start with, so people sheltered under the trees. The decision had to be made to move, mass exodus to the church hall! We still had our social, albeit a little damp!

Sadly, no scavenger hunt that Anne Williams had organised but weather permitting we will try again another time!

We started September with a most enjoyable afternoon tea for our members and friends and family, at Carriages of Cambridge. Such a successful afternoon with so many enjoying both the atmosphere of the train carriages and wonderful food.

In September two teams joined in the annual Federation Quiz. Great evening with challenging questions!

In September sadly, we had to change our theme for our meeting at short notice, from women's health and instead invited back Fran Saltmarsh. We had a most interesting talk on The Georgians. She explained the changes over the hundred plus years. Her talk included how the clothes, society and architecture all fitted together over the period. Completely fascinating.

Our October meeting, we celebrated Harvest with a social evening, homemade soup, and quiz about soup! It was a special time to chat and mix with members.

A group of members and some partners met on a Saturday lunchtime at Lakeside Lodge in Pidley for a couple of games of bowls followed by a lovely meal. an enjoyable social afternoon, plus we had some very competitive bowlers too!

What a wonderful morning....spent on a Saturday in November, when a group of us got together to enjoy Willow weaving . A great deal of the concentration was the order of the day as we all followed our instructor Denise in creating our Swedish Stars. The second item, yes, we made two! was a basket weave Christmas Tree, which some of us found harder to follow, but our instructor led us through, showing us what to do next, and we all produced great results, ready for Christmas.

In November meeting we had a fascinating talk from Dot Reeves, who is a speech and language therapist and gave members an opportunity to explore the way we communicate on a day-to-day basis without thinking about it. The presentation included a taster of 'Makaton' an approach using speech, signs, and symbols to support people who have communication challenges.

Panto - ADC Theatre -

Our second year to the Pantomime – oh no we didn't!!!

What a fantastic performance by the drama students – very alternative but what fun!

Our meeting in December was led by the two Linda's in Christmas Craft and enjoying mulled wine and mince pies. Not forgetting the Xmas raffle with lots of prizes and Secret Santa.

Change to our planned meeting in January at the very last minute as our speaker was unable to join us!

Instead, we had a fascinating talk by Ruth Bond, a previous National Federation and Cambridge Federation Chair, on the history of the Cambridge Federation from its beginnings, the first offices with the smell of fish in the 1900s, to our existing one, the eco-friendly office now in Girton, officially opened by Prince Edward. The Prince asked for his tea in a mug so he could walk and chat!

Midwinter Feast

Our annual winter meal was a change this year when we supported the local pub, we all enjoyed good food and of course, good company!

Our February meeting about promoting the WI and the campaign for climate change had us sewing green hearts for the WI post box topper. We also painted pebbles to hide around the village for people to find.....then hide again. Show the Love Oakington and Westwick WI, was a success thanks to Pauline and Jane for the Topper on the Post Box and you all for dropping round the pebbles around the village.

What a wonderful morning.....spent on a Saturday in February we thoroughly enjoyed our painting session....and for once, silence was the order of the day as we all concentrated in creating our paintings. The instructor led us through, showing us what to do next, and we all produced a lovely painting.... all a beach scene, but all of them unique!

Three teams took part in the CFWI Jigsaw Challenge in February and one of our teams won. Completing their jigsaw in an amazing 1 hour and 30 minutes. The other teams did well too, 6th and 11th out of 16 teams.

Our most recent meeting was our talk from Sophie Smiley on Swimming in Cambridge. A very informative talk.

Each year we are involved in the voting process for resolutions from when they are announced to the final part of voting. We will be discussing in our meeting next month. This year our resolution is on Dental Health Matters.

Finally, I would like to thank all the committee for the hard work, support, and commitment to me as President. We make a great team, and our meetings are always fun and interesting, otherwise I don't think any of us would do it.

Thank you to all the Members for being part of our WI. We have a good one!

Elaine Bailey
President

CLLR FIROUZ THOMPSON

Council composition

- Liberal Democrats 23
- Conservatives 22
- Labour 9
- Independents 4
- Non-aligned 3

County Council

The Council has completed its third year as a Joint Administration, which has seen a successful partnering of Liberal Democrats, Independent and Labour Groups.

The County Council is the statutory Local Authority for Highways, Social Care, Education, Waste and Recycling, Libraries and Leisure, Registration services (births, deaths, marriages), and Public Health. It also convenes citizenship ceremonies.

The County Council is a partner organization on the Cambs and Peterborough Mayoral Combined Authority, which was created in 2017. It assumed the Transport Authority remit that previously sat with the County Council.

The County Council, together with South Cambs District and Cambridge City Councils, is a partner on the Greater Cambridge Partnership. The GCP is a time-limited body with the remit of dispersing government funding for infrastructure in this high growth area.

The Council key service committees also cover Environment and Green Investment, and Assets and Procurement. The council declared a Climate Emergency in 2019 and has developed a Cambridgeshire Net Zero 2045 action plan. The council has a Health in All Policies approach to all of its work, in an effort to address the wider determinants of health inequalities which are pronounced across the county and exist within all localities.

Social care is demand-led, with expenditure on a mixture of preventive and means-tested care; this accounts for 70% of the council's net budget. Good work has been done to bolster the social care workforce, both via rolling out the Real Living Wage and supporting our providers to do so; developments of the Care Academy supporting professional training and development, and the creation of new work around 'care micro-enterprises', new small, localized care businesses that offer both new employment opportunities and also new choice in care provision for those who need it.

Highways is the service perhaps most in the public eye as we all encounter it every day, the network consists of some 2,600 miles of roads and over 1,800 miles of rights of way. The well-known 'managed decline' of the Highway Network over many years has left the network in very poor condition and the service in a state of fire-fighting. Government provides 33 times more funding to the national highway network than it does to Local Authorities for their highway networks. Workforce is challenging too with a thin officer corps covering a massive brief; our Local Highways Officer covers 35 villages, for example. Extra funding would be welcome, but we also need the workforce to be able to spend it. This is a predicament common to local authorities and there is competition with national transport projects. Huge efforts are underway to introduce cyclical maintenance where none existed, for example on gully emptying, but turning round a network allowed to decline so severely, with limited resources to do so, will take time.

Cambridgeshire's population is growing far above the national average, which puts very significant additional pressure on demand led services. This trend is set to accentuate as National Government is looking to expand the Cambridge area by a very significant degree, through a Development Company, in a scheme known as Cambridge 2040/50 depending on the speech of the day. 'Cambridge' in this scheme has not been defined though it is assumed to mean South Cambs at least.

Water scarcity and a poor public transport network are the headline factors of concern around growth, even at the rate laid out in existing local plans.

Income is via a combination of government grants and council tax.

BUDGET 2024-25

The budget seeks to bridge a potential funding gap for the coming year of £23m in County Council funding for 2024/25 as a result of inflation and other factors. This has now been closed to c.£2m.

The revised proposals focus on sustaining social services, continuing to provide free school meal vouchers for eligible children during holidays, progressing the council's commitment to pay the real living wage to people providing adult social care, and prioritising highways and cycleways maintenance across the county. However, even with a proposed council tax rise of 4.99% – 2% of which will be dedicated to adult social care services – the combination of demand for services, inflation and the ending of some government grants will still leave a £2m gap in the 2024/5 budget.

Included in the proposals for the coming year are for the council to:

- Invest £57 million to sustain children's and adult social care services.
- Further the Council's commitment to the Real Living Wage, which has increased to £12ph outside London, to take account of the Government uplift of the legally enforceable Living Wage, being paid by adult care providers.
- Prioritise £3m to continue to provide holiday food vouchers for all children eligible for free school meals, despite the government support being likely to end in the next financial year.
- Invest £2.2m to deliver other anti-poverty initiatives – such as support to make sure that vulnerable people are claiming all the welfare benefits that they are entitled to.
- Put £1.3m into delivering more accessible libraries to support vulnerable communities.
- Prioritise investment of £23m into making highways, footpaths, and cycleways safer – on top of a recently announced government allocation of £2.3m. This will be to deliver improvements which both repair and prevent potholes, deliver improved drainage schemes, and reinstate cycleway maintenance and weed clearance.
- Put additional funding into schemes for people experiencing mental health issues to prevent them reaching crisis, particularly focussing on younger people.

The proposals include an increase of council tax by 4.99%, the maximum permitted by Government before a public referendum is needed – with a total of 2% of this increase dedicated to adult social care services across the county, and £17.6m of identified additional savings – from areas such as:

- moving to LED streetlights which are set to deliver £1m in energy savings each year.
- £1.5m across the next three years from rationalising the council's office accommodation.
- more than £2m from reviewing the highest cost children's placement costs, and home to school transport routes – to bring children closer to home and reduce travel time.
- £0.5m from driving down the amount of bad debt.
- reviews of income raised by permits and parking charges are also proposed to raise just under £1m.

Committees and Outside Bodies

My responsibilities are serving on:

- Children and Young People Committee
- Environment & Green Investment Committee (sub)
- Communities, Social Mobility, and Inclusion Committee (sub)

Outside Bodies member

- Cambridgeshire Music Board
- Northstowe Delivery Group
- Needingworth Liaison Committee

CONTACT DETAILS

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions about the above, or any other matters.

Firouz Thompson, County Councillor for Longstanton, Northstowe, Over and Oakington & Westwick

Email: firouz.thompson@cambridgeshire.gov.uk

For those on social media we have highly active Facebook groups:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/2066298150052161/> - Longstanton, Oakington and Northstowe

<https://www.facebook.com/libdems3rdMay18> - Over & Willingham

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL (SCDC)

ANNUAL REPORT TO ANNUAL MEETINGS IN LONGSTANTON WARD:

OAKINGTON & WESTWICK PARISH (22.04.24)

LONGSTANTON PARISH (29.04.24)

NORTHSTOWE TOWN (30.04.24)

DISTRICT COUNCILLOR NATALIE WARREN-GREEN

It's a pleasure to share my report to for the Annual Meetings in Oakington & Westwick, Longstanton, and Northstowe covering activity across South Cambridgeshire including Longstanton Ward.

2024/25 is the sixth year of the Liberal Democrat administration of South Cambridgeshire District Council since May 2018. As with each year we've been working on delivering for our residents.

The last 12 months have been super busy and productive, dealing with a wide range of issues. There has been a great deal of progress in which I am proud to have played a small part as a District Councillor, and as a member of the Skills Committee, the Climate & Environment Advisory Committee (CEAC), and the Northstowe Delivery Group.

Firstly, I thought it would be useful to remind everyone of the main (statutory) services that SCDC provides:

SCDC Services

- Benefits
- Business support and development
- Council tax collection and support
- Environmental Health
- Housing
- Licensing (pubs, taxis)
- Planning Services (a shared service with Cambridge City Council)
- Waste collection and recycling (a shared service with Cambridge City Council)

You can find more details here: [Home - South Cambs District Council \(scamborough.gov.uk\)](https://www.scamborough.gov.uk)

And now, here's some information about what we've been achieving against clear strategic pillars:

2024/25 Budget

In February, we passed our budget for the 2024/25 financial year which included a whole range of ways we're investing in improving the lives of our residents.

South Cambridgeshire District Council is in a strong financial position – something increasingly rare amongst local authorities, many of whom have faced stinging budget cuts or bankruptcy this year (and many more who will face bankruptcy over the next twelve months).

Rather than making short-term, politically easy choices like freezing Council Tax, we gave thought to the long-term wellbeing of South Cambridgeshire's residents, making sure we are in a position to continue to fund services in the long term. Because of the rampant inflation we've seen under years of the Conservative government's financial mismanagement, real-terms Council funds are shrinking faster and faster and traditional funding methods for council funding can't keep up.

Thankfully, the Lib Dems have made sensible financial investments over the past 6 years in administration. Because of this, the Council brings in £7 million thanks to its commercial investments. Without these investments, South Cambs wouldn't so easily be able to continue to provide the high-quality services we do and wouldn't be in the strong financial position we are in.

Council Tax and Council Tax Support

The District Council's increase in Council Tax represents an extra 42p per month for a band D household. The rise in Council Tax is below inflation. Inflation has been at record levels and is still at 4.1% (which is lower than it has been recently but is still far higher than it should be). This means that the Council is facing a real term budget cut.

We are increasing the thresholds for support offered under the Council Tax Support Scheme in line with inflation, making sure people currently able to claim don't lose out.

This scheme means that the poorest in our communities get up to 100% relief on their council tax bills. The brunt of Council Tax should not fall on the poorest in our society.

Across Cambridgeshire, South Cambs, Huntingdonshire and Cambridge City offer up to 100% relief whereas East Cambs offers up to 91.5%, Fenland 80% and Peterborough 70%.

2024/25 Business Plan

We also agreed our 2024/25 Business Plan. Our work for the next financial year will be focussed on the council's 4 priority areas: (1) Growing Local Businesses and Economies, (2) Delivering Truly Affordable Housing, (3) Being Green to Our Core, and (4) Being a Modern and Caring Council.

1. Growing Local Businesses and Economies

Our work helping businesses (specifically SMEs) grow will help local communities thrive, bringing jobs and opportunities into our villages. Access to high quality jobs is essential to make sure everyone can live their life how they want to. Helping local businesses transition to net-zero means they will be more resilient to the impact of climate change and help the district at large in its efforts to be more sustainable. Our work to support local highstreets and markets will directly benefit communities and will help residents shop locally and help them support local businesses.

2. Truly Affordable Housing

Our work as a council to ensure that housing is truly affordable for all is essential to giving residents the freedom to live their life how they want. We recognise that everyone deserves a high-quality, safe, and affordable place to live and therefore our plans are ambitious and will make sure that the South Cambridgeshire continues to be a leader when it comes to building homes.

We have a proven track record of delivery - delivering more and more affordable housing (more than the city each year) since we've taken control of the administration.

There have been over 1,000 housing completions every year in South Cambs since 2018, up to 1,500 completions in the most recent year we have data for (2022/23). Each year (except for a slight dip in 2020) we have increased the number of affordable homes being built in the district. This is consistently higher than what the city are building. (2022/23: City – 322; Scambs – 472). The amount of market-rate housing built has consistently been double that of the City for the entire duration we've been in power in South Cambridgeshire. In 2017/18 the Conservatives oversaw 736 completions (only 180 of those affordable). In 2022/23 we oversaw 1500 completions (472 of those affordable).

This is part of our work to address the skyrocketing house prices at the root cause of the problem. We recognise that giving people access to an affordable home to live in is one the best way to tackle the structural inequalities we face and to give people the agency to make decisions in their lives. We are an unambiguously 'YIMBY' Council.

We are working to ensure housing across the district is built to the highest possible standards of energy efficiency and are working to bring existing housing up to scratch. This will help our residents who are facing rising energy costs and is part of our work to combat the devastating impacts of climate change.

3. Green to Our Core

Climate change is the single biggest issues facing the world. This is not some far away problem we can ignore and bury our head in the sand, it is affecting South Cambs. Our water scarcity crisis, air quality problems, extreme weather, flooding, and heat waves are all direct consequences of the climate crisis. That being green to our core is a lynchpin of all the work we do as a Council demonstrates how fundamentally serious, we are about tackling climate change.

Our work on 20% biodiversity net gain has pre-empted and gone further than Government goals and our contributions to the upcoming Local Area Energy Plan will help Cambridgeshire set forth how it will reach net zero.

Further, we are actively engaging with Government, the water industry, Cambridge City and other partners to find solutions the water scarcity crisis we are facing.

Our Waterbeach Renewable Energy Network Project will help reduce the Council's carbon emissions and is a landmark project being watched by other authorities up and down the country.

Over the next year we will continue to improve the energy performance of our commercial buildings and other assets owned by the council, following on from the Greening of South Cambs Hall.

Alongside this we are, through the Zero Carbon Communities Scheme, EV Charging Point Scheme and other community engagement programmes, helping local communities take steps on the path to reducing emissions, ensuring they can be resilient to the effects of climate change and that all residents are able to benefit from the transition to net zero.

We are giving more staff support for the Zero Carbon Communities Fund. Over the past 4 years we have given out £500k in support of projects to help local communities. This year £125,000 will be available through the scheme.

Through schemes such as repair cafés, food waste redistribution schemes and cooperation with other authorities across the county, we are helping reduce household waste and encourage recycling and the development of a circular economy.

We have this year employed two new Environmental Enforcement Officers. These roles are in place specifically to address the issue of fly tipping – so that the council can more effectively prosecute fly tippers. Also included in the budget is more support for the cleaning team, so that incidents of fly tipping can be addressed more quickly. The capital budget also includes funding for a new vehicle for these officers, meaning we are giving officers the resources they need to do their jobs effectively.

Fly tipping is a stain on the countryside and as a rural area, South Cambs is particularly vulnerable to it. This proposal amounts to a significant investment into our ability to combat fly tipping and to make sure offenders are brought to justice.

We are creating two new posts, bringing in house our litter picking along highways rather than contracting it out. This will save the Council approx. £25k a year - giving us a more reliable and cost-efficient service.

4. Modern and Caring Council

The council is undergoing significant transformation work. Our transformation work, unlike in other councils, is not just about saving money but is about finding ways of improving our services

for residents and using the resources we have efficiently and effectively to the most impact. We are making more and more of our services available online and are updating our website to make them more easily accessible to residents. Our commercial investments are successfully bringing increasing income to the Council and we're working to tackle income tax and business rates fraud. The Council is creating a member development plan, making sure Councillors have the skills and knowledge needed to best support their residents and effectively work to improve the district together.

Safe & Secure Homes

We are making sure we provide tenants with safe and secure homes – undertaking all landlord safety checks and provided targeted health and wellbeing support for vulnerable residents. Part of this is making sure our staff have the training to respond appropriately to safeguarding issues. Further we are working to do all we can to support asylum seekers and refugees, including those from Ukraine, who are settled across the district.

Homes for Ukraine Scheme

Continuing Russian aggression in Ukraine means that this scheme is still very active. The council is going to spend £897,000 on support for Ukrainian guests, this is funded by central government. How this money gets spent and what exact support we provide is up to the Council.

Currently, South Cambs supports one of the largest numbers of Ukrainian guests of any district and the council provides support such as funding for hosts, employment support for guests, and small grants for activities to help guests to integrate. The latest initiative is to provide support for guests moving on from hosts into independent accommodation via our landlord incentive scheme which encourages private landlords to accept Ukrainian guests as tenants. The council determines the priorities for the scheme but continues to receive financial support from the government to provide them.

Neighbourhood Plans

We are working to develop new neighbourhood plans so that local communities can take a leading role in determining their future development. In Northstowe, this past year saw the opening of The Cabin (temporary community centre), and Western Park Sports Pavilion, and we will in the next year be building the permanent Community Centre and we are advancing our plans for a Civic Hub and the Phase 2 Sports Pavilion.

On a cross-party basis, we passed a motion meaning the Council will treat care experience as though it is a protected characteristic. The Council also agreed on a cross-party basis to work towards White Ribbon accreditation, a charity that seeks to tackle domestic abuse and gender-based violence.

Cambridge 2050

Michael Gove announced his plans for 'Cambridge 2040' in July 2023. Since then, we have had little clarity from the government. The figure of 250,000 homes has been revised down to 150,000 homes and 2040 has been pushed back to 2050.

In March 2024 a 'growth corporation' was announced, which will direct a lot of the initial work. We had hoped that as the local planning authority we would have a seat on the board of this to try and direct the new development. Unfortunately, local authorities will only sit on an advisory council alongside businesses and industry partners, meaning we won't have a vote or decision-making powers. There is a lot we still don't know about Cambridge 2050, as your district councillor I will keep parish/town councils informed as we learn more. As an administration SCDC have been clear about the importance of having local voices involved in local planning decisions, as well as the need for new transport, new schools, and new health services.

We've also been firm on the issue of the environment and water scarcity. This is why we have seen movement from the government to help us unlock developments such as at Bourn Airfield, Waterbeach and the Cancer Research Hospital. This has been a good first few steps but significantly more work on water scarcity will be needed to realise the scale of growth within the SCDC local plan let alone Michael Gove's plans.

Four-Day Week Trial

As many will be aware, due to the media coverage of this groundbreaking initiative, SCDC has been trialling a desk-based four-day week since January 2023. This included an initial three-month trial and in May 2023, following independent assessment of performance data, Cabinet extended the trial by 12 months, meaning the trial period ended March 2024. Separately, a three-month trial for waste crews was approved in May 2023. This followed the initial desk-based trial due to the complexities of reorganising bin collection rounds for around 128,000 households across Greater Cambridge.

Under a four-day week, officers are expected to carry out 100% of their work, in 80% of the time, for 100% of the pay. The Council undertook the trials because of the acute recruitment and retention issues it was facing, which is amplified in Greater Cambridge due to the high cost of housing. Similar trials are taking place across the UK, Ireland, and US, as outlined by the 4 Day Week Global Campaign, notably both the Scottish and Welsh Governments are considering such trials.

During the trials, the Council has spent £434,000 less on agency staff covering roles that were previously identified as hard to fill. Initial results suggest there has been no statistically significant negative impact on services but rather in some areas, the Council's services have improved. Further, health and wellbeing surveys of council staff show there has been a significant positive impact on both mental and physical health.

In November 2023, the government issued a 'best value notice' to the council, stating its opposition to the four-day week. This notice asked the council to submit significant amounts of data to the government.

In December 2023, the Government published a four-week consultation on the Local Government Finance Settlement, setting expectations around local authority funding in future years. The Government reiterated that they do not support a four-day week for local authorities and asked for views about the use of financial levers in future settlements to disincentivise the practice. The results of this consultation were overwhelmingly against the imposition of financial levers although the government appear to be ignoring this result.

The Council had expected, subject to data showing performance had been maintained or improved and a member decision, to consult on a four-day week shortly after the end of the formal trial. We cannot do that until the government tells us what financial levers it would use, as we would not be able to explain the full financial impact on the Council. Whilst we wait for the government to tell us what they will do so we can consult, staff are continuing to use a four-day working pattern.

Once a consultation has been carried out, and once all the evidence has been independently analysed, councillors will at full council decide whether, or not, to keep the four-day week permanently. This decision will be based on the evidence put before councillors and has not already been made. We believe in evidenced based decision-making and have not pre-judged the outcome of the trial.

COUNCILS, RESPONSIBILITIES AND KEY GOVERNMENT FUNDED ORGANISATIONS

If you have a problem or concern do not worry too much about who can solve it just ask the question and we will endeavour to signpost to the right person. The organisational structure of Cambridgeshire is complex, but it is important to identify where responsibility lies.

<p>County Council</p> <p>Responsibilities: Education, Transport, Highways, Heritage, Social care, Libraries, Trading standards, - Waste management, Maintaining their estate.</p> <p>Some of these services are shared between Peterborough City Council and Cambridgeshire County Council but any concerns should be directed to the county council.</p>
<p>District Council</p> <p>Responsibilities: Council tax payments and benefits, Household bin collections, Housing and housing benefits, Council leisure facilities, Environmental health, Residential planning.</p>
<p>Parish/ Town Council</p> <p>Responsibilities: Looking after community buildings, Open spaces, Allotments, Play Areas, Bus shelters.</p>
<p>Greater Cambridge Partnership (GCP)</p> <p>'The local delivery body for a City Deal with central Government worth up to £500 million over 15 years, to vital improvements in infrastructure (decarbonising transport), supporting and accelerating the creation of 44,000 new jobs, 33,500 new homes and 420 additional apprenticeships.'</p> <p>Partnership between Cambridge City Council, Cambridgeshire County Council, South Cambridgeshire District Council, University of Cambridge.</p>
<p>The Combined Authority, Cambridge and Peterborough, our elected Mayor</p> <p>'A combined authority (CA) is a legal body set up using national legislation that enables a group of two or more councils to collaborate and take collective decisions across council boundaries.'</p> <p>What our mayor does – Business support, skills, housing, transport, environment, international, digital connectivity, resilience, research, and strategy. New homes.</p>
<p>Police and Crime Commissioner, Cambridge and Peterborough</p> <p>To support and challenge the Chief Constable to provide effective and efficient policing services for the area.</p>
<p>Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority</p> <p>The Fire Authority is the governing body responsible for delivering a fire and rescue service to Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. It is made up of Cambridgeshire County Councillors and Peterborough City Councillors.</p>

CONTACT DETAILS

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions about the above, or any other matters.

Cllr Natalie Warren-Green for Longstanton Ward including Longstanton, Northstowe, and Oakington & Westwick

Email: cldr.warrenngreen@scambs.gov.uk

For those on social media we have a highly active Facebook group:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/2066298150052161/> - Longstanton, Oakington and Northstowe

Report from Parish Councillor Jake Camilleri

Annual Parish Meeting 22 April 2024

Parish Councillor role

I have really enjoyed getting to know you all. It is incredible seeing all the hard work that goes into running a PC. It has been an eye opener for me seeing the range of issues and subjects that a Parish Council deals with, where our responsibilities start and end. I certainly no longer take the community amenities for granted. I find it rewarding being in the room and helping make decisions on behalf of the community. I find it useful knowing what is going on in and around the village (not just from the PC but from the SCDC/ County news bulletins and Cllr reports. I hope that my contributions are useful and I would encourage anyone to join the Parish Council.