District Councillor report to Parish Council October 2025

Six Free Trees Scheme

Please see below the latest announcement from South Cambridgeshire District Council regarding its annual Six Free Trees scheme.

Parish and Town Councils are again invited to apply for either six small trees (whips) or one larger pot-grown tree. The Council acknowledges that this scheme has run for some years and is now open to considering alternative publicly accessible sites, though this is subject to landowner permission and further approval from the District Council. Schools may also participate, but only via their Parish or Town Councils.

Applications are open until 30th November, but early submission is encouraged to avoid delays.

Those wanting to claim free trees should complete the form at:

www.scambs.gov.uk/six-free-trees

Neighbourhood Plans for Stapleford & Great Shelford and Harston

South Cambridgeshire District Council has officially adopted Neighbourhood Plans for Stapleford & Great Shelford and Harston, marking a significant milestone in community-led planning. These plans, developed through years of dedicated work by local steering groups and Parish Councils, reflect the aspirations of residents and aim to guide future development in ways that preserve village character, enhance sustainability, and support biodiversity. With over 95% of referendum voters backing the plans, the strong support highlights the value communities place on shaping their own futures.

The adoption of these plans adds to a growing list of neighbourhoods across Greater Cambridge that are taking proactive steps to influence planning decisions. From protecting green spaces and heritage assets to improving active travel infrastructure and housing provision, the policies within each plan are tailored to local needs.

Local Climate Action Conference

A reminder that we are hosting our third annual Local Climate Action Conference on Friday 17 October 2025 from 12pm to 5pm at Storey's Field Centre, Eddington. This event is open to parish councils, community groups, charities and anyone interested in tackling climate change and enhancing biodiversity. There will also be an opportunity to input into the upcoming Climate and Nature strategy consultation and learn about different climate-friendly initiatives around the district to inspire your own. Lunch and refreshments will be provided.

Please RSVP via this link: https://forms.office.com/e/DKWNNDkxfF

Water efficiency in new homes

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) has launched a consultation proposing updates to the Building Regulations that would improve water efficiency in new homes. The suggested changes include installing features like aerated taps, efficient showerheads, and dual-flush toilets, aiming to reduce water usage by up to 20 litres per person per day. Defra is working with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to explore tightening standards under the Building Regulations 2010, helping households save on water and energy bills.

The consultation also invites feedback on the potential for water reuse systems in new developments, such as rainwater harvesting, to further enhance sustainability. One option under consideration is revising the minimum water efficiency standard for new homes through updated fittings. These proposals are part of a broader effort to support environmental goals and unlock housing development in water-stressed areas. This will be particularly important in this area give expected growth and demand on water supply so I will be supporting these changes.

You can read the full press release:

https://www.gov.uk/government/news/water-saving-plans-to-reduce-bills-and-unblock-new-homes.

Update to Council's accounts

It's our job as elected councillors to ensure taxpayer's money is being spent appropriately, and it's important that we can scrutinise accounts and audits to make sure this happens. While the external audit fee is necessary to provide reassurance of how our money is being spent, ultimately this money is not being used to benefit residents' lives. Therefore, extra money being paid due to overruns and delays is more dead money - money being spent unnecessarily and to little or no benefit to residents. In the past overruns have gone into hundreds and thousands of pounds. This is not a few pence here or there. It is very disappointing that despite central government essentially wavering full audits for the last few years in order for our councils to catch up and start afresh, South Cambs yet again is facing the prospect of spending a significant amount of money to the external auditors due to overruns and delays.

This is not a new problem and its one that we feel should be very much resolved by now if the finance department was resourced properly and they had enough time in their working days to complete their work.

Planning Update

The opposition group has written to Steve Reed MP, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government asking for the process of planning applications to be sped up when they go to the Planning Inspectorate.

Currently, an application can take around two years for a decision to be reached. Where this is an appeal, an additional two years on top of the time from when the application process was started is an unnecessary long time for residents to hear decisions – and at times, can be very distressing to residents and the wider community.

Available grants – all in one place.

This month, the council launched the Service Support Grants with up to £300,000 per year for eligible local organisations. It's focused on six key areas:

· Mental health and wellbeing - £50,000 a year

· Advice services

· Independent living

· Support for the voluntary and community sector

· Cost-of-living support

· PLACE-based Initiatives

For information click below:

Grants and Funding - South Cambs District Council

Tenant community grant

Local organisers can apply for up to £1000 for a project that benefits the community. You can apply for the funding for projects such as:

· Gardening equipment

· Community gardens or benches

· Updating communal rooms

· Organising local events

· Equipment for regular clubs

Local organisers can apply here:

Tenant Community Grants - South Cambs District Council

Local Council Tax Support scheme

South Cambridgeshire District Council is consulting on proposed updates to its Local Council Tax Support scheme, aimed at simplifying processes, improving efficiency, and ensuring residents receive the support they're entitled to. Key proposals include using Universal Credit

claim notifications to streamline applications, extending backdating provisions, introducing a flat-rate deduction for non-dependants, aligning disability and carer premiums with Universal Credit, and simplifying income bands and adjustment rules. Improvements to award notifications are also planned, with clearer details provided online and in Council Tax letters.

The consultation is open until 11:59pm on Wednesday 15 October 2025, giving residents and stakeholders the chance to share their views. Feedback will help the Council assess the impact of the changes and align with other authorities while preparing for future developments in local government. A final version of the scheme will be presented to Full Council in February for approval. Paper copies of the consultation are available on request via email to engage@scambs.gov.uk.

Consultation:

Project: Council Tax Support Scheme 26/27 Consultation | South Cambridgeshire District Council

Thank you for taking the time to read my report; if you have any questions or want to discuss any of the issues raised email me on graham.cone@councillor.online or ring 07595 361 285 (please leave a voicemail if I am unavailable) ***Councillor Graham Cone***