

DISTRICT COUNCILLORS LONGSTANTON WARD ANNUAL REPORT 2018-2019

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We are both surprised by how quickly this year has flown by since we were elected in May 2018. We would like to begin our review of the year by thanking our community for being so welcoming and showing us patience and support during our first year of being your District Councillors. We would like to particularly thank the Parish Council, Chair John Street and especially Parish Clerk Libby White/Chair Stephen Moore and especially Clerk Laura Lawrence, as well as our County Councillor Peter Hudson for all their assistance and time.

We have had a busy year and would like to highlight some of what has happened locally in our ward before going on to briefly review some District wide updates.

- Northstowe has kept us particularly busy, with a lot happening over this year. We are now at over 300 occupations and we have been so impressed to see the community growing and already developing a strong sense of identity and community spirit.
- Phase 3 consultations have taken place over this year and we are expecting planning permissions to be brought through in Autumn this year.
- The proposed masterplan for the new Northstowe town centre was presented and public consultations are taking place. We are excited by these potential plans and you can still view them via www.northstowe.com/towncentre and can comment until 3rd May.
- The Northstowe Town Square, The Green, is now open and already being used by residents for community events.
- After lobbying and pressure from the community, ourselves and our County Councillor, the Community Wing is now finally fully open and available for the community to use.
- We worked to get a temporary footpath to allow residents to safely get to the Busway from Northstowe, which opened in November last year.
- The land transfer has now been completed for the new allotments and community orchard at Northstowe and the next step will be to set up an allotment society to run and maintain these community allotments- we have argued for these new allotments to be made available to both Northstowe and Longstanton residents.
- We met with some of the team from the Cambridge Food Hub project. This exciting project aims to increase the accessibility of sustainable food whilst supporting local producers and

small businesses. The Hub will be a centre for all aspects of food: from production and consumption to education and research. The team are very keen to look at locating the food Hub in Northstowe. We would like support exciting, local and small businesses like this to locate themselves in Northstowe. For more info Food Hub project visit their website:

<https://cambridgefoodhub.org/>

- We have met regularly with our Community officers, the planning team and Homes England to keep up to date with plans and developments at Northstowe and to be able to feed information back to residents- one of our aims when we were elected as District Councillors was to ensure residents were kept up to date and so we have published regular information on our Facebook group, via newsletters and in our monthly Parish Council reports.
- The Northstowe Community forum, which we are now chairing, has also been a great opportunity for residents to hear from and speak to planners and developers at Northstowe. Again, we have published notes and presentations from these meetings which can be viewed on our Facebook page or we would be happy to send these to residents.
- We have been working with enforcement throughout this year to try and get on top of issues with developers and contractors breaches of planning conditions at Northstowe, which have been a significant issue for residents of both Northstowe and Longstanton. We are encouraging residents to report issues directly online as Planning Enforcement advise this is the best way to collate the data and build a record of the breaches and evidence which could be used for legal action. It appears that Enforcement have not always had all reports from residents from the first dates of construction activity which is very frustrating for residents. To directly report issues with breach of planning conditions, this is the best link: <https://scambs-framework.egovhub.net/REPORTABREACHOFPLANNINGCONTROL/launch>
- Enforcement have to date issued Breach of Condition notices to the Directors of Barrett, Bovis and Linden.
- In Longstanton there have been ongoing concerns regarding water levels in the village and the Kingfisher Pond. We have agreed to arrange a meeting with Bridget Smith, the SCDC Leader to discuss these issues and what action SCDC can take to further investigate.
- We have worked with officers from the Streets Team at SCDC to address several issues across the ward- in Northstowe we facilitated, along with Community Officer Jon Northstowe, meetings to address issues with Northstowe bin collections- we hope services have now improved. In Longstanton we were finally able to get the footpaths in Clive Hall Drive cleared to allow resurfacing work by the Highways team. In Oakington we have

increased road sweeping in the village and are attempting to coordinate this with drain clearing to reduce the risk of flooding caused by block drains in the village- particular thanks should go to the Oakington EAG group for their work surveying the drains in the village.

- For Oakington the proposed Rural Travel Hub has been a major issue this year- we supported the view of the Parish Council and many residents, who responded to the consultation (including the Transport Action Group, who we would also like to thank for their work on this and other transport issues in the village) that the Hub would only be acceptable without parking and if improvements were made to bus services and cycling infrastructure. We made this case clearly to our representatives at the GCP. We are still waiting for the final decision regarding the Travel Hub but will keep residents updated.
- Improvement to community transport is a priority for us and we supported a motion at Full Council last year calling on the Combined Authority to bring forward the outcome of their strategic review of transport. We need better options for integrated public transport that makes car use a less favourable option for residents.
- We also met with Stagecoach to discuss residents' issues with existing bus services and the Busway and will continue to feedback complaints from residents.
- Finally, we would like to thank residents for their support for our summer holiday foodbank collection for the Cambridge foodbank last year. Thank you to the local businesses who supported the collections and to residents for their kind donations.

DISTRICT WIDE UPDATES

Our first year as a District Council in headlines:

- Given more money for mobile warden schemes
- Increased Council Tax for empty homes
- Supported local businesses to get council work
- Tailored the Localised Council Tax Scheme for Universal Credit
- Offered homes for five Syrian refugee families
- Provided Brexit help to local businesses
- Sold land for self-build
- Identified sites for more new council houses
- Produced a new homelessness strategy
- Made available a 3-year £4,000,000 fund for community groups
- Published a new tool kit for loneliness

- Commenced the preparation of a new joint Local Plan with Cambridge City
- Saved X3 bus service from the chop

Governance

The Liberal Democrats won control of the Council in May 2018 and are now a 30-strong group (previously 14). There are 11 Conservatives, 2 Independents, 2 Labour. In a spirit of co-operation, we appointed an Independent Councillor as Council Chairman, and for good governance, appointed a Conservative as Chairman of the important Scrutiny and Overview Committee. A 7-strong cabinet is made up of 4 women and 3 men.

New Business Plan

Following a public consultation, a new Business Plan covering the period 2019 to 2024 has been published, which changes the direction of the Council. We are committed to providing homes that are truly affordable for everyone to live in; to help local businesses to grow; to be green to our core and to put customers at the centre of everything we do as a modern and caring council. Check out the new Business Plan at: www.scambs.gov.uk/businessplan

Re-organising the Council

It became clear in putting together the new Business Plan that the departmental structure of the council would struggle to deliver on our priorities. Furthermore, studies of other district councils showed that South Cambridgeshire had fallen behind in the use of new technology and working practices essential to run a modern council. Management consultants were commissioned to carry out a review of the council and to recommend what would need to change to improve business delivery and it was made clear to the consultants that business improvement was their brief, not cost-cutting.

Medium Term Financial Strategy

For most of the first year in control of the council, we had to work with the budget set by the previous Conservative-led administration. The council has recently approved a new budget for 2019-20, which sets the priorities for the Lib Dem administration. The council no longer receives central government grants and the amount which the council can raise from Council Tax is also capped by the government.

Our five-year financial plan has been altered to deliver more income from investments and

commercialisation with the aim of having 25% of £20 million income coming from these sources by 2024. The previous administration's plans were to reduce general reserves to less than £3 million by 2023 while we are aiming for reserves of £4.5 million by then. An inherited budget shortfall of £0.5 million has already been turned into a £1 million surplus which has gone into the General Reserve to help prepare for future uncertainties.

Housing

One of this administration's priorities is the provision of more council houses and a resolve to meet agreed targets for affordable housing in new developments. We are aiming to build 70 new council houses per year, and even more where possible. So far in 2019, we've completed 28 new homes, adding those plus 6 purchased council houses to our stock. We also completed 13 shared ownership houses for sale in the last year and have another 61 plus 24 shared ownership currently being built on site.

A new strategy for Housing in South Cambridgeshire has been adopted to deliver homes that are affordable, not just to buy but to live in. In addition to delivering new homes, in the right place and at the right price, we will strive to keep utility bills low by ensuring that they are as energy efficient and water efficient as they can be. We also strive to build close to places of employment to encourage walking and cycling to work as well as using public transport.

New Investment Strategy

Our new investment strategy – new because one did not previously exist - is ensuring council taxpayers are getting the best return for the council's financial reserves. One investment; Cambridge Ice Rink is now close to being completed. Located off Newmarket Road on the edge of Cambridge but in South Cambs district, last autumn the council approved an additional loan to ensure the delivery of this high-quality community sporting venue that will benefit the health and wellbeing of residents. The ice pad will meet the requirements of the International Ice Hockey Federation, allowing visiting teams from around the world to play ice hockey there. South Cambs Council Tax payers will benefit from returns on the investment.

We moved quickly to put solar panels on the roof of the Waterbeach refuse depot to obtain the Government's feed-in tariff and purchased the lease of an office block

strategically placed in the Cambridge Science Park which is delivering nearly a 6% net yield on a £13 million investment. We have refocused Ermine Street's (the council's trading company to let homes on the open market) attention on South Cambridgeshire and the employment catchment of the Greater Cambridge sub-region to deliver properties that are not being supplied by current market conditions, such as rented homes for single people.

Better Pay to Attract and Retain Staff

There are a relatively high number of unfilled posts within the council (which effects customer service) and recruitment has not been helped by a squeeze on staff pay put in place by the previous administration, putting us at a disadvantage against neighbouring councils as well as the Greater Cambridge labour market. We have increased pay by 3% over the past three months, while ensuring that no South Cambridgeshire employee earns less than the real living wage. We are also considering improved non-pay employment packages. Some of the initiatives are listed below:

- Apprenticeship schemes.
- Negotiating discounts for staff, for example on public transport.
- The council has become a Disability Confident employer and an officially recognised disable friendly employer.
- We have agreed to better maternity leave rates for staff who have premature babies.
- We are starting regular staff surveys to gauge employee satisfaction and encourage ideas to improve the working environment.

Customer Service

Our administration has set a target of improving complaint-handling by 10% and it is hoped that this will be exceeded. The 'mysouthcamb's' customer portal is being rolled out, offering our customers the means to access Council services 24 hours a day and 365 days of the year.

<https://tinyurl.com/yxscn8rf>

Although digitising council services such as 'mysouthcamb's' will lead to a lower footfall at the Council offices, we have not forgotten customers who do not have access to, or cannot use, the internet and who prefer to speak to our officers. The visitor experience at the Cambourne offices is therefore to be improved and, at the same time, measures also taken to address issues that staff have raised about their personal security.

Shared Services

Around 40% of the Council's revenue and 52% of its services are delivered by Shared Services (in cooperation with other councils) and it is apparent that when they were set up under the previous administration that insufficient attention was paid to details of governance and accountability. We are working with partners now to rectify this.

'Green to our core'

Our administration has pledged to become a zero-carbon district by 2050. A working group of members and officers is preparing a high-level business case for a set of energy conservation measures (such as EV charging points, solar panels over our car park and on our waste depot). We intend that our Cambourne offices will be a showcase for a Zero Carbon Council and an exemplar to our residents.

A council with a heart

Our administration is determined to find homes in our district for 5 refugee families. The Home Office previously asked the council to help with the rehoming of refugees, and two years ago the then minority Lib Dem Group, put a motion to Council proposing this but it was voted down by the majority Conservative Group. The current Home Office scheme runs until December 2019, and we hope to be able to provide homes for these 5 families by then.

Council grants

The committee that administers council grants has been refocused to make it more responsive to a range of needs and interests across the district. We have put more money into the mobile warden scheme this year and another increase is promised next year. We have initiated a piece of work to look at extending the scheme across the whole district and commissioned a similar piece of work on community transport.

GOING INTO OUR SECOND YEAR 2019-2020

As we go into our second year we have still much to do across our ward – in Northstowe, we will see the greenway and the formal park, Pioneer Park being built, work beginning on the sports pavilion, sports pitches and civic Hub, the first houses being built in Northstowe Phase 2, our first intake of students at Northstowe Secondary College and plans being submitted for Northstowe Phase 3.

In Longstanton, we will continue to work with the Parish Council to complete the outstanding areas of Home Farm.

In Oakington, we will prioritise working with the Parish Council to ensure flood attenuation is delivered for Oakington as part of the Northstowe developments.

We always welcome any feedback or suggestions on how you think we can help to grow and support our community. We are especially enthusiastic about any ideas you have on how we can achieve our aim of being 'green to the core' – be it additional tree planting, reducing plastic usage or other initiatives to make our communities more environmentally sustainable.

We look forward to another year working hard as your District Councillors and thank you again for your support.

To keep up to date with all we are doing throughout the next year, we send out email newsletters and have been post regular updates on our Facebook group. Details are here:

- Monthly email newsletter - with updates on local news as well as wider district issues which will impact us all. To sign up please go to:
https://www.sclibdems.org.uk/email_signup_longstanton
(Note to help us manage GDPR it is easier for us to host from the LibDems webpage, but we absolutely promise this link will NOT subscribe you to LibDem news)
- For all the latest news & updates so far please go to:
https://www.sclibdems.org.uk/longstanton_news
- For those on social media we have a very active Facebook group covering the whole ward here: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2066298150052161/>
- We will also be holding regular councillor surgeries for residents who would prefer to speak with us in person, dates for the coming year to be confirmed.