

Over Parish Council



Emily Pacey
Over Community Centre
16 The Doles
Over
Cambridge
CB24 5NW
07525029561
parishclerk@overparishcouncil.org.uk

Annual Parish Meeting MINUTES Monday 22nd April 2024

Over's Annual Parish Meeting was held on Monday 22nd April 2024 at 19.00pm in the Seminar Room at Over Community Centre.

Present – Cllr G Twiss (Vice Chairman of Over Parish Council), Emily Pacey (Clerk and Financial Officer for Over Parish Council), CCllr F Thompson, DCllr B Handley, 4 members of the public.

- 1. Review of Minutes of the 2023 Annual Parish Meeting**
(Available on the PC website (www.over-pc.org.uk) and will be taken as read at the meeting).
Cllr G Twiss signed the minutes of the 2023 Annual Parish Meeting.

- 2. Chairman's Report for 2023/2024.**

Prepared by Geoff Twiss, Vice-Chairman

It's been a busy year for the Parish Council as a whole, and for me personally standing in as Chairman since November. We shall find out shortly whether Anne is able to continue as a Councillor, following her six months' leave of absence, or whether we will have another vacancy to fill.

It was good to see the **County Council** carrying out some long-overdue work to fill in the worst of the **potholes** that infest our village roads, and we must thank Firouz Thompson for making this happen. Sadly, many of the repairs have not lasted well and, although further work has been happening in some places, there are still too many areas that require attention.

Overcote has continued to grow in popularity, which has proved to be a mixed blessing.

Neighbouring residents were unhappy about the increase in traffic and noise, as well as overnight camping and the lack of toilets. Councillors have worked with the residents to try to find acceptable and practical measures to regulate the area – without much tangible success so far, apart from more signage. It's a public area that cannot be locked up at dusk, so our options are quite limited. People now travel from some distance to enjoy this area, but some of the worst offenders are locals.

Money has now come through as a by-product of the flurry of new housing – we have four large housing sites that got planning permission when SCDC was caught without a 5-year supply of housing land. Under the current planning rules, it is only developments of more than 10 houses that are required to contribute to local facilities, so this sudden influx of money is unlikely to be

repeated. Other parishes have already received and spent their windfall money on enhancing their facilities, leaving our own looking rather tired in comparison. But now it's our turn!

We have been spending a small fortune recently in steadily refurbishing **the pavilion** on the Green – a new roof, new windows and doors, new heating and hot water system, new lighting, CCTV, redecoration, etc – and trying to make best use of the limited space available. Hopefully these works are nearing completion, and we will soon have the facility in full operation once more.

The **play area** on the Green was overdue for some serious attention and investment since much of the equipment was at the end of – or had exceeded – its design life. A working group of parents of young children and councillors assessed what would be possible with the newly available funds and asked the children what kind of play equipment they really wanted. We decided to replace virtually all the existing units and, despite one of the wettest winters on record, the installation has finally been completed. It was great to see the area officially opened last weekend, and the obvious joy on the faces of the children. We owe a lot of thanks to the Over Parks Regeneration Group, and to Councillors Michael Grange and Judith Davies in particular, for juggling the competing pressures of budgets, expectations, and legalities so successfully.

But this is just Phase 1 of their work – their next project is the **play area alongside the Community Centre**, where a significant enhancement is proposed. I will be as keen as anyone to see what they have in mind, but the plans always seem to be just one more meeting away!

As if that wasn't enough, OSKA has been meeting again to advance plans for recreating the **Skate Park**, with the design draft finally being unveiled a few weeks ago. We are assured that serious fundraising efforts will start soon!

The **Recreation Ground extension**, in the form of a new full-sized football pitch straddling the old boundary with the Hayfield development is advancing – albeit with a few issues. The ground levels won't merge as seamlessly as everyone had assumed, but we are assured that the final levels will be much more compatible than they now appear. This will create a much larger open area, allowing a wider range of activities to take place.

There are big decisions ahead, particularly about the future management of the new or refreshed play areas, as well as the further development and management of Overcote.

The Parish Council has risen to the many challenges it has faced this year, even though it is still running with some unfilled places. However, it's not **number** of people sitting round the committee table that matters, it's having the **right** people with the skills, knowledge, commitment, **and** time to make a **positive** contribution – and they are much harder to find.

I can't finish without thanking my Council colleagues, Emily our Clerk, and our regular contractors, as well as the volunteers on various working groups, the litter pickers, the yarn bombers and many others – all combining to maintain and enhance the village as a great place to live.

3. Questions to the County and District Councillors (if present) about their work for the Parish.

- A parishioner raised a query as to why Highways only repair certain potholes that occur on the roads. Cllr F Thompson advised Cambridgeshire County Council had raised these repair issues with their contractors. CCC have not been happy with their contractors work and they have held back 1.4 million pounds from the contractor for uncompleted jobs or poor-quality work. Cllr F Thompson advised Highways are having trouble recruiting staff, but they are trying different ways for this service to work.
- A parishioner raised their concerns about the significant difference between the road levels on the Hayfields development and New Road. She advised that this is likely to cause flooding problems for the properties in New Road with gardens abutting the development. Cllr B Handley advised he will raise this with Toby Williams from the Planning Department in SCDC.
- Cllr B Handley advised due to the 4-day week, SCDC have managed to fill most of their Planning Officers vacancies.

Cllr G Twiss mentioned that he had been trying without success to phone Phoebe Carter (Senior Planning Officer from SCDC) regarding the current planning appeal. Cllr B Handley advised he will also raise this with Toby Willams as phone lines should be managed 5 days per week.

- A parishioner asked for an update regarding the trig point that had been removed by Hayfields, the clerk advised she will follow this up.
- 4. Open Forum – an opportunity for Parishioners to raise and matters relating to the Parish which are of concern to them.**
- Two parishioners raised their concerns of how busy Overcote will become in the Summer, Cllr G Twiss advised Over Parish Council are looking at different ways to manage Overcote for the Summer months.
 - One parishioner asked if there would be any affordable housing or shared ownership in any new developments in Over, Cllr B Handley advised unfortunately these are only for exceptional developments.
 - One parishioner raised her concern of the speed of cars going along New Road. She advised there will be an accident soon if the speed limit remains the same. Cllr G Twiss advised Over Parish Council have put in a 20mph speed limit application for the whole of Over village to Cambridgeshire County Council since the village is so compact. The results of the application will be published in the summer.

Closure of the meeting – 20:00.

South Cambs District Councillor (SCDC) Bill Handley's Report to Over Parish Meeting

A summary of activity over the 12-month period to April 2024

Apart from being one of your district councillors, Bill is also the Lead Cabinet Member for Communities (a portfolio which includes health and wellbeing, arts and culture and new towns (notably Northstowe)).

Here is my report to Over's Annual Parish Meeting. It's quite long because there has been a lot going on in the last twelve months, 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.

SCDC Services

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

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 \(scambs.gov.uk\)](https://www.scambs.gov.uk)

SCDC's financial position

SCDC's accounts have been published as required by government and are up to date. In common with all other local authorities, SCDC has seen its government funding cut significantly in recent years. Unlike many other councils, SCDC is on a very sound financial footing. Commercial investments have been used to make up the shortfall of withdrawn government funding and, in this, SCDC has been very successful, bringing in around £7M per year. If it were not for the threat of the Government's Fair Funding Review, which threatens to strip district councils of business tax revenue and give it to bigger, unitary councils, SCDC would have a projected surplus all the way to 2029. Very few councils can say that.

When it comes to Council Tax, SCDC remains one of the lowest taxing authorities in the country, with a £5 per year increase – 42p a month - for the average band D home, equivalent to a below inflation rise of around 3%. It is remarkable that three parish councils in South Cambs have a bigger council tax precept than SCDC. The Council Tax relief threshold has been increased in line with inflation so that people on the lowest incomes can continue to claim. SCDC is one of a diminishing number of councils still offering up to 100% relief for those residents in most need.

Councillors' allowances have been raised in line with officer pay. The basic allowance is now £5,800 out of which councillors are expected to cover certain costs such as telephone calls and internet charges.

Non-statutory services

SCDC provides a number of services that are not statutory – ones that the administration provides because it thinks they are important to its residents rather than because they are obliged to provide them by law and they include the provision of certain grant-funding and community initiatives. SCDC's healthy financial position has meant it has been

able to continue to underpin these services, where many other councils have had to scale them back or discontinue them. Here is a brief commentary on some of them:

Cost of living support

The council's ongoing support for the cost-of-living crisis was extended into a second year. The initiatives included supporting mobile food and Community Hubs (offering advice on the support available) and delivering 500 electric blankets to residents struggling with the high cost of energy.

Mobile/Community Wardens

One of the first things I did after I became a councillor was to press for the Mobile/Community Wardens scheme to be extended to Over and Willingham. Unfortunately, the Age UK scheme (in particular) is under financial pressure. SCDC has injected an extra £1M of funding to keep the schemes going for another year, whilst work that we have commissioned continues to quantify the benefits of the scheme to the wider care system. It is hoped that with this data, extra funding will might come from organisations such as the County Council and the NHS to help underpin the schemes.

Homes for Ukraine scheme

Continuing Russian aggression in Ukraine means that this scheme is still very active. 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.

SCDC Allotments toolkit

We appreciate the health and wellbeing benefits of garden allotments and is trying to promote them by offering grant funding and signposting to advice. <https://www.scambs.gov.uk/community-safety-and-health/community-action/allotment-toolkit/> There are also small grants in the pipeline to encourage new community growing clubs – look out for further details soon.

Grants

Here are examples of grants that have been made available through the year:

- Community chest (small community projects) - £80K (in 2023/24)
- Service support grants (for the voluntary and community sector) £174K
- Long-term health - £13K
- Leisure Centre support (post-Covid) - £5K
- Council tenant community grants - £6K
- 6 Free Trees Scheme - £5K
- EV charge-points for local charities - £15K
- Zero carbon (larger grants to encourage carbon reduction) - £126K see below.

Zero Carbon Communities grant scheme 2024

SCDC's popular Zero Carbon Communities grant scheme has now been running for six years and the latest scheme is now open for applications. Since its inception, more than half a million pounds has been given to schemes across the district under two main themes: to lock-up carbon or reduce emissions and to increase community engagement on any matters related to climate change. Grants of between £2,000 and £15,000 are available to parish councils and community groups in the district and a total pot of £125,000 is available. Further information, help and advice is available by emailing zcc@scambbs.gov.uk

Growth in Greater Cambridge

Michael Gove announced his plans for 'Cambridge 2040' in July 2023 but, since then, details have been slow to emerge. Gove's original figure of 250,000 homes has since been revised down to 150,000 and the 2040 target has been pushed back to 2050. Last month, the government announced that it intends to set up a 'growth corporation'. The administration had hoped and assumed that, as the local planning authority, it would have a seat on the board of this organisation and bring to it significant local knowledge and experience but it seems that local authorities will only sit on an advisory council alongside businesses and industry partners and without a vote or decision-making powers.

There is still a great deal that is unknown about the government's Cambridge 2050 plans. Even if there is a Labour government after the upcoming general election, we do not think that government policy will change much because large and powerful international high-tech businesses want to move here, especially those engaged in medical research, bioscience and medical sciences the pressure for growth will be intense. It is therefore vital that the local authorities use any power that the government allows to make sure that the infrastructure needed for such growth is in place, such as plans for a sustainable transport system, which is badly needed to prevent our roads from grinding to a halt due to congestion and to reduce the decline in air quality levels. New schools and health facilities are going to be needed, water scarcity issues are critical and environmental protections must be put in place. Affordable housing is going to be vital.

What about the Local Plan?

As a partner (with Cambridge City Council) in the Local Planning Authority (LPA), SCDC has already put in a huge amount of work into shaping the new Greater Cambridge Local Plan. This is a key planning document which ensures that growth is delivered in a sustainable way both for people and the environment. The Cambridge 2050 proposals means that much more work will now have to be done and the existing timetable is no longer realistic. I will keep you up to date with developments as the emerging Local Plan develops.

Four-Day Week Trial

Ironically, just as the government's Cambridge 2050 vision places huge extra demands on the LPA's planning resources, they are trying very hard to hinder SCDC's attempts to recruit more planners! 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 and the council has been conducting a four-day week trial since January 2023.

The reason for considering a four-day week is because of acute staff recruitment and retention problems especially for certain types of qualified people, such as planners (of which there is a national shortage) and HGV drivers for our waste collection vehicles. The problem is amplified in Greater Cambridge due to the high cost of housing but similar trials are taking place across the UK, Ireland, and USA and both the Scottish and Welsh Governments are giving consideration for such schemes. Four-day week working is becoming increasingly common in the private sector.

Initial data from the trial are encouraging. The Council has spent £434,000 less on expensive agency staff, who were needed to cover roles that are identified as hard to fill. There has been no statistically significant negative impact on

services and in some areas, the Council's services have improved. Health and wellbeing surveys of staff show a significant positive impact on both their mental and physical health.

The government has been vigorous in its opposition to the trial and it issued a 'best value notice' demanding that the council regularly submit large amounts of data to the government. They have issued a threat to use "financial levers" to penalise the council which has had ramifications for the conclusion of the trial – because a consultation cannot be undertaken or a conclusive report on the trial produced until the government states what those financial penalties will be. Whilst this information is awaited from the government, the council's staff continue to operate a four-day working pattern.

Once we have clarity from the government, a resident consultation will be conducted and the trial data will be independently analysed. The council's elected members will then, at full council, decide whether or not to make the four-day week permanent.

More (and better) council homes

One of our business plan priorities, most 'affordable' housing is delivered by housing associations, often via S106 schemes. However, SCDC acquires social affordable housing in significant numbers and since 2018 we have more than doubled the council's stock. There are currently over 400 new council homes planned for the next few years, all of them built to high standard of energy efficiency. We are also well into a programme of upgrading the thermal efficiency of our existing council housing stock which will result in a significant reduction in energy running costs for tenants.

Bill Handley April 2024. Contact 01954 200287 (please leave a message) or email cllr.handley@scambs.gov.uk

CAMBRIDGESHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL REPORT – ANNUAL REPORT 2024 LONGSTANTON, NORTHSTOWE, OVER, OAKINGTON & WESTWICK 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 microenterprises', 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: firoz.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