

A Meeting of GREAT AND LITTLE CHISHILL PARISH COUNCIL

Venue: Village Hall
Date: 16th November 2023
Time: 7:30 pm
Chair: Cllr Dring
Parish Councillors: Hall, Hatt, Leitch, Ridge
Clerk / Proper Officer: Sarah Scott
County Councillor: Cllr McDonald
District Councillor: Not present
Members of the Public: None
Start Time: 7:30pm

1. Apologies for Absence (and reasons)

Cllr Pine – previous engagement
Cllr Clement – previous engagement
Cllr Hobro – previous engagement

2. To receive any declaration of Pecuniary and non-Pecuniary Interest of Councillors

There were none declared.

3. Approval of the Minutes of the 12th October meeting

There were no comments relating to the meeting. As the minutes were a true and accurate account of the meeting they were signed and dated by the Chair.

4. Public Participation.

There were no members of the public present.

5. Correspondence Received (already circulated)

There were no comments on the communication report. The Clerk added that six trees have been ordered following receipt of the offer by South SCDC; these will be planted on the playing fields or Plaistow.

6. District and County Councillors Report (already circulated)

The District and County Councillor reports are at the end of these minutes. The link to the SCDC Team Leader has been circulated. There is no shortfall in SCDC finances for the coming financial year. It was reported that there are 800 families from Ukraine in the County which needs the support of 40 officers. The 4 day week trial finishes in December and it is reported that there is a decrease in agency staff being contracted by SCDC which has reduced costs and that they are retaining planning officers. The County Council has a large gap in finances partly due to adult services (see County Councillor report). He reported that loneliness is high amongst the 18-24 age range. Cllr Hall asked about investing funds and Cllr McDonald explained that this is now not permitted (in the past County had invested in property). There is a new campaign being launched on fostering. 2/3rds of the budget is used on adult care as there is a statutory duty to do this.

Cllr McDonald sent an email to the Parish Council re Connecting Cambridgeshire. It was pointed out that Great and Little Chishill was not mentioned. Cllr McDonald to follow this up.

7. Highways / Transport

- Outstanding highways issues in Great Chishill (drains, floods, potholes, New Road). It was reported that David Crowther is now in charge of drainage. There are still lots of issues in New Road. Issues are being reported but seem to be taking longer to fix. Cllr Hall gave some examples of these. For instance the speed signs just before Flint Cross fell over a year and a half ago, were reported on the website and are still have not been put right.
- Outstanding highways issues in Little Chishill. Cllr Ridge reported that potholes are fixed and then they fall again quite quickly.
- A505 report. There will be no decision until the spring but there will not be any dualling. Potentially traffic lights might be installed at Flint Cross. Another option that is being looked at is to open up Junction 9 of the M11 which could cut traffic on the A505.
- No 31 Bus. Cllr McDonald reported that costs are being looked into and at the moment the No 31 will continue.

8. Planning

- 23/03631/HFUL – Creation of driveway 34 Heydon Road. The Parish Council support this application but will add in their comments that the application should be retrospective as the works have mostly been completed.
- Land in Village. We have heard nothing since our meeting.
- North Hall Farm. There has been no feedback since the last online report was filled out. Clerk to contact Mr Braybrook
- Bridgefoot Farm. Appeal is on-going. Mobile home has been reported online.
- Rabbit Residence. The Parish Council has heard nothing but will chase the planning officer.

9. Finance

- Finance Sheets. These were circulated, there were no queries and the sheets were signed and dated.
- Clerks Salary. The Clerk left the room. On re-entering the Chair told the Clerk that the Council had awarded the Clerk a back dated pay rise. The Clerk thanked the Council.
- Request of Grant of circa £500 for folders and lights for the choir. It was felt that £500 was disproportionate also there are other local choirs to consider. The Parish Council is not allowed to give money to Churches so it was agreed that subject to checks a grant of £200 would be awarded.
- Christmas Tree Festival. It was agreed that the Council purchase a tree and a theme of community engagement would adorn it. The Clerk to organise.

10. Speed and safety

- Speed Watch. Cllr Hall is working on Speed Watch. He is going follow up on the signage on posts and identify specific post where the signs can be attached.
- The Clerk has the mirror. The Chair and Cllr Hall to erect it. Cllr Ridge has also offered to help.

11. Promotion of Parish

Clr Hall gave an overview. The Chair contacted another potential lead to undertake the work.

12. To Accept Notices & Matters for the next Agenda

D-Day anniversary 6th June.

There being no further notifiable business the Chair closed the meeting at 8:35pm.

Cambridgeshire County Report

Cambridgeshire County Council's estimated budget gap for 2024/5 has increased from a predicted £16m to more than £23m – largely due to increases in demand for services and inflationary pressure.

In papers published for last week's Strategy, Resources and Performance committee, the Council is also estimating that without action being taken this gap will grow, and is predicted to be more than £20m in the following year, and a further £19m+ the year after that.

In 2023-24, pressures on our budget have arisen principally due to several very high-cost children's social care placements and a delay in receiving income from a newly constructed solar farm (which requires connection to the electricity grid). In addition, we are seeing that demand for bed-based care for older people is also rising, following a period of reduction in demand and then stability stretching back for some time, to the beginning of the pandemic.

It also points to wider national and even international issues which have impact on the council's pressures – such as interest rates which the Bank of England has said are likely to remain above 5% until 2026, which impact on all goods and services the council buys, the cost of borrowing as well as pay award costs for both council workers, and a large externally commissioned workforce which includes residential care for vulnerable adults and children.

Proposals to set the Council's 2024/5 budget will be discussed by Members in December before a period of scrutiny, throughout January, including an opportunity for residents to comment on the plans.

Fostering Teenagers

The Cambridgeshire Fostering Service is asking parents whose own children have flown the nest, either to attend university or gain independence in other ways, to consider fostering vulnerable young people.

In Cambridgeshire, there are currently more than 400 young people in the 12-18 age range who, for reasons beyond their control, are unable to continue living with their birth families. These young people would benefit hugely from the invaluable experience of people who have raised teenagers and supported them on their journey to independence.

Quality Of Life Survey

Most Cambridgeshire residents feel happy and safe in the county, well connected to their local communities, and believe it's a great place to raise children – according to the County Council's first annual Quality of Life survey involving more than 5,500 residents. But unsurprisingly this is less likely to be the case for people in some specific groups, with a stark finding that loneliness in Cambridgeshire is far higher than the national average. Loneliness was most likely to be reported by those aged 18 to 25, who also reported more struggles with their mental health.

Satisfaction with Council services was mixed. It was highest across library, waste management, street lighting and registration services, and lowest in road and pavement maintenance.

A snapshot of results

▣ 84% of residents feel safe in, and 75% feel they belong to, their local community - defined as the area within 15-minute walk of their home.

▣ 72% of residents reported high or very high levels of happiness, with an average score of 7.25, in line with the Office of National Statistics (ONS) 2022 national benchmark of 7.45.

▣ 29% of residents indicated they often feel lonely - higher than national ONS data, of 8% feeling lonely always or often, and 25% felt lonely always, often or some of the time.

▣ Younger age groups are more likely to report loneliness – including 52% of 18-24s – compared to only 18% of those aged 55+ years.

☑ 37% of residents reported struggling with their mental health in the last year. This rose to 61% for 18-24s and 59% for 25-34s reporting struggling with mental health in the last year. A significantly smaller proportion of 65+ years report similar struggles (11%).

☑ 30% of parents reported their child has faced mental health problems in the last year.

☑ 52% of residents trust CCC to make decisions about services.

☑ 44% agree that the council delivers value for money, slightly higher than the Local Government Association (LGA) national benchmark of 42%.

☑ 45% agree that the council acts on the concerns of residents against 40% who disagree, with a high number of don't knows (16%). This is below the LGA average of 52%, with only 2% unsure - but the two surveys use different answer scales and so are not directly comparable

☑ 84% of those who use the services say they are satisfied with libraries and registration services, with 83% satisfied with waste management and 78% with street lighting. Park & Ride, the guided busway and trading standards also scored satisfaction levels above 70%

☑ 76% are dissatisfied with road and pavement maintenance – both a local and national concern. In open questions at the end of the survey, improving road maintenance and fixing pot holes were the most often raised concern.

☑ 86% of residents are concerned about cost of living increases, as a result 48% have cut back on heating use, 27% have cut back on nutritious food, 8% have used a foodbank and 9% have stopped using prescription medicines.

District Councillors Report

Bin collection information

The South Cambs web site includes a facility to check exactly which bins are being collected at any address on forthcoming collection days. This can serve as a reminder of the black/blue+green cycle and also to check when the green bins are being collected during the winter. Simply enter a postcode and click on the address from the list. The result includes links for iOS and Android that allow you to subscribe to the bins calendar on your phone. This means that your phone calendar will always show which bins are being collected on any collection day.

Planning Application queries

The Greater Cambridge Planning authority processes well over 3000 planning applications every year, and most of these applications run smoothly. However, occasionally there are problems with the handling of planning applications. Concerns about the planning application process should initially be referred to the application case officer, whose name is listed on the application and whose contact details can be found here (we are in Area Team West). Any concerns that have not been dealt with satisfactorily by the case officer should be referred to the Area Manager (Michael Sexton, <Michael.Sexton@greatercambridgeplanning.org>). If there is still a problem at this stage then please contact either Cllr Hawkins (the Cabinet Member for Planning, <Cllr.Hawkins@scambs.gov.uk>) or myself and we will investigate.

In the event of any problems it is much better to follow this process while the application is still being considered. Once an application has been decided, the mechanisms available to revisit the decision are very limited.

Council Financial Health

Councils across the UK are facing a collective budget gap of over £3 billion, according to recent research by the Local Government Association and Unison. This is affecting most of the 50 councils across the East of England, 29 of which face budget shortfalls of over £1 million, and 41 of which face a budget shortfall of some kind, which is likely to lead to a cut in service provision.

South Cambridgeshire District Council is one of only 9 councils in the region that has no shortfall, with a balanced budget for the forthcoming financial year, thanks to our administration's careful financial management and well-designed investment strategy.

Youth engagement workshops

As part of the council's youth engagement programme, planning officers have been running workshops in local schools introducing children to some of the design challenges and career options in development and planning.

One of these was held recently at Fowlmere Primary School, where the children were given presentations about a current development proposal, were taken on a site visit, and took part in a competition to design some visual elements of the proposals.

I attended this event and was impressed with the way the officers engaged with the children, giving them something concrete to do that was part of the design process for the development.

Continuous Improvement and Key Performance Indicators

The District Council regularly monitors its performance across all services as part of a philosophy of continuous improvement. Performance is tracked by a set of 31 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), which I examine quarterly along with the other members of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee. In the last assessment we examined the council's performance for the period April–June 2023, including scrutinising the KPIs and performance against the business plan for the year. Overall, the council is maintaining excellent performance levels when compared with other councils, with most KPIs showing steady good performance or gradual overall improvement. Many of these targets are set at ambitious levels designed to stretch the performance for South Cambridgeshire well above typical levels for local government.

Performance improvement highlights include reducing the average time it takes to determine householder Planning Applications from 11 weeks to 9 weeks in the past year, and reducing the average time to re-let vacated Council Houses from 100 days to 22 days over the past 3 years. The council will continue to work on improvements like these that make a real, positive difference to the lives of residents.

Serious questions are asked in these committee meetings if any KPI appears to be showing a trend in the wrong direction. The questioning is summarised in the minutes which can be examined for all previous meetings.

Homes for Ukraine update

The war in Ukraine may no longer be on the front pages of our newspapers but the crisis continues for those families who have been displaced by ongoing hostilities. The council has recently launched a Homes for Ukraine Landlord Incentive Scheme, designed to make more options available to guests who are moving on after their initial stay with a host. Landlords who are able to provide properties in South Cambridgeshire to Homes for Ukraine guests resident in the district will qualify for a financial incentive. The incentives differ depending on the size of the property, and whether the property is provided at market rent or at local housing allowance rate. The landlord must also provide a minimum tenancy of 6 months from the outset. To express interest, please sign up here, email HFULiaison@Scambs.gov.uk or call the Home for Ukraine team on 01954 713411.