**Parish AGM Report 2021 The Mordens Ward**

I would like to start my report by thanking all residents for the way they have supported each other during this pandemic, it has been a very challenging time for us all but hopefully the end is nearing, and we can meet together in person once more.

Via a new virtual world, I have continued to represent you at South Cambs District Council and will continue to do so, the most recent of meetings being of the planning committee which lasted for over 9hours! As parish councillors will be aware, we are due to soon return to in person meetings, a little earlier than many would have liked including myself. I have made the decision, after discussing the potential impacts of this with my family, that I will attend physical meetings at the District and Parishes, but this is not an easy decision for councillors to make and I will fully respect if others do not feel able to.

**Financial position of the SCDC**

The year ending March 2018 accounts were signed off just before Christmas 2020 (these accounts were due to be signed off back in the autumn of 2018). Work has begun on the audit for the 2019 year end accounts and it is likely that the council will not be on time with its accounts reporting until the 2022 year end. Though there are no financial penalties for Local Government bodies filing late accounts, there are extra external auditor costs being of 6 figure sums for the 2018 accounts and likely additional costs for the future years that are delayed. It is of deep concern for myself and many others that the District council will take so long to get on time with its audits, I continue to raise this at meetings and along with questioning the officer resources available given this and staff turnover have been sighted as the reasons for many delays along with resources issues from the external auditor.

The budget for 2021-2022 was agreed in February. There were elements that I welcome for example the resources towards homelessness prevention and supporting businesses and communities through the Covid recovery. However, on balance, there were too many elements that I was uncomfortable with and therefore voted against the budget. Below are some of the reasons as to why I voted against:

* The accumulative borrowing figure on the four-year forecast is nearly £420m – this is a 95% increase in the Council’s debt over the four-year forecast, a rate that I personally believe is unsustainable given the limit the council has set itself is £511m (though this can be exceeded in the short term).
* There is a budget gap of nearly £6m with over £4m intended to be filled with growth.
* The Budget pressure figures forecast were significantly lower than the actual figures that we were comparing it to, so am concerned this is not overly realistic.

The council continues to increase its commercial investment portfolio, under its £340 million investment strategy. The Council has entered financial Limited Liability Partnerships with Hill Group and Balfour Beaty to the sum of £140 million as part of the investment strategy. As these decisions are taken with the press and public excluded, I am legally limited as to what I can say, however I can say that I did not support this and my main reasons are that I believe there are real issues of conflicts of interest as the partnerships will be looking to develop land and will be applying to the District Council for planning permission. While this is Legal, I fear for the perception of this given a recent report from an independent planning advisory service from the Local Government Association spoke of a “Lack of Trust” in planning at South Cambs. I do not feel that these partnerships will restore that trust and at the same time it is a lot of money, taxpayers and future loans that will be needed to fund this project to be investing.

**The environment**

The District Council has recently published its Doubling Nature Strategy, and Im pleased to say that on environmental issues at South Cambs there is rarely a time where there is not cross-party support. On such an important issue its important that we put any other differences aside and all play our part to help in solving this problem. I am looking carefully, while the next local plan is being developed, as are others at the real implications’ development is having on our water. It has been an incredibly difficult year for flooding and yet there are also rivers that completely dried up last summer.

**Planning**

It has been another difficult year for planning at South Cambs, when writing this report 90% of my case work is in relation to planning. No one at the moment is benefitting from this situation, the residents, the parish councils, the applicants, or the officers. This year has seen an embarrassing situation with the District Council affectively having to take itself to court to quash its own decisions, and this cannot carry on.

As part of the Planning Advisory Services report a group has been formed, of which I sit on, to try and implement the recommendations, a link to which is below. I hope that we will be able to find ways to improve this service, but I do believe that the key reason as to why planning is in a pickle as one council called it at a planning meeting, is a lack of planning officers. I will continue to raise this and while I’m pleased that this year much of the previous years near £1m budget cut has been restored, we need the rest of it and more if residents are to get the service they deserve.

[Appendix A - Peer Review Final Report 2020.pdf (moderngov.co.uk)](https://scambs.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s120312/Appendix%20A%20-%20Peer%20Review%20Final%20Report%202020.pdf)

At the budget meeting I proposed an amendment that saw a reduction in councillors allowances and communications budget to enable the long term employment of an extra planning enforcement but unfortunately this was voted down as there was not considered a need for it, below are the case figures which I believe show why it is, full stats are available at [Appendix 1 - Cases received and closed 10 Feb 2021 Committee.pdf (moderngov.co.uk)](https://scambs.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s120715/Appendix%201%20-%20Cases%20received%20and%20closed%2010%20Feb%202021%20Committee.pdf).





**As your councillor**

As your district councillor I am on the following committees:

* Audit & Corporate Governance Committee
* Civic Affairs Committee
* Climate & Environment Advisory Group (Substitute)
* Full Council
* Employment & Staffing Committee
* Grants Advisory Committee (Substitute)
* Licensing Committee (Substitute)
* Planning Committee
* Scrutiny and Overview Committee (Substitute)
* Anti – Bullying Task and Finish Group (Chairman)
* Planning Committee Development Group

I also have responsibilities as the Major Opposition Group Leader, I sit on the Greater Cambridge Partnership Assembly and I am a substitute on the Combined Authority’s scrutiny and overview committee.

**Political Balance of South Cambs District Council**

The Current Political Balance of SCDC is:

Liberal Democrats 27

Conservative 11

Labour 2

**Cllr Heather Williams**

**SCDC The Mordens Ward**

Tel: 07885 774 775

Email: cllr.williamsh@scambs.gov.uk

Twitter: @Cllr\_H\_Williams

Facebook Page: Cllr Heather Williams

Blog: <https://cllrheatherwilliams.home.blog>

Website: <https://cllrheatherwilliams.co.uk>