

Parish AGM Report 2022 The Mordens Ward

We started this municipal year still in a virtual world but we have ended the year in a more normal way, meeting face to face once again. It has been lovely to see people again and I would like to thank all parish councillors, Chairmans and residents that have made me feel so welcome at parish meetings.

My report includes some updates from the council over the municipal year, if you would like any further information on these topics or anything else to do with the district council then please do get in touch via the contact details at the end of my report.

Financial position of the SCDC

The year ending March 2019 accounts were signed off on the 29th March 2022. There has been significant delays again in relation to completing external audits at SCDC. Though there are no financial penalties for Local Government bodies filing late accounts, there are extra external auditor costs yet again. The final bill has yet to be negotiated but the guide figure given at the latest audit and corporate governance meeting was £216,456. Others and I have continued to raise concerns as to whether or not the finance department is being properly resourced. Resources issues and staff turnover have been sighted as reasons for many delays along with resources issues from the external auditor.

The budget for 2022-2023 was agreed in February. There are many things to welcome in the South Cambs District Council budget such as money towards environmental improvements. I supported money towards building more council houses, something I believe we desperately need more of. However, other areas I could not support, primarily the increase of Council Tax and increased external borrowing for the purpose of commercial investment.

With the current cost of living problems, I could not support increasing the council tax to the maximum legally allowed which is £5 for a Band D property (a £50 difference to the council tax paid four years ago). The budget included spending £200,000 on recarpeting the council building and £70,000 on redecoration which I thought could wait and would cover the majority of the money an increase would raise this year (£327,000 is the amount generated from this year's council tax increase). It was also revealed through the course of the meeting that over £500,000 has been used to pay staff to leave the council over the past four years via Early retirement settlements, gardening leaves and redundancies, if this was avoided then significant savings could be made. The District Council will also be putting up council tenants' rents by the legal maximum of 4.1%, which I did not support.

The council's budget is reliant on the investment strategy. We can see that the only real need for the council to borrow and get into debt is to make commercial investments, like buying offices to rent out. The district Council has had to scale

back on its investment plans due to government changing the rules, local authorities are no longer allowed to borrow money from government purely for yield, but there must be additional benefits for communities. Councils looking to bring in money from investments is not a principle that I disagree with entirely, but I don't believe we should be borrowing nearly £150m to do so in uncertain times especially when this risk could burden residents with further tax. Below is a table that shows the authorised borrowing limits:

	2020/2021 Limit £000	2021/2022 Limit £000	2022/2023 Limit £000	2023/2024 Limit £000
Authorised limit – borrowing	433,603	479,142	359,908	304,468
Authorised limit – other long term liabilities	-	-	-	-
Authorised limit – total external debt	433,603	479,142	359,908	304,468
Operational boundary – borrowing	428,603	474,142	354,908	309,468
Operational boundary – other long term liabilities	-	-	-	-
Operational boundary – total external debt	428,603	474,142	354,908	309,468

I had proposed for an additional planning enforcement officer, many have felt for a long time now that the planning enforcement department needs additional resource, unfortunately this was voted against but we have been told that there is a review taking place as to how the department runs. I hope that once this review has taken place, more officers will be recruited.

There has been a significant increase in the planning budget, a department that saw a large cut of nearly a million pounds two years ago this means a net increase over the two years of around £2m. Many have pushed for more money for the planning department at every budget meeting so in the first instance were pleased to see this. However, some of this increase covers yet another review of the planning department and in many parts of the planning budget were words such as “an increase in recharges/overheads for 22-23” or “Estimate to 2022-23 is mainly attributable to higher Recharge/Overhead costs being attributed to the service” which means we are unclear as to whether this will equate to more officers aka ‘new money’ or the majority being simply reallocation from other budget areas. This is particularly important as we are aware that over £300,000 is at risk of being returned to developers for failing to deal with their applications on time.

To see the budget papers in full you can do so via the link below:

[https://scamb.moderngov.co.uk/documents/g9214/Public reports pack Tuesday 22-Feb-2022 14.00 Council.pdf?T=10](https://scamb.moderngov.co.uk/documents/g9214/Public%20reports%20pack%20Tuesday%2022-Feb-2022%2014.00%20Council.pdf?T=10)

Universal Credit

Please see below details of how the District Council can support people who are financially struggling at the moment. In the current climate many people will find themselves in financial difficulty for the first times in their lives and seeking help may be a daunting and scary experience. I would stress that all conversations with the council, or myself are confidential. And whether this is the first time or not, if you, or anyone you know, is struggling please reach out, there is support out there, short term/ long term which ever applies to your circumstances please do not suffer in silence.

There are a range of options for those struggling financially, including:

- Discretionary Housing Payments which provide financial support towards housing costs. You can **apply for these Discretionary Housing Payments**
- The Council Tax hardship fund, which aims to provide support to those who are struggling financially because of the pandemic. You can **apply for this Hardship Fund**
- Support and advice from our Welfare and Money Maximisation Officer, Lucy Tompkins, who can be contacted via **Lucy.Tompkins@scambs.gov.uk**
- Along with Cambridgeshire County Council and partners, we also still offer one-off small payments to help with immediate food or fuel needs - up to £49 for a family, or £29 for an individual, for food or fuel. Anyone needing that one-off help should **email our communities team**.

Email our Benefits team if you have specific questions, or call **01954 713 000**.

Environment & Waste services

I'm pleased to say once again that on environmental issues at South Cambs there is rarely a time where there is not cross-party support. Two further electric bin lorries should be arriving at the Waterbeach depot soon. This now takes the depot to its maximum electricity supply. A solar plant is now to be installed from part of the 'greening' budget proposals so that more electric bin lorries can be purchased in the future.

There have been interruption to the Green Bin collections over the last year but things appear to be getting back on track. Residents can now report missed collections on the website once more and I would encourage those who do experience problems to report it or get in touch with myself to resolve any outstanding problems.

The Food waste caddy trial has been run in parts of The Mordens ward. This has proven a well used and popular service with many. I have been feeding this back to the council and hope that this trial is rolled out across all villages within the ward and through the district.

Planning - Local Plan

Thank you to all who took part in the local plan consultation. Officers are now looking through all the submissions and are aiming to compile the draft local plan ready for consultation in the Summer. The Local Plan sets out where development of housing and commercial sites are proposed to be situated during the planning period. The current documents are out for consultation soon but give a clear indication of what is proposed by the administrations. The

policies within the Local plan will in many ways dictate how development happens in our villages for years to come. It will be what we rely on to support or refuse planning permissions. It is also vital that it is sound, robust, and reliable as the plan will need to be approved by an independent planning inspector. If the plan was to fail then our district, and our villages would be open to speculative development. This is why, it is one, if not the, most important document the District Council is responsible for producing.

The Council has gone through the for a call for sites and then Councillors and officers deciding which out of those proposed developments they want to include within the Local Plan. Ultimately the Council will have to come forward with a credible plan that will pass a planning inspectorate to show it delivers housing for growth within the Local Plan area.

The proposed Local Plan will have huge impacts on the District and I am sure that all the parishes within the area will want to make comments once more on these proposals when the next consultation begins. As a District Councillor, I have several concerns regarding the proposals put forward. My initial concerns are that around 48,840 houses are included within this Local Plan which is above and well beyond what the Government's calculated need suggests. Growth figures have been calculated within the Local Plan have been calculated by a methodology that has been used has not been used anywhere else before to our knowledge which has worried many.

I also have concerns about the build out rates that are proposed due to the worry of how realistic they are and to be so reliant on them given build out rates are at the discretion of developers. It is also noted that the proposed developments within this Local Plan, especially those around the city, are very dense, cramming lots of houses into small spaces, this will have a big impact on communities and residents' privacy in relation to garden space etc.

Water is a grave concern given the existing pressures on chalk streams and water supply in our area. 48,840 houses using 80litres a day equates to over a billion litres of a water needed every year, if the house numbers were lower, the water demand would also reduce. This has already been challenged by councillors and the response has been it is for others to sort the water problem, but it seems unreasonable to pass responsibility to others when so many more houses are being proposed. Requiring this amount of housing within the Local Plan with the infrastructure not being there is of great concern.

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.

Political Balance of South Cambs District Council

The pre 2022 election Political Balance of SCDC is:

Liberal Democrats	31
Conservative	11
Labour	2
Independent	1

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