



SOUTH CAMBRIDESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL DISTRICT COUNCILLORS REPORT

Councillors James Hutchcraft and Aisha Rashid

Climate change: progress on the Council's own emissions

Following an exceptionally hot summer, it is encouraging to see South Cambridgeshire District Council reach the carbon-reduction target it set itself in 2018.

Council emissions in 2025/26 were 1,183 tonnes, compared with 1,929 tonnes in 2018/19. Once renewable electricity purchased by the Council and electricity exported are taken into account, this represents a 45.3% net reduction in emissions since the 2018/19 baseline.

A significant part of this progress has come from improvements to the energy performance of South Cambs Hall and the transition towards lower-carbon vehicles.

The Council has also made considerable progress with its fleet. In 2018 there were no electric or low-carbon vehicles; today there are four electric bin lorries, with a further five expected this autumn, alongside three electric vans and an electric road sweeper. A further 38 vehicles operating across Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire are using HVO, a renewable diesel alternative.

Planning: significant national changes

There have been major changes to the national planning system which will affect planning decisions in South Cambridgeshire.

The Government has strengthened the presumption in favour of sustainable development, meaning that development within existing settlements should generally be approved unless its benefits are substantially outweighed by adverse effects. There is also greater support for certain development outside settlements, including agricultural and farm diversification and sport and recreation.

The new rules also place greater emphasis on development close to well-connected railway stations and transport hubs, including locations within the Greater Cambridge area. There is increased support for higher-density development, including development in existing urban areas, extensions and some development within residential gardens.

Other changes include stronger national protection for community facilities such as public houses, continued support for brownfield redevelopment, and stronger support for telecommunications and infrastructure.

There are also changes affecting local standards. Local authorities retain some ability to set higher requirements where these can be properly justified, including in relation to water consumption and biodiversity net gain on specific sites.

The new framework places particular emphasis on tackling climate change, including energy efficiency, renewable and decentralised energy, electric vehicle charging, walking, cycling, public transport, green infrastructure and nature-based solutions.

These changes will inevitably affect how planning applications are considered. Local planning officers are applying the new national framework alongside the other policies and requirements that remain in force.

New powers for Mayors

I am concerned about the new powers the Government has given Mayors to overturn local planning decisions, or approve large applications of more than 150 homes which councils have decided to refuse. Councils approve well over 90% of applications, and where they do refuse, there are usually good reasons such as flooding, environmental damage, inadequate infrastructure or poor-quality housing.

Planning is highly complex and requires detailed local knowledge and professional expertise. Mayors are not planners, and there are concerns that allowing them to override local planning decisions risks undermining local democratic accountability and could lead to inappropriate development.

Indeed, there is a real risk that this approach could ultimately slow housing delivery rather than increase it, if developments are approved which subsequently face significant problems around infrastructure, flooding, environmental impacts or viability.

New national forest

The Government has approved the creation of a new national forest as part of the Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor. Given the scale of planned growth across our wider area, increasing woodland, improving biodiversity and creating green infrastructure will be increasingly important.

Northstowe: first shop and more Council homes

There is welcome progress at Northstowe, which is set to receive its first shop with a new Morrisons store.

The District Council purchased a 190-square-metre retail unit from Keepmoat Homes as part of the wider Phase Two development. Importantly, the development also includes six affordable Council-rented flats above the shop. These are the final six of 60 new Council homes being provided at Northstowe by the District Council.

FreeToFeed campaign

South Cambridgeshire's #FreeToFeed campaign continues to grow.

Since its launch in 2022, 174 businesses, community venues and public organisations have signed the pledge to provide welcoming spaces for families who breastfeed or express milk while out and about.

Participating venues adopt a breastfeeding welcome policy and ensure their staff understand how to support families positively and inclusively.

The Council is encouraging more cafés, businesses, community venues, leisure facilities and other organisations to take part.

Grants to help people stay active

The District Council is once again offering its Long-Term Health Condition Grant, with grants of up to £2,000 available to community groups, voluntary organisations, specialist providers and small fitness businesses.

The funding is designed to help develop activities specifically for adults living with long-term health conditions and can be used for items such as venue hire, equipment, training and accessibility requirements.

Applications close at 5pm on Friday 25 September 2026, with successful applicants due to be notified on 9 November.

Projects can operate within an individual village or across several communities, so I would encourage local groups and organisations to consider whether this funding could support something they would like to provide locally.

Water resilience grants for farmers

Cambridgeshire farmers and growers can also access the Agricultural Water Resilience Grant.

Grants of between £2,000 and £50,000 are available for projects that improve water efficiency, increase resilience to drought and protect the water environment.

The funding can support proven water-saving technologies as well as innovative approaches tailored to individual agricultural businesses.

Given the pressures on water resources in Cambridgeshire, improving water efficiency and resilience will be increasingly important for both agriculture and the wider environment.

Energy resilience funding for community organisations

There is also an Energy Resilience Fund available to eligible charities and social enterprises in England.

The fund combines grant and loan finance to help organisations improve their energy resilience. Potential uses include improving energy efficiency, reducing energy costs and carbon emissions, upgrading buildings, improving comfort and replacing older vehicles or equipment with more efficient alternatives.

This may be particularly relevant to parish councils, village halls, community organisations and charities considering improvements to their buildings or equipment.



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