

County Councillor report - Sawston & Shelford Division

(includes Sawston, Little and Great Shelfords, Stapleford, Babraham, South Trimpington, Hauxton, Harston, Newton and Haslingfield)

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Council Tax changes

Cambridgeshire County Council	+ 4.99 % (£1.72 per week Band D)
South Cambridgeshire District Council	+£5 per annum at Band D
Fire Authority	+ £4.95 per annum at Band D
Police & Crime Commissioner	+ 5.8% (£0.29 per week Band D)

As reported last month, the Government announced its 'financial settlement' for councils just before Christmas, and proposed that Cambridgeshire County Council's 'core spending power' (the overall revenue funding available for council services) should increase by 9.5 per cent, less than the current rate of inflation. Half of that 9.5 per cent is from the council's power to raise council tax—in other words, the Government expects local council tax payers to shoulder a lot of the extra costs.

The County Council proposes to set a balanced budget for 2023-24, in the face of a national funding settlement which takes no account of Cambridgeshire's population growth. The Government's decision to move its fair funding review back for a further two years leaves Cambridgeshire with a formula which takes no account of recent population growth, and in some cases bases funding on population figures which are more than twenty years old.

The proposed budget seeks to bridge a potential funding gap for the coming year of £21.4M, even after finding more than £10M of additional savings or income, in the face of levels of inflation not seen for forty years along with rising costs for energy and essential services.

The proposed budget also outlines how the Council plans to spend more than £15m in one-off funds from reserves next year including

- £1M to continue free school meal vouchers for eligible children
- £1M into highways schemes including rural roads drainage
- £1M investment into flood mitigation
- more than £1.3M into libraries
- £380,000 investment in community services.

The council's new 'triple bottom line' approach to the social and economic impacts of budget proposals has seen increased investment in biodiversity improvements, and in ensuring all new schools are built to net zero standards.

The budget proposal would see band D properties paying an additional £73 per year in council tax, although more than half (64 per cent) of the county lives in homes rated band C or below and would see rises of between £49 and £65 per year. In total this would raise £17.8M towards setting a legally balanced budget for 2023/4 and help to mitigate the additional costs of adult social care.

Making Connections Consultation

The Greater Cambridge Partnership Making Connections 2022 consultation closed on 23 December.

This was about proposals for public transport improvements, better cycling and walking options, and a Cambridge congestion charge. Around 23,000 responses were received, and the Greater Cambridge Partnership expects to publish a final report on the consultation outcomes and next steps for consideration by its Board in June 2023. Significant work in the coming weeks to take on board the consultation responses will then inform that report and it is hoped to have some detail by the end of May.

Mayoral precept to support existing bus routes

A precept from the Mayoral Combined Authority of £12 per year per Band D property has been agreed, to ensure continued subsidy for bus services restored following the Stagecoach cuts last year. The Combined Authority was able to step in before Christmas to provide a 6-month subsidy for a large number of threatened rural service (including replacing 915, axed by Stagecoach, with 26 run by Centerbus) but this was from financial reserves and it was always known that a longer term solution would be required. The effort now needs to go into improving bus ridership so that in the longer-term large subsidies will not be required.

Potholes

Potholes have worsened dramatically following the December freeze and continuing wet weather, unsurprisingly given the effects of freezing temperatures and water on long neglected infrastructure resulting from decades of underfunding and a policy of 'managed decline.' Last summer's drought has had an additional impact on soil beneath road structures, causing further problems.

We have been working closely with our Local Highways Officer to log potholes for action and we would encourage everyone to please check on the 'Cambridgeshire Report a Fault' webpage (just google those words to find it) to find out whether potholes you are concerned about have already been logged. If not, please do log the pothole and note the reference number. If there is a problem with the reporting page do let us know. Please note that currently, when the subcontractors go out to fill potholes, they can only address what has been logged on the system, though the council is looking at whether this can be changed.

Believe it or not, for Cambridgeshire as a whole, this year has seen a reduction in the numbers of potholes, despite further real term budget cuts from Government. Over the past year the council has adopted the use of new scanning technologies to identify surface defects so it can intervene earlier and also have larger area patching systems – but it still needs sufficient people and funding in place.

You'll be interested to know that in one week in January 5586 potholes were reported – 2.5 times the normal. The dragon patchers (of which there are two) can do 100 every day, with manned teams able to do only 20 a day. We fixed more than 45,000 last year. Over 500 claims are made for compensation for vehicle damage every year of which the County Council settle approximately 85.

In general terms, if a pothole is large and deep, we will fix it within five days. If it is smaller and less of a hazard, we will fix it within 21 days. We mark up the potholes in different ways, those repaired in five days are not marked as our repair is immediate, yellow means we will repair it in 21 days. We always aim to fix potholes within five and 21 days. We aim to fix emergency faults as soon as possible, always within five days.

We always aim to repair potholes with a permanent fix first time, however, in the winter this can be difficult due to the weather and numbers of potholes. At this time of year, we sometimes have to make temporary fixes to keep people safe, to keep up with the numbers and because road conditions are too wet for permanent repairs. Permanent fixes will then be programmed in and delivered when the weather allows

The total amount of money we have specifically to fix potholes is £2.2m – this is part of a larger highway maintenance budget (which includes planned maintenance, patching, drain clearing etc) which is around £30million per year for maintenance of 4,500km of road. The average cost of fixing a pothole is £42.

Looking forward, the County Council plans to fit street lighting with energy-efficient LEDs. The council spends £3.3M a year on energy for street lights, and investment in a programme of LED replacement would pay back in under six years. The Council is also proposing to recycle materials from road works, from asphalt and tar to gully water, with an estimated saving of around £250,000 a year.

Strikes in schools

The National Education Union has announced further strike dates affecting Cambridgeshire.

- Wednesday 1 March (East of England)
- Wednesday 15 March (national)
- Thursday 16 March (national)

The County Council's education team has been providing advice and information to schools, and the Director of Education has met with the Trade Unions. The most up to date and relevant information about strikes affecting particular schools will be on the schools' own websites.

However a list will also be maintained at <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/children-andfamilies/schools-learning/school-term-dates-closures/school-closures>