

Cambridgeshire County Council

ANNUAL REPORT 2025/26

Sawston and Shelfords Division (Cllrs Damary-Homan & Fane)

INTRODUCTION

Local elections took place for all 61 seats on Cambridgeshire County Council on Thursday 1 May 2025. The Liberal Democrats made significant gains to win a majority with 31 councillors and formed the administration running the Council. Two Independents joined the Lib Dems to form an administrative group, and one of these has now joined the party. The election for Mayor of Cambridgeshire & Peterborough (via the Combined Authority- CPCA) also took place that day, with Paul Bristow (Conservative) elected.

Peter Fane and I were both elected as new County Councillors for the Sawston and Shelfords Division (with Peter as sitting District Councillor for the Shelfords). I serve as Vice-Chair of the Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee, and sit on the Children & Young People, Constitution & Ethics and Planning Committees. Peter is Vice-Chair of Audit and Accounts and Health Scrutiny, also sitting on the Communities and Highways & Transport Committees. This has been a full and eventful first year, with roads dominating the casework, while at county level we have been managing significant financial pressures, navigating local government reorganisation, and engaging with the Government's growth agenda for Greater Cambridge.

	2021	2025	Now
Conservatives	28	10	10
Liberal Democrats	20	31	32
Labour	9	5	5
Independents	4	2	1
Reform UK	0	10	9
Non-aligned	0	0	1

COUNTY COUNCIL

The Council has considered a number of issues raised by councillors for debate, including opposing plans to merge our local police force into a larger and more remote body, the need for better support for people in mental health crisis, and the importance of flood prevention. The Council also agreed to appoint a councillor member champion

to advocate for local care-leavers, and asked Cambridgeshire Culture to develop a culture and arts strategy serving children as well as adults.

Local Government Reorganisation

Significant time and energy this year has been put into working on the Government's Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) proposals, which plan to abolish district and county councils and replace them with unitary authorities. The powers, responsibilities and funding of district and county councils will be merged into single authority areas, once a selection of powers has been handed to the Mayor of the CPCA.

The Government informed local councils of the outline LGR project in December 2024 year and provided councils less than a year to produce full proposals, without granting any support to undertake such extensive work. Like many central government proposals, there is a decent idea somewhere in there, but the guidance was too brief, timeframes and resourcing were inappropriate, and the Government didn't work closely with local authorities to ensure the best outcomes for residents. This is, to me, a familiar story in the local-central government relationship, where the Government expects local authorities to take on significant responsibilities without properly resourcing them.

In June, Councils agreed that three options would be drawn up by for the Government's consideration, based off the information that had been provided at the time. The local consensus was that the Government was unlikely to support proposals that involved boundary changes, which may have been considered if more time and support was granted by the Government. The options produced were:

- Option A (South Cambs, Cambridge City & East Cambs; Fenland, Huntingdonshire & Peterborough)- to be drawn up by Cambridgeshire County Council.
- Option B (South Cambs & Cambridge City; East Cambs, Fenland, Huntingdonshire & Peterborough)- to be drawn up by South Cambs District & Cambridge City councils.
- Option C (South Cambs, Cambridge City & Huntingdonshire; East Cambs, Fenland & Peterborough)- to be produced by Huntingdonshire.

Unfortunately, once these agreements were made in June, the process became politically sensitive locally as preferences were drawn by various groups. Options A and B were produced as planned, but C was abandoned and Huntingdonshire instead produced:

- Option E (Huntingdonshire; South Cambs & Cambridge City; East Cambs, Fenland, Peterborough)

Peterborough City Council and Fenland District Council also produced an option:

- Option D (Peterborough & 9 Huntingdonshire wards; Fenland, East Cambs & 17 Huntingdonshire wards; South Cambs and Cambridge City)

By the submission deadline in November, Options A, B, D and E were submitted to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), and the matter had become highly contentious in some areas of the county. Throughout the process, Peter and I have remained fairly neutral locally given that our areas were inevitably going to be part of a unitary containing South Cambs and Cambridge City. We supported the process of providing multiple proposals to the Government, as agreed in June, but have tended to avoid forming any preference on option. Instead, we agree that the Government's process has been rushed and underfunded, and the procedural issues around the project hamper any chance of actually turning it into a successful

change for local people and the area. I have felt great sympathy for colleagues in Huntingdonshire where the political debate around Option E has become unpleasant, especially given that the option is incredibly unlikely to be chosen by the Government and the fact that it may not hold up legally if chosen.

The Government consultation for LGR in Cambridgeshire & Peterborough, consulting on Options A, B, D & E, closed on 26 March after 7 weeks. My response, in summary, was as follows:

- Option A- This is my most preferred option of those on the table. Most pragmatic as it is closest to meeting Government guidance and has the right population balance with two cities as anchors.
- Option B- I can see a world where this is reasonable in light of Government growth ambitions (current DevCo boundary proposals) but I hold concerns that the Greater Cambridge unitary is too small in population/tax base terms for the foreseeable future.
- Option D- I have a concerns three-unitary approach with a weak tax base. I am uncertain about a "Mid Cambridgeshire" authority with no city identity and Fenland's deprivation concentrated within it.
- Option E- I feel that this is an entirely unserious and politically motivated proposal. Strongly disagreed in response to the majority of questions. A standalone Huntingdonshire unitary doesn't come close to meeting the Government guidance, and I have questions over if it is legal or viable.

I feel that Government should actually do is create a two-unitary solution with properly considered boundary changes, drawing in Cambridge-facing parishes from Huntingdonshire and East Cambridgeshire into a southern unitary. The Government needs to take its time and actually produce the best option possible (which I don't believe lies in the 4 presented), given its growth ambitions for Greater Cambridge.

What I find entirely nonsensical about the process is the lack of alignment with the Development Corporation proposals. Both are being produced by the MHCLG, and both LGR and DevCo decisions will shape the future of our area and communities for generations to come. I suggest an expanded Greater Cambridge to give the Government more space to work on its growth ambitions (which I have general misgivings over) and to soften the impact on our existing communities by dispersing the desired growth somewhat across a larger area. Given that significance of the two proposals, I find it nonsensical that the MHCLG is not closely aligning the two process, instead conducting them separately. These have been major issues to contend with in a first year of office.

From here, we await the Government's decision regarding our future in the LGR context. My biggest concern is how much power will be sent to the Mayor of the CPCA in the process, taking many decision making processes a step further away from residents. The expected timeline for LGR in Cambridgeshire is as follows:

Confirmed	5 February 2026	Launch of Government statutory consultation on proposals for LGR in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.
Confirmed	26 March 2026	Government statutory consultation on proposals for LGR in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough closed.
Proposed	Summer 2026	Expected Government decision on LGR model
Proposed	Autumn 2026	Expected secondary legislation
Proposed	May 2027	Expected elections (Shadow authorities)
Proposed	Spring 2028	Expected vesting day for new unitary councils

More details on LGR can be found on the County Council website:

[Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation | Cambridgeshire County Council](#)

Development Corporation

The Government's proposal to establish a Greater Cambridge Development Corporation (DevCo) is one of the most consequential decisions for this area in decades. I submitted a detailed response to the consultation ahead of its close in April 2026.

I understand the Government's intention for Greater Cambridge as a growth centre, as part of the wider Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor, but I hold a lot of concerns about these. As Councillor, I feel my duty is to serve the best interests of the residents who elect me, and growth programmes don't always but the interests of residents in the centre of their thinking as national motivations are prioritised. However, I know that purely opposing the Government without solid legal grounds to do so is unhelpful in trying to negotiate on major projects. Therefore, I try to accept that these things are coming and bargain in good faith to ensure they're as beneficial/harm free as possible, whilst also providing support to residents who do want to oppose proposals.

With regard to the DevCo, I recognise Greater Cambridge does face real barriers to housing delivery, but in my view those barriers do not lie with the local planning service and therefore a DevCo focused on housing delivery is inappropriate. The Greater Cambridge Shared Planning service is nationally recognised as excellent. The constraints lie elsewhere, in water supply and drainage capacity, transport infrastructure, construction market conditions, the genuine unaffordability of homes for so many residents, and a chronic lack of social infrastructure in communities already under pressure. Funding is the single greatest constraint. Greater Cambridge has permissions in place for significant amounts of housing, and the Local Plans (both current and emerging) identify major sites to deliver significant amounts of housing. Housing delivery is not held up by "NIMBYism" and a poor local planning service, it is held up by very real and serious constraints, some are broad issues and some are hyperlocal.

My central argument is that *infrastructure must come first* and should be the core focus of the DevCo, if it is to progress. Large-scale housing delivery should not proceed

ahead of resolving existing constraints, especially our water issues, or new development significantly risks being built on unstable foundations. Regeneration of existing communities must also be a core DevCo objective, not an afterthought, but doesn't appear anywhere in their proposals. Regeneration is usually a major focus of an Urban Development Corporation, but the MHCLG doesn't seem to be thinking of it as a priority when implementing an Urban DevCo in a mostly rural area. To me, prioritising regeneration of our existing communities and infrastructure is the only way that a DevCo could actually bring a net positive to the area.

I have significant concerns about the proposal as drafted. The process and phasing is too far rushed- similar to the LGR experience. The transfer of planning powers from the local authority to the DevCo is too broad and risks undermining a high-performing planning service both financially and in terms of long-term expertise, and the governance is insufficiently democratic. I am of the view that Council leaders alone on the board is inadequate and it is common sense to suggest that portfolio holders for planning be granted a formal role. This becomes more pressing post-LGR, when there will be fewer leaders and even less democratic accountability unless governance arrangements are reviewed.

A well-designed DevCo, focused on unlocking infrastructure constraints and leveraging investment that local authorities cannot secure alone, could genuinely be positive for the area and tackle some of the pressing issues we face. But the current proposal centralises too much, too quickly, in ways that could leave the area exposed to political or economic shocks. I fear that aggressive growth that does not first build strong foundations will do great harm to the area, and national impacts may well be felt if such major investment doesn't deliver.

East West Rail

East West Rail has been a significant issue for many of our parishes, particularly Haslingfield, Harston, Hauxton, Newton and the Shelfords, which lie in or near the proposed route corridor. This is a nationally determined infrastructure project and the final decision on its delivery will not rest with local representatives, but that does not mean our voice is not valuable and essential in shaping if and how it comes forth.

My position is straightforward. I have sincere sympathy for our communities that are concerned and opposed, and I do not want to see this railway delivered in a way that causes unnecessary harm to the places I represent. At the same time, as an elected representative I have a responsibility to be at the table, negotiating in good faith to maximise community benefits and minimise harms, rather than simply to protest from the sidelines. Engaging constructively with EWRCo is not an endorsement of the project.

Areas I have been working on include a bus connection from Cambourne station to Cambridge South and the Hauxton travel hub, the possibility of nature areas created during construction being handed to parishes afterwards (where appropriate), further active travel improvements particularly around Haslingfield, and laying the groundwork for a community benefit fund negotiation when EWRCo reaches that stage. I greatly value the work of Parish Councils and residents (including groups like Cambridge Approaches) and their efforts on the matter shape my approach.

EWRCo launches their **final route-wide public consultation on 14 April 2026, with a response deadline of 9 June 2026**. This is the last opportunity for residents to formally respond before the Development Consent Order application in 2027. I urge everyone in affected parishes to take part and am happy to discuss my own plans for consultation response.

STRATEGY, RESOURCES & PERFORMANCE

The Council set its budget in February 2026, including record investment in roads, support for vulnerable residents, and continued funding for children and families. The gross budget stands at £1.27 billion. Council Tax rose by the maximum permitted 4.99%, with 2.99% for general spending and 2% for adult social care. The scale of financial pressure is significant: since 2019, home-to-school transport costs have risen 122%, the costs of supporting children in care have risen 99%, and learning disability care costs have risen 76%. Nearly two thirds of the budget goes on social care, with SEND and highways maintenance also major areas of spending.

The budget included an additional £20 million for highway maintenance on top of Government funding, and continued investment in the council's climate change and environment strategy. Our additional highway funding, committed for both 2026/27 and 2027/28, allows our Capital Maintenance Programme to operate which enables us to deliver some of the resurfacing works that are sorely needed in our area.

The Council ran its third annual Quality of Life survey in 2025, polling 5,500 residents directly. Happiness levels remained high (84%), but loneliness (30%) and mental health struggles (28%) persist, particularly among younger residents. Concern about the cost of living was high at 87%. Residents' trust in the Council to make decisions and deliver value for money was at its highest since tracking began.

ADULTS & HEALTH

One of the first decisions of the new administration was to split the Adults and Health Committee into two: one covering public health, adult social care and procurement; the other dedicated to scrutinising local NHS services. The Council's adult social care services were rated as Good by the Care Quality Commission in summer 2025.

This has been a turbulent time for the NHS locally. The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Integrated Care Board has been merged into a much larger body, NHS Central East, covering Cambridgeshire, Peterborough, Bedfordshire, Luton, Milton Keynes and Hertfordshire. As an administration, we continue to raise the importance of maintaining transparency with the public when services are changed or reduced and have expressed concerns that structural reorganisation risks crowding out the service improvements that both health services and local government partners want to see.

The Health Scrutiny Committee examined NHS dental provision in Cambridgeshire and found serious gaps in access. Six formal recommendations were made to the Integrated Care Board, including a call for a dental training school in the East of England and greater transparency around urgent dental appointment capacity. Primary care provision across the county remains fragile.

The future of the Arthur Rank Hospice remains uncertain. A private donation enabled it to continue operations for a further year, but the withdrawal of over £800,000 of NHS Trust support means the long-term picture remains unresolved. We continue to support calls for a sustainable solution, working in conjunction with Pippa Heylings MP.

We have raised concerns in committee about NHS patient data being transferred to the company Palantir through national contracts, and sought assurances from the ICB about data security. This remains a matter of concern for many elected representatives across the country, and I hold strong reservations over allowing Palantir to manage British public data.

ASSETS & PROCUREMENT

The County Council's Assets and Procurement Committee agreed a partnership with developer Prologis to support the future expansion of Cambridge Biomedical Campus. Sixty-seven acres of council-owned land is being put forward for the next phase of growth, delivering space for life science research, co-working laboratories, key worker accommodation, and training facilities. The project will provide a future commercial return to help fund key services.

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

Like most county councils, Cambridgeshire continues to experience enormous financial pressure from Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. The number of children with an Education Health and Care Plan has grown by 71% between 2020 and 2025. The Council invested an additional £780,000 in autumn 2025 to increase processing capacity. The projected SEND deficit approaches £100 million — a position shared by around a hundred other councils nationally. The County Council has backed national campaigns calling on Government for urgent and adequately funded reform.

The Government is delivering two new special schools in the county, in Gamlingay and March, providing 270 new places.

Holiday food vouchers for children eligible for Free School Meals had been provided using the national Household Support Fund, supplemented by £1.5 million of council funding, benefiting around 22,500 children across the county. The Government ended the Household Support Fund and replaced it with a more limited scheme that cannot be used for blanket voucher provision. I raised this repeatedly at committee over several months. The Council agreed to invest £2.7 million to continue providing vouchers through the Easter and summer holidays of 2026, giving families time to adjust whilst

support schemes through the Crisis & Resilience Fund are worked up. We continue to press the Government to ensure that no child goes hungry during the school holidays without placing the burden on Council Tax payers.

The Holiday Activities and Food programme continues, with 132 schemes running over summer 2025 and an estimated 3,300 children participating across the county. County maintained activity centres (Burwell House and Grafham Water Centre) support the scheme alongside private providers.



COMMUNITIES, SOCIAL MOBILITY AND INCLUSION

As Vice-Chair of this committee, I have been closely involved in overseeing the Council's anti-poverty work. An increasing number of families are struggling financially, and the committee has focused on both immediate support and longer-term prevention.

The committee procured a new data-led income maximisation system, already used to great effect by South Cambridgeshire District Council, which secured nearly 1,000 additional benefit claims worth over £500,000 for residents in its first year. This will complement our current income maximisation work administered through, Citizens Advice, which has supported nearly 1500 residents in securing nearly £2.7m in additional income (averaging £1,812 per person). The systematic approach to identifying households missing out on entitlements is exactly the kind of preventative work that can make a real difference.

Work is underway to implement the recommendations of Cambridgeshire's Poverty Strategy Commission, grouped around income maximisation, digital inclusion, rural poverty, housing and homelessness, children and families, and mental health. Cambridgeshire is the most unequal county in England, with Cambridge being home to areas of severe deprivation, and South Cambridgeshire having pockets of hidden rural poverty that are easy to miss in a generally prosperous area. We are working on creating a number of schemes to support residents of all backgrounds who face financial crisis, through the Crisis & Resilience Fund, including our recently launched scheme for household heating oil users.

The High Impact Use (HIU) service, hosted by Cambridgeshire County Council in partnership with the ICB, launched in October 2024 for an initial 18-month period. The service supports frequent attenders at Addenbrooke's, Peterborough City and Hinchingbrooke Hospital A&E departments who are coming for social and environmental reasons rather than, or as well as, health reasons. Cambridgeshire County Council is currently the only local authority in the country to host such a service, and its community-led model is being promoted nationally as an example of good practice, having already received an Outstanding Achievement Award from one of the county's acute hospital trusts. An evaluation of the project's first year has concluded, with early findings showing significant positive impacts for both individual residents and financial savings to the NHS. In 2023, the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Integrated Care System spent an estimated £28 million of NHS funding on emergency care for around 4,500 people who attended A&E between five and ten times a year — an average of £6,200 per person. This approach of the HIU service has

been shown to reduce A&E attendances and unplanned hospital admissions nationally by at least 40%, and the ICB committed £600,000 to keep the service running in 2026/27.

We continue to support our libraries, protecting their funding and delivering a wide range of services through them. I have enjoyed another successful year of The Library Presents, and was delighted to be part of opening the new EverySpace in Cambridge Central Library. The Digital Inclusion Directory, a practical guide to help residents get online, access devices and build digital skills, is available at libraries and community hubs across the county. As key community spaces, protecting libraries is one of my top priorities.

Our adult education services and work support schemes are performing well. Cambridgeshire Skills were rated “Good” overall by recent Ofsted inspections, with “Outstanding” in many areas. We were delighted to be awarded funding as part of the Connect to Work scheme, supporting residents in finding suitable employment, and we continue to work with NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) young adults through various schemes including the Youth Guarantee Trailblazer programme where we are national leaders in innovative approaches.

Good performance continues in our registration services, although we are looking at how to improve our venues offer. Trading Standards is functioning well, and we are welcoming staff into the new structure at Cambridgeshire County Council, following a decoupling of services with Peterborough City Council.

I am working with our local youth work services as Lead Member on the National Youth Agency’s peer network, spending time with SSYI and others, and continue efforts in the campaign against violence against women and girls as a White Ribbon Ambassador for the Council.

ENVIRONMENT & GREEN INVESTMENT

Water scarcity and water management is a critical issue for Greater Cambridge, and one I consider the biggest single constraint on sustainable development in our area. Water Resources East is responsible for producing a regional water resources plan. The Fens 2100+ project — bringing together multiple agencies to manage long-term flood risk in the Fens — has published a Case for Change, Partnership Action Plan, and baseline report. A full Flood and Coastal Resilience Strategy is due in 2027.

Community Watercourse Maintenance Grants of up to £10,000 are available from the Council to support communities where the condition of local watercourses is increasing flood risk. Any parish concerned about local watercourse condition should get in touch.

The Council’s Nature Recovery- From the Ground Up project invites parishes and community groups to design their own Community Nature Recovery Plans. The first phase runs to March 2027, with parishes across South Cambridgeshire invited to register interest for future phases.

The County Council has been ranked by Climate Emergency UK as one of the top-

performing councils in the country for action taken towards Net Zero, having reduced its own carbon footprint by 32% since 2018. The Babraham Road Park and Ride now generates solar energy powering 35 EV charging points on site and exporting surplus electricity directly to Addenbrooke's Hospital.

Residents are urged to recycle batteries and battery-powered electricals safely. Over 1,200 waste-related fires were recorded across the UK last year, a 71% rise since 2022, many caused by incorrectly disposed lithium-ion batteries. Batteries can be recycled free at Household Recycling Centres, supermarkets and DIY stores.

HIGHWAYS & TRANSPORT

Highways have dominated our casework this year, and we make no apology for that- it is what residents across the division tell us matters most. The condition of our roads and pavements deteriorated significantly over the winter of 2025–26. Peter Fane and I have spent significant time out on the ground inspecting the division, raising issues directly with highways officers, and pushing for permanent resurfacing solutions rather than endless patching.

The Council continues to supplement Government funding for road maintenance. Cambridgeshire currently receives £31.3 million from central Government against an assessed need of £58.3 million just to maintain the network in its current condition. The Liberal Democrat administration has committed an additional £20 million on top of Government funding in both 2025/26 and 2026/27. Our three Cambridgeshire Lib Dem MPs, Pippa Heylings (South Cambridgeshire), Ian Sollom (St Neots and Mid Cambridgeshire) and Charlotte Cane (Ely and East Cambridgeshire), are actively pressing the Government for fairer DfT funding.

Peter and I have secured over **£1.7 million of resurfacing investment** in the division for 2026/27, representing a significant share of the £4.6 million allocated to South Cambridgeshire from the county's £20 million Capital Maintenance Programme. The specific schemes are:

- A1301, Great Shelford- a major resurfacing scheme covering approximately 2.2 miles in total, from Granhams Road junction through Tunwells Lane to the village boundary towards Trumpington. Current works from Granhams Road to Tunwells Lane (£460,000) are already under way. The extension was secured in January 2026. The Woodlands Road to village boundary section was collaborated on with Cllr David Levien (Trumpington division), with a combined value exceeding £1 million for the Great Shelford sections. The delay to initial works was caused by National Highways requiring the road for M11 diversions — outside our control.
- A10, Harston- resurfacing secured for 2026/27.
- Link Road, Sawston- resurfacing secured for 2026/27.

We continue to prepare for the next round of Capital Maintenance Funding. We are also actively working on various Local Highway Improvement projects, trying to offer the best support we can in what are quite lengthy and sometimes frustrating processes. Other schemes are also being worked on, be they currently active or forthcoming.

I have worked extensively with the Streetworks team, learning about the procedural framework around utilities works on our highways, and am actively working on high

impact permits and looking out for poor quality reinstatement. The Council issued fines totalling £483,000 in 2024/25 to utility companies and developers for non-compliant or over-running roadworks, and we have continued to actively inspect and issue fines this year.

New LED street lighting is being installed across the county at around 2,000 units per month, with over 47,000 lights to be upgraded, aiming to reduce the Council's energy use by a third.

COMBINED AUTHORITY

Work is ongoing on bus franchising, putting control of routes, fares and timetables within the responsibilities of the CPCA, with an independent review update due to the Combined Authority's Transport Committee in June 2026. Franchising does have the potential to increase the CPCA's costs significantly in the future.

The Tiger Pass, which allows young people to travel by bus for £1, was secured with County Council funding through to March 2027. Its future beyond that date remains uncertain, as the removal of the national fare cap from April 2027 will increase the per-ticket subsidy cost. The Tiger On Demand scheme is starting to be seen in some parishes.

We were concerned by the Combined Authority's decision to cut funding for a number of bus routes, including the Wednesday 15 service between Haslingfield and Royston, which matters greatly to residents in our rural parishes with limited transport alternatives. Rural bus provision in Cambridgeshire remains chronically underfunded.

The Combined Authority produced a Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Cambridgeshire during the year.

Notes

Peter Fane and I attend regularly parish council meetings across the division and are always happy to come out and meet with residents. Please do not hesitate to get in touch about any issue affecting your community, whether that is a planning matter, a highways concern, a question about council services, or anything else. We will take up matters that are County Council, advocate on CPCA matters, and liaise with District Council colleagues where required.

Monthly county councillor reports are circulated to all parishes and published on parish council websites across the division.

I'd like to thank the clerks and parish councillors of all ten parishes in the division, and to the many residents who have engaged with me this year. Thanks too to Peter for all his efforts alongside me. Local government works best when it is genuinely rooted in the communities it serves, and we are both committed to engaging with residents to effectively represent their needs at the County Council.

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