

Cllr Brian Milnes & Cllr Libby Earle

South Cambridgeshire District Councillors' report – April 2026

Elections and local government reorganisation

Elections for South Cambridgeshire District Council will take place on 7th May 2026.

But this will be the last ever election for SCDC. This is because of the national Government's re-organisation of *local* government with another election in 2027 of a new transitional "Shadow Authority". Old and new will run concurrently, until May 2028, when the new Unitary Council will start in earnest.

The councillors elected this May will therefore have a 2 year term of office whilst SCDC and the County Council prepare to make way for the new Unitary authorities. The composition and geography of the new unitary authority is being considered from several options presented by local councils, and is due to be announced by the government later, this summer.

Back to the here and now, elections are fast approaching and postal vote registration is only valid for 3 years, so postal voters should check immediately at <https://www.gov.uk/how-to-vote/postal-voting>. Below is a summary of the election timetable.

Publication of Notice of Election	Monday 30 March 2026
Receipt of Nominations	4:00 pm Thursday 9 April 2026
Last Date for Voting Registration	Monday 20 April 2026
Receipt of Postal Vote Applications	5:00 pm Tuesday 21 April 2026
Last day for Voter Authority Certificates	5:00 pm Tuesday 28 April 2026
Receipt of Proxy Vote Applications	5:00 pm Tuesday 28 April 2026
Receipt of Emergency Proxy Vote Applications	5:00 pm Thursday 7 May 2026
Day of Poll	7:00 am -10:00 pm Thursday 7 May 2026

Full details on the council website at <https://www.scambs.gov.uk/elections/elections-2026>

Nominations for this year's elections opened on 30th March and two candidates for South Cambridgeshire District Council will be elected for the Sawston ward. Longstanding councillor Brian Milnes will be standing again for the Liberal Democrats whilst Libby Earle will be retiring and Sawston local, Ed Sanders, is standing as the other Liberal Democrat candidate.

Development Corporation for Greater Cambridge?

Greater Cambridge has been identified by the government as a key UK powerhouse. It's seen as a high-octane mix of world-class research and "the next big thing" in tech and life sciences. The government is therefore proposing to create a "centrally led **urban** development corporation" (GCDevCo). A key element of this proposal is to

remove planning powers from local government (i.e. Greater Cambridge Shared Planning) for plan making and for determining applications over a certain size.

The removal of powers from our local planning service, nationally recognised as the best planning authority in the country in 2025, is a matter for serious concern. The majority of the DevCo members will be Secretary of State appointees, rather than local politicians, which will reduce democratic accountability during a critical time for the development of our (largely rural) community.

The government consultation ended on 1st April 2026, however details can be found at <https://bit.ly/DevCo-GreaterCambs>.

Markets across Greater Cambridgeshire

In March SCDC and Cambridge City Council published the results of an independent study to evaluate the contribution of traditional retail markets across the region.

This covered:

- 3 markets in Cambridge (including the historic Market Square)
- 17 markets across South Cambridgeshire district

The report confirms that local markets are vital for economic value in creating jobs, supporting small businesses, and providing apprenticeship opportunities. They also support community cohesion as they act as focal points for social interaction and strengthening local identity. Perhaps most importantly they provide access to diverse products, offering fresh produce and goods that might otherwise be unavailable locally.

However, the study also notes challenges: trading can be fragile, and some traders struggle to source produce locally, impacting sustainability. The study makes recommendations including.

- Embedding dedicated market policies in the emerging Greater Cambridge Local Plan.
- Ensuring markets are included in new development proposals.
- Improving recycling and waste management facilities at markets.
- Strengthening partnerships between markets and local businesses to boost footfall.

Both councils are already acting on these insights through the Future Markets Trader Programme. Some of the actions include training and business advice and small start-up grants for new traders.

You can read the full assessment on the council's business pages <https://bit.ly/3Q1cryh>

Progress with providing more housing

When the current Lib Dem council administration came to power 8 years ago, the council was building about 35 new council houses each year. Furthermore, because of 'right to buy' sales its portfolio was shrinking so the period 2013 to 2018 saw a net reduction of 99 council houses.

Since then, SCDC has nearly quadrupled the rate of council house building. This municipal year, at the time of writing, at least 120 new council homes had been

completed across the district, including those in Sawston, and by the end of the financial year, we will have delivered 139 new council homes.

Affordable homes, as opposed to council houses, are generally delivered by housing associations, often through S106 agreements. In 2024-2025 2,265 new homes were completed across Greater Cambridge, the highest since 2011. Of these 1,735 new homes were in South Cambridgeshire, of which 424 were affordable homes.

Work has begun on building out the South Cambridgeshire Investment Partnership (SCIP) development next to South Cambs Hall in Cambourne. The project will build 256 new low-carbon Passivhaus standard homes of which 40% (102) will be affordable, comprising 72 for rent and 30 for shared ownership.

In addition to increasing affordable and council housing, we are well into a programme of upgrading the thermal efficiency of our existing council housing stock. We are using grant funding from the UK Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund to bring them up to EPC Band C, which will result in a significant reduction in energy running costs for tenants.

Lastly, a major milestone has been reached in tackling long-term empty homes in South Cambridgeshire, with 75 properties brought back into use in the last three years. This was achieved by appointing an Empty Homes Officer in 2022. To find out more about our work bringing empty homes back into use visit our webpage at <https://www.scams.gov.uk/housing/empty-homes>.

M&Me App - For council tenants to report repairs

The Council has launched M&Me, a new mobile app developed in partnership with Mears, offering council tenants a quicker and more convenient way to report repairs. Using the app, tenants can report a repair at any time, choose an appointment slot that suits them, receive real-time alerts and updates about their repair, see who will be attending their home and when.

Mears will be writing to all council tenants with full details about the new app, including their unique access code.

Emerging Draft Joint Local Plan

Work is advancing on the joint local plan with Cambridge City that should determine how our district is developed over the period 2025-2045 (DevCo concerns notwithstanding). Recently concluded early consultation showed strong community engagement with over 4500 responses gained from over 80 events online and offline. These comments are now being compiled and analysed. A finalised proposal will come out for final public consultation in the summer and subsequently submitted to MHCLG by the deadline of December 2026. More information can be found at <https://greatercambridgeplanning.org/emerging-plans-and-guidance/greater-cambridge-local-plan/>.

Waste Collection news

Greater Cambridge Shared Waste started rolling out weekly collections of food waste in parts of South Cambridgeshire and Cambridge City from this January 2026. It will be extended to all parts of Greater Cambridge by the end of the year. All households will receive a letter with full details a few weeks before the service begins in their area to help ensure they are prepared. Sawston is due to be started in May and notifications have been sent. In addition, before their new collections begin, households will receive a new outdoor caddy to put out for collection at the kerbside with their wheelie bins.

Going renewable for the bin lorry fleet

Construction has begun on a pioneering renewable energy solar park to power the growing fleet of electric bin lorries for Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire. Due for completion by the end of 2026, it is expected to supply 59% of the Waterbeach depot's total energy needs and achieve over 40% biodiversity net gain through measures such as wildflower planting and new hedgerows to create a haven for local wildlife. More details at <https://bit.ly/SolarEnergyPark>.

Financial Position and Budget

At the Council's budget meeting, members approved its business plan and budget for the coming financial year. The meeting agreed to a £5.24 increase for an average Band D property. This works out to 10p a week and below inflation rise.

The table below shows comparison of the different precepts charged across Cambridgeshire

District	Unitary Precept	District Precept	County Precept	Total
East Cambs		£142.14	£1,785.42	£1,927.56
Huntingdonshire		£170.86	£1,785.42	£1,956.28
South Cambs		£180.64	£1,785.42	£1,966.06
Cambridge		£239.07	£1,785.42	£2,024.49
Fenland		£253.35	£1,785.42	£2,038.77
Peterborough	£1,836.72			£1,836.72

This doesn't include the police, fire, parish council or Mayor's precepts which are not set by SCDC but are collected by the council. It also doesn't include town and parish precepts (which in an increasing number of cases are now larger than the District Council's). As seen, South Cambridgeshire charges slightly more than Huntingdonshire DC, but significantly less than both Cambridge CC and Fenland DCs.

SCDC is one of the best run councils in the country and is often held up as an exemplar. It continues to deliver high quality services in the face of sustained cuts by central government, including recent reductions to the amount of Business Rates that local authorities can retain. Our core spending power is being cut by over £5

million over the next 3 years, thanks to the Government's "fair funding review 2.0" which is hurting councils in rural areas like ours. That drop is the equivalent to 15% of our core spending power.

As a result of the government's funding changes, we are increasingly reliant on council tax. In this budget - council tax represents 35% of our core spending power. Come 2028/29 - council tax will represent 47% of our core spending power.

We have council tax relief offering up to 100% relief from council tax for those residents who need it most. Even with the rise, South Cambridgeshire remains among the lowest-taxing district councils in the country, some 70% less than the England average.

Cambridge South East Transport (CSET)

The next phase of this important link from Haverhill via Sawston into the expanding Cambridge BioMedical Campus and into the City centre continues its laboured journey into possible existence.

- Public Inquiry: A public inquiry is expected to take place in 2026 to examine Phase 2 of the scheme's impact. This follows the formal submission of a Transport and Works Act Order (TWAO) in January 2025.
- There was a late objection presented by National Gas which delayed this, but which is now resolved and we are awaiting a firm date for the inquiry to begin.

Thank you, Libby for all your support, and here's looking forward to seeing new faces at the District Council in May!