

County Councillor Annual Report for Melbourn PC

It's almost a year since my election to the county council, so it's a good time to take stock. It's a huge responsibility and a continuous exercise in balancing the needs of residents of all ages and in all walks of life.

The initial sections focus on high-level developments at the County Council during the past year. These are the result of the joint work of over 4,000 employees and 61 county councillors. Towards the end I also mention some of the committees I am getting involved in. Being in local politics can make a real difference, and my hope is to inspire the next generation to participate in public life.

In the year ahead, I look forward to continuing to meet and get to know more and more residents and to continuing to work closely with Melbourn Parish Councillors.

Highways

We understand that this is the number one concern for many residents. It's important to begin by saying that the general condition of our roads and footways is the result of many years of underinvestment, which has left us with incredibly poor surfaces and an estimated £800m repair bill across the county. Legacy maintenance contracts are also behind the problems we have seen as the wet and cold have taken their toll. Even with recent increases, government funding still falls short of the manifest challenge.

In the last three years, the county council has more than doubled the annual amount spent on highway maintenance. Within the constraints of stretched local authority budgets and statutory responsibilities for adult social care, the county council's recently approved budget nevertheless includes an additional investment of £20 million, bringing the amount to be spent specifically on maintenance and improvements to £58 million. During the winter, the county council surged the deployment of repair crews and dragon patchers, with pothole repairs reaching 2,000 potholes each week.

The long-term outlook is slowly improving, following a reorganisation of the highways department and the introduction of a new asset management system. Last summer, significant areas of deterioration were tackled with large patches and significant overdue vegetation management was carried out. We expect to see more of this when spring arrives and in future years. Work is also underway to strengthen maintenance contracts and internal processes to improve the responsiveness to the worst potholes reported by residents.

Please continue to report issues:

<https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/travel-roads-and-parking/roads-and-pathways/roadworks-and-faults>

Schools

Hardly anything is as important as the next generation. Recently, the Melbourn Practical Solutions Group, with representation from all local councils as well as community and

youth services, reconvened its meetings at Melbourn Village College, for the first time since the pandemic. Following the withdrawal of discretionary school buses from and to Royston, we supported the provision of an additional bus stop for Bassingbourn-bound students in the afternoon. I look forward, together with our district councillors, to continuing to work with all schools and PTAs on future projects, from initiatives like a “bike bus” to facilitating the provision additional services to support students and pupils.

Budget

In February, the council approved its nearly £1.3 billion business plan and budget, which includes a number of investments.

- Highways: an additional £20 million for highway maintenance.
- £14.7 million of additional funding for adult social care providers to help them manage rising costs and ensure care workers are paid the Real Living Wage, improving stability and quality for those who depend on care workers for their support.
- continuing holiday meal vouchers until the end of summer 2026 for those children most in need, despite the Government withdrawing the Household Support Fund; the council will also use the new £5 million Crisis and Resilience Fund to provide a wider range of anti-poverty measures, offering practical support to households facing financial challenges.
- 3,500 new primary school places, and £72 million over five years to increase secondary school places.
- £780,000 a year to run a children’s residential home in South Cambridgeshire, along with continued funding for the Families First early intervention programme that helps keep more families together.
- more than £1.2 million will be invested in libraries and archives over the next two years.

Rising costs in social care and special educational needs are putting enormous pressure on council finances, and these statutory services for our most vulnerable residents now account for by far the largest part of our budget.

The plans include an increase of council tax by 4.99 per cent, the maximum permitted by Government for county councils, as is the case in nearly all councils across England, and the level assumed by Government in setting its grant allocations. This will generate around £21 million in additional funding and help the council continue providing the essential services people rely on.

Growth in the economy is sorely needed for public services to improve.

Local Government Reorganisation

The reorganisation of local government by merging district and county council into new unitary authorities has taken up much bandwidth at county council during the year. Most

recently, the government is undertaking its own consultation on all four options for local government reorganisation developed by local councils.



Map of LGR option A



Map of LGR option B

In our area, two main options are in play for a future unitary authority. Very likely, South Cambridgeshire District will either merge with Cambridge City Council to form a “Greater Cambridge” unitary authority, or merge with Cambridge City and East Cambridgeshire to form a “South-East Cambridgeshire” unitary authority. While most other parts of Cambridgeshire would prefer to merge with the uniquely successful City of Cambridge, our area will very likely do so.

The consultation, with the opportunity to comment on all the options for local government reorganisation, closes 26 March 2026.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/local-government-reorganisation-in-cambridgeshire-and-peterborough/proposals-for-local-government-reorganisation-in-cambridgeshire-and-peterborough>

Greater Cambridge Development Corporation

Wishing to build on Cambridge’s success, the government has proposed to create a centrally led Greater Cambridge Development Corporation. If established, this would extend the remit of the existing Cambridge Growth Company. Initially, the DevCo would focus on delivery of the housing development identified in the emerging Greater Cambridge Local Plan, with planning powers to determine large developments. The ambition is that development would be infrastructure-led, and the DevCo would have the ear of government in addressing challenges relating to transport and water in our area. With economic growth, it may also be possible to address regional transport challenges.

At a recent information event, representatives from parish and town council stressed the need to adopt a strategic and long-term approach to development mindful of the needs of younger people and of business, including in villages such as ours. Transport challenges were mentioned several times.

The consultation is surprisingly short and closes on 1 April 2026.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/establishing-a-development-corporation-in-greater-cambridge/establishing-a-development-corporation-in-greater-cambridge>

Buses

We have continued to receive much feedback about the performance of the local 17 and 26 bus services, which are nevertheless a lifeline for many residents. We have passed this feedback on to the Mayoral Combined Authority, which is the responsible local transport authority. As a result, the bus operator has been called in to discuss performance.

The most recent meeting of the local Bus User Group took place in March to discuss performance and the shape of future services in this area as the Combined Authority moves towards bus franchising. Please let us know if you want to be added to the Bus User Group mailing list.

Waste

In the coming year, food waste collection by means of dedicated caddies will commence in Melbourn. We ask everyone in the community to support this for two reasons. First, food waste recycling is a requirement under national legislation. Second, in contrast to ordinary garden waste, food waste decays to release a lot of methane gas into the atmosphere. But if the food waste is recycled in a special facility, the resulting methane can be fed into the gas grid and burned to produce carbon dioxide, which has a much lower global warming potential than the methane that would otherwise be released.

Safe disposal of batteries

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Waste Partnership RECAP is urging residents to recycle batteries and battery-powered electricals safely, following an increase in fires caused by incorrectly disposed lithium-ion batteries. Recent incidents include a fire at Thalia's Alconbury waste transfer station at New Year, as well as thirteen bin lorry fires across Cambridgeshire in the last twelve months.

In 2023, over 1.1 billion household items such as phones, tablets, e-cigarettes, toothbrushes and power tools were thrown away with batteries hidden inside. When these items end up in general waste or mixed recycling, batteries can ignite or explode during collection, transport or sorting.

To help prevent fires, residents are urged never to place batteries in the bin, to use designated recycling points, tape over damaged terminals and check for local collection schemes.

All types of batteries can be recycled free of charge at Household Recycling Centres, supermarkets and DIY stores. This includes loose household batteries, lithium-ion and rechargeable batteries, and batteries in small electrical items. Any shop that sells batteries must also accept used batteries for recycling.

Sustainability

The county council played a large part in the development of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, formally the remit of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority. This strategy is now front of mind of many of local nature and sustainability groups, which are now being further supported by the council's "Nature Recovery from the Ground Up" project. It is good to see that there are so many active groups in our community.

In my role as vice-chair of the Environment & Green Investment Committee, I have also asked council officers to take a closer look at the community benefits parishes across the county receive from renewable energy schemes. Local solar farms, for example, are already making significant community benefit payments to parish councils, and in principle community benefits can be direct (i.e., a share of the energy generated) or indirect (i.e., a recurring payment in proportion to electricity generated).

The council has successfully developed several renewable energy schemes, which are now exporting energy to the electricity grid and generating an economic return. The next step is to give communities the same opportunities to generate electricity and income via the council's work in community energy. All of this responds to the 79% of people across Cambridgeshire tell us that they are worried about climate change.

Economy

After over five hours of democratic scrutiny, the council's Assets & Procurement Committee on which Adam sits approved a deal to put forward 67 acres of land, owned by the County Council, to allow the next phase of growth of Cambridge Biomedical Campus. This deal opens the door to up to £3 billion of private sector investment in Cambridgeshire and includes upfront delivery of a "Southern Access Road" and other transport infrastructure.

<https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/news/3-billion-investment-to-support-future-expansion-of-cambridge-biomedical-campus>