

Local Government Reorganisation

What Melbourn Needs to Know — and Could Do Now

CAPALC Parish Briefing — March 2026 — prepared with the assistance of AI, there may be some errors

LGR is underway. The question is whether Melbourn is prepared for the practical consequences — or risks discovering them after the window to act has closed.

How Each Option Affects Your Parish

The government consultation numbers the four proposals 1–4. The local option letters (A, B, D, E) used throughout this briefing correspond to Proposals 2, 1, 3 and 4 respectively. Each proposer chose their own working names for the new authorities (e.g. ‘North West’, ‘South East’, ‘North East’); this briefing uses more descriptive names to help distinguish the authorities across options.

Option	Your UA	Parishes	Key Risk
A (Proposal 2)	Southeast Unitary Council (South Cambs + East Cambs + Cambridge City)	138	Large mixed authority; rural parishes may be overshadowed
B (Proposal 1)	Greater Cambridge (South Cambs + Cambridge City)	102	Urban-dominated; parish voice competing with city priorities
D (Proposal 4)	Greater Cambridge (South Cambs + Cambridge City)	102	Urban-dominated; parish voice competing with city priorities
E (Proposal 3)	Greater Cambridge (South Cambs + Cambridge City)	102	Urban-dominated; parish voice competing with city priorities

The Risks That Matter Most to Melbourn

Planning influence diluted — but legal weight unchanged. Melbourn remains a statutory consultee under all options. The legal weight of parish comments does not change. The practical risk is that fewer officers covering more parishes means less capacity to engage meaningfully with Melbourn’s responses, and less local knowledge to interpret them. A larger authority dilutes influence, not legal standing.

Developer contribution regime could change entirely. As a South Cambs parish, Melbourn currently sits under an S106-only regime (no CIL). Under options that merge {dist} with CIL districts, the parish could move to a CIL regime — changing the developer contribution framework entirely. The greater risk is administrative: whether the new UA collects contributions promptly and allocates funds without delay. CIL should not be relied upon as a primary funding source regardless of option.

No Neighbourhood Plan leaves the parish more exposed. The benefits of an NP extend well beyond the CIL uplift (15% to 25%) — a made NP provides statutory weight across housing, design, green space, and local character. However, NP policies must be in general conformity with the Local Plan’s strategic policies. If the new UA has not yet adopted a Local Plan, Melbourn would face a policy vacuum that makes starting an NP significantly harder. The window to begin is now, while the current Local Plan still provides a clear framework to align to.

Relationships with officers may need to be rebuilt. The working relationships your clerk and councillors have built with current district and county officers could be disrupted. Officers in a new authority may not have the same familiarity with your parish. The transition period (to April 2028) is when parish issues are most likely to fall between the cracks.

What Melbourn Could Do Now

Document existing commitments. Record all current S106 payments, CIL neighbourhood portion payments due, grant agreements, SLAs, and concurrent function funding. These are at risk during transition and must be actively chased with the new authority.

Identify which promised benefits are statutory and which are discretionary. For every benefit cited in an LGR proposal (parish forums, locality working, asset devolution), ask whether it is written into law, constitution, or binding agreement — or whether it is simply a stated intention.

Press for embedding during transition. This is the window where the Parish Council has the strongest negotiating position. Once the new authority is operational, engagement promises are easily deprioritised. Press for a parish charter and constitutional recognition.

Model financial impact. Prepare for potential precept implications from lost grant schemes, concurrent function changes, and possible asset or service transfers. Communicate proactively with residents about what the precept pays for.

Engage your ward and division councillors. Your current ward and division councillors are your advocates within the principal authorities. Ensure they understand your parish's specific concerns and are briefed to raise them during transition planning.

Start a Neighbourhood Plan now. Start while the current Local Plan provides a clear policy framework to align to. A made NP protects parish interests across housing, design, green space, and local character — not just developer contributions. Once the new UA begins its own Local Plan, starting will be harder. CAPALC can advise on how to begin.

Note on bus services: Bus service funding sits with the Combined Authority (CPCA) under the Mayor and is unaffected by LGR. The transport risk for parishes is around highways maintenance priorities and local road management transferring to a new UA — not bus subsidies.

The full option-by-option analysis follows on the next page. Contact CAPALC at info@capalc.org.uk for support.

Your Parish At A Glance

Parish: Melbourn

District: South Cambridgeshire

Population (2023): 5,185

Dwellings (2023): 2,335

Parish type: Variable-UA

Neighbourhood Plan: None

As a South Cambridgeshire parish, Melbourn could fall under different unitary authorities depending on which option is selected: Greater Cambridge, Southeast Unitary Council. This means the character, priorities and scale of your principal authority vary significantly between options — and so do the practical consequences for your parish.

Your Parish Under Each Option

Option A: Southeast Unitary

Merges: Cambridge, East Cambridgeshire and South Cambridgeshire

Parishes: 138

Character: Cambridge-anchored, growth-focused authority

Option B / Option D / Option E: Greater Cambridge

Merges: Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire

Parishes: 102

Character: Tightly focused on the Cambridge economic area

How Each Option Affects Key Impacts

A. Planning & Development

Option A (Southeast Unitary):

Local Plan: Cambridge's strategic growth agenda would be a major influence. There is a question about whether housing allocations might increasingly be directed to rural South Cambs parishes.

Developer Contributions: South Cambs currently uses S106 only (no CIL). East Cambs CIL at £125/m² indexed. New authority will need a unified approach to developer contributions.

Option B / Option D / Option E (Greater Cambridge):

Local Plan: Greater Cambridge already has a joint Local Plan process. Parishes benefit from planning continuity but Cambridge growth pressures intensify.

Developer Contributions: South Cambs currently S106 only (no CIL). New authority may introduce CIL or maintain S106.

FROM YOUR DATA: Melbourn has grown by 290 residents since 2021 (+6%), with 30 new dwellings added in the last year alone. This growth trajectory suggests that housing allocation in any new Local Plan will be an important consideration for your parish. 31% of households have dependent children (960 children aged 0–15). New housing allocations would ideally account for school capacity, play areas and youth infrastructure.

FROM YOUR MINUTES: Melbourn regularly reviews planning applications and has engaged with the Local Plan process — so these changes are likely to matter to you. S106 developer contributions appear in 14 sets of your minutes. Under options that merge your district with others, the approach to developer contributions could change.

B. Finance & Funding

Option A (Southeast Unitary):

Council Tax: Wide council tax harmonisation gap between Cambridge City and rural districts.

Rural/Urban: Cambridge carries significant economic and political weight. Rural parishes may want to consider how to ensure they are not seen primarily as Cambridge's hinterland.

Option B / Option D / Option E (Greater Cambridge):

Council Tax: Harmonisation between Cambridge City and South Cambs rates.

Rural/Urban: Cambridge carries the greater political weight. South Cambs parishes would be the rural minority and may wish to consider how to make their voice heard effectively.

FROM YOUR DATA: 18% of housing is social rented, meaning a narrower council tax base and residents who may be more affected by any service changes.

FROM YOUR MINUTES: Melbourn's budget, precept and reserves are discussed regularly. Your precept may become more visible as a separate line item when district rates merge into a single UA rate, which could create pressure to freeze or reduce it -- so it may be worth thinking about how to communicate the value of what it pays for.

C. Governance, Services & Representation

Option A (Southeast Unitary):

Representation: Cambridge is unparished — parish councils only exist in South Cambs and East Cambs. It would be worth considering how attention and resources might be balanced between parished and unparished areas.

Services: Strong service capacity from Cambridge City resources, though services could tend towards urban-centric design.

Option B / Option D / Option E (Greater Cambridge):

Representation: 102 parishes in a Cambridge-focused authority. Parish forums are viable at this scale, though it would be worth ensuring they reflect rural as well as urban concerns.

Services: Strong urban service base from Cambridge City, though rural South Cambs parishes may want to consider how to ensure their needs are given equal weight.

FROM YOUR DATA: With 5,185 residents, Melbourn has the scale to be a credible partner for the new UA — and it may be worth seeking engagement mechanisms that are constitutionally embedded rather than discretionary.

FROM YOUR MINUTES: Your council has engaged with service changes (8 meetings). LGR has already been discussed at 8 of your meetings. These service delivery arrangements are likely to be redesigned under the new UA, and the approach will depend on which option is selected.

D. Highways & Transport

Option A (Southeast Unitary):

CCC highways responsibilities transfer to Southeast Unitary. With 138 parishes, your highway improvement priorities would need to be heard alongside a much larger area.

Option B / Option D / Option E (Greater Cambridge):

CCC highways responsibilities transfer to Greater Cambridge. With 102 parishes, your highway improvement priorities would need to be heard alongside a much larger area.

FROM YOUR MINUTES: Highways and transport issues feature prominently in Melbourn's minutes. These are currently managed through established relationships with CCC highways officers. Under LGR, all of this would transfer to the new UA - so it may be worth thinking about how to carry forward the relationships and progress you've built.

E. Flooding & Environment

Option A (Southeast Unitary):

Relatively lower flood risk geography, but chalk stream and clay soil drainage issues in South Cambs.

Option B / Option D / Option E (Greater Cambridge):

Focused geography helps flood management coherence.

FROM YOUR MINUTES: Melbourn's minutes record flooding and drainage concerns. The Lead Local Flood Authority responsibility transfers from CCC to the new UA, and the capacity to manage your specific catchment area could vary depending on which option is selected.

F. Education, Health & Social Care

These services are currently managed county-wide by CCC. Under LGR they transfer to the new UA(s). While not directly controlled by parishes, they significantly affect residents and take up a large share of UA budgets -- which could reduce the discretionary spending that parishes often benefit from.

Option A (Southeast Unitary):

Greater financial resilience for social care, but resources spread across a larger population.

Option B / Option D / Option E (Greater Cambridge):

Moderate financial base for social care. Competing demands from a mixed urban/rural population.

FROM YOUR DATA: 24% of residents are aged 65 or over (1,190 people), and 16% of households are a single person over 65. Adult social care — the single largest cost facing any new UA — could affect service availability in your area. If a UA comes under financial pressure, discretionary services may be reduced to fund statutory social care obligations. 960 children aged 0–15 live in Melbourn (19% of the population). School place planning, currently managed county-wide by CCC, transfers to the new UA. If the new authority covers a larger or differently shaped area, catchment planning could become more complex, and it is worth considering how SEND provision might be affected. With 230 children aged 0–3, early years and childcare provision is also a live concern that will transfer to the new authority.

Risks Common To All Options

Regardless of which option is selected, every parish faces these risks:

- **TRANSITION DISRUPTION (to April 2028)** — Both old and new authorities operate simultaneously. Officer capacity may be stretched by merger logistics, which could affect response times. Planning processing could slow. It is worth keeping a close eye on existing S106 payments, grants and contracts to make sure they carry across.
- **EXPENDITURE TRANSFER** — There is a possibility that a UA under financial pressure could pass services to parishes without fully matching funding. National evidence suggests precepts have sometimes increased significantly (69%+) following unitarisation, so this is worth being aware of.
- **ASSET TRANSFER PRESSURE** — The new UA may rationalise its assets. Parishes could be offered parks, play areas or buildings along with their running costs. It is worth thinking through the financial implications carefully, and being aware that the alternative may be that the asset is no longer maintained.
- **ASPIRATIONS VS FORMAL COMMITMENTS** — "Co-production", "community empowerment" and "parish voice" do not currently have a statutory basis. Experience from previous reorganisations suggests these can be difficult to maintain under financial pressure. It is worth seeking formal embedding of any engagement mechanisms that matter to your parish.
- **NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN** — Melbourn does not currently have a Neighbourhood Plan. Without one, the parish has less statutory weight in planning decisions and receives only 15% (rather than 25%) of CIL from local

development. Starting a Neighbourhood Plan before the transition could be a valuable step to strengthen your parish's position.

What Melbourn Can Do Now

1. **1. CONSIDER DOCUMENTING YOUR EXISTING COMMITMENTS.** It may be helpful to record all current S106 payments, grant agreements, SLAs and concurrent function funding, so you have a clear record to follow up with the new authority.
2. **2. THINK ABOUT WHAT IS STATUTORY VS DISCRETIONARY.** For benefits mentioned in LGR proposals, it is worth asking whether they are written into law, a constitution or a binding agreement. If not, they may be harder to rely on in the long term.
3. **3. MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD DURING THE TRANSITION.** The period between now and vesting day is likely when parishes have the best opportunity to shape how the new authority will work with them.
4. **4. THINK ABOUT THE POTENTIAL FINANCIAL IMPACT.** You might want to consider modelling how changes to grants, concurrent function funding and possible asset or service transfers could affect your precept.
5. **5. STAY IN TOUCH WITH YOUR COUNCILLORS.** Your South Cambridgeshire ward councillor(s) (Cllr Jose Hales, Cllr Sally Ann Hart) and your CCC division councillor(s) (Cllr Adam Bostanci) are your current advocates within the principal authorities. It would be helpful to make sure they understand Melbourn's specific concerns and are briefed to raise them during transition planning. They are copied on this email for that reason.

How Capalc Can Help

The full 47-point LGR Parish Impact Assessment

Guidance on reviewing LGR option proposals from a parish perspective

Template responses for parish council engagement

Advice on Neighbourhood Plans, asset transfers and service devolution

Updates as the reorganisation process develops

Contact us at info@capalc.org.uk.

Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Association of Local Councils (CAPALC)

This briefing draws on CAPALC's LGR Parish Impact Assessment (March 2026), the LGR option proposals (Options A, B, D and E), national evidence from previous reorganisations, and NALC/SLCC research.

Sent to: Melbourn Parish Council (clerk and councillors), with copy to ward and division councillors.