

Cllr Sue Ellington

2025-26 Annual Report to Swavesey, Fen Drayton and Lolworth

March 2026

This year has been defined by three major themes: the permanent adoption of the four-day working week, the publication of the Draft Greater Cambridge Local Plan, and the Government's proposal to abolish district councils entirely through Local Government Reorganisation. Each of these will shape how our area is governed for decades.

In addition the proposals to introduce a Government managed Development Corporation and the removal of planning powers from local government will cement central government's grip of making important decisions which affect us all

Finance and Budget

At the February 2026 budget meeting, the District administration set the maximum Council Tax for the coming year and confirmed its financial direction. As in previous years, my group proposed an alternative budget. Our aim was not to oppose for opposition's sake, but to redirect spending toward frontline services and demonstrable value for residents.

The fundamental question facing any council is simple: what are residents paying for? The district's share of Council Tax is smaller than that of the County Council, but it remains significant. When residents see bins missed, planning decisions delayed, complaints unanswered or empty council homes left unused for long periods, confidence is eroded

The Four-Day Week: from trial to permanence

The most controversial decision of the year was taken in July 2025, when the administration voted to make the 32-hour, four-day week permanent.

The trial began in January 2023. It was originally presented as an experiment in recruitment and retention, designed to attract staff in a competitive labour market. But the evidence presented before the final vote raised serious questions.

The public consultation data presented did not demonstrate statistically significant improvement in any service. Several services, including waste collection and Council Tax administration, recorded statistically significant decline. Other services showed downward trends that did not meet the statistical threshold but were nonetheless concerning.

Subsequent reporting showed that South Cambridgeshire and Cambridge City jointly recorded 12,797 missed bin collections in the previous year — the highest in the county and fifth highest in the East of England.

The Government has intervened previously over the four-day week via a Best Value Notice, and further correspondence has taken place this year expressing concern about value for money. The council has now been written to by both the outgoing Conservative administration and the current Labour one, but the management of the council remains the responsibility of the political administration and the 4 day week for 5 days pay continues.

Local Government Reorganisation: The proposed end of the District Council

While the council has been focused on its internal working arrangements, the Government has initiated the most significant restructuring of English local government since 1974. The proposal would abolish district and county councils and replace them with large unitary authorities serving populations of roughly half a million people or more. For South Cambridgeshire, this means that the District Council in its current form will cease to exist.

In November 2025, the council voted to recommend a unitary authority combining Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire. I voted for an alternative option that would also include Huntingdonshire, creating two evenly balanced unitary authorities across the county. My concern is that a Cambridge–South Cambridgeshire authority alone risks becoming overwhelmingly urban in outlook and priorities. We await the Minister's decision as to the Unitary make up after the election

Planning

Late in 2025, the Draft Greater Cambridge Local Plan was published. This document will shape development to 2041 and beyond. It is arguably the most important planning document affecting our villages in a generation.

The Cambridge Development Corporation and the future growth of the city

Alongside the Draft Local Plan and Local Government Reorganisation, a further and potentially more dangerous far-reaching proposal has emerged: the creation of a Cambridge Development Corporation.

Development Corporations were used extensively in the post-war period to deliver the New Towns, most infamously Milton Keynes. They sit outside the normal structure of local government, with powers granted directly by central government. However, ours will include 300,000 people and is more than ten times the geographic size of Milton Keynes. Significant planning and development decisions will be taken by an unelected body, rather than by district or county councillors or Unitary councillors.

The Government has made clear that Cambridge is central to its ambitions for national economic growth, particularly in science, technology and research. Ministers have spoken openly about the need to enable Cambridge to expand more rapidly, removing what are seen as constraints on housing delivery, infrastructure and commercial space. Given that the District Council has cooperated fully with the government so far in its growth plans, it isn't clear why such a drastic and undemocratic change is necessary.

Supporting Local Businesses

This year my group brought forward a motion supporting the abolition of business rates for small local businesses and pubs. Amendments introduced a proposed Commercial Land Levy, effectively substituting one tax for another. As a result, the motion was withdrawn.

Village pubs and small businesses are not merely commercial enterprises; they are social infrastructure. Their survival affects community cohesion as much as economic vitality.

Conclusion

This has been a year in which long-term decisions have overshadowed day-to-day administration. The four-day week has been made permanent. A new Local Plan proposes significant reshaping of our settlements. The District Council itself will be abolished. Central government may assume direct planning powers.

These are not minor changes. They will determine the governance, character and growth of our area for a generation.

My priorities remain clear: protecting village identity, ensuring infrastructure keeps pace with development, securing value for taxpayers and preserving democratic accountability.

If you would like to discuss any matter raised in this report, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Cllr. Sue Ellington District Councillor Swavesey, Fen Drayton and Lolworth Ward.