



East Cambridgeshire District Council

Minutes of a Meeting of East Cambridgeshire District Council
held at The Grange, Nutholt Lane, Ely, CB7 4EE
on Tuesday 24 February 2026 at 6.00 pm

Present

Councillor Chika Akinwale	Councillor Julia Huffer
Councillor Christine Ambrose Smith	Councillor Bill Hunt
Councillor Anna Bailey	Councillor Mark Inskip
Councillor Ian Bovingdon	Councillor James Lay
Councillor David Brown	Councillor David Miller
Councillor Charlotte Cane	Councillor Kelli Pettitt (Chair)
Councillor Christine Colbert	Councillor Alan Sharp
Councillor Lee Denney	Councillor John Trapp
Councillor Lorna Dupré	Councillor Ross Trent
Councillor Lavinia Edwards	Councillor Lucius Vellacott
Councillor Mark Goldsack	Councillor Mary Wade
Councillor Martin Goodearl	Councillor Alison Whelan
Councillor Kathrin Holtzmann	Councillor Christine Whelan
Councillor Keith Horgan (Vice Chair)	Councillor Gareth Wilson

30. Public Question Time

There were no public questions.

31. Apologies for Absence

No apologies for absence were received.

32. Declarations of Interest

Councillors Christine Ambrose Smith, Ian Bovingdon, David Brown, Christine Colbert, Lorna Dupré, Lavinia Edwards, Mark Goldsack, Martin Goodearl, Kathrin Holtzmann, Keith Horgan, Bill Hunt, David Miller, Alan Sharp, John Trapp, Lucius Vellacott, Alison Whelan, Christine Whelan and Gareth Wilson all declared a personal interest in agenda item 7, as members of an Internal Drainage Board.

Cllr Alan Sharp also declared a personal interest in agenda item 7, as a member of the Special Interest Group of the Local Government Association.

Under agenda item 12, Council Tax, councillors were advised by the Director Legal and Monitoring Officer that whilst being a council taxpayer or being eligible for a discount under the Council tax support scheme was a pecuniary interest, it was not a disclosable pecuniary interest and they did not have to apply for a dispensation to participate in the debate or vote on the item.

33. Minutes – 20 November 2025

It was resolved unanimously:

That the Minutes of the Council meeting held on 20 November 2025 be agreed as a correct record.

34. Chair's Announcements

There were no announcements.

35. Petitions

No petitions had been received.

36. Notice of Motions Under Procedure Rule 10

(i) Internal Drainage Boards

Cllr Lucius Vellacott proposed, and Cllr Alan Sharp seconded the following motion.

East Cambridgeshire District Council, hereinafter referred to as 'the Council', in support of the Fens' c.£3bn agricultural economy and the rural communities of our District, notes that:

- The work of our Internal Drainage Boards (hereinafter 'IDBs') is essential to the Fen-based economy, irrigation and flood prevention in East Cambridgeshire
- The East of England is one of the most water-stressed regions in the United Kingdom (per the Water Resources East Regional Water Resources Plan, 2022)
- Major infrastructure solutions are required to alleviate the projected water shortage, such as the cutting-edge agricultural reservoirs project championed by the Council (per Eastern Powerhouse, 'A network of local reservoirs' report, July 2025)
- The Council offers a £1,000,000 pot of Community Infrastructure Levy funding for District-Wide Water Management and Flood Prevention
- DEFRA and MHCLG are undertaking an IDB funding and costs research project led by ICF and Logika consultants, the aim of which is to analyse the funding mechanisms and costs of IDBs and determine the economic and social value of their work. ICF intend to contact relevant stakeholders for comment, and a dissemination event is planned after publication

- DEFRA have proposed an additional £16m (now up to £91m in total) to improve farm and rural flood resilience, however, they have also proposed a three-band system of capital funding allocation effective April 2026 (all of which also encourage co-funding from local contributions) (table taken from public report to Middle Fen and Mere IDB dated to 30th September 2025, but information also available publicly via DEFRA website):

Band	Project Type	Typical Grant Range	Indicative Grant Rate (% of eligible costs)
A	Small-scale works (e.g. culvert repairs, pump upgrades)	Less than £250k	Up to 85%
B	Medium-scale infrastructure (e.g. embankment reinforcement, sluice upgrades)	£250k-£2m	60-75%
C	Large-scale or strategic schemes (e.g. new pumping stations, catchment-wide interventions)	More than £2m	40-60%

- It has a representative (Cllr Alan Sharp) on the LGA Special Interest Group on IDB reforms

The Council believes that:

- Whilst the additional £16m provided to improve farm and rural flood resilience is welcome, the banding restricts the ability of IDBs to make the necessary large-scale infrastructure investments for the optimal performance of their functions
- IDBs and Councils should not be forced to rely too heavily on the Special Levy alone, in the long term
- The proposed Fens Reservoir, whilst a welcome step, will not alleviate the need for action to protect the work of our IDBs in the immediate term
- Local action is necessary to protect and champion the work of our IDBs, especially in light of recent challenges to water supply due to below average rainfall

Therefore, the Council resolves to:

- Take account of the estimated 6% increase to the IDB Special Levy paid by the Council
- Invite its representatives on the IDBs to gather information about how the Council might best support their work, and about their views on the proposed changes and research by DEFRA, and also to relay these to the LGA Special Interest Group via its representative (Cllr Alan Sharp)

- Instruct the Director (Community) and Director (Finance), as they have been doing, to continue to engage with IDBs on the financial impact of future changes to their governance
- Instruct the Director (Community) to write to DEFRA on behalf of the Council, as an interested stakeholder, to request the opportunity to provide input into the work undertaken by ICF on the future of IDBs
- Actively communicate with IDBs regarding the circumstances in which CIL (or other ECDC) funding may be applied for to support infrastructure used by IDBs for the purposes of water management and flood prevention for the benefit of the District's residents and businesses
- Monitor and engage with IDBs and DEFRA as further information about the future of IDBs emerges
- Promote widely its agricultural reservoirs project, especially with the regional Mayor, Paul Bristow, and the Cambridge Growth Company, as well as supporting other efforts to improve sustainable water management (as per its Climate and Nature Strategy to 2028)

Cllr Lucius Vellacott amended the word "Instruct" to "Invite" on the second bullet point in the final section of the resolution to Council. He explained the importance of Internal Drainage Boards in preventing flooding, protecting farmland and supporting the local economy. Funded by rates from residents and landowners, it was vital for the Council to respond positively to the Government's research project to ensure the work of the Internal Drainage Boards continued.

Cllr Lorna Dupré proposed and Cllr Christine Whelan seconded the following amendment, replacing the motion with:

"Under procedure rule 12.3.1, the Council resolves to refer the motion to the Finance & Assets Committee for its consideration."

Cllr Lorna Dupré stated that the motion was unclear and lacked well-defined solutions to the issues faced. She highlighted the absence of a plan for how the Internal Drainage Boards were expected to respond. She also noted the omission of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Flood and Water Partnership, meetings of the Internal Drainage Boards' Chairs and the Regional Flood and Coastal Committees by the Environment Agency. Furthermore, she suggested that the impact of Climate Change should be included. Concluding that the motion was too flawed to be amended at Council, she recommended sending it to the Finance and Assets Committee for a more comprehensive revision.

Cllr John Trapp highlighted the confusion between the roles of the Internal Drainage Boards in flood prevention and the construction of reservoirs. He urged a review of the full report on the reservoirs, as the summary from the Eastern Powerhouse was inadequate. He had consulted Andrew Newton, chief engineer of the Internal Drainage Board. Whilst he supported the concept, he could not endorse the motion in its current form.

Cllr Anna Bailey explained that reservoirs were linked to drainage systems and clarified their roles in relation to the Internal Drainage Board. She regularly met with Andrew Newton and Internal Drainage Board representatives who support plans to increase reservoirs in the area. The motion sought to gather the opinions from these Boards and report to the Government. She urged Council not to refer the matter to the Finance and Assets Committee as the Government were already requesting stakeholder feedback and any delay might hinder the Council's influence.

Cllr Charlotte Cane stated that this issue should be referred to the Finance and Assets Committee for proper wording. She explained that those councillors on the Internal Drainage Boards were appointed members, not Council representatives, making the motion's wording incorrect. Cllr Christine Ambrose Smith explained that she had been a member of the Littleport and Downham Internal Drainage Board for many years and she acted as a member of the Board and not as a representative of the Council.

Cllr Lucius Vellacott thanked the proposers of the amendment for their wording but suggested earlier communication of concerns could have fostered a cross-party motion, similar to past ones. He acknowledged contributions of councillors on drainage boards and clarified that he did not believe the motion implied otherwise. He stressed the importance of sharing the Internal Drainage Board's views with the Government, cautioning that delays could hinder this.

A vote was taken on the amendment and with 14 votes in favour and 14 votes against, the vote was tied. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4 the Chair had a casting vote, which she used to vote against the amendment and so the amendment was lost.

The discussion returned to the substantive (original) motion.

Cllr Christine Colbert explained that this was a complex issue and suggested that Cllr Lucius Vellacott could have notified members of the forthcoming motion earlier, which would have allowed all councillors to work together on this matter.

Cllr Keith Horgan supported cross-party working and he had worked with Cllr Mark Inskip to produce a motion on empty homes, which had been agreed at the last meeting of Council. However, in this case, time was limited and he feared that if Council had deferred this matter to the Finance and Assets Committee, the resulting motion would have been agreed too late to be considered by the Government.

Cllr Mary Wade explained that clear, accurate and unambiguous wording on a motion was vitally important. Cllr Kathrin Holtzmann agreed.

Cllr John Trapp understood that the plan for reservoirs had depended on the water treatment plant moving to Honey Hill, which was no longer going ahead. He asserted that it was vital for the Environment Agency to be involved in

drainage issues and he expressed disappointment that there had not been more time to consider the motion's wording.

Cllr Alan Sharp explained that he sat on the Local Government Association Special Interest Group, which liaised with the Government on drainage issues, and he was keen to support the motion. He explained that the work conducted by Internal Drainage Boards was of national importance but their funding was the responsibility of a small number of councils and this was unsustainable. The Government's review was likely to have a huge impact on drainage issues in the district and so it was imperative that the Council responded to the Government as soon as possible.

Cllr Lucius Vellacott expressed his support for cross-party collaboration, but noted that the motion had been published nearly two weeks ago, and he had only been contacted by opposition councillors that morning. He chose Cllr Alan Sharp to second the motion due to his membership of the LGA Special Interest Group. Cllr Vellacott cautioned that delaying the decision to improve the wording could cause the authority to lose its opportunity to influence the Government's policy and he urged Council to agree the motion.

Cllr Lucius Vellacott proposed and Cllr Alan Sharp seconded the motion. A vote was taken and with 14 votes in favour, 0 votes against and 14 abstentions the motion detailed above was carried.

37. To Answer Questions from Members

Question from Cllr Mark Inskip to the Chair of Operational Services Committee

"At the full council meeting held on Thursday 20 November 2025 the Council resolved to direct officers to develop a new Empty Homes Strategy by July 2026. Can the Chair of Operational Services committee update the Council on the work already undertaken and confirm whether officers are on track to complete the work by July 2026."

Response from Cllr Julia Huffer, Chair of Operational Services Committee

"Thank you, Councillor Inskip, for your question.

"The Waste and Environmental Services Manager, Nick Baker, was tasked with taking this work forward in late 2025.

"He has since met with a number of officers undertaking similar work in other local authorities, and attended a recent workshop hosted by the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health to examine good practice in this area. Work has been undertaken with the Policy Lead at the Empty Homes Network in bringing together a paper which outlines various options open to the council, for initial discussion with senior officers in March.

"It is anticipated that this would allow recommendations to be considered by members before a final Empty Homes Strategy is produced.

“The work remains on track for completion by July 2026.”

Question from Cllr Lorna Dupré to the Chair of Operational Services Committee

“Many residents in new developments in East Cambridgeshire will be interested in the Government consultation currently under way on reducing the prevalence of private estate management arrangements <https://consult.communities.gov.uk/leasehold-and-private-rented-sector/reducing-the-prevalence-of-private-estate/>

“The consultation focuses on tackling the growing issue of unadopted amenities on privately managed housing estates in England, where roads, drainage systems, green spaces, and other communal infrastructure is maintained by private estate management companies rather than public authorities. This trend has led to unfair charges, poor transparency, and limited homeowner rights, creating significant consumer detriment.

“As the local planning authority responsible for negotiating management arrangements on new developments in East Cambridgeshire, what response is the council making to this consultation?”

Response from Cllr Julia Huffer, Chair of Operational Services Committee

“Thank you, Councillor Dupré, for your question. The Council recognises the issues that can occur when amenities on housing estates are maintained by private estate management companies rather than those adopted by public authorities and supports the aim to address this. The Council supports the proposal that more of these amenities be adopted by public authorities, and the suggestion of the introduction of common standards for adoptable infrastructure to make it easier for this infrastructure to be adopted. The Council also supports the proposal for resident-controlled management and through our Trading Company has set up a resident’s management company at Eden Square in Ely so that the residents are fully in control of how the open space and shared areas are maintained, what service charge is payable and how this is spent. Officers will draft a response to the consultation, which will be circulated to all Members for comments before it is submitted.”

Question from Cllr Chika Akinwale to the Chair of Finance and Assets Committee

“Can the Chair of Finance & Assets provide a clear update on the delivery of the Council’s Accessible Play motion, passed in May 2024, which I proposed and you seconded?”

“For context, the motion committed the Council to an independent audit of play areas under its control, invited parish councils to submit their sites for the same audit (Council-funded), and brought the audit outcomes to F&A, alongside developing an Inclusive Playground Strategy, Toolkit, and Communications Strategy.

“Given that the last couple of F&A updates have included the same update along the lines of ‘no significant updates’, with no further information on the specifics, can you therefore confirm in your answer to the above:

- Exactly, how many parish sites have been audited to date, and how many remain?
- What is the exact date of the audit's completion?
- When exactly will a detailed report on the audit outcomes be provided to F&A, noting that no audit report has been received for the sites already completed?
- When will the Inclusive Playground Toolkit be published?
- When can we expect a communications strategy to promote Inclusive Playgrounds?
- What practical guidance and support have been provided to these parish sites to complete the audit?
- What benchmark cost range are cost officers using for an inclusive playground?
- When can we expect to see the inclusive playground strategy, which needs to be in place before we can start awarding inclusive play grants?
- When can we expect the CIL grant criteria to be brought to F&A?
- What support and guidance will be made available to applicants for the grant?
- When can we finally expect this audit to move to delivery?”

Response from Cllr Alan Sharp, Chair of the Finance and Assets Committee

“Thank you, Cllr Akinwale, for your question. I am aware of your passion for this issue. Members have been receiving updates at every Finance and Assets committee meeting. We were told early on that PiPA Play has limited resources to conduct the audits, but we did agree that it was important to use an independent organisation that sits outside of the play industry. I am a Trustee of the Ellesmere Centre in Stetchworth and we asked PiPA Play to do something and it took a while, so I know that their resources are stretched.

- “19 Parishes expressed an interest in an audit of their play areas, 15 attended an information seminar with PiPA Play and 7 submitted information for an audit, all of which have been completed. Three reminders about the audit offer have been sent to parish councils since the seminar took place.
- There is no end date for audit's completion, parishes can still request an audit. The Council prioritised the parish audits and so the audit of ECDC managed play areas is due to complete in the spring.
- A date for the audit report for the ECDC managed sites to be presented to a meeting of Finance and Assets committee will be confirmed once the final report is received.
- The Inclusive Playground Toolkit will form part of the Inclusive Playground Strategy.
- Once the ECDC managed play areas audit has completed, there will be a review of what communications will be issued.

- PiPA Play, the company conducting the audits, have supported parishes throughout the audit process.
- Making a play area inclusive isn't just about providing appropriate play equipment, it is also about making the play area accessible to all and costs for this will vary. Officers will follow the Council's procurement rules to establish costs.
- A draft strategy will be presented to the September meeting of Finance and Assets Committee.
- Subject to the decisions made later this evening, CIL criteria will be presented to Finance and Assets Committee in March.
- Officers will offer guidance and signpost parishes to other sources of support.
- Discussions with developers providing new play areas about making these more inclusive is already taking place. Two recent examples of this are in Kennett and Little Downham. Once the ECDC audit report is received, a plan for what adjustments can be made to these to make them more accessible will be developed."

Question from Cllr John Trapp to the Chair of the Audit Committee

"External auditor EY's annual audit report to the Council's Audit Committee meeting of 20 January for the year 2024/25 noted that:

- "The first version of the draft financial statements published by the Council had significant internal inconsistencies, typographical and arithmetic errors, that should have been identified through internal quality review prior to publication. I did spot some arithmetic errors as well."
- "Working papers and requested evidence were not provided in line with the agreed timetable and were generally not to the expected standard."
- This caused "significant slippage to the agreed project plan and inefficient use of the planned audit resources."
- "Because of the significance of the matter described... [they] have not been able to obtain sufficient appropriate audit evidence to provide a basis for an audit opinion."
- Balance sheet figures did not agree with the Council's own records, leading to misstatements across pension assets, property, plant and equipment, and capital grants.

"EY warned: "If we are not satisfied with the pace and substance of improvements ... we would be minded to issue Statutory Recommendations", and cited the "recurring inability to prepare robust financial statements and support the audit process."

"What plans does the Chair of Audit have to ensure an improvement on this dire audit judgement?"

Reply from Cllr David Brown, Chair of the Audit Committee

"Thank you for your question, Cllr Trapp. I can confirm that meetings have taken place with External Audit to agree on actions going forward. This was reported to the Audit Committee on 20 January. A recruitment process has

also taken place for the role of Principal Accountant and I can confirm to Council that the final audit opinion was received at 8:34 pm on 20 February and that opinion found that External Audit did not need to issue any statutory recommendations.”

38. Pay Policy Statement

Council considered a report (AA141, previously circulated) that presented the Council’s Pay Policy Statement 2026/27, which was a requirement under the Localism Act 2011.

Cllr Kelli Pettitt proposed and Cllr Keith Horgan seconded the recommendation in the report. A vote was taken and Council unanimously agreed

to resolve:

to approve and adopt the 2026-27 Pay Policy Statement.

39. Schedule of Items Recommended from Committees and Other Member Bodies

Council considered a report (AA145, previously circulated) which considered the recommendations made to Council by both the Licensing Committee and the Finance and Assets Committee.

Cllr David Miller left the meeting at 6:53:41.

Council were invited to agree the Statement of Licensing Policy, which was recommended by the Licensing Committee. Cllr Julia Huffer proposed and Cllr Martin Goodearl seconded the recommendation. A vote was taken and Council unanimously agreed

to resolve:

to approve the Statement of Licensing Policy.

Cllr David Miller returned to the meeting at 6:55:03.

Council were invited to note the Council’s Treasury Management Strategy on the recommendation of the Finance and Assets Committee. Cllr Alan Sharp proposed and Cllr Ian Bovingdon seconded the recommendation in the report. A vote was taken and Council unanimously agreed

to resolve:

To note the mid-year review of the Council’s Treasury Management Strategy for 2025/26.

Council were invited to agree the recommendations from the Finance and Asset Committee regarding the 2026/27 Treasury Management Strategy, the Annual Investment Strategy, the Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement and the Prudential and Treasury Indicators on the recommendation of the Finance and Assets Committee. Cllr Alan Sharp proposed and Cllr Ian Bovingdon seconded the recommendations. A vote was taken and Council unanimously agreed

to approve

- i. The 2026/27 Treasury Management Strategy
- ii. The Annual Investment Strategy
- iii. The Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement
- iv. The Prudential and Treasury Indicators

Council were invited to approve up to £300,000 of CIL funding towards the Bereavement Centre project for risk contingency, as recommended by the Finance and Assets Committee.

Cllr Anna Bailey stated that the Finance and Assets Committee had thoroughly discussed this matter. She explained that previously undiscovered underground structures required additional funding for mitigation. Normally contingency funds for such projects were 10%-15% of the total cost, but with the additional £300,000, this would represent 4.7%. She emphasised that not approving the recommendation could delay the project, lead to contractual issues, and result in a loss of income, with potential costs surpassing the £300,000 requested.

Cllr Lorna Dupré stated that nine months ago the Council was informed that the Bereavement Centre contract had been set at a fixed price. She raised concerns that the price had not been fixed and that £300,000 was needed to proceed. The total cost was approaching £14m, far more than the original cost of £9m.

Cllr Charlotte Cane asked for what she was about to say to be minuted in full: "I would like a recorded vote on this. So, as Cllr Dupré said in May 2025 when we agreed the budget for this project we were told in the paper that went to Council, in clause 5.13: "following the procurement process, using the national framework, the Council is required to enter into a Joints Contracts Tribunal Design and Build Contract with the successful contractor. The terms and conditions of the contract are in a standard form and will commit the Council to the build programme. The cost returned through the tender is a fixed price, however as with all contracts of this nature does make provision for exceptional circumstances but remains low risk." I stress the contract is of standard form. Then we were told in feedback to the Finance and Assets Committee that under the standard and nationally recognised joint contract the risk of existing site conditions generally rests with the contractor, but we agreed amendments, which meant that the district Council took on a share of those risks. That is not what we were told when we approved the budget and other things keep changing and I am not convinced that we as members are being given all the information. As Cllr Dupré says, the costs of this project have ballooned and

now we are being asked to set aside another £300,000 from money, by the way, that as we shall see later on in the agenda, we don't yet have all that money and we are being asked to set that aside for this project. I cannot support it. I don't think that it is responsible to support it until we properly understand what is going on with the contracts, the terms of the contracts and what we as councillors are being asked to approve."

Cllr Martin Goodearl stated that projects often exceeded their budgets making a contingency fund essential. Since the project had been agreed by Council, delaying it would be financially irresponsible. If any contingency funds were unspent, they would be returned to the CIL budget.

Cllr Lucius Vellacott argued that rejecting the £300,000 funding could lead to higher costs for the Council due to project delay. He pointed out that more money than expected was being added to the CIL Fund and that any unspent contingency funds would be returned to it.

Cllr Bill Hunt stated that the interests of the residents would not be served by a costly delay to the project and he suggested that those opposed to the proposal should abstain.

Cllr Mark Inskip expressed concern regarding the management of both the contract and the developer carrying out the work. The Council had been informed last May that the risk was low and the cost was fixed. It was now clear that the risk was higher and the cost was not fixed. He concluded that the £300,000 could be of greater benefit to residents across the district to deliver the services they wanted.

Cllr John Trapp accepted the project would proceed but suggested the extra cost could have been offset by reducing other expenses and asked why this had not been considered.

Cllr Alan Sharp explained that the Finance and Assets Committee discussed the matter thoroughly. He mentioned that provisional costs were standard in building projects and assured the Council that the £300,000 contingency funding would be used only if necessary. He stressed the importance of avoiding project delay.

Cllr Anna Bailey explained that the project's cost would have been far higher if all potential risks had been addressed. She warned that any delay would incur costs and loss of income not covered in the proposed budget or the opposition's alternative budget. Cllr Bailey highlighted that residents had voted for an administration committed to establishing a bereavement centre.

Cllr Anna Bailey proposed, and Cllr Alan Sharp seconded the proposal. A vote was taken and were cast as followed:

For (14): Cllrs Christine Ambrose Smith, Anna Bailey, Ian Bovingdon, David Brown, Lavinia Edwards, Mark Goldsack, Martin Goodearl, Keith Horgan, Julia Huffer, Bill Hunt, David Miller, Kelli Pettitt, Alan Sharp and Lucius Vellacott.

Against (14): Cllrs Chika Akinwale, Charlotte Cane, Christine Colbert, Lee Denney, Lorna Dupré, Kathrin Holtzmann, Mark Inskip, James Lay, John Trapp, Ross Trent, Mary Wade, Alison Whelan, Christine Whelan and Gareth Wilson.

Abstain (0)

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4 the Chair had a casting vote, which she used to vote in favour of the recommendation. Therefore, Council agreed

to approve up to £300,000 of CIL funding towards the project, for risk contingency.

40. The Making of the Witcham Neighbourhood Plan

Council considered a report (AA142, previously circulated) which stated that the Witcham Neighbourhood Plan had been approved in the recent referendum, with 141 votes in favour and 14 against.

Cllr Mark Inskip stated he admired the residents' enthusiasm for creating their own plan to shape their future. The Witcham Neighbourhood Plan aimed to enhance the parish while considering the conservation area, small businesses and ecological significance. He was impressed by the turnout on a wet day in February and the overwhelming vote in favour of the Plan.

Cllr Lorna Dupré congratulated Witcham parish council and their residents on their Neighbourhood Plan. She welcomed the fact that three of the villages in her ward now had Neighbourhood Plans.

Cllr Mark Inskip proposed and Cllr Lorna Dupré seconded the recommendation in the report.

A vote was taken and it was unanimously agreed

to resolve:

- a) to congratulate Witcham Parish Council on its preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan, and a successful referendum outcome; and
- b) Formally make the Witcham Neighbourhood Plan (Appendix 1 to the report) part of the development plan for East Cambridgeshire with immediate effect.

41. Revenue Budget, Capital Strategy and Council Tax 2026/27

Council considered a report (AA146, previously circulated) to receive the Council's proposed revenue budget, capital strategy, and the required levels of Council Tax in 2026/27. The report assessed the robustness of the budgets,

the adequacy of reserves and updates the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). The Director Finance explained that appendix 1 had been circulated after the agenda had been published, as the Council had to wait for all the information to be received from all the preceptors in the district.

Cllr Anna Bailey expressed her pride that this authority was the only principal council in the country not to have increased Council Tax in the last 13 years. Services had been maintained with a new food waste collection service launching in June, to boost recycling rates. Free parking remained available in district car parks, the East Cambs trading company remained profitable and affordable housing was being delivered, including an opportunity in the next phase of the Haddenham Land Trust. This was impressive, especially given the reduced funding from the Government's Fair Funding review, which has favoured urban areas. She concluded by thanking officers for their hard work in saving money and delivering services.

Cllr Lorna Dupré proposed and Cllr Christine Whlean seconded the following amendment:

To approve:

- i) The formal Council Tax Resolution, which calculates the Council Tax requirement as set out in Appendix 1
- ii) The draft revenue budget for 2026/27 and MTFS for 2027/28 to 2029/30 as set out in Appendices 2(a) and 2(b) (LDI amend), specifically to reflect the following proposals:
 - To fund the initial capital cost (£600,000) and then ongoing revenue costs to implement Civil Parking Enforcement within the District (£40,000 in 2027/28 and future years) (Capital cost to be funded from Surplus Savings Reserve)
 - To increase the Environment Fund from £100,000 to £200,000 per year
 - To provide funding for Arts, culture and tourism £100,000 per year
 - To provide revenue funding to support further provision of community facilities, £75,000 per year
 - To provide revenue funding to establish a Citizens Advice presence in Ely- £45,000 per year
 - To build in a £200,000 turnover allowance on staff costs in recognition that there will be staff vacancies throughout the year
 - To revise projected interest income by an additional £160,000 per year in recognition that actual interest in previous years has been greater than the assumptions made at the time of budget approvals
- iii) A Council Tax freeze in 2026/27
- iv) The draft Statement of Reserves as set out in Appendix 3 (LDI amend)
- v) The draft Capital Strategy and financing as set out in Appendix 4 (LDI amend)
- vi) The 2026/27 Fees and Charges as set out in Appendix 5

- vii) The application of Business Rate reliefs for 2026/27, including those announced in the Autumn Budget and fully funded by Government through Section 31 grant, as detailed in sections 6.6 to 6.7 of this report.
- viii) The changes to the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme and premiums for Long-Term Empty and Second Homes as detailed in sections 11.8 and 11.9 of this report.
- ix) To delegate authority to the Finance and Asset Committee to approve the fees and charges for the new Bereavement Centre.

Cllr Lorna Dupré explained that the opposition group proposed a Council Tax freeze, redirecting funds for improvements. She noted that Civil Parking Enforcement, already in place in many areas, was necessary due to ongoing parking concerns among residents. The alternative budget proposed funding for Civil Parking Enforcement and included an extra £100,000 for environmental projects. It also suggested promoting tourism and supporting local artists, as well as establishing a Citizens Advice Bureau in Ely, funded through current staff vacancies and projected interest rate savings

Cllr Lucius Vellacott welcomed the opposition group's support for freezing Council Tax but raised concerns about their budget calculations. He questioned the assumption of higher interest rates and the reliability of savings from staff vacancies. He noted that the capital cost of Civil Parking Enforcement in Fenland had been approximately £1m and so the proposed £600,000 was inadequate. He suggested that the County Council should take on this work and expressed concern about the one day notice given to councillors for these proposals, which he felt was inadequate for public funds.

Cllr Bill Hunt was pleased that the opposition agreed that Council Tax should be frozen.

Cllr John Trapp stated there had been an annual surplus of approximately £2m, which he believed should be used for residents on projects such as Civil Parking Enforcement. He reported that many departments were understaffed and these savings should not simply increase the Council's surplus.

Cllr Mark Inskip supported the amendment, calling it practical and community focussed. He stated that investing £600,000 in Civil Parking Enforcement and £45,000 annually in ongoing revenue would address dangerous parking in the district. An additional £100,000 would promote biodiversity and reduce carbon emissions. He also mentioned that funding arts, culture and tourism initiatives and establishing a Citizens' Advice Bureau to assist with the rising cost of living, would greatly benefit residents. Cllr Inskip noted that there had been consistent underspending in the staffing budget, making these proposals both beneficial and affordable. He expressed pride in supporting them.

Cllr Charlotte Cane asserted that unsafe parking in the district was of great concern to the district's residents and should be addressed through Civil Parking Enforcement. Some residents were able to go to Newmarket for advice but many others could not and would benefit from a Citizens' Advice Bureau in Ely. She supported the amendment as it would support others.

Cllr Alan Sharp argued against funding Civil Parking Enforcement, as this was the County Council's responsibility. He noted that drivers were usually given five minutes to move a poorly parked car, so Civil Parking Enforcement would not completely solve the problem. He did not believe that the Council could rely on staff vacancies to fund the proposed projects. He highlighted the benefits of the authority freezing Council Tax, which reduced costs for taxpayers, whilst providing more affordable housing, a sports centre in Ely and a Bereavement Centre in Mepal.

Cllr Christine Whelan supported the amendment, which made practical improvements, whilst freezing Council Tax in 2026/27. She welcomed the proposed doubling of the environmental funding to promote biodiversity and tackle climate change. Residents clearly wanted action taken on poorly parked cars and the amendment funded ongoing Civil Parking Enforcement. A Citizens' Advice Bureau in Ely could advise those falling into debt due to rising living costs. Funding for arts, culture and tourism would encourage civic pride and more money for community facilities would help youth groups and local projects. She concluded that these projects were fully costed and would help the district's most vulnerable residents.

Cllr Anna Bailey welcomed the opposition's shift away from funding a 100% Council Tax reduction scheme and their acceptance of income from the Bereavement Centre as part of the budget. She asserted that the County Council were responsible for Civil Parking Enforcement and pointed out that the funds in the amendment seemed insufficient, based on Fenland District Council's experience. She explained that the budget savings allowed the authority to freeze Council Tax and any underspend in the staffing budget or due to lower interest rates should not be relied upon to fund additional services. She cautioned that approving the amendment could create a budget gap, leading to increases in Council Tax.

Cllr Lorna Dupré proposed and Cllr Christine Whelan seconded the motion. A vote was taken were cast as followed:

For (14): Cllrs Chika Akinwale, Charlotte Cane, Christine Colbert, Lee Denney, Lorna Dupré, Kathrin Holtzmann, Mark Inskip, James Lay, John Trapp, Ross Trent, Mary Wade, Alison Whelan, Christine Whelan and Gareth Wilson.

Against (14):

Cllrs Christine Ambrose Smith, Anna Bailey, Ian Bovingdon, David Brown, Lavinia Edwards, Mark Goldsack, Martin Goodearl, Keith Horgan, Julia Huffer, Bill Hunt, David Miller, Kelli Pettitt, Alan Sharp and Lucius Vellacott.

Abstain (0)

The vote was tied and in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4, the Chair had a casting vote which she used to vote against the amendment detailed above, and so the amendment was lost.

Cllr Vellacott stated that the authority will freeze Council Tax for a 13th consecutive year whilst maintaining a balanced budget, which was an unprecedented accomplishment. He expressed pride that the authority was poised to make a decision that would benefit low-income residents, emphasising that Council Tax increases should only follow thorough exploration of efficiencies and income generating options. He doubted that this could have been achieved if a different party had been running the Council. He thanked officers for their efforts and congratulated the Director Finance on his first budget.

Cllr Lorna Dupré reported that she was proud to have successfully lobbied for inclusive play areas and empty homes and for unsuccessfully campaigning for the funding of Civil Parking Enforcement, arts, culture and tourism and a Citizens' Advice Bureau, instead of choosing to fund a bereavement centre that would have to compete with the private sector.

Cllr Alan Sharp commended the budget, which was freezing Council Tax for a 13th consecutive year and still managing to deliver essential services for its residents.

Cllr John Trapp stated that the Council's reserves had increased by £3m over the past five years. He suggested this money should be spent on projects that would benefit residents, whilst maintaining Council's reserves.

Cllr Julia Huffer expressed pride in the Council's achievement in freezing Council Tax for the 13th consecutive year. The administration did not support funding Civil Parking Enforcement, which was a County Council responsibility, but was happy to support a balanced, prudent and well-thought out budget.

Cllr Anna Bailey explained that the Council used CIL funding to build new community buildings, roads, footpaths, cycleways, a leisure centre, a country park, a new GP surgery in Stretham, a youth centre in Littleport, a new theatre in Soham, museums, a new bereavement centre and allocated millions of pounds to town and parish councils to support their own projects, all whilst freezing Council Tax for 13 consecutive years. She concluded that these achievements had been made without support from the opposition party.

Cllr Anna Bailey proposed and Cllr Julia Huffer seconded the recommendation in the report. A vote was taken and were cast as follows:

For (14): Cllrs Christine Ambrose Smith, Anna Bailey, Ian Bovingdon, David Brown, Lavinia Edwards, Mark Goldsack, Martin Goodearl, Keith Horgan, Julia Huffer, Bill Hunt, David Miller, Kelli Pettitt, Alan Sharp and Lucius Vellacott.

Against (14): Cllrs Chika Akinwale, Charlotte Cane, Christine Colbert, Lee Denney, Lorna Dupré, Kathrin Holtzmann, Mark Inskip, James Lay, John Trapp, Ross Trent, Mary Wade, Alison Whelan, Christine Whelan and Gareth Wilson.

Abstain (0)

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4, the Chair had a casting vote which she used to vote in favour of the recommendations. Council agreed to

resolve to approve:

- a) The formal Council Tax Resolution which calculates the Council Tax requirement as set out in Appendix 1
- b) The draft revenue budget for 2026/27 and MTFS for 2027/28 to 2029/30 as set out in Appendices 2(a) and 2(b)
- c) A Council Tax freeze in 2026/27
- d) The draft Statement of Reserves as set out in Appendix 3
- e) The draft Capital Strategy and financing as set out in Appendix 4
- f) The 2026/27 Fees and Charges as set out in Appendix 5
- g) The application of Business Rate reliefs for 2026/27, including those announced in the Autumn Budget and fully funded by Government through Section 31 grant, as detailed in sections 6.6 to 6.7 of the report.
- h) The changes to the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme and premiums for Long-Term Empty and Second Homes as detailed in sections 11.8 and 11.9 of the report.
- i) To delegate authority to the Finance and Assets Committee to approve the fees and charges for the new Bereavement Centre.

42. Local Government Reorganisation Statutory Consultation

Council considered a report (AA144, previously circulated) to request delegation to respond to the Government's Statutory consultation in relation to Local Government's Reorganisation (LGR).

Cllr Lucius Vellacott stated that Council had agreed Option B at its meeting on 20 November to keep rural economies together, to avoid housing growth in the district and to allow councillors to represent local interests. He supported the recommendation, which allowed the Council to submit its views to Government.

Cllr Lorna Dupré recognised this was a procedural matter and the Council needed to delegate authority to individuals to respond to the Government's consultation. However, half of the councillors did not support Option B, which would create one of the largest councils in the country with Peterborough, which was 60 miles away from some residents. She supported Option A, which would link the area to villages in South Cambridgeshire and to Cambridge City, where the majority of residents study, work, shop and access healthcare. For this reason, opposition members could not support the recommendation.

Cllr Keith Horgan thanked the Director Operations for her exemplary work on this contentious matter. He supported this recommendation, which ensured the Council could respond to the Government's consultation.

Cllr Lucius Vellacott stated that Council had agreed to support Option B and the recommendation allowed the authority to convey this view to the Government. He asserted that whatever decision the Government made with regarding LGR, the administration would strive to get the best deal for its residents.

Cllr Lucius Vellacott proposed and Cllr Keith Horgan seconded the recommendation in the report. A vote was taken and with 14 votes in favour, none against and 14 abstentions

It was resolved:

To delegate authority to the Director Operations, in consultation with the Leader and Deputy Leader, to respond to the LGR statutory consultation.

43. Community Infrastructure Levy Governance Arrangements

Council considered a report (AA147, previously circulated) which proposed changes to the infrastructure List and Governance Arrangements.

Cllr Martin Goodearl explained that the Community Infrastructure Levy had funded various infrastructure throughout the district, without resource to borrowing or increasing Council Tax. Requests for expenditure were brought to the Finance and Assets Committee, which would allocate funds to those schemes that met the criteria. He was proud to support the report's recommendations, which would allow this work to continue.

Cllr Mark Inskip proposed and Cllr Lorna Dupré seconded the following amendments:

Add at the end of 2.2 'subject to an Inclusive Play Strategy, including the availability of experienced advice and support for applicants, having first been adopted by the Council'.

Add new 2.5 'add Civil Parking Enforcement to the Council's Community Infrastructure Levy Infrastructure List of schemes which may be funded from the Community Infrastructure Levy'

Cllr Mark Inskip stated that Civil Parking Enforcement should be added to the list of schemes so that money from the Community Infrastructure Levy could be used to help address a major concern for residents. He also suggested that play equipment funded by the Levy should be inclusive, to help social interaction and promote mental well-being.

Cllr Anna Bailey explained that approving the report's recommendations would secure funding for play parks and support to parish councils. She noted that the amendment would cause delays. She reiterated that Civil Parking Enforcement was the responsibility of the County Council and it did not meet the Community Infrastructure Levy funding guidelines. She therefore opposed the amendment.

Cllr Alan Sharp stated that the report recommended the scheme take effect from 1 April 2026 and the proposed amendment would delay implementation and project funding. He emphasised that funding for Civil Parking Enforcement would take resources from other projects. He recommended that the amendment be rejected and the original recommendations be agreed without delay.

Cllr Charlotte Cane pointed out that Community Infrastructure Levy funds were being used to pay for the Bereavement Centre, which also resulted in less money being for other projects.

Cllr Lorna Dupré explained that the aim of the amendment was to fund inclusive play equipment after the strategy had been agreed and to help prevent dangerous parking, which was a major concern of residents.

Cllr Martin Goodearl stated that money from the Community Infrastructure Levy should not be used to fund parking enforcement measures, as this was the responsibility of the County Council. Town and parish councils had conducted play structure audits and were waiting for funding. The Community Infrastructure Levy rules were in place and if the Finance and Assets Committee was unsure, they could refer a decision to full Council.

Cllr Mark Inskip proposed and Cllr Lorna Dupré seconded the amendment. A vote was taken and with 14 votes in favour and 14 votes against, the vote was tied. In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 9.1.4, the Chair had a casting vote which she used to vote against the amendment and so the amendment was lost.

Cllr Alan Sharp explained that funding from the Community Infrastructure Levy had already greatly benefited residents and he hoped that Council would agree the recommendations.

Cllr Martin Goodearl proposed and Cllr Alan Sharp seconded the recommendation in the report. A vote was taken and with 14 votes in favour, none against and 14 abstentions

it was resolved:

- a) To approve the draft Governance Arrangements as set out in Appendix 2 to take effect from 1 April 2026.
- b) To instruct the Community Infrastructure Manager to bring forward criteria for approval by the Finance and Assets Committee in accordance with 3.15-3.17 of the report.

- c) To delegate authority to the Finance and Assets Committee to commit CIL receipts to schemes that meet the criteria flowing from the recommendation in (b) above.

44. Constitutional Update – Further Amendments

Council considered a report (AA143, previously circulated) which proposed amendments to the Constitution.

Cllr Kelli Pettitt proposed and Cllr Keith Horgan seconded the recommendation in the report. A vote was taken and it was unanimously agreed

to resolve:

To approve the amendment of the Terms of Reference for the Operational Services Committee to include two additional services – Digital Services and Bereavement Services.

45. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority – Update reports

Council received the reports (previously circulated) from the Combined Authority’s meetings in November 2025, December 2025 and January 2026.

Cllr Lucius Vellacott asked for an update from the Combined Authority Skills Committee regarding investment in Soham. Cllr Mark Goldsack reported that the heads of terms had been agreed for premises in Soham for West Suffolk College to provide apprenticeships and academic support for 16 to 18 year olds. He explained that premises were being sought for a similar institution in Ely and he invited the councillors for Ely to either contact him or Cllr Lucy Nethsingha, Chair of the Skills Committee, if they could help.

It was resolved:

that the reports on the activities of the Combined Authority from the Council’s representatives be noted.

The meeting concluded at 8:52 pm

Chair.....

Date.....