

Open Door

Autumn/Winter 2021



For the Tenants & Leaseholders of Cambridge City Council

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David Greening
Head of Housing Services

Welcome to this edition of *Open Door*. On the page opposite, you can see how to get the most from the Council's Customer Services, whether online, by phone or in person by appointment. And there is an update on Covid testing and vaccinating in our city.

Pages 4 and 5 bring you our annual overview of how the budget of your landlord service is spent and how your rent compares to rents on the open market. We also overview the year's complaints from customers, to show you the improvements we are making as a result.

On page 6 you can learn more about how to help prevent the exploitation of vulnerable people through drug-running. On page 7 you can read about our new Engagement, Education & Enforcement Officer, who will educate residents

about *zero tolerance* on storing or leaving items in communal areas. He will support them to remove the items and create sustainable change, which increases resident safety. And there is an article explaining solicitors' claims around housing disrepair.

As the winter approaches, we show you what we are doing to prevent homelessness, both by providing new homes and through the reporting mechanisms of *Streetlink*. On pages 8 and 9 there is information on getting help with utility bills, low-cost furniture and free food for those who need it.

We also bring you a page of local news and initiatives on how the city is tackling the effects of climate change, with success stories about planting trees and reducing plastics. And there are some stunning photos of gardens entered by council tenants and leaseholders in this year's Garden Competition. Meanwhile, leaseholders can read about extending the lease on their property, keeping up with fire and gas safety issues, and attending the Council's annual Leaseholders' Consultation Meeting, coming up soon.

Below, I am happy to introduce Anna Hill, the new Housing Services Manager for City Homes. You will see that Anna has worked with us before, and is happy to be back.

With best wishes,
David Greening

Hello, I'm Anna Hill, the new Housing Services Manager for City Homes. Some may remember me as a Housing Officer in the south of the city from 2012 to 2017. I have also worked with Housing Associations on Anti-Social Behaviour, Housing Management, Tenancy Sustainment and Welfare. I had earlier worked in banking in Customer Service, Underwriting and Fraud Investigation roles, and then for a local police force within their Major Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour Units.



I am a huge animal lover so our furry residents will always get attention from me! My passions outside of work include live music events, exploring new places and attending football matches. Having worked under Sandra Farmer, the retiring Housing Services Manager, I have big shoes to fill but I really look forward to the challenge ahead as we begin to emerge from the pandemic.



Access your council services online

Are you using the **MyCambridge** portal online yet? It's easy to register, at the top right-hand corner of the Council's website at www.cambridge.gov.uk You can also use it to access your own housing account as a tenant or leaseholder (see page 3, opposite, for details).

And why not receive *Open Door* by email instead of on paper? It's easy to read on any device with wifi, saving paper and carbon footprint. To receive it by email instead of post, visit <https://camcit.co/opendooremail>

One copy of *Open Door* is sent to each council home. To ask for another copy for a joint tenant, email opendoor@cambridge.gov.uk

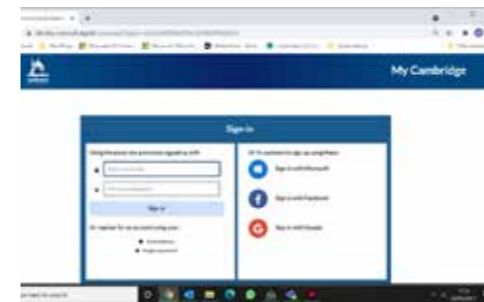
A panel of council tenants and leaseholders help select and edit the content of every *Open Door* edition. To get involved, email opendoor@cambridge.gov.uk

All information was correct when going to print but could change quickly due to Covid-19

All main photos are by Emily Downey

Cover photo shows the Community Garden at Princess Court, created by residents

Your own housing account online



Why not use the **MyCambridge** portal online? It's easy to register, at the top right-hand corner of the Council's website at www.cambridge.gov.uk

As a council tenant or leaseholder, you can then register to also access your own private housing account online. That is a confidential online space dedicated to your housing information, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

£100 prize draw for registering

Anyone registering for their online housing account via the portal over the next month will be put into a prize draw, with a number of lucky residents winning £100 cash prizes each - help with the costs of Christmas!

Once you have logged in to your housing account, you can then use it to book your own repairs and appointments, check and print out the current status of your rent account, or view your past rent payments and any rent or arrears that are due. You can update your personal information, order a new rent payment card, and much more.

If you need help with getting started at using your online housing account or other online services, just book an appointment at Mandela House by phoning 01223-457070.

Your other MyCambridge services online

Over 8,000 residents are already using the **MyCambridge** portal online. On there, as well as your housing account, you can also manage your Council Tax account, claim benefits, notify about a change of circumstances or request a new bin.

You can also use the portal to easily report issues in streets or parks, like litter, fly-tipping, fallen branches or graffiti. You can even show the exact location: your report goes straight to council staff out in the community, ready to deal with it. Soon you will be able to

report things like problems with a sports pitch, damage to benches or bus shelters, any plant maintenance needed, issues at play areas or public toilets, and much more. You will also be able to track the response online, seeing when the action you requested will be completed.

Council services going forward

Face to face meetings with council staff are by appointment only. This also helps to minimise the risk of infection for customers, and for staff who are needed to deliver council services. If you want to contact them, please first check whether the service or information you need is available online. But if you have an essential need to meet staff in person, phone 01223-457000.

Remember that you can make payments to the Council remotely, or via other organisations like the Post Office. For more information, visit www.cambridge.gov.uk Those without internet can still contact the Council by phoning 01223-457000.

For service updates, visit www.cambridge.gov.uk/coronavirus-changes-to-our-services To be notified every time it updates, register at www.cambridge.gov.uk/subscribe-for-emailalerts

Easy vaccinations and testing in Cambridge

There are three simple, free ways to get vaccinated against Covid-19 in Cambridge.

1. Walk-in any day, 8.30am-4pm

- Grafton Centre
- Cherry Hinton Leisure Centre
- Chesterton Indoor Bowls Centre

2. Walk-in 4pm-7.30pm, Wednesdays

- Grafton Centre
- Cherry Hinton Leisure Centre

3. Pre-book an appointment online for:

- Grafton Centre
 - Superdrug, Sydney Street
 - Cherry Hinton Leisure Centre
- Visit www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/book-coronavirus-vaccination

Visit www.thevaccinators.co.uk or follow on social media @The Vaccinators Cambridgeshire & Peterborough

Tests if you don't have symptoms

1 in 3 people with Covid-19 have no symptoms. So testing everyone regularly will help to overcome the virus.

1. Pick up tests to do at home

Pick up free home testing kits from a local pharmacy or testing site. You can pick up two free packs at a time, containing 14 tests in all.* To find your nearest pick-up spot, visit <https://maps.test-and-trace.nhs.uk>

2. Order free tests, sent to your home

By phoning 119 (free from landlines and mobiles) any day, 7am-11pm, with support in 200 different languages. To order tests online, visit www.gov.uk/order-coronavirus-rapid-lateral-flow-tests

3. Pick up from a test site near you

You can pick up free test kits at the Cambridge test site, overflow car park near Abbey Leisure Centre, Pool Way, off Whitehill Road, every day, 8am-8pm.

Tests if you do have symptoms, ie:

- high temperature, or
- new, continuous cough, or
- change to sense of smell or taste

Make a pre-booked appointment

To have your test, visit the Cambridge test site at the overflow car park near Abbey Leisure Centre, Pool Way, off Whitehill Road, daily, 8am-8pm.

- To book your appointment online
- visit www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test
 - or freephone 119 any day, 7am-11pm

General safety guidelines

Overall, the national advice remains:

- Be vaccinated
- Wear a mask in enclosed or crowded spaces with people you don't meet daily
- Meeting outdoors is safer, but ventilate the room well if meeting indoors
- Test yourself or get tested regularly
- Self-isolate if required

Visit www.cambridge.gov.uk/coronavirus for more information and updates as the situation evolves.

* All this information was correct at time of going to print, but policies could change in the ensuing weeks.



How your rent was used in 2020/21



Residents' complaints about housing

In 2020/21 City Homes received 55 complaints, mainly about:



With residents at home more due to Covid-19, neighbours' behaviour, privacy through fencing, and maintenance of the estate all became more important to them. Communal maintenance was new to the top 3 complaints in 2020-21. The year's 55 complaints were up from 46 the previous year.

Value for money of Cambridge council rent?

Average weekly rent for 2-bed Cambridge council home
£103.90

Average weekly rent for 2-bed home on the open market
£314 *

How was the housing budget invested into homes?

73% on building or buying more council homes

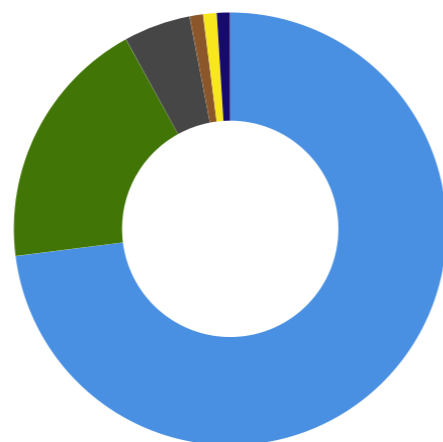
19% on 'Decent Homes' programme that improves kitchens, bathrooms, doors & windows

5% on other investments in homes

1% on improving estates through the Estates Improvement Programme

1% on IT, stores equipment, estate services van, housing service shops

Under 1% on improving sheltered housing



* Average private rent is from Cambridge City Council report 'Strategic Housing Key Facts', April 2020

Improvements made in response to complaints

Actions taken to reduce neighbour disputes

- City Homes met with the Residents' Panel to explore alternative resolution routes such as the Neighbourhood Resolution Scheme
- More information on tenants' rights and responsibilities is being made available online and in *Open Door*, as recommended by the Residents' Panel
- City Homes, the Council's Community Safety Team and local police are working to protect residents' homes from smoke drifting in from neighbours' illegal drugs
- The Housing service published its policy for managing sensitive lettings, and tightened procedures for managing difficult tenants
- And acted on recommendations by the Housing Ombudsman

Actions taken to manage customer expectations better

- City Homes reviewed each customer complaint individually, to identify areas where it could improve its response
- We made the *Home Loss* payment process clearer, and shared this clarity with staff
- And worked with the Council's Customer Service Centre to ensure they refer tenants on to Housing staff correctly

Actions taken to improve maintenance of communal areas

- New Engagement, Education & Enforcement Officer to enforce zero tolerance of items left in communal areas on estates
- Improved Estate Inspections, examining more elements
- A new, targeted list of sites for Green Inspectors
- Online reporting made available for residents
- Improved monitoring of performance in the maintenance of communal areas

What your Housing staff are doing for your estates

Report anti-social behaviour and crime

Cambridge City Council works in partnership with the police and other agencies to help tackle and resolve anti-social behaviour and crime. They share information as appropriate under data protection law.

Listed on the right are the type of complaints that you can report to the City Council. Crime, however, must always be reported to the police.

Most residents report anti-social behaviour to the Council online, though it is also possible to report it by phone.

If you do not have internet access yourself, you can use the internet for free at your local library or community centre.

Whatever method you choose for reporting it, please remember that **any information you provide about anti-social behaviour is given in confidence, and you also have the option of reporting it anonymously.**

To report anti-social behaviour, eg:

- rowdy or inconsiderate behaviour
- nuisance neighbours
- any activity causing harassment, alarm or distress

Phone 01223-457950

Email asbsection@cambridge.gov.uk

Report online at www.cambridge.gov.uk by typing 'report asb' in the search box

To report noise nuisance, eg:

- noise from within a property, including loud music or shouting, that causes a disturbance to others
- inconsiderate busking
- misfiring alarms

Phone 01223-457900

Email env.health@cambridge.gov.uk

Further information at www.cambridge.gov.uk by typing 'report noise' or 'pollution noise' in the search box

To report needle finds and drug paraphernalia:

Phone 01223-458282

Search or report at www.cambridge.gov.uk by typing 'needles' in the search box

To report racial harassment:

Phone 01223-457967 or 07973-883-261

Email community.safety@cambridge.gov.uk

Further information at www.cambridge.gov.uk by typing 'racial' in the search box

To report environmental issues, eg:

- graffiti
- fly tipping or littering
- abandoned shopping trolleys, bicycles, or vehicles
- illegal advertising

Phone 01223-458282

Search at www.cambridge.gov.uk by typing 'street park maintenance' in the search box

For lost or stray dogs, and dog fouling
Phone 01223-457900

To report crime and criminal activities:

Phone the police at 101

Or report online at www.cambs.police.uk

In an emergency, always phone 999

Housing disrepair claims

Message from Lynn Thomas, Head of your repairs service:

"As your landlord, the City Council has an obligation to meet specific basic conditions, including an obligation to repair your property in line with the Housing Act 1985 and your tenancy agreement.

A housing disrepair claim is a type of lawsuit that involves a tenant taking legal action against their landlord for failing to fix damage or make repairs in their property in an appropriate time or to an appropriate standard.

Currently there are lots of solicitors and legal firms offering 'No win, No fee' services to follow a case on tenants' behalf. They are actively contacting tenants and promoting this service.

So not surprisingly, Cambridge city Council's repairs service has received a high number of Disrepair Claims that our surveyors and legal officers have been dealing with.

The proceedings can take a long time to complete. And it is worth noting that in the last two years, not one of the claims has proven successful.

We would like to remind you that you can request non-urgent repairs online through our website or online housing portal at <https://housing.cambridge.gov.uk>

But for an emergency or urgent repair, phone the Customer Service Centre at 01223-457060.

If you are not happy with the service you receive, we encourage you to contact us rather than starting a lawsuit. If you do not feel that your request for a repair has been addressed fast enough or to an appropriate standard, please email housing.repairs@cambridge.gov.uk

Or you can make a formal complaint via the City Council's Complaints webpage at www.cambridge.gov.uk/complaints-complaints-and-suggestions"

Tackling crime by reporting it

By reporting issues, safely and in confidence, you can help prevent the criminal exploitation of young and vulnerable people by drug dealers.

A 'county line' is a term used to describe certain activities of an organised criminal network. They use dedicated mobile phone numbers to move illegal drugs into an area.

The gangs exploit children, young people and vulnerable adults, using them to move and store drugs and money. They will often use intimidation, violence and weapons.

This exploitation is against the law. The *Cambs Against County Lines* partnership is working to prevent it, and you can help by reporting suspicious behaviour.

If somebody you know shows any of these signs, they might be involved in county lines activity, for instance if they:

- often go missing from home or school
- spend time with someone who is older and controlling
- travel alone to places far away from home

- suddenly have lots of money, new clothes or mobile phones
- receive more phone calls or messages than usual
- carry or sell drugs
- carry weapons or know people with access to weapons
- have unexplained injuries
- seem scared or reserved, or like they have something to hide
- are self-harming

Report suspicious activity to the police online or phone 101. You can report just what you know or have seen, without giving your name.

You can also give information to *Crimestoppers* anonymously, or phone 0800-555-111.

But you should phone 999 if somebody is in immediate danger or a crime is taking place.

For more information:

- visit online at www.cambridge.gov.uk/cambs-against-county-lines
- email countyline@cambridge.gov.uk
- phone 01223-457950
- or follow Cambs Against County Lines on Facebook

Domestic abuse

The pandemic saw more Cambridge families fleeing home due to domestic abuse. 134 such households with children were helped by Cambridgeshire councils last year, compared to 119 in the previous year.

Cambridge City Council acts to protect tenants suffering domestic abuse. For help, phone your housing officer at 01223-457070 or visit <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/advice-for-people-affected-by-domestic-abuse> Or phone *Cambridge Women's Aid* at 01223-361214.

In some families, a parent is abused by their offspring, whether verbally, psychologically, financially, physically or sexually. Free, confidential help is available from the organisation *PEGS (Parental Education Growth Support)* at www.pegssupport.co.uk/contact Or email hello@pegssupport.com

Respect is a free helpline for male victims of domestic abuse. Phone them in confidence at 0808-0810327 or visit <https://survivingeconomicabuse.org>

Clear communal areas



To increase fire safety, your Housing Service has a **Zero Tolerance Policy** on stored items and fly tipping in communal areas. It has powers to remove items and charge offenders for costs. Jamie Lambert (pictured above) has just become the new Engagement, Education & Enforcement Officer who will work with residents to achieve zero items left in communal areas.

That includes communal hallways, walkways, staircases, balconies, bin and storage areas, access paths, gardens and drying areas. The area immediately outside a resident's front door is also communal, and must not have anything

stored there. This includes bikes, pushchairs, prams, buggies, rubbish bags, wheeled bins and lockers or cabinets. It also includes toys, shopping trolleys, carpets, plant pots, mail and newspapers. Items awaiting disposal, like washing machines or mattresses, must never be left in communal areas.

Fire doors to escape routes must never be wedged open. Bicycles, mopeds or motorbikes must not be serviced or stored in communal areas, unless in designated stores provided by the Council. Mobility scooters must be stored inside the resident's home or away from communal areas. Any item left in communal areas will be tagged with a deadline for the resident to remove it. Otherwise, the Council will remove it, and can charge the offending resident - or all residents of the block - for the cost of this.

To report items left or flytipping in internal communal areas on your estate, email Jamie.Lambert@cambridge.gov.uk or phone 01223-457070.

For flytipping in external communal areas of estates, report it online at www.cambridge.gov.uk/report-flytipping or phone the Council at 01223-458282.

Financial help and support for you

Emergency food supplies

Affording food has become a challenge for many in Cambridge due to loss of income during the Covid-19 crisis.

Emergency food is being provided by the *Cambridge Food Poverty Alliance* - 25 organisations that are working together to tackle poverty in the city.

If you or someone you know is struggling to afford or access food, phone the Cambridge Food Poverty Alliance at 01223-967426, Monday-Friday, 10am-2pm. Or fill in their contact form online at <https://cambridgesustainablefood.org>

They are coordinating free emergency food supplies, and providing a signposting service for people in need of food.

For instance, residents in crisis can get a voucher for a Food Bank. This gives you access to receive basic store-cupboard foods up to three times over six months. Phone 01223-967426 for help to get a voucher to use a Food Bank.

Note that you can't use the Food Bank without first getting this voucher.

You must be infection-free, wear a mask and take your own bag.

Local hubs near you

Emergency food supplies and other support are also available in your locality if you need them, at community food hubs around the city.

They can give free food to those in need of it. To find the outlet nearest to you, visit www.cambridge.gov.uk/coronavirus-ask-for-help

You can also phone the helpline at 01223-967426, or see the full range of help online at <https://cambridgesustainablefood.org/cfpa-covid-19>

These local hubs are also ensuring that vulnerable residents locally get access to medicine, social support and other necessities.

Free school meals

Free school meals can be accessed by registering your child at www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/freeschoolmeals or phoning 01223-703200.

If struggling with utility bills or debts

During the Covid-19 crisis, energy suppliers are not allowed to disconnect your gas or electricity if you miss a payment. They must offer a payment plan you can afford.

Your energy bills

If you are struggling with energy bills due to the virus crisis, get help at www.ofgem.gov.uk/information-consumers/energy-advice-households/getting-help-if-you-cant-afford-your-energy-bills

For a prepay meter that you can't afford to top up, ask your supplier for 'Emergency Credit'. Also email homeenergy@cambridge.gov.uk - they may be able to help with a Temporary Fuel Voucher. Those with a pre-payment meter can also get help at www.energyhelpline.com/coronavirus-help/covid-19-measures-in-place-for-prepayment-energy-customers

Your water bills

If struggling to pay your water bill, Cambridge Water can help at tel. 0800-587-7701 or online at www.cambridge-water.co.uk/household/extra-help/help-with-paying

If you are on a low income, you should apply for their *Assure Tariff*. You may get up to 60% off this year's water bill, and 40% off next year's. See www.cambridge-water.co.uk/household/my-bills-and-payments/my-bill-explained/other-charges-and-tariffs/assure-tariff

'Breathing Space' from debts

A government scheme called *Breathing Space* can give those with problem debt up to 60 days' 'freeze' on interest, repayments and contact with creditors.

And it can give those in treatment for a mental health crisis the same protection throughout the duration of their treatment, plus 30 days more.

The scheme can also provide professional support to help resolve problem debts. People using the programme report improvements in their wellbeing, such as sleeping better and coping better with day-to-day life.

For more information, visit www.gov.uk/government/news/breathing-space-to-help-millions-in-debt

Free services at your Post Office

You can pay your council rent at any local Post Office branch that shows the PayPoint sign. To see the many different ways to pay your rent, including online, over the phone or at Post Offices, visit www.cambridge.gov.uk/pay-your-housing-rent

At Post Office branches you can also pay money into your bank account, or withdraw money from one.

Unfortunately, Post Office Card Accounts have ended this month. You can no longer receive benefits, state pension or tax credit payments into one. You must withdraw any money you have in a Post Office Card Account, via your local Post Office branch or via their phone helpline 0345-722-3344.

To receive benefits or state pension from now on, you must have a bank, building society or credit union account. Or in exceptional circumstances, you could request a special 'Payment Exceptions Service' at your local benefits or pension office.

Local services available

Cambridge Re-Use can provide low-income residents with quality, low-cost furniture at prices cheaper than those of charity shops.

Come and visit their warehouse to see their bargains and start shopping! Now open again to the public, you can visit and browse their shop at Unit H, The Paddocks, 347 Cherry Hinton Road, CB1 8DH on Mondays to Saturdays, 10-4pm. The No 3 and No 2 bus routes have stops nearby.

The shop is also open to the wider public. But there are special discounts available for customers who bring along evidence of being either:

- a single-person household earning under £20,000 per year, or
- a couple earning under £25,000 per year in all

They even deliver around the city for just £10 per delivery, no matter how many items you buy. For more information visit www.cambridgereuse.org.uk or phone 01223- 576535.

Cambridge Women's Resources Centre

Cambridge Women's Resources Centre is a welcoming, accessible women's centre in Cambridge.

They offer practical support and advice on many challenging day to day issues. You can join their informal groups, workshops and networking events.

And they run a variety of projects designed to meet local women's needs, from those of jobseekers, to mums, to women at risk of offending and imprisonment.

If you'd like to come along to any of their support groups or courses, email info@cwrc.org.uk or phone 01223-321148 to get signed up.

Priority is given to women who are unemployed or working less than 24 hours per week.

Help with rent and your budget

If you are having difficulties paying your rent, contact the Council immediately to arrange a special payment plan that will spread the cost, and avoid you losing your home.

For instance, you might pay less rent or no rent for a few months, then catch up by spreading what you owe over a longer period agreed in advance with the City Council.

For example, if your monthly rent is £500 (ie. £6,000 per year), you might pay no rent for 2 months, then pay an extra £100 (ie. £600 per month) for the following 10 months. Or you might pay £250 per month for 3 months, and then pay £583.33 per month for the next 9 months to make up the difference.

The Council can sit down with you and agree a personal payment plan that is tailored for you. So don't let the problem mount up. If you need help, phone the Council at 01223-457070 to discuss a personal payment plan today.

Other help is available too. To see the benefits that are available, visit www.understandinguniversalcredit.gov.uk/employment-and-benefits-support

You can use the City Council's online benefits calculator to find out what benefits you could claim, including Universal Credit. It's at <https://cambridge.entitledto.co.uk/home/start> To see how much you may be entitled to, you'll need to have information to hand about your savings, income, pensions and any existing benefits.

For help with budgeting or claiming benefits, you can email the Council's Financial Inclusion Officers at incometeam@cambridge.gov.uk or phone them at 01223-457000.

And the Council's online budgeting tool can also help you manage your finances at www.cambridge.gov.uk/advice-about-debt-and-managing-your-money

Have your wages reduced or stopped?

If so, and you are receiving housing benefit or Council Tax reduction, make sure you update your Benefits Account now.

The Council will look at your current earnings and update your benefits as needed.

If you receive Tax Credits, let HMRC know your current situation. If you are not eligible for any of the above, you may need to claim Universal Credit.

For more information, visit www.cambridge.gov.uk/coronavirus-financial-support-for-residents

You can also get information about the financial support and benefits available by phoning Cambridge Citizen's Advice at 0344-848-7979.

Residents take climate action

Helping swifts to nest

Thanks to a local venture to protect these wonderful birds, the Swift population at Edgecombe flats is expanding!

Cambridge City Council and the charity *Action for Swifts* installed 71 nest boxes at Edgecombe in 2010. Ten years later, 34 were occupied by Swifts, as well as a lot of House Sparrows. The project has now installed another 24 nesting chambers.

As part of the city's many projects to boost wildlife diversity and restore the wildlife habitats that are disappearing so quickly, projects like the one at Edgecombe show that it is all worth while.

In July 2020, a survey looked for:

- droppings below nest box entrances
- chicks looking out of the boxes
- adult birds flying in or out

The survey found more than 34 boxes occupied by pairs of Swifts. Furthermore, 32 boxes had evidence of previous occupation by House Sparrows, in the form of grass or feathers in the

entrance. And 16 of those boxes were now occupied by Swifts. The project is now experimenting to discover whether Swifts prefer a dark-painted interior or an unpainted one.

For updates, visit [#Action for Swifts Community](#) on Facebook

New swift boxes coming to estates in south of city

The City Council is now optimistic that Edgecombe flats will grow into a major colony of both Swifts and House Sparrows.

The success of the project should encourage other neighbourhoods to do similar things. So the Council is investing up to £5,000, through its *Environmental Improvement Scheme*, to fund more Swift boxes on estates in the south of the city, as those to date have all been in the north.

To propose your estate as a suitable site for swift boxes, or to get involved with the project, email resident-involvement@cambridge.gov.uk



Wenvoe Meadow Nature Area

This is a small piece of City Council land that has been dedicated to enhancing biodiversity.

It was derelict, but over three years of hard work from council staff, Wenvoe Allotment Society and resident volunteers have transformed it. It's now a flourishing nature reserve with a large, wildlife-friendly pond.

The Mayor, Cllr. Russ McPherson, and David Greening, Head of the Council's Housing Services, attended the opening ceremony above, congratulating the local groups and volunteers on what they have achieved.

Cambridge's tree canopy

Tree planting can contribute to tackling the climate crisis. Earth's climate is changing at an unprecedented rate. The impact for cities like Cambridge may mean elevated urban heat and more frequent flooding events. Having more trees can help to mitigate these impacts and adapt our cities to climate change.

More 'Green Infrastructure' in our cities – including trees, parks, hedgerows, flower beds, drainage ditches, green or 'living' walls and roofs, rain gardens, and permeable paving – helps to build climate resilience. Residents' gardens also contribute to this green infrastructure. You can help to maximise it by planting a tree in your garden. The sooner the better, because it will take time to mature and deliver its full benefits.

By planting a tree you can join in with initiatives like the *Queen's Green Canopy*, launched by the Queen for her Platinum Jubilee in 2022. It invites households to 'Plant a Tree for the Jubilee' and to pin it onto the project's map online. Another project is the BBC Countryfile's *Plant Britain*, to get 750,000 trees planted across the UK. This too has an online map to add your new trees to, with

almost half a million planted already.

The *Cambridge Canopy Project* is our own project to increase tree canopy cover in the city by planting 16,000 additional trees. 2,000 of these will be in public spaces. Another 1,500 will be given to residents for free through the *Free Trees for Babies* scheme and *Neighbourhood Canopy Campaigns*. And we hope 12,500 more trees can be planted by residents in their gardens. If you have planted a new tree in your garden, please add it to the 'Cambridge Tree Map' online and tag it with [#CambridgeTreeChallenge](#).

If you can't plant a tree yourself, you can sponsor one in the city's streets or parks through our collaboration with *Trees for Streets*. Every new tree in the city will help with the mission to combat climate change. So please get involved and do your bit – and don't forget to add your new tree(s) to each initiative's map!

For information, visit www.cambridge.gov.uk/cambridgecanopy-project, phone 01223-457000 or follow [@CamCanopyProj](#) on Twitter and [@CamTrees](#) on Instagram.

Plastic cut by over a third

Churchill, the cleaning contractor on the Council's estates, have cut their use of plastic containers by over 35%.

In just six months, they used 291,345 fewer, just by replacing their top five cleaning products with water-soluble sachets. This huge reduction was nationwide, with the biggest reduction here in the South East.

But 12 million tonnes of plastic still pollute oceans each year, so Churchill partnered with *Surfers Against Sewage*. Churchill have worked with them to clear plastic from the UK coastline: they call it their "first step of many towards a better future for our oceans, riverways, and coastlines".

For easy tips to reduce your own use of plastics, see at www.cambridge.gov.uk/plastic-recycling-campaign or on social media [@GreaterCambridgeRecycles](#)

Residents' Gardens



The Council's tenants and leaseholders entered stunning gardens for this year's *Residents' Garden Competition*, winning £400 worth of prizes (winners are listed below, right). The cover of this edition shows the lovely Community Garden created by residents at Princess Court flats during lockdown, using found and upcycled materials.

Residents are seeing that, as well as being a haven of peace, nature-friendly gardens support wildlife and biodiversity. They are a lifeline for bees, birds and butterflies, forming a patchwork of nature refuges across the city. The Council's annual *Garden Competition* encourages residents' gardens to be more nature-friendly, through the money-saving tips below that save on effort too...

✓ **Gardeners helping Nature...**

- Leave some natural areas with dandelions, buttercups, nettles, etc. to



feed birds, bees, butterflies and other insects.

- Grow natural flowers with single blooms: bees and butterflies can't feed from 'double' blooms.
- Compost garden and kitchen waste, for free fertiliser that improves your soil.
- Collect rainwater in a butt, to water your garden for free.
- Mulching protects plants and reduces the need to water.
- Grow your own organic veg to save money and eat healthily. Use physical barriers like fleece, rather than chemicals that poison wildlife such as thrushes.

X Gardeners stopping...

- Stop using chemical pesticides, herbicides or fertilisers. As well as potentially harming human health, they harm bees, butterflies, birds, hedgehogs, toads and other wildlife.
- Mow your lawn a lot less, letting dandelions, daisies, buttercups and plantain come through it to feed wildlife.



Next Spring, for entry forms for the 2022 *Residents' Garden Competition*, visit www.cambridge.gov.uk/tenant-and-leaseholder-garden-competition or email resident-involvement@cambridge.gov.uk or phone 01223-458323.

Winning Gardens, 2021

- New Garden** ~ Godwyn Way
- Nature Garden** ~ Bridewell Road
- Community Garden** ~ Princess Court
- Kitchen & Sunflower** ~ Ramsden Square
- Baskets** ~ Jolly Ford Court
- Tubs** ~ Kendal Way
- Communal Garden** ~ Hanover & Princess
- Established Garden** ~ Ramsden Square

Keeping you well and safe this winter

Youth mental health support

YOUnited

YOUnited is a new service in Cambridge providing free help to children and young people for their emotional wellbeing and mental health. For those under 25, it provides a range of support including therapies, counselling and guided self-help. Young people have helped to co-design these important services.

A young person can only be referred to YOUnited by a GP or professional working with youth. Specialist staff then work directly with the child or young person, as well as their family or carers if necessary, to support their needs.

Centre 33

17- to 25-year-olds can also get free mental health support directly, without a referral, at Centre 33 in Cambridge. They help with mental health, housing, food vouchers, sexual health, caring responsibilities and more. Centre 33's offices are temporarily closed due to Covid-19 but email, phone or text them and they will get back to you with support. They will find the 'best fit' mental health support for you, whether at Centre 33 or a partner organisation.

Phone 0333-4141809
Email help@centre33.org.uk
Follow them on social media
[@centre33cambs](https://www.facebook.com/centre33cambs)

Keep Your Head

Keep Your Head at www.keep-your-head.com gives an overview of the mental health and wellbeing support available for children and young people in Cambridge

Chat Health

Chat Health is a confidential text messaging service in Cambridge for those aged 11-19. Just text 07480-635-443 to start a conversation with them to support your health, Mon-Fri, 9.30am-4pm.

Kooth

Kooth, at www.kooth.com, is an online mental wellbeing community offering free, safe and anonymous support for young people.

For information on other support services for the mental health and wellbeing of children and youth, visit www.keep-your-head.com/cyp/CP-MHS/who-else-can-help-me/local-support

Housing homeless people

Since Covid-19 began, the City Council will be temporarily housed over 100 homeless people. The Council also has an affordable housing programme that will over time deliver more than 500 new council homes, including specialist housing solutions.

Meanwhile, a scheme called **Cambridge Next Steps** is tackling homelessness, providing new, one-person modular homes (pictured, right), with help from land and property owners. Designed by local housebuilder Hill, they give formerly homeless people a stepping-stone to a stable lifestyle. Hill have pledged to create 200 nationally.

The homes are delivered to the site fully furnished with high standards of safety, security and insulation. The City Council has provided land for the first ones, and homelessness charities will support new tenants to integrate into the local community.

The Council provided the land in the Abbey area for these first homes designed and installed by Hill. Maintenance of the homes and

comprehensive support for the tenants will be provided by Jimmy's charity. The homes provide an independent space for people seeking to rebuild their lives following a period of homelessness, with expert staff supporting them through this transitional period. Residents will live there temporarily as a step on to more permanent forms of accommodation.

Each home has 25 square metres of floor space, with separate living and cooking, sleeping and bathroom areas and its own front door.

Built in Britain with steel frames and walls and advanced levels of thermal and sound insulation, they are designed to last 60 years. And with running costs of less than £5 a week, they are ready to move into. Cambridge is one of the first UK cities to try using them, and the model is being replicated around the country.

For services for homeless people or to avoid becoming homeless, visit the City Council's website at www.cambridge.gov.uk/homeless-people or phone their Housing Advice service at 01223-457918.



Streetlink in the cold months

StreetLink lets you bring someone sleeping rough to the attention of services who will help them. To send services to an adult you see sleeping rough, just visit www.streetlink.org.uk Ideally, contact StreetLink via their website or mobile app, or else phone them at 0300-500-0914. (But for a rough sleeper under 18 or in immediate danger, phone 999.)

Anyone faced with sleeping rough in Cambridge should contact the Council's Housing Advice Service at 01223-457918 or the Street Outreach Team at 01223-366292.

To be safe, get vaccinated

Public Health
England

Pregnant?

Have your COVID-19 vaccines!

It is important to have both doses of your COVID-19 vaccine to protect you and your unborn baby.

COVID-19 infection is currently circulating and can be serious for pregnant women.

Thousands of pregnant women have been safely vaccinated in the UK and worldwide.

Call 119 or go online to www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/ to register for your vaccination appointment. You can also attend walk in, mobile or pop up vaccination clinics in your area.



Taxi vouchers for disabled residents

The City Council's **Taxicard** scheme gives free vouchers to disabled people on low incomes in Cambridge, to help them pay for taxis. Travelling companions can accompany the person for free. The Council would like to see more disabled residents joining up to use and benefit from the scheme.

For the period from 1st October 2021 to 31 March 2022, Taxicard scheme members receive vouchers worth £5 and £1, totalling £75, towards the cost of taxi journeys in Cambridge. (Those joining after 1st October will receive the appropriate number of vouchers for the remaining months).

You pay at least £1 towards the fare, and can choose to use one, two or more vouchers for each one-way trip. You hand over the voucher(s) at the end of the journey. If you are also a Cambridge Dial-a-Ride member, you can use your Taxicard vouchers on the community transport bus. (Additional passengers must pay to travel with you on the bus.)

To be eligible for a Taxicard, you must receive one or more of these benefits:

- Universal Credit, Income Support,

Pension Credit or Income-based Jobseekers' Allowance

- Housing Benefit or Council Tax Reduction (including disability premiums or reductions, but not the single occupancy reduction)
- Employment & Support Allowance (income-related, not contribution-based)

You should also be at least one of the following:

- registered blind or partially sighted
- receiving Attendance Allowance, or the higher mobility or higher care component of Disability Living Allowance
- receiving the Mobility or Daily Living Enhanced Personal Independence Payment
- receiving War Pensioners' Mobility Supplement

But even if you do not meet any criteria on this second list above, you are still eligible for a Taxicard if unable to use public transport because you:

- are a permanent wheelchair user
- cannot walk more than 100 metres
- cannot walk without a walking aid, eg. a frame or crutches
- are unable to stand unsupported for more than 5 minutes

You can apply to join the Taxicard scheme directly online at www.cambridge.gov.uk/taxicard Or you can print out an application form there and post it to Taxicard Administrator, PO Box 700, Cambridge CB1 0JH. Applications must include a passport-sized photograph and copies of evidence that you are eligible.

For more information about eligibility criteria, how the scheme works and how to apply, please visit www.cambridge.gov.uk/taxicard or phone the City Council at 01223-457000.

If you have a mobility problem, the City Council's **Shopmobility** service can lend you a scooter or electric wheelchair to help you visit the city centre. They are based at the Grand Arcade car park and the Grafton Centre car park.

To use this free service, you must register with them. For information, phone 01223-457452 (Grand Arcade car park) or 01223-461858 (Grafton East car park), or email shopmobility@cambridge.gov.uk or visit www.cambridge.gov.uk/borrow-a-scooter-from-shopmobility

Involving residents

Message from a tenant rep



"Hi, My name is Mandy Powell-Hardy and I have lived in Cambridge for the last 17 years. Before being elected by you onto the Council's **Housing Scrutiny Committee**, I was already representing

tenants by helping the Housing Service with Green Inspections, Asset Management, recycling, and attending meetings for Estate Liaison and for the Housing Development Agency.

Since being on the *Housing Scrutiny Committee*, I have learnt how the City Council goes about maintaining the city, and the wellbeing of its own tenants and leaseholders.

This is my second term on the *Committee* and it's extremely interesting, especially given the changes needed to meet the Council's target of reducing to net zero carbon emissions by 2030. So a big issue in the city now is how the Council are dealing with the transition to building new housing that has electric,

rather than gas, heating. Solar panels on the roofs will help the tenants of those homes with their heating costs. And the Council are now building completely passive housing too, with net zero carbon emissions.

Why not come and get involved as a resident representative? You would be helping the city along the path to achieving our sustainability goals. We need residents of all ages, from all sorts of backgrounds. And if you are prepared to learn, there are so many aspects of running the city that you can explore and help with..."

At the Council's *Housing Scrutiny Committee*, your tenant and leaseholder representatives are in a unique position to challenge, input and vote on the top decisions relating to your housing. The other elected resident representatives on the Committee are tenants Diana Minns, Christabella Amiteye, Lulu Agate and Colin Stevens, and leaseholder representative Diane Best. They champion your interests, and use *Open Door* to keep you updated on their activities.

Decisions they debated and voted on at their meeting in September 2021 included:

- the mid-term financial strategy of the City Council's budget for its Housing Service
- how best to manage residents' car parking spaces on council estates, and at newly built social housing sites across the city
- changes to the scheme that assists tenants to move from their under-occupied homes
- the Council's policy on Shared Ownership homes
- overseeing how the Council's Estates and Facilities department complies with government standards and regulations
- a complaint supported by the Housing Ombudsman about one of the City Council's housing repairs

Your elected resident representatives are always available to listen to your concerns and questions. If you want to contact them, please send an email to hsc.residents@gmail.com or phone 01223-458323 to leave them a message.

For leaseholders

Extending your lease

About 25% of the City Council's leaseholders have 90 years or less left on their lease. The sooner your lease is due to expire, the less your flat is worth, and the more expensive it can be to extend its lease. For instance, you could have problems selling your flat if the lease has less than 80 years left.

After you have owned your flat for two years, you have the right to engage a solicitor to apply to add 90 years to its lease. For instance with 100 years left, you could extend it to 190 years. Extending your lease would mean you no longer pay ground rent, as the price for the new lease takes this into account.

But if you wish to extend your lease, you should first get advice from an experienced solicitor, plus surveyors and financial advisers if necessary.

Your solicitor will start the process by serving the Initial Notice on the Council, stating the amount you wish to pay for the extension. You will then be responsible for the City Council's costs, whether you complete the extension or not. The Council's current costs for the

process are:

- Legal: £550 (or more if it is a protracted process)
- Surveyor: £250
- Valuation: £750 plus VAT
- Administration: £50

The Council has up to two months to respond to your request, and the whole process can take up to 12 months. However, the Council doesn't have to extend your lease if any of the following apply:

- your lease has already expired
- you have sublet your flat on a lease of 21 years or more
- the majority of leaseholders in your block have applied to obtain the freehold
- the Council wants to demolish or redevelop your block of flats

To apply to extend your lease, please send a written request to Home Ownership Services, Cambridge City Council, PO Box 700, Cambridge CB2 3QJ. For more information visit the independent advisor www.lease-advice.org

What's happening for residents?

Tablet loan scheme

The City Council is offering free loans of wifi-enabled tablets to council tenants and leaseholders who receive Housing Benefit or Universal Credit. To be eligible, residents must have no access to digital equipment or wifi at home, other than smart phones.

With 20GB of free data, the loan is for three months initially, extended for another three months if needed.

The scheme is to help residents improve their economic situation. Using the internet can help them access employment and benefits, for instance, or swap utility providers.

To apply, email resident-involvement@cambridge.gov.uk or phone 01223-458323.

Residents' Newsletter

Why not sign up to receive the online *Resident Involvement E-Newsletter* of your housing service? Just two pages long, it keeps you informed at a glance on the latest news, offers and services

from your housing service. To receive it, just email resident-involvement@cambridge.gov.uk or phone 01223-458323 to request a paper copy.

Inspections by Residents

Why not do some *Resident Inspections* on your own estate? Even an hour a month from you can help drive up the quality of services like communal cleaning, grounds maintenance, window cleaning and so on. You inspect how well the services are done, and give your feedback to the Council. This can bring improvements to:

- the cleanliness of internal communal areas in blocks of flats
- the standard of communal window cleaning
- the quality of grass cutting and maintenance of shrub beds

You will receive any training and support you need, with any expenses reimbursed. To find out more or get started, please phone 01223-458323 or email resident-involvement@cambridge.gov.uk for more information.

Free grass-cutting service

An overgrown lawn can impact your home, neighbours and locality.

The Council provides a free service for eligible council tenants over 18 who cannot cut their own grass. They can receive a free cut every month from April to October. Eligible tenants must:

- have a disability for which you receive some benefits
- live alone, or with other people who are also eligible
- have no family living within a 10-mile radius who could do your grass-cutting, and are willing to do it

To apply, phone 01223-458323 or email resident-involvement@cambridge.gov.uk

Above: one resident's tidy garden in the north of the city



Fire safety in leasehold homes

Leaseholders are responsible for the gas and electrical safety of their property. If you have a gas appliance, the Council expects you to hold a valid Gas Safety Certificate. And if subletting your flat, it is a legal requirement. So if you have gas appliances, make sure you get them serviced regularly.

Please also familiarise yourself - as well as any subtenants you may have - with the guidance given in the City Council's leaflet *Fire Safety in Flats*, available at www.cambridge.gov.uk/fire-safety

This guidance includes:

- having working smoke alarms on each floor, and a fire action plan for escaping a fire
- keeping all exits clear, all doors closed at night, window and door keys easily accessible, and always keeping access roads to your home clear
- taking extra care with cooking, electrical sockets and appliances, portable heaters, smoking and candles

For more information, see www.cambsfire.gov.uk/firesafety and www.gov.uk/firekills

Pictured, right: a 25-headed sunflower grown by a council resident in the south of the city

Have your say

The annual *Leaseholder Consultation Meeting* will be on Thursday 25th November, 12.30-2.30pm, via Microsoft Teams online. As well as taking questions from leaseholders, there will be updates from council staff on issues like:

- future planned works, at 12.45pm
- building cleaning, at 1.10pm
- planned maintenance, at 1.20pm
- subletting your property and the Town Hall Lettings scheme, at 1.30pm
- the zero tolerance policy on items left in communal areas, at 1.40pm
- leasehold issues at the Council's Housing Scrutiny Committee, from elected leaseholder rep Diane Best
- Resident Involvement actions for leaseholders

To receive a link to join the meeting online - or to submit a question if you can't attend - email resident-involvement@cambridge.gov.uk or phone 01223-458323. The recorded meeting will later be posted online for viewing at www.cambridge.gov.uk/leaseholders



Where to get financial help

*Can't pay your rent?
Struggling to pay energy or water bills?
Wages reduced or stopped?*
See page 9 inside this edition of *Open Door*.

If NHS Test & Trace tell you to self-isolate...
You may be entitled to a £500 Support Payment. To apply, visit www.cambridge.gov.uk/test-and-trace-support-payment or email selfisolationpayments@cambridge.gov.uk

If you need to claim Universal Credit...
Apply online at www.gov.uk/apply-universal-credit

If you can't pay your Council Tax...
See if you are entitled to claim Council Tax Reduction. Apply online at www.gov.uk/apply-council-tax-reduction

If struggling with mobile phone or internet bills...
See www.connectingcambridgeshire.co.uk/2020/04/keeping-everyone-connected for companies who are supporting customers with difficulty in paying.

Cambridge Citizen's Advice can help with all the above at tel. 0344-848-7979.

Cambridgeshire Local Assistance Scheme can also provide help in the form of supermarket vouchers, energy vouchers, used cookers, white goods, furniture and clothes. Freephone 0808-278-7807, Mon-Friday, 9.30am-3.30pm.

To be eligible, you must:

- have no savings
- if working, have a total household income of less than about £16,000 per year
- if on benefits, receive Pension Credit, Universal Credit, Income Support, Income-based Job Seekers Allowance or Income-related Employment & Support Allowance

To apply, phone Cambridge Citizens' Advice Bureau at 0344-848-7979 or 01223-222660, or email them at caba@cambridgecab.org.uk

If you don't have access to the internet... or you want to learn to use the internet, Cambridge Online may be able to help you for free, if you phone at 01223-300407.

Noisy neighbours

During the pandemic the number of noise complaints increased. Please be mindful with music or parties, as you may be causing noise nuisance to neighbours.

The Council's Environmental Services work closely with City Homes, taking action on noise nuisance. New technologies have made investigations and assessment visits quicker. People who continue to cause noise nuisance risk a criminal record, having their stereo or TV seized, and putting their tenancy at risk.

If you experience neighbour noise, advice on resolving it is at <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/report-a-noise-issue> If you cannot resolve it informally, complain to the Council's Environmental Services at www.cambridge.gov.uk/report-a-noise-issue

To report a noise nuisance to the City Council, you can also phone 01223-457900 or email env.health@cambridge.gov.uk

Who to contact for services



Your My Cambridge account and your Housing Services account online
www.cambridge.gov.uk (top right corner)

Cambridge Virtual Community Centre
For support during Covid-19
visit www.facebook.com/cambridgevcc

Domestic Abuse 24-hour Helpline
Tel: 0808-2000-247 (Freephone, no cost)
Visit www.nationaldomesticviolencehelpline.org.uk

Council Payments by phone
Tel: 01223-457779, with bank card

Rents, tenancies, lettings, renting a council garage
Tel: 01223-457070
Visit www.cambridge.gov.uk/council-tenants

Contact Council in Sign Language
Register at <https://signlive.co.uk>, then dial 01223-457000: a live Sign Language interpreter will interpret during your call

Repairs
Tel: 01223-457060; or 0300-303-8389 for out of hours emergency repairs

Council Tax
Visit www.cambridge.gov.uk
Tel: 01223-457790

Housing for Older People, Visiting Support Service, Community Alarms
E: independent.living@cambridge.gov.uk
Tel: 01223-457199

Home-Link lettings
Visit www.home-link.org.uk
Tel: 01223-457918

Report tenancy fraud
E: fightfraud@cambridge.gov.uk
Tel: 0800-328-0572 (confidential Freephone)

Report anti-social behaviour
E: asbsection@cambridge.gov.uk
Tel: 01223-457950

Housing & Council Tax Benefits
Visit www.cambridge.gov.uk
Tel: 01223-457775

Bins, recycling, street-cleaning
Visit <http://bins.cambridge.gov.uk>
Tel: 01223-458282

Homelessness & temporary accommodation, outside office hours
Tel: 03300-538-109 (same cost as a normal landline)

Bulky waste collection
Visit www.cambridge.gov.uk/arrange-a-bulky-waste-collection
Tel: 01223-458282

Noise complaints (reduced service)
E: env.health@cambridge.gov.uk
Tel: 01223-457900
Out of hours: 0300-303-8389

Council emergencies out of hours
Tel: 0300-3038389

Complaints
Visit www.cambridge.gov.uk/compliments-complaints-and-suggestions.

Council's partners for housing Mears gas servicing
Freephone 03332-070-766, including out of hours; (for leaseholders' gas emergencies, tel. 0800-111-999)
TSG Services
E: enquiries@tsgplc.co.uk
Tel: 01223-828777

Suicide Awareness

If you or someone else feels suicidal, dial 111, then option 2, for help from NHS mental health professionals.

StayingSafe.net is a free website offering practical help for people with suicidal thoughts, and for those caring for them.