

# **Our plan for Huntingdonshire**

**The Local Conservative Manifesto  
for the Huntingdonshire District Council Elections  
5 May 2022**

# A personal message from the Leader of Huntingdonshire District Council



Dear Resident

Huntingdonshire is one of the best places to live in the country. It's a thriving and prosperous district known for its strong community, historic market towns, charming rural setting, excellent parks and natural spaces - as well as a high-performing local economy with good jobs and economic opportunities. Altogether, these attributes provide an exceptional quality of life for those of us lucky enough to call Huntingdonshire home.

However, it requires more than luck to succeed; it takes careful stewardship by those who have an ambitious and positive vision for our area. Huntingdonshire is seeing the benefits of such Conservative stewardship of the District Council, and the ambitions that my Conservative colleagues and I are delivering for the residents of the district. Conservative led Huntingdonshire District Council is recognised nationally as a high-performing, low-tax council that punches well above its weight in the quality of services we deliver and both the natural and economic environments we have helped to create to ensure that Huntingdonshire thrives.

HDC collects council tax on behalf of the Police, Fire, County Council and Town/Parish Councils. Just 7% of the council tax you pay actually goes to HDC. That means that the average council taxpayer is charged £150.86 per year, or just £2.90 per week, for all the services that HDC delivers. Of the 181 District Councils across England, HDC had the 18<sup>th</sup> lowest council tax charge for 2021/22. We were also one of only 19 District Councils in the entire country to freeze its council tax as the country was recovering after one of the worst phases of the pandemic. Huntingdonshire residents still pay less council tax than the residents of neighbouring South Cambridgeshire, Cambridge City and Fenland. The amount you pay for HDC's services has only risen by 25p a week since the last council elections in 2018 - less than the average increase in both state pension and wages.

Conservative councils generally charge lower tax than Labour, Lib-Dem, Green and independent led councils whilst delivering more, through focusing on the issues and services that matter most to residents. You don't have to look too far away to neighbouring Lib-Dem led South Cambridgeshire District Council to find a council in disarray, with bin collections cancelled for months on end, maximum council tax increases levied every year and no published financial accounts since 2018! The 'independent' and Labour councillors supporting the Lib-Dem led coalition running the County Council aren't proving to be much better - supporting maximum council tax increases that by the end of their four year term will have added hundreds of pounds to your annual council tax bills. Let's not risk all that happening here in Huntingdonshire.

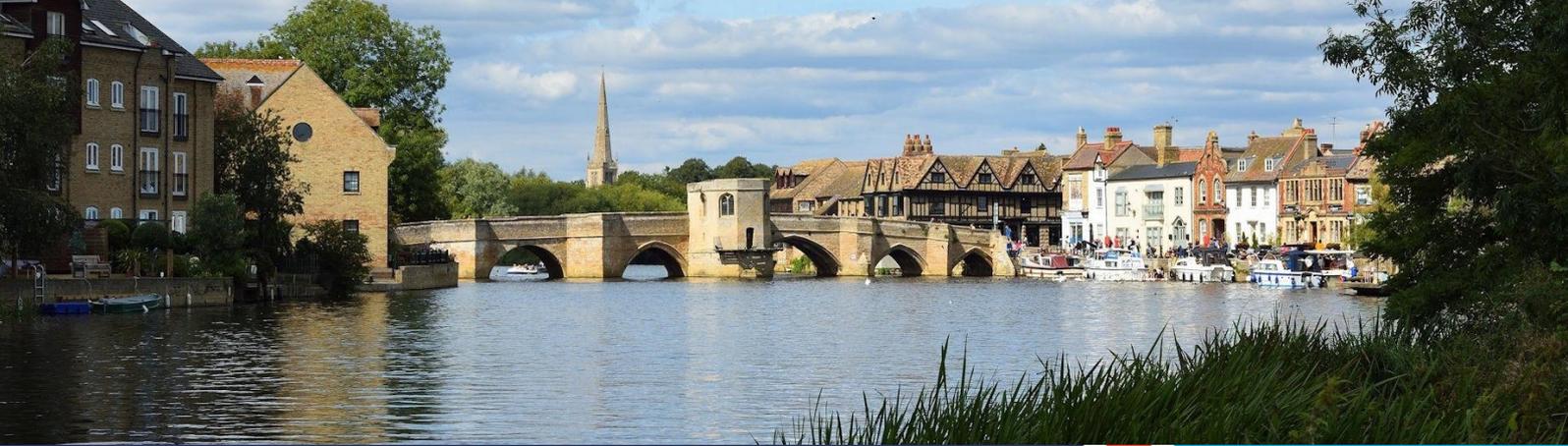
Your vote really matters because who gets elected locally directly determines the priorities and direction of the council, the delivery of services you receive and the quality of life you enjoy in Huntingdonshire. These are local elections about local issues, and when voting you're not expressing a view on national matters or sending a message to the Government; you're directly deciding on the future of Huntingdonshire. We can't risk going backwards by introducing the chaos seen elsewhere in areas run by the likes of the Lib-Dems, or so-called 'independents' who once elected drop their independence and vote with Labour and the Lib-Dems.

The following pages set out what we intend to do over the next four years. I hope that you share our positive and achievable vision for Huntingdonshire and will support us in delivering it by voting for your local Conservative candidates on Thursday 5 May to protect everything we value most about our district.

With best wishes

*Councillor Ryan Fuller*

**Leader of Huntingdonshire District Council**



# Supporting our residents

- We will ensure that all dealings with the council are as convenient for you as possible. Our progress in modernising and transforming the council has created more options for residents to access services differently. For example, since we created our online customer portal over 43,000 individual accounts are now being used by residents to access services. We will continue to add further options to access services online enabling residents to deal with the council at times that suit them. We pledge to enable flexible options to complete tasks with the council at times residents want to and without having to travel, make an appointment or wait to be dealt with. But in making contact easier and more convenient we will keep choice at the heart of what it means to interact with the council and ensure that other options are always available if you are unable to access our services online.
- Through our group of 'One Leisure' centres we will continue to offer residents across Huntingdonshire a value for money, well-equipped, knowledgeable, and professional hub for your leisure and wellbeing needs. We will continue to invest in a service that offers all age groups the ability to work towards a healthier lifestyle whilst offering opportunities to try new activities.
- Following multi-million-pound investments in Ramsey, St Neots, Huntingdon and St Ives leisure centres we will continue to invest in further substantial improvements and upgrades at each of the centres. We will also deliver a new capital investment scheme to upgrade the facilities at St Ives Outdoor Centre to help make the centre the 'go to' sporting site for local clubs.
- We will deliver a complete refurbishment of the Burgess Hall in St Ives, with plans to include upgrading the performance area, lighting and seating, along with an extension and overhaul of the bar area, as well as improvements to the toilets, reception and entrance areas. A review of events and performances will also be undertaken to ensure that the facility is accessible for as many local events and private hire opportunities as possible at a reasonable cost.
- We aspire to become the most active district in Cambridgeshire delivering a range of health and sports initiatives to support the community to get active, volunteer and enjoy the health and social benefits that this can bring.
- We have distributed £750k of community grant funding over the last four years and we will continue to fund and award Community Chest Grants to local community groups, and support the work of local voluntary organisations.
- We have significantly invested in supporting homeless people and rough sleepers in our district. The reasons for homelessness are complex and varied, but we pledge to continue to make the resources available to ensure that nobody who we are able to help, and wants to accept help, ever has to sleep rough on the streets of Huntingdonshire. We will continue to operate our successful street outreach service and invest in our innovative early-stage homelessness prevention approach, which has successfully prevented more than 1,300 cases of homelessness since 2018.



# Pride of place

We have long recognised the importance of enhancing our local environment, with a strong commitment to pride of place. Our focus has been on actions such as reducing the council's carbon emissions by over 1,000 tonnes or planting the equivalent of over five and a half Wembley stadiums of wildflower meadows and thousands of new trees to increase biodiversity. HDC is the guardian of 3,790 acres of green space, 106 acres of woodlands and a managed tree canopy of 1000 acres.

We have adopted and will deliver the following realistic, evidence-based and pragmatic environmental principles for Huntingdonshire as part of an environmentally positive recovery following the impacts of COVID-19:

- ◆ To target a net-zero carbon Huntingdonshire by 2040.
- ◆ To protect, enhance and restore existing natural areas and create new ones.
- ◆ To ensure that new development should be designed with a view to minimising and mitigating the effects of climate change.
- ◆ To ensure existing and new communities see real benefits in their wellbeing from living in Huntingdonshire.
- ◆ To use natural resources wisely.

These aims will be achieved through strong economic growth with strong environmental principles, good design of our homes and infrastructure, and health and biodiversity net gain at the core of our agenda.

- We will plant at least 10,000 more trees on our own land and continue to work with town and parish councils and communities to identify suitable sites for further planting of trees and wildflowers. We will also convert at least 25% of Huntingdonshire's grass areas such as roadside verges to meadow grass and wildflowers to further support wildlife and nature.
- We have already achieved prestigious internationally recognised 'Green Flag' status in our three largest parks. We have also won the national 'Keep Britain Tidy Love Parks' award for the second year in a row. We will continue to invest in all of our parks, nature reserves and open spaces to maintain their high standards and to enhance our local environment.
- To further enhance Hinchingsbrooke Country Park and better serve our residents and visitors we will deliver a £3 million investment programme including a new enlarged car park, new visitor centre facilities, new pathway networks and cycle routes and additional play areas.
- At St Neots and Huntingdon Riverside Parks we will upgrade and replace the pathways and cycleways to help make the parks more accessible.
- Having secured land from housing developers and turned it into the brand-new nature and wildlife focused Berman Park in St Ives we will secure two additional parcels of land to extend the park even further and complete the delivery of a protected connected natural green space between St Ives and Houghton.



- We will work with partners to more than treble the size of Paxton Pits nature reserve to 700 acres, bringing an additional 500 acres within the custodianship of the District Council. We will also deliver a new visitor centre, toilets, café and signage to further enhance the visitor experience.
- We will continue to deliver a high standard of street cleansing by providing funding for a seven day a week service to reduce the presence of litter. We will also continue to take swift action on enforcement matters such as fly tipping, littering, or other anti-social behaviour.
- Our refuse collection service is now award-winning, having won a national Association of Public Service Excellence award two years running. We have continued to maintain a full refuse collection service throughout the entirety of the pandemic - one of only 5% of all councils in the entire country and one of only two in Cambridgeshire to do so. Bin collections fell apart within weeks of the start of the pandemic in neighbouring Lib-Dem run South Cambridgeshire District Council and Labour run Cambridge City Council – where services have not yet fully resumed two years later! We are also one of the few councils that still provides a green bin service at no extra charge. We will continue to provide at least fortnightly black, blue and green bin collection services.
- The Government target is for 65% of all household waste to be recycled by 2035. HDC has already achieved a 60% recycling rate, one of the highest in the country, so we will seek to exceed that Government target of 65% well before 2035. We will continue to be ambitious in this area by piloting new ways of collecting food waste and reducing contamination of recycled material to reduce the amount of waste going to landfill even further.
- In response to residents’ concerns, we will introduce Civil Parking Enforcement in Huntingdonshire in 2023, using powers devolved from the police to enable HDC to enforce on-street parking issues, freeing up police time. We will deliver a district-wide enforcement service, consisting of officers employed by HDC rather than outsourcing it, to tackle persistent problem parking in our towns and villages, allowing us to better deploy resources in response to where the issues are across the district.
- We will actively support the Lead Flood Authority in the creation of a digitalised public map, working with our local communities, parish and town councils to identify and record owners of waterways, culverts, ditches and dykes within Huntingdonshire. This will ensure that responsibilities are understood and maintenance carried out to help reduce the likelihood of future flooding events. We will also actively support local residents and town and parish councils to create individual community flood and resilience plans.
- We will continue to push the Lib-Dem, Labour and ‘independent’ coalition of chaos running Cambridgeshire County Council to properly tackle the many blocked highways drains which are consistently cited as one of the causes of flooding. Conservative County Councillors recently proposed £4million for flood prevention schemes to match similar investment from other local agencies but this was voted against by the Lib-Dem, Labour and ‘independent’ councillors!
- We will take a strong position on planning enforcement issues to ensure that those who wilfully contravene planning policies, conditions and building requirements are brought to task. We will invest in increasing the size of the enforcement team to tackle the rising number of enforcement complaints.



# A thriving and prosperous district

- We will initiate a formal review of the Huntingdonshire Local Development Plan to ensure that local planning policies are working in the best interests of our communities. In undertaking this review we will work to ensure that future housing growth mandated by the Government is located in the right places, is as sustainable as possible within the current National Planning Policy Framework, and that necessary infrastructure and community facilities are provided on new developments.
- Over 1,000 new affordable homes have been delivered for Huntingdonshire residents since 2018 and we will work with Housing Associations and other partners to find new ways of delivering more much-needed keyworker homes and affordable homes for rent and low-cost home ownership to meet the needs of Huntingdonshire residents.
- Through our rural exception site policy we will actively deliver affordable community housing schemes to meet the needs of local communities. These small-scale housing sites will deliver affordable homes for both ownership and rent for people with a direct local connection to the locality. For example, a young person who has grown up in a village but cannot currently get a foot on the housing ladder there due to affordability.
- We support the Government's 'First Homes' policy and will revise our planning policies to ensure that 25% of all new affordable homes are built as 'First Homes' available at a 30% discount for first-time buyers with a local connection to Huntingdonshire. This policy will mean that first-time buyers in Huntingdonshire can buy their own home at up to a £107,000 discount on the market price.
- We have already awarded £20 million of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding from developers to towns and villages throughout Huntingdonshire, supporting a wide range of initiatives and delivering much-needed new infrastructure. We will go even further and allocate another £25 million of CIL to proactively work with ambitious town and parish councils and communities to co-sponsor and fund infrastructure improvement schemes to meet local needs. This could include projects such as highways improvements, new schools, health facilities, flood defences, parks and open spaces or town centre regeneration. Those areas of the district which have seen housing growth will be prioritised for these infrastructure improvements.
- With Conservative councillors having secured £16.3 million for the St Neots Future High Streets Fund project we will deliver that project, with construction due to start in 2023, and similar multi-million-pound town centre regeneration investment schemes in Ramsey, St Ives and Huntingdon. We will also do everything possible to secure a fair share of the Government's levelling-up and prosperity funding.
- We will work with partners to deliver full-fibre broadband in towns and villages across Huntingdonshire and will create an initial £1 million fund to help enable local Community Fibre Partnerships deliver full-fibre broadband in communities not covered by commercial roll-outs. We will also continue to lobby for better mobile phone coverage across the district.



- We will continue to encourage the Labour Mayor of Cambridgeshire & Peterborough to raise his aspirations for our area and deliver a world class transport system to better connect our towns and villages with each other, the wider county and beyond. We will continue to make the case for improvements to address existing congestion and traffic problems rather than just delivering infrastructure that enables further housing growth. The existing concerns of residents need to be addressed and we need to see transformative improvements to our current transport networks.
- We will also continue to lobby the Lib-Dem, Labour and ‘independent’ run County Council, which as the highways authority is responsible for maintenance of roads and paths, to make funding available to do something about the terrible state of many of our crumbling and potholed roads and paths.
- All town centre car parks across Huntingdonshire where charges apply operate the same parking tariff – there is no difference in parking charges between St Ives, Huntingdon or St Neots. The introduction of the new tariff in 2019, the wider payment options and the ability to pay in 15-minute segments has seen car park usage increase and people spending longer in our town centres. We will freeze car parking charges at their current level in all car parks whilst continuing to invest in car park upgrades such as CCTV, improved lighting and cycle parking and maintenance/repair facilities.
- Following the installation of electric vehicle charging points in our car parks using grant funding, we have so far supported approaching 100,000 miles of more environmentally friendly travel. As we monitor the demand for EV charging, we will work towards the development of new infrastructure to meet increasing demand and improved rapid charging technology.
- To help create jobs, grow our local economy and make Huntingdonshire the place to do business we will deliver a support package for all start-ups and new businesses, with access to business support, advice, networking, professional services and ongoing economic development assistance.
- To help ensure that young people across the district are able to gain necessary employment and skills we will create an active community mentoring program, drawing on those in our communities with key skills and abilities who can help support those looking for work, training or to improve their skills.
- We will work with partners to help young entrepreneurs in Huntingdonshire who want to start their own innovative businesses access start-up funding, mentoring, and practical support such as office space and professional advice.
- We will continue working with neighbourhood policing teams to make our communities feel safer and better places to live. We will continue to invest in and deliver our successful CCTV service and work with town and parish councils to expand and maximise the benefits of the service.
- We will continue to invest in supporting and expanding our popular local markets to provide greater choice to residents and visitors and to support the economies of our market towns.
- HDC’s commercial estates now contribute more than £5m of income every year to supporting local services. Where possible we will continue to carefully expand our estates to generate further income, which helps to keep council tax low, and to create jobs and investment within Huntingdonshire.



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