
To: South Cambridgeshire District Council
Date: 28 January 2019
Subject: Greater Cambridge Housing Strategy 2019–2023 consultation
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Observations

The draft Greater Cambridge Housing Strategy 2019–2023 document is notably deficient in detail about the transport infrastructure and services that will underpin the success, indeed viability, of future developments in Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire. It sets out a vision on page 6 that:

We want Greater Cambridge to be a place where ... homes are ... located in high quality sustainable environments with access to employment, retail, leisure and other services where appropriate. They benefit from ... effective transport links and other necessary infrastructure.

And on page 7:

Investment in transport and infrastructure is also critical to securing the delivery of the region's economic and housing growth and to enable those living in more established communities to access jobs and services.

Yet the only stated policy or action to achieve this is down to the Combined Authority (p9):

[Cambridgeshire and] Peterborough Combined Authority will support the activity identified in this Strategy. Their work to promote delivery of new homes and improve infrastructure and transport links will widen the scope for housing delivery and help to ensure that residents of Greater Cambridge can live in sustainable and accessible locations.

Page 13 makes reference to the importance of masterplanning, but omits explicit mention of transport, only hinting at it by the terms *infrastructure* and *links*:

Building new communities requires considerable master-planning to ensure we have the right mix of homes in terms of sizes, types and tenures. We also need to ensure early provision of appropriate: infrastructure, retail, leisure and other services; open spaces; and links to the natural environment, to enable residents to live settled, healthy lives from the outset.

As planning authorities, Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire have critically important roles in shaping future developments. Roads and pathways are the circulatory system of every development, facilitating or obstructing the free movement of people.

Design

Too often, urban design (in its technical sense, applying to villages and towns as well as cities) provides for the motor vehicle before people – as pedestrians, cyclists and bus users. Planning policies aspire to a different ordering, but provide little guidance as to what this means in practice. Minimum standards for road design are widely agreed and rigorously enforced; not so for road crossings, footways, cycleways, delivery bays, bus stops and bus services.

The road network surrounding a development often creates a barrier to walking or cycling beyond the perimeter. To take a few examples: Orchard Park and Kings Hedges Road, Eddington and Madingley Rd, Babraham Park and the A1307.

Not only does the final design usually prioritise motor vehicles, so too does the build-out. When the first properties are occupied, it is commonplace for cycleways and footways to be unfinished or closed off, and for bus stops to be absent or unserved.

Societal change

There are significant societal changes that are not being reflected in planning policies: a reduced desire amongst younger people to be car-dependent; an expectation of independent living by people with disabilities, including age-related; changing needs for community spaces; increasing use of home delivery for shopping; and accelerating transition from petrol/diesel to fully electric vehicles.

Climate change

Even societal changes are rendered insignificant by the urgent need to adapt our lifestyles to be carbon-neutral well before 2050, probably by 2030. (2050 is the global target set by the [International Panel on Climate Change](#), but the UK and other developed countries have a moral duty – quantified as a carbon budget – to be [more ambitious](#).) Rapid decarbonisation must happen on the timescale of *current* local plans, yet barely figures. The cumulative impact of recent and planned developments on natural resources and existing transport infrastructure is overwhelming. De-carbonising *at the same time* is currently inconceivable.

Capital funding

Current funding mechanisms to pay for transport infrastructure and public amenities are inadequate: Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), Section 106 agreements, City Deal, New Homes Bonuses, Transforming Cities Fund and other government grants are insufficient to meet the needs and mitigate the impacts of all the ongoing and planned housing, business, health, research and education developments. Transformational projects such as the Cambridge Autonomous Metro and the central and eastern sections of East-West Rail are still in the early appraisal stages – currently unproven and unfunded.

Section 106 is too narrowly prescribed and can only be used to mitigate impacts of a development on its surrounding area. Section 106 does not cover spill-over or cumulative impacts from a number of small-scale developments. CIL does not adequately plug this gap.

Elements such as “affordable housing” are often scaled back on the basis of viability assessments. This becomes self-fulfilling as developers are enticed by agents (and competitive pressures) to overbid for land, or to survey the land less rigorously than they might otherwise before agreeing a purchase price. They do this in the knowledge that unforeseen costs will, in effect, be paid for by the wider community through reduced Section 106 obligations.

Revenue funding

Equally concerning is that the increase in revenue/operating funding that new developments generate for the local authorities is insufficient to cover long-term maintenance and service requirements associated with the development.

For instance, if a pilot bus service is agreed as a Section 106 commitment, it is rarely adequate to the needs of residents. If it doesn’t start running until an occupancy threshold has been reached, early occupants will have to organise their lives without it. When the bus service does run, the hours and frequency are typically unsuited to getting people to and from work or school. If the service fails to achieve a commercially viable level of patronage, it ceases as soon as the Section 106 seed funding is exhausted.

Recommendations

The Greater Cambridge housing strategy and next local plan must embrace the central role of non-car modes of transport in creating sustainable, healthy, thriving communities. The design process should assess transport needs and opportunities, outside and within the development, before locating any transport infrastructure.

The modernist motto should prevail: *form follows function*. Every masterplan should explain and illustrate how the space will function *dynamically*, not just as a static collection of buildings. Transport assessments at the planning consent stage should be judged against this pre-design vision.

Design

The pre-application design process needs to be more open and transparent, with expert and community input enlisted before designs are drawn up. In this way, opportunities, constraints and concerns that may not be immediately obvious to the developer can be fed into the design process. The Mill Road Depot development started out well in this regard, but then rushed the process when government funding was made available.

Planning of developments needs to consider walking and cycling routes beyond the perimeter to ensure that routes to off-site destinations, such as schools, shops and other amenities, are safe and convenient for people aged 8–80, walking or cycling.

Funding

CIL is [still evolving](#). It is essential that the local planning authorities contribute to the review and

revision process to ensure it meets its original objectives in offering local authorities a more effective and reliable funding mechanism for strategic infrastructure and public amenities. Section 106 obligations need to reach beyond the developer to the original land owner (a key driver for the introduction of CIL), so that viability does not become an obstacle to the delivery of affordable housing and high-quality community amenities.

The role of parishes, including urban, and residents' management companies, funded by precept/subscription from residents, needs to be explored and expanded to support more community services, from public transport to maintaining infrastructure, amenities and landscape.

Infrastructure

Planning authorities need to be more explicit in what they deem to be best practice for transport infrastructure for walking, cycling and public transport. However, guidance should not be so prescriptive as to stifle creativity and innovation. Standards should be applied so as to raise quality, not homogenise design.

Transport assessments must seek to maximise the free movement of people by all modes, not just capacity for motor vehicles. They should also take greater consideration of personal safety ('safety by design'), through natural (overlooked) and remote (CCTV) surveillance and appropriate lighting of pathways, bus stops, car parks and cycle parks.

Roads

Road safety audit guidance needs to be reviewed and revised to align with current and future priorities, rather than past practice:

- Narrower lanes (to reduce vehicle speeds)
- Tighter corners at junctions (to reduce vehicle speeds and crossing distances)
- More pedestrian and cycle crossings
- Dutch design elements for cycling and walking infrastructure

Road crossings

Pedestrian and cycle crossings should be:

- Located on desire lines (where these may emerge or change during the build-out, temporary crossings should be used, and their locations reviewed periodically before the final crossing are built).
- Clearly marked, for the benefit of all users, including those with impaired vision
- Clearly indicated priority for pedestrians across side streets
- Appropriate priority elsewhere (pedestrian, cycle or car, depending on context)
- Light-controlled where the volume or speed of motor traffic warrants it
- Bridges or underpasses where safe surface crossings are ruled out

Footways

Minimum and optimal design parameters should be specified for:

- Dimensions (suitable for wheelchairs and 4mph mobility scooters)
- Directness (all points should be connected by direct paths, irrespective of the road layout)
- Accessibility for those with reduced mobility
- Lighting (ecological considerations must be balanced against the fact that unlit paths are unusable for much of the year)
- Surveillance (visible from the road or homes)

Cycleways

Minimum and optimal design parameters should be specified for:

- Dimensions (suitable for cargo bikes and 8mph mobility scooters)
- Directness (all points connected by direct paths, irrespective of the road layout)
- Separation from footway
- Protection (physical separation from the carriageway) where prevailing speeds or traffic volumes warrant it
- Direct access from every house and local amenity
- Gradients
- Lighting
- Surveillance (visible from the road or homes)

Cycle parking

Minimum and optimal design parameters should be specified for:

- Residential provision, e.g. one cycle parking space per occupier (not per bedroom), with at least one per dwelling able to accommodate an 'off-gauge' cycle (cargo, trailer, tricycle, etc), plus spaces for guests.
- On-street cycle parking, e.g. including a proportion provided as lockable cycle hangers, offering additional security and protection for valuable cycles.
- Secure cycle parking at bus stops (adequately surveilled)

Shared space (e.g. 'Home Zone')

Design guidance should:

- Ensure cars cannot dominate.
- Take into full consideration the risks posed to children, those with impaired vision and a range of neurological and mental health conditions. Note that the DfT withdrew [Guidance Note LTN 1/11](#) on shared space on 8 August 2018, following concerns raised by the House of Commons [Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee](#).
- Take into account the risks posed by virtually silent electric vehicles.
- Promote a sense that it is safe and normal for children to play outdoors.

Bus stops

Minimum and optimal design parameters should be specified for:

- Connecting and signing footways and cycleways to and from bus stops
- Proximity to homes (no home should be more than about 400m from a bus stop, though some flexibility should be allowed depending on the type and frequency of the service provided: the stop for a high frequency 'express' service can be further away than an hourly local service).
- Lighting
- Shelter with seating suitable for the elderly and at a variety of heights
- Button-operated call light or radio signal to alert an approaching bus driver that there is someone waiting at the stop.
- Surveillance (visible from the road or homes, and/or CCTV)
- Information provision (active display and/or WiFi to gain access to real-time departure times)
- Cycle parking

Electric charging points

It is expected that all new cars sold will be fully electric within the decade. Therefore, charging points must be included for all residential parking. Space should be allowed for on-street charging stations, either in the road or adjacent to it, but not in the footway.

Deliveries

Every development should include delivery ('loading') bays at appropriate intervals (in the region of 50m) to ensure that delivery vehicles are able to park without obstructing other road users. These bays will also serve for emergency vehicles, visiting health professionals, and other drop-in service providers.

Developments should also include lock boxes, attached to a community building, for delivery of parcels (by any retailer, not just Amazon).

Public transport

Every development must be accompanied by a fully funded, long-term public transport plan. Where it is unlikely that a scheduled bus service will be commercially viable, then alternatives must be considered, including demand-responsive services or subsidised taxis.

Public transport plans must be drawn up in consultation with transport operators and other transport professionals with specific experience of planning public transport services to ensure that they are realistic and sustainable. Services will fail if they are specified according to rule books by inexperienced planners, or designed by committees of councillors and community bodies, who inevitably have conflicting desires. A heavily compromised service (such as the ill-fated 115 service between Newmarket P&R and Addenbrooke's) is good for no-one.

If subsidies will be required, then the funding plan must be realistic for the long term, and not

reliant only on Section 106 seed funding. Options may include the local authority or parish council making a long-term undertaking to provide subsidy funding, or a local management company being formed to raise funds by subscription from local residents and businesses.

Travel planning

The time when someone moves house is a golden opportunity to instill new travel habits. The development marketing materials (online and printed) should include:

- A map showing walking and cycling routes and bus stops
- A timetable of local buses and trains
- Links to the most user-friendly journey planners

Every new owner or tenant should be offered a personal travel planning consultation (ideally on-site) to review their options.

The above would be a very small marginal cost to the developer, and should be included as a default Section 106 obligation. Developers should also seek to enter into partnerships with public transport operators and cycle vendors to provide attractive incentives, such as an introductory free bus pass or discount on cycles.

Car clubs

As car ownership reduces, so shared and hire car options become more important. Developments should include dedicated parking spaces for car clubs, either commercial (e.g. ZipCar) or privately-organised (e.g. by a residents' management company). These locations will need charging points and Internet access.

Build-out

The development must be planned so that footways and cycleways serving occupied dwellings are open, and remain open, from the day those residents move in. If construction vehicles must cross a footway or cycleway, then a plan must be in place to supervise the crossing when in use or provide a reasonable alternative route; and to keep the pathway safe and clear of mud.

A default planning condition should be that no construction or contractor vehicle may park on a footway or cycleway unless provision is made for people walking and cycling to pass safely. That includes people pushing a pram or using a wheelchair or mobility scooter.

The developer and the local authority must publish contact telephone numbers (staffed during hours of construction) and email addresses for people to report problems. The local authority must actively monitor and promptly enforce breaches of planning conditions to ensure that all residents' interests are protected, especially those that choose to use active and public transport.

Maintenance

Having attractive and well-maintained landscaping, infrastructure and amenities is essential to creating successful, vibrant, safe communities. They also require ongoing maintenance and renewal, which must be funded for the long term. Foot- and cycleways alone require regular pruning of vegetation, clearing of autumn leaves, gritting in winter, active repairs to damage by weather and tree roots, and periodic resurfacing and rebuilding. The developer, local authorities (district/city and highway) and, where one exists, parish council must work together to agree how much funding will be needed, and how it will be raised (see *Revenue funding* above).

About Smarter Cambridge Transport

Smarter Cambridge Transport is a volunteer-run think tank and campaign group. It was formed in 2015 to advance sustainable and integrated transport for the Cambridge region. It is run by a team of around 30 people, with a wide range of expertise and interests, and supported by 234 people (as of 21 December 2018). Its website is www.smartertransport.uk.