

Summary of main themes raised in discussions with a varied group of local representatives discussing the North East Area Action Plan 2019

Throughout the series of meetings, those attending have varied in number and focus. There have been no minutes or summaries circulated, and therefore these themes rely on notes taken and memory.

The concept of a balanced, sustainable and attractive community was welcome. Those attending were pleased to see the emphasis on zero carbon in line with City and wider aspirations, and have confirmation that the intention was to avoid adding to traffic on Milton Road.

All parties wished to see a full range of on-site facilities including a welcoming social space served by attractive independent outlets. It was important that the new community should engage with existing surrounding communities, so that it would not be seen as exclusive, and should offer 'social gain' to the less fortunate adjacent residential areas, e.g. King's Hedges.

- 1. Adequacy of school facilities.** Whilst there is no clear definition of the target demographic or mix of housing or tenures, it is clear that local Secondary schools are full and under stress. They are also inconvenient, so a strong shared view emerged that there should be on-site secondary school provision with adequate ancillary space as well as primary school (and nursery) provision.
- 2. Adequacy of medical facilities.** Accepting that these are facilities provided by third party (private) CCG entities, there was a strong view that adequate health facilities were required including pharmacy. The example of Trumpington should be followed. A settlement of circa 18,000 people will need more than primary care, and at least, integrated care centres. There also needs to be enhancement of the citywide facilities which the settlement will make additional demands on, such as Addenbrookes.
- 3. Permeability of the areas.** There was a strong view that presently physical barriers prevent movement into and through both the science park and the eastern side of Milton Road. Therefore, it was vital to open up access points to ensure that free flow could take place.
- 4. Inward and outward flows.** There is a danger that the concentration of wealth and opportunities in this area grows, without sharing these positive attributes with the less-privileged adjacent residential areas. The flow of activity and affluence must be facilitated both into and out of the development.
- 5. Adequacy of provision of open spaces.** A widely held view was that in CB1 the provision of green space was completely inadequate. Therefore as well as 'green arteries'/'a green spine' running through the area, it was vital that adequate green

space should be a requirement. The representative of Milton Country Park also noted that Milton Country Park is at, or over, capacity at peak times so cannot be seen as a reservoir of spare capacity for the new development. It needs investment in extra facilities to accommodate the anticipated growth. There is a proposal for expansion of the park to the unoccupied area between the railway line and the river and. There is also a proposal for a water sport lake area extending to Waterbeach which would provide a green corridor between several major developments. These should be implemented along with appropriate access for pedestrians and cyclists.

It also needs to be considered that people from the development will use the country park anyway so it needs to be able to cater for them. More operational funding will need to be provided for the park as it has no government funding.

Milton Country Park should not be seen as an alternative to adequate green space being provided in the development, but as a bonus.

6. Height of buildings. Those attending were concerned at the suggestion, only arising two meetings ago, that 12-13 storey buildings were being considered in relation to their impact on nearby sensitive areas. Whilst those attending fully understand – even if they do not agree with - the urge to have dense and therefore most likely 4 to 6 storey average building heights, the 12-13 storey idea came out of the blue, was alien to Cambridge and could not be explained. A fixed maximum needs to be set, and Eddington offers the worked example of 6-8 storeys maximum with overall heights which are far less. It was noted that Brookgate are notorious for exploiting any opportunity to go beyond the agreed building height and massing maxima, and it was entirely unclear how they would be restrained* (see footnotes). Unfortunately, the country's mechanisms for ensuring safety in high rise buildings have proved wholly unfit for purpose so this is another area where higher local standards need to be set.

Given that higher buildings need more space around them, and cost more, it has not been demonstrated that any increase in height is worth the marginal increase in gross density. Literature on the subject emphasises the criticality of the quality of building, environment and maintenance as heights increase. Given the failures of CB1, with far lower heights than are proposed here, there are doubts the quantum improvement in approach that is required will be achieved. This is particularly so when the same developers and culture pertain.

The height of buildings is the issue of most concern to local representatives within the current plans. We would like to look at how lower height alternatives compare in terms of gross density, costs and quality.

6. **Commitment to biodiversity and high quality landscaping.** Whilst various welcome indications were given about the central role of biodiversity, it remained hazy whether what was envisaged could combine increased density with sufficient space and emphasis on enhancing the natural environment. There was a lack of data, and in the case of the Science Park, the risk that densification would destroy the green qualities of this relatively low-density site. The attractiveness of the Science Park should be preserved whilst making it and its facilities more accessible.
7. **Vision for the area.** A concise expression of what the intended character and target occupancy is urgently required. What is the intended demographic? Where are the occupants of working age expected to work? What is the mix intended to be?
8. **Car ownership.** Whilst the vision of low car ownership is to be applauded, measures to reduce car use must be comprehensively planned to avoid adjacent residential areas being the reservoir for parking 'illicit' cars owned by occupants. The idea that not providing parking would reduce car usage at Orchard Park has just resulted in cars being scattered around the development. There needs to be effective and ongoing enforcement of any rules. Adequate electric car charging provision is required from the outset.
9. **A new Cultural Centre for Cambridge.** So far only the idea of occupants feeling so connected by reliable public transport with the centre of Cambridge that they will readily go there for cultural activity has been explored. This of course relies on a proper range of high quality public transport, not just inadequate bus services. Nor does the proximity of the Guided Bus, which is questionably a positive factor, or the railway station offer the means to take people to where they wish to be.

However, it is also important to consider using the creation of this community to be the basis for building a new top quality concert hall and venue for Cambridge that will be larger than anything presently on offer, near to the railway station, and of sufficient size and flexibility to serve as a major regional focus – 2,000 plus seats.

10. **Sustainable building.** It is essential that buildings achieve the highest eco standards and that adequate emphasis is placed upon water and achieving the Eddington standards of built-in sustainable water use, grey water recycling, SUDS etc. Emphasis on the highest standards of design and sympathetic materials are also regarded as essential. We should be aiming at Passivhouse standards of insulation which require barely any heating and actually pay for themselves in the long term.
11. **Social and affordable housing.** In order to obtain the widest benefit from the proposed development, there must be a mandatory social and affordable housing content, not diluted/redirected to alternative uses.

- 12. Finally dealing with the Fen Road Level Crossing.** For decades the ‘oubliette’ status of Fen Road north of the railway has spawned a well-known range of social and behavioural issues that spill over dangerously into Chesterton. The level crossing is still a focus for these problems. Closing the level crossing is an objective fervently wished for by many residents. In order to do so, a new bridge and route to Milton Road is required. This new development provides the opportunity to create an adequate bridged link over the railway line between the northern end of Fen Road and Milton Road, and must be seized. This can be combined with relocation of working spaces currently along Cowley Road to a new area bisected by a road running parallel with the A14.
- 13. Provision of substitute employment Space.** Current use of the eastern area includes both light industrial and Cambridge’s major bus depot. So long as Cambridge remains wedded to buses, a suitable bus depot will be required. It is unclear what alternative provision is proposed for existing commercial users, or what commitment will be included for additional working space.
- 14. Shopping facilities.** Everything needs to be done to encourage vibrant independent shops and facilities. This will require affordable rents and the ability for facilities to grow in an organic and flexible manner. Steps may need to be taken to prevent large chains. Providing higher buildings will not in itself provide what is required.
- 15. Cycling.** The majority of journeys within the development should be done by foot or by cycle and the amount of motor traffic travelling in and out of the development should be minimised. To do this, high-quality infrastructure must be designed in from the outset before considering road traffic etc. It should be suitable for cyclists of all ages and abilities to use. Paths and cycleways should be direct, convenient and attractive and, together with new public transport provision, ready to use before residents move in.

Land-use planning should be done in a way that prioritises and encourages walking and cycling. i.e. shopping and services should be most easily accessed by active transport modes and schools should not be on busy roads. All children should be able to walk and cycle to school via safe routes that are more direct than car routes.

Both actual safety and perceived safety should be considered with appropriate lighting installed and traditional-style street design with excellent permeability – rather than dead-ends, narrow alleys and cul-de-sacs. Good cycle and walking links open up a community and help create social places for all ages that can combat loneliness. Cycle routes should be well lit, unlike many new cycle routes in Cambridge.

Designing a neighbourhood that is friendly for walking and cycling is not just about the cycling and walking infrastructure, it is also about the car-infrastructure and the minimisation of motor traffic travelling through the development. Keeping the

majority of car storage (e.g. car barns) and travel to the edges of the development will have a positive impact on the liveability of the community and the levels of active travel.

The development should also make a contribution to the improvement of nearby cycle routes throughout Cambridge, helping to create a proper network which works for every type of cyclist and cycle. This will help new residents access jobs and facilities outside the area and attract others into the development's businesses and cultural spaces.

Although one can look at good examples (Pye Bridge) there are black spots (Newmarket Road Roundabout) and really easy things which have not yet been done (Chesterton Road). A much faster rate of improvement would be very beneficial and cost effective. About 95% of the benefits of the Milton Road improvements will be due to cycle infrastructure.

Excellent cycle parking and storage should be supplied across the development, for homes, businesses and community spaces. This should be easy to use, convenient and include spaces for larger and adapted cycles including tricycles and cargo bikes. Public cycle parking should be well-signed, secure and easy to access, learning lessons from the problems of previous developments such as the station Cyclepoint.

16. Culture of development. We are very encouraged by the approach of some of the planners who advocate the ideas of people such as Jan Gehl. However, so much of the development culture around local developments does not match the continental examples which are held up as exemplars. It is difficult to see how stakeholders, such as Brookgate, will ever achieve what is required.

Another problem is that although money can be found for capital there is no mechanism for providing sufficient revenue to support things such as bus services and social facilities. Until someone can find a solution examples from the continent, where this is not a problem, are not going to help.

17. Communities. Developing successful communities needs to be a top priority and needs to be given a great deal of thought and resources. Certainly, providing the right facilities and a people centric environment is a start. Thought also needs to be given to how different demographics will live together, as has so lamentably failed at CB1. Marmalade Lane is an example of an alternative approach that much can be learnt from, although it may not work wholesale for everyone.

18. Noise and environment. There doesn't seem to be much recognition of noise as a problem or emphasis on any kinds of noise barriers. As the development is right next to the A14, which is being enhanced to take more traffic, this is something that needs to be addressed. It is something people living at Orchard Park often comment

on. The only solution we can see is having noise barriers which really work without impacting other areas. The danger is that this is a downshift in the quality of life before we have even started.

There are also issues to consider of sunlight shading, cold wind gusts being dragged down by high buildings. How will the development achieve safe levels of particulate pollution from traffic given the nearby A14 when there are weather conditions that trap the pollution, such as fenland temperature inversions? What data is there on the current level of pollution on the site?

- 19. Safety.** If people are going to walk then the environment must not only be safe but be perceived to be so by the inhabitants. We assume that there is a body of knowledge that can be used to implement this. This will not be just about design but resources to deal with any issues that arise.

There is an issue locally that the council have significantly cut the level of street lighting to save money and most people think that it is now completely inadequate. There will need to be a level of lighting that people are genuinely happy with which will need to be much more than the current council "standard".

- 20. Sense of identity and place.** There is nothing so far to indicate that there will be anything about the design which provides a sense of identity which is unique, let alone anything identifiable with Cambridge and the local environment. Many new developments are bland and soulless and could be from any new development in Europe. Archetypal square boxes with a lot of steel, glass and concrete abound. The development has got off to a flying start in soulless architecture with the hotel and offices outside Cambridge North.

- 21. Impact on citywide facilities.** A development of this size, on top of all the other new developments both built and planned, will make large demands on the citywide facilities. These would include the hospitals, education, arts facilities, night life, social services and local government. It is not clear how these will be expanded to avoid overcrowding, or even where there is space to do so. There don't appear to be any plans for the developers to contribute to anything outside the actual development and local government has no money.

- 22. Housing for local workers.** It is commendable that there is an ambition to provide housing for local workers. However, it is not clear what measures are possible to stop developers actively promoting housing to buy to leave investors and commuters attracted by the nearby station. Even if they don't promote in these markets then simple market forces may have the same outcome. The idea of tied housing is worth considering but it fell into disrepute in the past because it shifted the balance of power towards employers.

There should not be housing provided specifically for students as it is of poorer quality and this approach has caused significant social problems in CB1.

23. Implementation. There is a need to ensure that the balance of power lies with the planners and not the developers or we will have the familiar pattern of poor architecture (The Marque), facilities delivered decades after the development (Cambourne) and heights that creep up with soulless developments (CB1). There needs to be a quantum leap in the legal and governance framework at the outset to avoid this.

Disappointingly, we already seem to be starting on the wrong foot. The hotel being built next to Cambridge North station is an exemplar of the type of development we would wish to avoid in terms of function, style, size and location. It has pre-empted a prime site for a transport interchange or cultural facilities. If we are going to develop at a micro level of granularity then hotel accommodation could have been developed in this manner and not as something which is monolithic.

There is a need to keep back resources and capabilities to rectify problems that become apparent later.

24. Local inequalities. Local representatives expressed a view that the Science Park and the development are, and will be, a citadel of affluence surrounded by some of the less affluent local wards. Just this week Cambridge was quoted being as one of the most unequal cities in the country, (Varsity). We would like our local community to benefit from the jobs and opportunities this development would offer.

The number of local people, particularly young people, who work on the science park in professional roles is virtually nil. This reflects the fact that local education and support is not empowering the local community to benefit from the local jobs.

The development is an opportunity to rectify this. We would like this to change things so that the local community feels empowered by having opportunities in the science park. If an educational and enterprise-ship programme could be developed this would really create a positive impact to the hopes, expectations and aspirations in our community. In terms of education the employers should work closely with local schools, colleges and vocational institutions, such as CRC, to engage local young people and provide joint education, apprenticeships and career paths.

25. Culture for local residents. The local inequalities are also an issue with regards to access to culture. We wish to have a community centre for community activities, arts and cultural activities. Research projects have shown that cultural activities in the surrounding area are almost non-existent. Very few of the local population have a strong educational, arts or cultural background. More affluent areas tend to make use of cultural amenities in the city centre and London but local people do not feel this is accessible to them. The development should be used as an opportunity to rectify these inequalities.

26. Travel within the site. There needs to be more consideration of travel within the site. Some distances, such as the distance between the station and the end of the Science Park, are too far to walk so this needs something like a shuttle bus. However, there is no mechanism for financing this at the moment. We welcome the idea of a green bridge across Milton Road although there were some concerns about the gradient leading up to the roundabout. This would enable cycle paths separated from the very unpleasant traffic junctions. The cycle paths within the Science Park also need a radical rethink to be coherently planned and continuous as they are currently fragmented.

27. Transport. If the residents of the new development are going to be prohibited from having cars the poor state of public transport will be a threat to the development's viability without a sea change in the quality of public transport. It is difficult for outsiders to grasp the inadequacy of Cambridge buses. A rule of thumb is that if a complete bus trip to the centre is even as fast as walking you are doing well. Central government wants London levels of development without enabling the London style control and operational finance of the buses which is essential for this to work. A particular grievance of local residents is the lack of buses stopping on Milton Road. Cambridge must be fairly unique in having quite a few bus services not remotely designed with the actual inhabitants in mind.

We welcome the concept of a trip budget for cars, however, it is an approach not a solution. Extra trips due to Science Park densification, the A14 upgrade and the many new developments such as Waterbeach and Northstowe will soon swallow this up. The plan suggests a reduction in the proportion of car trips of about two thirds to cope with this. The question is, How feasible is this? Are there precedents around the world for such a dramatic change and, if so, is it applicable to this case?

The option of re-installing the railway line on the guided busway should be considered. It would have far more capacity and reach and it would be the fastest way of getting to the central station and the biomedical campus. A route will be needed for the Varsity Line anyway.

The planners have our sympathies in grappling with, sometimes, conflicting transport strategies which may, or may not, materialise or have any hope of working. This is even if they are politically feasible and affordable.

The danger is that we will commit to an unfeasibly high level of development before we have a realistic plan to deal with the transport. Many key factors are outside the control of the planners and the result could be gridlock.

28. Catering for all demographics. There needs to be a better attempt than usual to cater for all demographics including the elderly and disabled. There need to be

effective routes for mobility scooters. Pavements are often too rough and mobility scooters are not supposed to use cycle lanes.

Footnotes

*<https://www.sopra.org.uk/1/brookgate/> SOPRA on CB1 aparthotel plans:

‘We are deeply concerned that Brookgate has already pushed the envelope on what they have built to date, adding floors and mass to create what most people are describing as ugly, characterless blocks.’

‘The outline planning consent refers to F2 being up to three storeys high, 15m at the southern end and 9m adjacent to Ravensworth Gardens (8.271 & 8.277). The officer was hesitant to support an application for a building even as tall as three storeys (8.466), yet what is proposed is three to five storeys high (11.9m to 18m, including 2m of plant, which will be clearly visible from Devonshire Rd)’

A. Milbourn, J. Latham, W. Blythe, M. Bond, S.Harris, R.Arbelaez and the NEC AAP Consultative Forum 11.11.2019