

## **Doubling Nature**

A summary of some of the points made at Natural Cambridgeshire's Doubling Nature Event 2020. This was how it was described:

"We aim to take decisive next steps in delivering our doubling nature ambition. We aim to share Natural Cambridgeshire's ambitious plans to double the area of rich wildlife habitats and natural green space across the region.

At the meeting Cllr Bridget Smith Leader of South Cambs District Council talked about the background of the Oxford Cambridge Arc and said that she had campaigned for the environment to be a central part of the Arc vision as well as economic opportunity, and that the scale of what is being proposed for the area is a huge opportunity for net gain in the Arc. The Defra message now is to brand the OxCam Arc as the Green Arc. She outlined what this means:

decarbonised space, green standards for houses, public transport so good that people don't need to own car; water management and prosperity from green economic growth.

Cllr Smith referred to the previous speaker, Dame Fiona Reynolds's question "is doubling nature enough" and asked should Natural Cambridgeshire be thinking in terms of a bigger scale. They are starting from a low baseline, less than 8% of Cambridgeshire is well managed for nature, so doubling nature will only bring that up to 16%.

The Arc ambition is to double the area of habitat guided by the Local Nature Partnership's Nature Network Report which has identified priority areas for habitat restoration and creation and land management. She pointed out that the level of ambition for the OxCam Arc is huge and that it is a very prestigious project with a lot of Downing St interest.

She highlighted that when the project first came out it had seemed to be all about an expressway and building a million houses by 2050. Cllr Smith said that now all the talk about the million houses has fallen away. Post Covid the OxCam Arc will be about economic recovery, though she admitted that housing does fund infrastructure and that the Budget announcement included proposals for four development corporations. But what style of development corporation she asked? If local political reps are involved they will have a stronger knowledge to shape development in the right way – rather than negatively.

The suggestion is to look at the whole Cambridgeshire county area. It was pointed out that with 13,000 hectares Cambridgeshire County Council is the largest landowner after the Ministry of Defence.

Cambridgeshire is the only project working at county scale and giving people access to local nature is seen as an equality issue. Consultants are mapping green space and park usage. They are also looking at how to improve access.<sup>i</sup>

Other questions raised at the event included how to balance the challenge of huge economic growth and achieving nature targets and carbon planning. South Cambs DC Cllr Pippa Heylings pointed out that the Greater Cambridge Local Plan had included for the first time in a planning consultation, a call for Green Sites, connecting pieces, small sites and big sites, which would enable local access. She

said that Greater Cambridge Councils were looking at updating the Greater Cambridge biodiversity SPD to bring it up to date with policy. She referred to a series of workshops that had taken place on the layering of evidence. The results would be published in October.

Martin Baker of Cambridge Wildlife Trust BCN was asked how do we define “doubling nature”. He listed this as:

- 1) Mixture of area priority habitats
- 2) Around quality of habitats
- 3) Around populations of species – birds - butterflies
- 4) quality of green space

Cambridgeshire farmer Stephen Briggs described how his programme for nature farming had focused around agroforestry - multiple crops out of the same field – a farm shop and café – and managed access to farmland – making space for insects – pollination. He said he had done a lot of work on baseline work monitoring bird populations. He highlighted that trees are a long term project and that this needs long term tenure but as the second biggest landowner after the MOD, this was a big opportunity for Cambridgeshire County owned farms to be part of the doubling nature process.

Martin Baker finished by adding that the biggest constraint to doubling nature was the region’s lack of water. Without it the Arc was not sustainable but he made the point this was a national issue that needed to be tackled collectively.

#### **Land management and net gain offsetting**

The business plan for Natural Cambridgeshire’s Nature Recovery Network is focused on net gain offsetting.<sup>ii</sup> The argument of more development and the bigger the scale of it the more funding that can be raised for nature.

The Deputy Director of Greater Cambridge Shared planning service (June 2020) wrote to FeCRA:

‘Ahead of and separate to the Local Plan process, the Local Nature Partnership (as a separate body albeit with some local authority input) is identifying priority projects it would support if funding were to become available in the short term, but no decisions have been made through the Local Plan process about which green spaces to prioritise.

And that:

‘The Local Plan green space evidence base study will identify priority projects, and will advise which should be included in the Local Plan, and which should be delivered through land management as opposed to development processes. This priority list will in future also inform biodiversity net gain offsetting, and bids for funding from other sources’.

The local authorities are heavily involved not just in planning but as land owners and partners in individual developments and in working to deliver biodiversity net gain through the planning system. This includes existing allocated sites including, but not limited to, the following:

- Northstowe phases 2&3
- Waterbeach barracks and airfield
- Land North of Cherry Hinton, Newbury Farm and within the North East Cambridge Area Action Plan.<sup>iii</sup>

South Cambridgeshire District Council have set up a housing development company with Hill, who are also Cambridge City Council's Housing Investment Partner. Hill are also a partner with property company Grosvenor and Oxford City Council in other OxCam Arc plans. Land management plans for a connected nature network may also tie in with Grosvenor's development plans and Hill's involvement in development plans with the two Councils .

Cambridgeshire County Council's development company *This Land* is already advertising housing in North Cambridge as handy for Cambridge North Station. Will the new North East Cambridge district and development round Cambridge South be marketed by the other Council Developer Partnerships in the same way?

Cambridgeshire County Council are major land owners via their county farms. They own farm land off the A1307 Babraham Road next to the small nature reserve at Nine Wells. Nine Wells is a historically important site containing several chalk springs, which form the source of Hobson's Conduit. Previously a Site of Special Scientific Interest, the view is that the drying up of Nine Wells in the 1970's when it lost SSSI status was caused by drought and by abstraction. There are plans for GCP's busway/AVRT to be built alongside the railway and for this reserve to be enhanced.

County owned land next to Nine Wells and on the A1307 Babraham Road has been listed as a potential development site.<sup>iv</sup>

Further residential development proposed (as well as growth of Cambridge BioMedical Campus) will add similar further pressures of footfall, and Hobson's Conduit Trust who manage Nine Wells are seeking to be in a position to partly help absorb those by increasing the size of Nine Wells. So far it is only the GCP CSET busway scheme that proposes to/is obliged to add area as mitigation for their encroachment. But infill development sites listed in the call for sites round Stapleford and Shelford will be "unlocked" by GCP's AVRT/ busway & cycleway plans in the same way as sites on the West Cambridge approaches.<sup>v</sup>

As with other green belt approaches this is development about which the developers, the councils, college landowners and the Universities are making decisions and benefitting financially.

### **Gog Magog Hills**

A proposal for a Cambridge Great Park is listed in the call for green sites although there is no information about this available.

This is a "land managed" park which will be added to via net gain offsetting.

### **Plans for North Cambridge and Fenland**

Wicken Fen expansion plans supporting North East Cambridge Area and North and East Cambs development are to be delivered in the same way.

### **River Cam Corridor**

River group Cam Valley Forum are working with the Environment Agency on Greater Cambridge's water cycle. They support investment on riverine margins – 'Riverscape Opportunity Areas' .

Water Resources East set up by Anglian Water is working with the Environment Agency and [Biodiversify](#) and [WWF – UK](#) to develop a natural capital plan for Eastern England. They say, 'This plan does not come with a budget, rather it is a tool for attracting funding and support'.<sup>vi</sup>

**Natural Capital East** – led by Andrew Brown, Head of Sustainability, Anglian Water Services Ltd. (members include Nestle, National Grid, UK Power Networks, Barratt Developments, Kier, Sainsburys, Tarmac, CPCA, OxCam Arc LNCP team, Highways England, Natural Cambridgeshire/DNIP, EA, New Anglia LEP, Prof Paul Leinster (Cranfield) , Water Resources East and National Trust, want to create an agreed set of regional metrics.

### **Cambridge Ahead Cpier strategy**

In his January 2020 presentation to the Cambridge Forum for the Construction Industry 4th Nov, 2019 on managing high growth in and around Cambridge and the concerns about the impact of this on nature and green belt, Matthew Bullock the Vice Chair of growth group Cambridge Ahead talked about Cambridge Ahead’s Cpier strategy for growth. He explained that this was a blended approach of densification and transport corridors underpinned by an extensive spatial infrastructure to underpin Cambridge’s special quality of life and to achieve biodiversity and climate change goals. He said that the green belt would be maintained but in new curated urban fringe parks proposed by CPPF and the Wildlife Trust BCN. <sup>vii</sup>

In January 2020 the National Environment planning and policy forum of Natural Cambridgeshire set up by a founder member of Cambridge Ahead referred to actions on the Combined Authority’s Non Statutory Strategic Spatial Framework and the vision that Natural Cambridgeshire had come up with for “doubling nature” as part of the plans for the Oxford Cambridge Expressway and building one million homes in the Oxford Cambridge Arc. They referred to natural capital investment and “shovel ready projects” in collaboration with the Combined Authority and the Greater Cambridge Partnership.

### **Natural Cambridgeshire the ‘pledge’ for nature**

“As part of the Government’s plans for the Oxford, Milton Keynes, Cambridge Growth Arc, accelerated development will deliver one million homes by 2050. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough’s landscapes need enhancing because one of the fastest growing economies in the UK will need to be matched by one of the fastest nature recovery programmes”.

<https://naturalcambridgeshire.org.uk/docs/doubling-nature-landscape-led-approach.pdf>

### **Natural Cambridgeshire Investment Programme workshop 6 Oct, 2020**

[https://naturalcambridgeshire.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/workshop\\_6.10.20.pdf](https://naturalcambridgeshire.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/workshop_6.10.20.pdf)

Attendees included landowners, development sector, business interests and consultancies SQW and LDA Design and board members of Nat Cambs who have been working with the Defra led OxCam Arc LNCP team hosted by the Environment Agency.

### **Next meeting of Natural Cambridgeshire Partnership Forum 15 Dec, 2020**

#### Agenda

- 1 Cambridge Nature Network  
James Littlewood (Cambridge Past, Present & Future)
- 2 Local nature recovery strategies  
Justin Tilley and John Torlesse (Natural England)

3 All-Party Parliamentary Group on the Environment

Anthony Browne MP

4 Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority Climate Change Commission

Baroness Brown of Cambridge

<sup>i</sup> See extracts from Natural Cambs 'Scoping Nature for Investment' <https://www.fecra.org.uk/docs/Extracts%20from%20Natural%20Cambs%20Scoping%20Nature%20for%20Investment.pdf> see p 130

<sup>ii</sup> See <https://www.fecra.org.uk/docs/Extracts%20from%20Natural%20Cambs%20Scoping%20Nature%20for%20Investment.pdf> p 139

<sup>iii</sup> See <https://www.fecra.org.uk/docs/Extracts%20from%20Natural%20Cambs%20Scoping%20Nature%20for%20Investment.pdf> p

<sup>iv</sup> <https://consultations.greatercambridgeplanning.org/form/40138>

v

<sup>vi</sup> <https://wre.org.uk/projects/systematic-conservation-planning/>

<sup>vii</sup> See

<https://www.fecra.org.uk/update-7th-jan-2020/> <https://www.fecra.org.uk/docs/Extracts%20from%20Natural%20Cambs%20Scoping%20Nature%20for%20Investment.pdf> p 115

Cambridge Ahead <https://www.cambridgeahead.co.uk/media/1889/ca-annual-publication-200820-na-email.pdf> 12, 15 The Nature of Growth