

Note of meeting at the Guildhall on 5<sup>th</sup> February 2020 at 6.30 pm

Informal Questions and Answers Session with Stephen Kelly

### **The New Local Plan**

The meeting was chaired by Jean Glasberg who guided the discussion around a series of questions that had been agreed before the meeting and sent to Stephen (SK).

There were then follow-up questions and comments from those present, please see list of those attending below.

Present:

John Preston

Chris Smith

Stephen Tomkins

Sonia Spinks

Anne Miller

Jean Glasberg

Wendy Blythe

John Latham

Glenys Self

Prof Wendy Pullan

Robert Lowson

Ben Bradnack

David Stoughton

Richard Scurr

Dr Robert Evans

Allan Brigham

Andrew Milbourn

Frank Gawthrop

Joe Stallard

William Ackernley

Dani Redhead

Dr Elisabeth Garnsey

Opening commentary:-

There is a lot of concern from residents about the lack of vision, and what appears to be a piecemeal and growth-driven interest-led approach to development which lacks coherence and strategy and doesn't acknowledge the need to address the biodiversity and climate emergencies. These have now been recognised in Council policies, but plans seem to be going ahead which pay only lip service to them.

Item	Issue/Question	SK Response	Follow-up
1.	Growth		
	<p>a) What has been the evidence on which the strategy of intensification of population growth has been selected instead of dispersion of growth, e.g. to surrounding small towns?</p> <p>The CPIER report gave no systematic evidence in favour of doubling the population of Cambridge without commensurate expansion of infrastructure. There was simply an assertion that tech firms will leave the UK if they cannot be located within Cambridge. Evidence?</p> <p>Other than that proximity used to be a benefit to businesses in the early days of the Cambridge Phenomenon. Is there current evidence to support this assertion?</p>	<p>SK sought to set the context. This is an early part of the process. He encouraged those present to look at the video and other material that is available. SK is keen for people to participate, and to take part in the Big Debate at the Corn Exchange. He was keen that the context should be understood.</p> <p>SK saw the evidence as being part of the current process. The consultation is not on a binary question of densification vs. dispersal, but that represents one of the choices to be made.</p> <p>SK emphasised that the process has to be shaped in line with government policies and frameworks, among these the NPPF, which defines what local plans have to do. SK pointed to various paragraphs, including those that require the plan to make sufficient provision for housing, and to</p>	

		<p>support the government's objective of significantly boosting the supply of homes.</p> <p>SK will circulate the relevant sections.</p> <p>There is emphasis on the need to support growth and productivity, and the plan has to respond to identified need, whether in terms of growth or social or environmental weaknesses.</p> <p>The CPIER looked to a doubling of GVA in the combined area, with implicit additions to infrastructure and population.</p> <p>The hearings for the last local plan were suspended as the council were told to re-think housing growth. So if the plan is unable to answer this question adequately it will not proceed.</p> <p>The government has done work under a standard methodology to set housing growth requirements with a minimum figure, but James Palmer has said that more is needed.</p> <p>The CPIER study came via the University and Cambridge Ahead, but is only one reference point in setting a growth parameter. For credibility it has been recognised that an independent study is needed. SQW have been engaged to challenge rather than model, and the approach will involve looking at individual sectors. It will not be a case of accepting a consultant's report. The two</p>	
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		<p>authorities will own the process, and assembling a view from a variety of sources will be the work of the City and South Cambs.</p> <p>Responding to concerns that SQW are conflicted SK said that all such entities are in some way conflicted as they all work in the same space. They were trying to be clear about assumptions, but had not yet determined figures. The growth figures that they arrive at could be seen as minima, but the modelling was under way.</p> <p>Once finalised however, the figure would not be an agreed on 'right' number. It was expected that the mayor would also have a view.</p> <p>Later in the year the outcome of the modelling would be shared.</p>	
			<p>The points being made by SK were understood, but it was difficult to express confidence when Segal Quince &amp; Wickstead, SQW had been so involved, e.g. right from the start as members of Cambridge Ahead Growth and Housing groups, working on the modelling and employment data for CPIER, on the GCP gateway review, and SQW had earlier selected the schemes being pursued by GCP, and had also written the Last Mile report. SQW were also a member of CPPF's planning committee, the charity is a planning consultee, and its former Chair is another long term member of Cambridge Aheads growth modelling</p>

			<p>group.</p> <p>SK responded that if SQW were making any decisions he could accept that it was an issue, however the council were going to set the growth figure. SQW had been challenged on how they would avoid any conflict.</p> <p>SQW have protocols and say that they are not conflicted. SK anticipated that people would challenge the growth assumptions when these emerged. However the CPIER report is a public document endorsed by the Mayor, but will it stand in future?</p>
			<p>Anne Miller said that accepting a growth figure and acting accordingly would produce a dreadful result. Predict and provide would cause acceleration towards catastrophe. A better balance was needed so that economic prosperity generated jobs, housing for local people, action towards net zero carbon, and quality of life</p> <p>SK agreed and said that the plan would have to assess how much housing could be accommodated. In doing so neighbouring authorities would be involved. He cited the previous example of Peterborough taking some of Fenland's growth. They would try to achieve a consensus.</p>
	b) How much growth is it realistic to plan for	SK said that the constraints of lack of adequate water supply	Dr Elizabeth Garnsey said that the devil was in the

	<p>beyond what is already envisaged in the existing local plan? In particular, how far can office development and the growth of tourism be contained at a level where economic, social and environmental well-being isn't prejudiced?</p>	<p>were being recognised, but some solutions to such issues would need to emerge nationally, such as a response to the challenge from Cllr Katie Thornburrow on why we cannot deliver on 80 litres of water per person per day. Similarly, the response to the Climate Act, and what may emerge in a new Environment Act in terms of biodiversity. Wellbeing issues and the consequences for place, beauty etc. would have a national context.</p>	<p>detail. It was necessary to challenge the whole thesis that agglomeration is better than dispersal. The evidence to support theories about the impacts of lack of continuing provision in the city was flimsy. Strength of evidence was critical.</p> <p>SK said that he was broadly in agreement. The growth rate in Cambridge is exceptional, and it is important to understand why. There are lots of small companies growing fast. To a degree the evidence is anecdotal but it is also in the figures. The challenge is that the mood music says that agglomeration is important. There are relatively fewer companies that are big elsewhere. Many growing enterprises are smaller entities in sectors in which Cambridge is a leader. There is nothing available that disproves the clustering theory.</p> <p>Elizabeth Garnsey reiterated that there are alternatives to increasing densification. Densification will be based on carbon. Dispersal has the highest carbon, however, where there is a lack of infrastructure. The Cambridge Ahead model has no regard to climate and similar problems.</p> <p>SK said that there are going to be difficult trade-offs. The Climate Act will shape spatial choices.</p> <p>Andrew Milbourn said that</p>
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			<p>he was glad to hear that constraints were being considered. Adding 70,000 to 120,000 will simply create gridlock and pollution. Rigour should be built into constraints on growth.</p> <p>SK said that he was sorry if it came across as one-sided. There are lenses through which the plan is being formulated. These are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Place</li><li>- Biodiversity</li><li>- Climate Change</li><li>- Wellbeing and quality of life issues</li></ul> <p>These will challenge the people supporting growth but these emphases and growth are not mutually exclusive.</p> <p>Definitions are being sought for zero carbon incorporating questions such as offsetting. Repairing the landscape in relation to agriculture and a facilitated process of physical change will be part of the equation.<sup>44</sup></p> <p>Dani Redhead asked how it was intended to overlay resource mapping, including biodiversity deficits in the context of missing links in the green infrastructure.</p> <p>Access to green space and intensive agriculture needed to be meshed together .</p> <p>Size would need to be considered in the context of the climate change agenda,</p>
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			inclusion, social infrastructure and school provision.
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2.	City Centre		
	<p>a)With the proposals for extensive growth and increased housing, what are the strategies for developing the public realm? How can the centre of Cambridge grow and develop in a way that complements the growth of the city and includes all residents including students? Eg Market Square, Cambourne busway ending at Grange Road, Silver Street</p>	<p>SK It was anticipated that by 2050 there would be a 50% decline in retail floor space. This raised questions about sustainability.</p> <p>He has asked Arups to look to Europe for models of size and density.</p>	<p>John Preston highlighted the stress on what is in essence a mediaeval market town, for example the market place. He wished to see management of the tensions between growth and the mediaeval city centre.</p> <p>Allan Brigham said that the approach should be bottom up not top down. The monopolisation of the debate by the Cambridge Arc and Cambridge Ahead lobbies produced a rosy view of developments like Clay Farm. The question was why does everyone need to come to Cambridge? (Considerable agreement in the room) It was important to look at other British cities to see how densification has been done. It has produced very unpleasant results. What is required is a balanced supply of housing, not just a lot more housing</p> <p>Frank Gawthrop said that he was pessimistic about the future and felt that citizens were unable to exert influence. He sees the influence of Cambridge Ahead as very pervasive towards unbridled economic growth. He was somewhat encouraged by what SK had said, but at the heart of the issues was economic growth.</p> <p>Bob Evans questioned</p>

			<p>whether water resources were available to support growth. Unless that issue was grasped nothing would be achieved.</p> <p>Dani Redhead said that the result of a push to provide housing was that extended families were spread among too many spread-out houses. Limiting supply would bring family groups together and such multigenerational housing should be encouraged rather than an expanded supply of single occupant homes.</p> <p>Prof Wendy Pullan queried whether the right questions are being asked. Is growth the right way? What kind of city do we want? Emphasis should be on the qualitative as much as the quantitative. Wrong size vs. right size studies were needed looking at precedents.</p> <p>Glenys Self drew attention to the meaningful value that attaches to shared space. The market is a social hub that revolves around commerce. It is the centre of something meaningful in a city of small entities. It is not like, for example, Harlow. The value of small communities can be lost. It is elusive.</p> <p>Joe Stallard said that there should be a better focus on elements that assist small companies in growing, not on attracting larger</p>
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			<p>Robert Lowson said that he had found some encouragement in what had been said, but having read the document the whole focus seemed to be on where do we build houses? There was nothing about the need to constrain growth. This should be made clear.</p>
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			<p>companies.</p> <p>Richard Scurr pointed to five separate development projects taking place along Madingley Road. Every single one had been put forward in isolation. There was no evidence that cumulative impacts of individual projects were being recognised and factored.</p> <p>This was linked to the consultation. How can people feel that their voice is being heard, and vested interests are not running the process?</p> <p>SK said that he would address the last point first. There is no easy answer. People are being engaged with. All seek the answers to a range of concerns but the politicians are really the ones who need to make decisions and describe the future shape of the area. It is complex. Life is manifestly complex. There will ultimately be an independent examination process for the plan, so this is the start of a long journey. The members (of the councils) make the decisions, and the public vote for them. Will they be grasping all of the issues ?</p> <p>Aspects such as biodiversity, the water study, transport, creating a carbon budget are all being looked at. The housing needs assessment will be a very complex study.</p>
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			<p>SK noted that villages are dying because they are too small, and right sizing was needed to produce sustainable rather than dysfunctional futures. SK pointed to the Cottenham neighbourhood plan.</p> <p>SK commented that not all growth was coming from start-up companies, and gave examples of Astra Zeneca and Amazon. Relatively speaking South Cambs was exhibiting faster growth than the city.</p> <p>SK noted that villages are lacking facilities to support businesses and mentioned the Cottenham neighbourhood plan.</p> <p>Growth was not being driven primarily by large companies, indeed there was some evidence the=at these were growing elsewhere. Smaller enterprises needed suitable premises. Melbourne was showing signs of success in this but Northstowe less so.</p> <p>Household formation rates are going up. There were differences in travel carbon between higher and lower income bands. Consideration of key worker housing was required. SK noted that the 40% affordable housing quotient does not assist in a low carbon context.</p> <p>The value of land was forcing business outwards. There is a great need for affordable business space,</p>
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			<p>including for start-ups and grow-on space.</p> <p>One argument for densification was in order to achieve more mixed use e.g. in North East Cambridge (Sewage Works redevelopment)</p>
	<p>What are the key conservation and heritage issues, related to public open spaces that must be taken into account?</p>		
	<p>What are the strategies for sub-centres to be developed and enhanced to take pressure off the City Centre?</p>		

3.	<b>Consultation</b>		
	<p>There are numerous on-going consultations and widespread concerns about engagement and stakeholder feedback. There seem to be many private meetings convened by non-statutory interest groups which involve officers, councillors and NGOs – eg growth, housing, water, natural capital and call for green sites.</p>	<p>SK responded that in Cambridge there is a multiplicity of interests, and a long history of a wide variety of interest groups emerging. But decisions are made in the Council chamber. SK felt it was inevitable in a place like Cambridge that people would gather and try to suggest that they have his ear or his colleagues'. The officers have to try to understand what is being said. However, they try always to be open and transparent. Experts when procured will always be found to have worked for developers. SK said that 3% of people trust developers and 8% trust planners. It was thus healthy to ensure that the scrutiny process was public. His team are trying to be as well informed as possible and are working for the members. The objective was to produce the best possible plan and in due course decisions will be made in public.</p>	<p>Wendy Blythe raised concerns about the approach to procurement of landscape advice, and the number of 'private' interest groups having meetings with planners and other interactions with local government where there was no public record of discussions although decisions appeared to be made about prioritising landscapes and calls for green sites.</p> <p>Wendy expressed concern that the objective of increasing biodiversity was being lost in the effort going into natural capital mapping without addressing the evidence base of environmental degradation caused by over abstraction she said this was not the right approach and was not looking in the right place. The river was being ignored and there was no proper evidence base being assembled.</p>
	<p>The minutes of these are not easily available for public scrutiny, and the remit of many of these groups is not transparent.</p>		
	<p>There are concerns that strategic decisions are being made by those who have a vested interest and benefit financially.</p>		

SK concluded by emphasising the great range of expertise available in Cambridge City and South Cambs in the production of the new local plan which he believes is of a scale and quality unmatched outside London. He asked those present to engage with the development of the plan, and to respond to the questions on-line.

Jean thanked Stephen and asked those present to ensure that RAs and community groups participate and have their say.

JAL

19.2.20



Informal Q & A with Stephen Kelly , Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> February

Attendees

John Preston

Chris Smith

Stephen Tomkins

Sonia Spinks

Anne Miller

Jean Glasberg

Wendy Blythe

John Latham

Glenys Self

Prof Wendy Pullan

Robert Lowson

Ben Bradnack

David Stoughton

Richard Scurr

Dr Robert Evans

Allan Brigham

Andrew Milbourn

Frank Gawthrop

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