

As Chair of Friends of Paradise Nature Reserve, I am writing in support of the South Newnham Neighbourhood Plan. We are a group of 170 members who support this unique Local Nature Reserve and help Cambridge City Council who manage the Reserve Nature assisting with their work parties.

With the help of a local ecologist, a team of residents including members of Paradise Nature Reserve, gathered evidence on our neighbourhood green infrastructure to provide the evidence for the Neighbourhood Plan. The range of natural habitats includes flood meadows and fen, wood and hedgerows, river and riverbank, streams, a lake, a local nature reserve, playing fields, allotments and private gardens, The “green corridor” described in the Evidence Base is the area along the River Cam from the City Centre through Coe Fen, and Sheep’s Green, Lammas Land, Paradise Nature Reserve, Skaters’ Meadow and into Grantchester Meadows. This is a very detailed and well researched document and if the Neighbourhood Plan is adopted it will be an invaluable aid to planning officers when considering planning applications that affect the environment in South Newnham.

The Neighbourhood Plan Policies, SNNP Policy 1: Protecting and Enhancing Biodiversity and SNNP 2: Delivering Biodiversity Net Gain are intended to protect and enhance biodiversity in the green river corridor and the other natural habits listed. Policy SNN3: Reduce and Maintain Low Levels of Light Pollution is intended to ensure the impact of light pollution on wildlife is fully considered when development proposals come forth.

The Cambridge Local Plan 2018 has policies aimed at protecting the biodiversity of the natural environment of the City of Cambridge and the Policies proposed by the South Newnham Neighbourhood Plan mentioned above will add extra detail and granularity to the Local Plan.

Paradise Nature Reserve is rich in wildlife and a habitat of high suitability for bats. Eight species of bats have been recorded, include the rare Barbastelle bat. Cambridge Local Plan Policies 69 and 70 are intended to protect the natural environment but did not prevent a large development of four blocks of student housing being granted planning permission in a garden alongside Paradise Nature Reserve.

Friends of Paradise and many other organisations objected to this development as it would cause harm being so close to the Nature Reserve. Cambridge City Council refused the planning application, and it was therefore a great disappointment when the Government Inspector upheld the Appeal and allowed the development to go forward.

We believe the Policies proposed in the Neighbourhood Plan, will give added protection to our green infrastructure and I give my full support to these policies and the Neighbourhood Plan.

Neighbourhood Plan Policy 4: Creating Local Green Spaces identifies five local green spaces including Skaters' Meadow Footpath, which is described in the Evidence Base as a Cambridgeshire County Council Public Right of Way, 39/32. It is legally a footpath but has become a rutted area due to parking by visitors, daily commuters, and recently by caravans and residential vehicles/motor homes.

This footpath is in the green river corridor and hundreds and hundreds of people walk along it every day to access Grantchester Meadows. It is also used by rambling groups who follow this route from the city. During lockdown, when so many green spaces were barred to the public, the volume of visitors including walkers and cyclists coming to Grantchester Meadows reached a peak. The volume of cars also increased, and this has led to the present state of the footpath.

I have lived in Newnham for 50 years and have watched the decline of the footpath from a green verged leafy entrance to Grantchester Meadows to its present pot holed state, with cars parked on the verges and trees under threat with the ground underneath and beside them compacted from the weight of parked cars.

Pedestrians are the main users of the footpath, but car parking has made it an unsafe place for walkers. I used to walk there regularly, including with my grandchildren, but it has become dangerous for pedestrians with cars manoeuvring in this narrow space, and I no longer walk there. The designation of Skaters' Meadow Footpath would meet the criteria of a special place of recreational value, for the many people who walk along it on a daily basis. I therefore support the proposal to designate this as a Local Green Space so that any future plans for the footpath will include the protection of the verges and trees and ensure that it is a safe place for walkers.

Pam Gatrell
Chair, Friends of Paradise Nature Reserve