

Girton Parish Council Response to the Greater Cambridge Draft Local Plan

1. Homes

Local Plan priority: Deliver significant new homes across Greater Cambridge, including edge-of-Cambridge sites and new settlements; ensure affordability.

Girton Draft NP proposed policies: GP18–GP20 – Limit major housing beyond Eddington; maintain Minor Rural Centre status; prioritise small homes (1–3 bedrooms); cap height at 3 storeys; require climate-friendly design.

Survey sentiment: Mixed views; majority oppose further major development beyond Eddington.

Challenge points:

- The scale of proposed growth around Girton continues to place cumulative pressure on infrastructure.
- Girton is enclosed by Green Belt, and as such would realistically struggle to **meet the Local Plan’s assigned figure unless Green Belt boundaries are altered**, which neighbourhood plans cannot do.
- The Local Plan uses the term “*housing requirement*”, but in line with NPPF and the Draft Local Plan’s own para 2.22, Girton Parish Council **now uses the accurate term “indicative housing figure”**, reflecting that this is *not* binding on NPs.

GPC requests:

- Replace the term “*housing requirement*” with “*indicative housing figure*” throughout the Local Plan documentation, to avoid misleading implications of deliverability within a fully constrained Green Belt settlement. The indicative housing figure for Girton has also been overstated due to a data limitation in the 2021 Census. At that time, part of the population counted under “Girton” was in fact living in Eddington. As Eddington is a strategic extension of Cambridge and not part of the Girton built-up area, this census inclusion inflates the proportional calculation used to generate the indicative figure of 90 homes. A corrected figure would be materially lower, likely closer to 80. This further reinforces the need for the Local Plan to treat Girton’s figure as indicative only, and to recognise that the village’s capacity is fundamentally constrained by strategic Green Belt policy.
- Formally recognise **Girton as a Minor Rural Centre** with a defined limit to growth.
- Restrict major housing development beyond Eddington unless exceptional public benefit is demonstrated.
- Support landowner diversification in ways compatible with settlement character and employment needs.

Budget context:

Major community projects (e.g. St John’s Field, ARU land, Active Travel routes) depend on accurate population assumptions and realistic assessment of housing growth.

Evidence: National youth social value research (e.g. Centre for Young Lives) shows £1 invested in youth provision returns £2.40 in social and economic benefit.

2. Infrastructure

Local Plan priority: Reduce reliance on private cars; prioritise sustainable and active travel; integrate new developments with strategic corridors.

Girton Draft NP proposed policies (GP03–GP05):

- Safeguard strategic Active Travel routes.
- Improve connectivity.

- Achieve NIAB bridge link. This is the bridge over the A14 formerly used by NIAB before Darwin Green 2/3 came about
- Address the Huntingdon Road junction.
- Maintain Rights of Way
- Promote safe, non-car mobility.

Survey sentiment: Very high interest (293 mentions).

Challenge

points:

The Local Plan must commit to:

- NIAB bridge
- Improvements to the Huntingdon Road junction
- The tunnel under Huntingdon Road linking Girton and Eddington
- Integration of Active Travel with the Madingley Road corridor
- Eliminating unsafe severance points between Girton, Histon, and Eddington

New update included:

- Girton Parish Council supports bringing forward **Darwin Green 2/3 Active Travel connections (Wellbrook Way, Thornton Road, Thornton Close) to Phase 1**, as formally requested by members of the NP team. This accelerates community benefit and aligns with Draft Local Plan objectives.

GPC requests:

- Formal inclusion of the Girton–Eddington tunnel
- Full integration of the Eddington Huntingdon Road West Junction will **all** nearby active travel routes
- Formal safeguarding of Active Travel corridors (Girton–Histon, Girton–NIAB, Girton–Darwin Green)
- Strategic integration with Madingley Road P&R, emphasising child safety and congestion reduction.

3. Jobs

Local Plan priority: Encourage a flourishing innovation economy; support mixed-use developments and job density near transport hubs.

Girton Draft NP proposed policies (GP06–GP08):

- Support local retail and small businesses.
- Resist further erosion of village employment land.
- Enable flexible retail locations.
- Encourage community-scale businesses, not just strategic-scale innovation centres.

Challenges identified:

- The Local Plan continues to focus on large-scale research and innovation sites, which risks overshadowing village-scale business needs.
- Girton’s survey responses strongly support local retail, small enterprises, and functional high street provisions.

GPC requests:

- Allocate space for small businesses, coworking, and shared-use community hubs within Girton’s Development Framework.
- Recognise landowner diversification as essential for sustainable employment.
- Promote economic diversification suitable for village environments.

4. Biodiversity & Green Spaces

Local Plan priority: Leave nature better than it was; expand multifunctional green space; strengthen habitats.

Girton Draft NP proposed policies (GP09–GP12):

- Protect the Girton Gap
- Maintain Green Belt integrity.
- Designate Local Green Spaces (LGS)
- Implement Local Nature Recovery Plan (2023–2033)

Survey sentiment: Strong support for biodiversity and LGS protection.

Challenge points:

- The Draft Local Plan **does not provide strong enough protection to the Girton Gap**, despite the Cambridge Green Belt Assessment (2021) stating that releasing AR1 would “*remove the gap and merge Girton with Cambridge*”.
- The Draft Plan’s POS and LGS protections in Policy **BG/PO are weaker than NPPF para 108**, which requires “*only in exceptional circumstances*” may LGS be developed.
- The NP team’s analysis shows several overlapping or insufficiently defined green-space categories.

GPC requests:

- Policy S/GB and BG/PO must explicitly protect the Girton Gap.
- LGS development should meet **the national “exceptional circumstances” test**.
- Allocate land for shared recreation near the Girton–Histon permissive path.
- Support biodiversity corridors linking village spaces, the Rec, Town End Close LNR (awaiting Natural England confirmation), and the Active Travel network.
- In addition to chalk streams, Girton requires explicit protection for its non-chalk blue corridors. Washpit Brook and Beck Brook have both contributed to flooding in Girton and provide locally important ecological and connectivity functions. Policy BG/GI should therefore be broadened to ensure the safeguarding and enhancement of these brooks, with a requirement that any development affecting their catchments demonstrates no net increase in downstream flood risk and delivers meaningful biodiversity gain.
- The Parish Council also notes the Neighbourhood Plan Team’s identification of an additional site, referred to as Area 11 (the Hibbert-Ware Garden and Smithy Green), which meets the Local Plan definition of Open Space. Subject to mapping verification, GPC supports this site being assessed for both Protected Open Space and Local Green Space designation to ensure consistency with other valued spaces in the village.

5. Wellbeing & Social Inclusion

Local Plan priority: Improve wellbeing, social inclusion, access to community facilities, and opportunities for active and healthy lifestyles.

Girton Draft NP proposed policies (GP15–GP16): Protect existing community facilities; upgrade the Recreation Ground; provide enhanced youth facilities; explore Country Park options; support an indoor sports centre.

Survey sentiment: High community interest in pavilion upgrades and youth sports.

Challenge points:

- Current Local Plan emphasis remains too heavily directed toward “strategic hubs,” with insufficient recognition of village-scale infrastructure needs.

- Girton Parish Council emphasises that **parish councils spend up to 85% of their annual budgets on youth and sports provision**, demonstrating both demand and community commitment.
- The Local Plan does not adequately secure land for village-scale wellbeing facilities.

GPC requests:

- Mandate land for youth, sports, and community wellbeing facilities within or adjacent to the built-up area of Girton.
- Provide a policy expectation that Local Plan allocations must include **shared-use agreements with schools**, supporting localised recreation and youth activity.
- Prioritise investment into **village recreation spaces**, not just district-scale centres.
- Recognise the role of accessible local facilities in delivering health, loneliness reduction, and community cohesion.

6. Great Places

Local Plan priority: Sustain the distinctive character of Cambridge and its villages; ensure high-quality design.

Girton Draft NP proposed policy (GP17): Preserve heritage assets, maintain rural character, avoid over-intensification, and require sympathetic design.

Survey sentiment: Residents emphasise the importance of retaining village identity and avoiding urbanisation.

Challenge points:

- The Local Plan’s design code policy allows neighbourhood plans to set “local design principles,” but the NP team has agreed that **producing a full design guide is neither feasible nor evidence-based at this stage**.
- The Local Plan risks importing urban typologies (e.g., Eddington-scale density) that are incongruous with Girton’s built form.

GPC requests:

- Require design codes that explicitly respect rural character in Girton.
- Confirm that Eddington-style building typologies are inappropriate within the existing village context.
- Require consultation with Girton NP policies prior to approving any design-related proposals in the parish.

7. Climate Change

Local Plan priority: Transition to net zero by 2050; improve energy and water efficiency; support climate-resilient development.

Girton Draft NP proposed policy (GP18): Exceed building regulations; adopt Passivhaus or equivalent standards; ensure water efficiency; strengthen flood resilience; promote net zero community initiatives.

Survey sentiment: Strong support for low-carbon buildings and energy-efficient community infrastructure (including the Pavilion).

Challenge points:

- The Local Plan lacks enforceable, binding energy and water performance thresholds.
- Policies rely heavily on “encouragement” rather than requirements.
- Flood resilience remains a particular concern in northern Girton and Washpit Brook areas.

GPC requests:

- Adopt Passivhaus or equivalent mandatory energy standards for new development.
- Enforce water efficiency and water-neutrality standards in high-pressure catchments.

- Integrate flood-risk mitigation and natural-drainage solutions into all site allocations that impact runoff into Girton.
- Set measurable, enforceable climate performance indicators.

8. Specific Measurable Requests & Draft Policy Wording

Homes:

“Development beyond Eddington will not be supported unless exceptional public benefit is demonstrated.”

Infrastructure:

“Strategic infrastructure must include safe active travel links between Girton, Eddington, and Madingley Road, including a tunnel under Huntingdon Road.”

Jobs:

“The Local Plan will safeguard land for community-scale enterprise within the Girton Development Framework.”

Biodiversity & Green Belt:

“The Girton Gap will remain Green Belt. Recreation land will be prioritised for community use and biodiversity enhancement.”

Wellbeing:

“Local Plan policies must allocate land for youth provision and encourage school–parish collaboration on shared facilities.”

Climate Change:

“All new developments must meet or exceed Passivhaus and water-efficiency standards.”

9. Economic Sustainability & Collaboration with Landowners

Girton Parish Council is committed to economic sustainability and recognises the importance of supporting both existing and emerging community needs. Parish councils spend **up to 85% of their budgets on youth and sports provision**—a compelling justification for safeguarding local land for recreation and wellbeing.

Key GPC positions:

- Strategic collaboration with **Anglia Ruskin University** for potential youth/sports land at Whitehouse Lane.
- Partnership opportunities with **St John’s College** for land procurement across north Girton.
- Landowner diversification should be explicitly supported in the Local Plan as a way of improving sustainability and local employment resilience.

Economic case:

- £1 invested in youth delivers £2.40 in social and economic benefit (Centre for Young Lives).
- Providing land for youth facilities yields long-term economic resilience within the community.

10. Alignment with Bridgwater & Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)

Bridgwater demonstrates how:

- parish-level collaboration
- cross-boundary infrastructure planning
- shared facilities
- joint funding bids

deliver significant benefit under LGR processes.

GPC applications to Girton:

- Girton and Histon could jointly develop shared recreation land along the Girton–Histon Active Travel corridor.
- Cross-parish procurement, federated committees, and shared maintenance contracts all strengthen the case for Local Plan support.
- GPC emphasises that **the Local Plan must not marginalise parish roles** during devolution transitions.

11. Supporting Hyperlinks & Citations

- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, December 2024)
- South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2018
- Centre for Young Lives
- UK Youth
- Camcycle
- Girton NP Evidence Base
- Local Nature Recovery Plan (2023–2033)

12. Defined Development Extents & Neighbourhood Plan Scope

Girton’s existing built form is tightly constrained by Green Belt. While the Draft Local Plan (S/DE) describes how development is managed within and outside “Defined Development Extents,” it leaves ambiguity where those extents overlap Green Belt. **Neighbourhood Plans cannot amend Green Belt boundaries:** any change is a strategic matter and must be handled through strategic policies in the Local Plan and associated Green Belt reviews. Girton’s NP will therefore not propose Green Belt amendments; instead, it will focus on shaping development quality, protecting critical green spaces, and enabling infrastructure that supports safe, inclusive village life.

GPC request:

- The Local Plan should **state explicitly** whether NPs can alter development extents *where those extents coincide with Green Belt*. If they cannot (which is GPC’s view), this must be unambiguous in policy and supporting text so that Parish-level expectations are realistic and deliverable within statutory constraints.

13. Local Green Spaces (LGS), Protected Open Spaces (POS) & Policy BG/PO

GPC welcomes the mapping of open space designations but remains concerned that **Policy BG/PO treats LGS less protectively than national policy (NPPF para 108)** by not explicitly applying the “**exceptional circumstances**” test to development within LGS. Girton’s NP will proceed with LGS designations in order to secure the higher level of protection intended by national policy, even where the Local Plan also shows POS, because **POS policy (with replacement provision tests) is different and weaker than LGS** in terms of resisting loss.

GPC requests:

- Amend BG/PO so that **development in LGS is only permitted in exceptional circumstances**, aligning the Local Plan directly with national policy.
- Confirm that where a site is designated as both POS and LGS, the **more protective LGS policy** applies.
- Encourage Local Plan text to recognise the evidence base supporting LGS in Girton NP, including landscape, biodiversity, heritage setting, and recreational value.

14. Girton Gap & Green Belt (Policy S/GB and S/NWC)

Girton Parish Council reiterates that the **Girton Gap**—the strategic separation between Girton and Cambridge—is fundamental to settlement identity. The Cambridge Green Belt Assessment (2021)

makes clear that releasing parcel AR1 would remove this gap and **merge** Girton with Cambridge. GPC therefore seeks that **AR1's harm rating is recognised as "Very High"** and that relevant Local Plan policies **explicitly protect the Girton Gap**. For Policy S/NWC (Eddington), GPC supports revised wording to ensure the policy refers to **the already existing built-up area of Girton** and to the **separate historical identity** of the village area of Girton Parish.

GPC requests:

- Update S/NWC criterion to:
"An open gap with the already existing built-up area of Girton is maintained, ensuring the separate historical identity of the village area of Girton Parish is protected."
- In S/GB, incorporate explicit reference to the **Girton Gap** as a matter of Green Belt purpose (preventing merger of settlements).
- Confirm in the supporting text that **AR1** is not suitable for release due to its role in maintaining settlement separation.

15. Grey Belt Transparency

The Draft Local Plan maps do not show any **Grey Belt** parcels, nor do they explain the methodology for identifying them. Given national policy sequencing (previously developed land → grey belt → other Green Belt locations) when Green Belt release is necessary, the absence of clear assessment risks ad-hoc decision-making at application stage. GPC therefore seeks transparent publication of any Grey Belt analysis or, alternatively, a clear statement that **no Green Belt release is required** within the plan period and that grey belt is **not** being proposed.

GPC requests:

- Publish the Grey Belt methodology and outputs or confirm that **no grey belt** is identified because Green Belt releases are **not** required to meet plan needs.
- If grey belt is considered in future iterations, require **public and parish-level consultation** with detailed parcel-by-parcel reasoning.

16. Strategic Infrastructure: Active Travel Phasing & Safeguards

GPC welcomes the Draft Local Plan's emphasis on sustainable mobility and requests **formal safeguarding and phasing commitments** for the following Girton-critical links:

- **Darwin Green 2/3 Phase 1** delivery of Active Travel connections at **Wellbrook Way, Thornton Road, and Thornton Close** (community benefits from day one).
- **Tunnel under Huntingdon Road** linking Girton to Eddington with fully separated, safe routes.
- **NIAB bridge** and junction improvements at **Huntingdon Road** to remove severance and reduce conflict points.
- Strategic integration with **Madingley Road Park & Ride**, prioritising child and vulnerable user safety.

GPC requests:

- Add these links to the **Local Plan infrastructure schedules** and ensure funding/consenting pathways are clearly identified.
- Require early-phase delivery where it enables safe access to schools, recreation grounds, and emerging employment/education sites.

17. Governance, Delivery & the Golden Thread

Girton has begun to establish a **golden thread** from community priorities and evidence → NP policy choices → GPC strategic responses → Local Plan representations → and readiness for **Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and Devolution**. This is visible in:

- Transparent precept setting and project justification.
- Coordinated NP/GPC submissions while keeping statutory roles separate.
- Early-phase Active Travel requests.
- Evidence-led LGS proposals.
- Partnerships with ARU and St John's College regarding land use.
- A clear delivery cadence that moves proposals from concept to implementation.

GPC requests:

- The Local Plan should **recognise parish-level roles** in delivery and explicitly enable **cross-parish partnerships** (e.g., Girton–Histon) for shared recreation, Active Travel, and biodiversity corridors.
- The Local Plan and any future CIL arrangements should **not marginalise parishes**; rather, they should allocate identifiable, locally controllable funding streams in line with evidence-based community priorities.

18. Submission Logistics & Next Steps

GPC and the Girton NP team will **submit together but separately**:

- **GPC submission** covers statutory Local Plan representations, infrastructure asks, economic and delivery arguments, and cross-parish cooperation proposals.
- **NP submission** will continue to progress evidence and policy for LGS, biodiversity corridors, and design principles appropriate to Girton, whilst **not** altering Green Belt boundaries.

GPC remains available to meet officers to discuss:

- Explicit **Girton Gap** protection and AR1.
- **BG/PO** alignment with national policy.
- **Defined Development Extents vs Green Belt** clarifications.
- **Active Travel** phasing and safeguards.
- **Grey Belt** methodology.
- **Small business / community enterprise space** within Girton.

19. Closing Statement

Girton Parish Council is committed to **constructive, evidence-based planning** that protects the village's distinctive identity and delivers practical improvements for residents. The changes requested in this response are **measured, policy-led, and deliverable**. They ensure that the Local Plan reflects the realities of a Green Belt-enclosed settlement, **while enabling the village to thrive** through strong Active Travel networks, youth and wellbeing facilities, and a resilient local economy. We look forward to continued collaboration as the Local Plan moves toward submission. Girton Parish Council also notes that the Neighbourhood Plan (NP) Team and the Parish Council prepared their responses to the Draft Local Plan independently, reflecting their distinct statutory roles and areas of focus. Following this, both groups undertook a joint review to compare, contrast, and better understand the alignment and implications of their respective submissions. This collaborative exchange strengthened the coherence between the two documents and enabled minor refinements to reinforce consistency of message. The Parish Council's final response was approved at the Full Council meeting of **21 January 2026 (Agenda Item 25FC/186.7)** and delegated to the Clerk for submission. The scheduled NP meeting was moved to ensure GPC representatives could attend and participate in the Local Plan Forum held in Girton on **19 January 2026**, enabling the Council to incorporate insights gained directly from that engagement into its final position.

