

Boxworth Parish Meeting
Input to the Greater Cambridge Draft Local Plan

Introduction

Boxworth Parish Meeting supports the need for Greater Cambridge to continue to develop and there is a requirement for additional housing and employment in the area. It is vital that these developments are managed in such a way that they not only provide for the future needs of a growing population but do so in a way that does not adversely affect existing communities. We welcome the opportunity to comment on the Draft Local Plan and hope that our constructive engagement can add value.

Our comments fall under three main headings:

- Traffic, including HGV Parking
- Environmental Effects, especially flood risk
- Size, scale and purpose of the developments, including visual impacts.

Before addressing these issues we want to make an overall observation. We have been unable to find where the Draft Local Plan presents the cumulative effect of all of the proposed developments, including those which are not supported in the draft allocation. Individual sites are presented in some detail but there is no attempt to consider the cumulative effect on, for example, the road network along the A14 corridor. Similarly, flood risks associated with each individual site are addressed to a degree but there is no discussion of how flood risk across the wider area will be managed if all these proposals are taken forward.

Site assessments contain general statements that developers would be required to produce traffic management plans or flood risk management plans but there is no point at which these plans are consolidated and their overall effects assessed. We believe this to be a significant shortfall in the Draft Local Plan and needs to be addressed before the next round of consultation.

Policy I/ST requires developers to:

“address transport infrastructure in the wider area including across the district boundary, services or behavioural change measures to encourage the use of sustainable modes of transport. Such measures should be provided to meet the first or early occupation of a site in order to influence travel behaviour from the outset.”

And

“Outline planning applications are required to submit a framework for the preparation of a Travel Plan. All other developments (other than householder applications) will be required to submit a vision-led Transport Statement.”

It is our contention that leaving such critical matters to the application stage and requiring developers to address these issues site by site misses an opportunity to be clear at the Daft Plan stage what is and what is not acceptable across the region.

Traffic

General Comments

It is the nature of logistics and light industrial developments that they will generate additional traffic flows, notwithstanding the ambition to promote active travel. None of the developers of the A14 logistics sites have provided their estimates for traffic flows generated by their developments, despite numerous requests at the public consultations and in parish engagements. This is disappointing and makes meaningful assessment of proposed access to the sites and any mitigations difficult, if not impossible. Developers should be required to make public their high and low cases for traffic generated by their developments prior to the next round of consultation.

The road network along the A14 corridor has undergone significant change in the last 5 years and this is welcomed. There are however existing issues which need to be addressed in addition to planning for the additional traffic generated by the logistics developments.

The bridges over the A14 have structural issues which result in deterioration of the road surface and while efforts have been made to patch the roadways more significant work is required to provide permanent solutions, particularly at junctions 24 and 25 which already see high levels of traffic.

Junctions immediately adjacent to the A14 currently see traffic build up at peak periods. The Swavesey south roundabout at J24 of the A14 is poorly designed with traffic leaving the A14 in the evening peak effectively blocking access to the roundabout from the Cambridge Services slip road. In addition, while the approach to the roundabout from the Cambridge Services slip road is dual lane, the roundabout itself only has a single lane forcing traffic to merge while trying to navigate the roundabout.

Traffic wishing to travel north/south from Northstowe and the surrounding villages of Longstanton, Willingham, Over and Swavesey, to the existing Cambourne development and the soon to be added East West rail station and Cambourne North have to use small country lanes through Boxworth, Knapwell and Elsworth. The Draft Local Plan is silent on how addition of traffic generated by the logistics and housing developments will be managed and what mitigation measures will be put in place. There are general comments made regarding traffic calming and other restrictions, but such measures have already been installed and have not made a significant impact on traffic flows.

It is difficult to see how the existing road network through the villages of Boxworth, Elsworth and Knapwell will accommodate increased traffic. As a minimum consideration needs to be given at an early stage to new roads providing effective bypasses for Boxworth and Knapwell to remove traffic rat running between the extended Cambourne

and the new station and villages to the north and north east. Elsworth needs a by pass that will take traffic from the north and north west which already runs through the village to the new developments.

The timing of these infrastructure improvements is vital, not just in relation to new roads. It is too often the case that infrastructure improvements lag the construction of new developments by many years. This is unacceptable. New infrastructure needs to be in place before any significant development takes place.

The Draft Local Plan is silent on specific public transport proposals which will support the proposed developments and the surrounding communities. There are general statements regarding the need for additional provision and some discussion of possible routes but nothing that would allow an informed discussion of adequacy of the proposals. This needs to be addressed before the next consultation.

The Combined Authority has responsibility for producing a Regional Transport Strategy but this is not due to be completed until the end of 2026, after the Draft Local Plan has been signed off.

It is unreasonable to ask local communities to respond to the Plan consultation in the absence of information on how these traffic issues will be addressed and without sight of the Regional Transport Strategy.

Active Travel

It should be a plan principle that any new logistics/commercial development should be located as close as possible to residential centres, without impinging on them, to facilitate active travel. Of the two sites included in the draft allocation it seems that Slate Hall Farm/C25 can meet this requirement, although there are significant issues with other forms of traffic generated by this site. It is less clear that Jaynic's site is within reasonable active travel distance for existing or proposed housing sufficient for its needs.

Of the two sites not included in the Draft Plan, Newlands would seem to be remote from centres of housing sufficient to result in a significant number of employees choosing active travel as a regular means of commuting. Noon Folly, or Tritax may provide more scope for active travel. It is difficult to see how these developments would comply with Policy I/ST.

Site Specific Comments

The two proposed logistics developments show adjacent to J24 show in their initial plans, access to their sites off local roads which were not designed for the traffic flows they will generate. It should be a design principle, included in each relevant Policy, that all proposed logistic developments over a certain size should demonstrate how their site will be accessed from the National Highways network, including modification of all junctions between their site entrance and National Highways. These proposals should be

presented at the initial consultation phase so affected communities can make meaningful comments and not left to conditions applied on granting permission.

See Policy I/ST Para 3. 'Developments will only be permitted where they do not have an unacceptable transport and highways safety impact. Developers will be required to demonstrate they will make adequate provision to mitigate the likely impacts (including cumulative impacts) of their proposal including environmental impacts (such as noise and pollution) and impact on amenity and health.'

The Jaynic site on the land to the south of Cambridge services shows all traffic entering and leaving the site from Boxworth Road, a narrow, single carriageway road which is currently subject to a 7.5 ton weight restriction. Jaynic should be required to show how their site can be accessed from a combination of the A14 slip road (for HGVs) and the roundabout adjacent to the Cambridge Services.

Where logistics developments are included in the local plan the relevant Policy should be amended to make specific reference to acceptable access routes to the national road network.

The development to the North West of Cambridge Services promoted by Newlands Developments (not included in the draft allocation) initially showed access from a new roundabout on Boxworth Road. It is understood that it is now proposed to access the site from a new exit/entrance off the Swavesey south roundabout at J24 of the A14. As already discussed, this roundabout suffers from congestion from existing traffic. Our estimates are that in the region of 4,500 additional vehicle journeys per day will be generated by this site and it is not clear that the junction can accommodate this volume.

In discussions with the developers they maintain that traffic management plans will be required for their sites at the planning application stage and that it is not appropriate to address this 'detail' at the Draft Plan stage. We maintain that, far from being 'detail', without site access requirements being set out in the Draft Plan Policies we are unable to assess the cumulative impact on our local communities.

HGV Parking

HGV parking is already a significant problem for the communities along the A14 corridor, particularly Bar Hill and Boxworth (adjacent to the services).

All of these logistic sites will generate additional HGV journeys and result in the need for their drivers to take breaks in accordance with statutory requirements. We recognise and welcome the efforts made by Jaynic to address the problem of inappropriate HGV parking by including 150 HGV parking spaces in their proposal. All site specific policies should require developers to be explicit about how they will manage HGV parking within their sites.

Environmental Issues

Flood Risk

Swavesey's drainage system is at capacity now and it is not yet receiving all the water from already consented developments at Cambourne, Northstowe, Bourn and other smaller development sites

Water from large scale developments flowing into the Swavesey system needs to be conditioned with attenuation basins able to hold water for up to 4 weeks when Webb's Hole Sluice, at the Great Ouse, closes at high water levels. Cumulative data showing the effect on the Swavesey Water system needs to be provided.

Developments in this area should be required to demonstrate attenuation to cope with the winter high water levels and indicate how they will cooperate such that when they all release water when the Webb's Hole Sluice gate re-opens following a closure, the system will not be overwhelmed.

The foul water from all the proposed sites will flow into Uttons Drove Treatment Works with treated water then flowing into the Swavesey system to the river. This is on top of the surface water already mentioned. The developers need to demonstrate how Uttons Drove will handle the additional demands and that the drainage system will cope.

Size, Scale and Purpose of the Developments

Greater Cambridge has developed into a world-renowned centre for the technology, life sciences and biomedical industries. Future developments should support these activities while maintaining the essential nature of a university city in a still, largely, rural setting.

It would be inappropriate for the scarce resources of land and water together with fragile flood management to be used to support national and regional logistics hubs where the primary focus is not on supporting the local economy. See Policy J/NE Para 7. 'Large scale warehousing and distribution centres providing for national or regional needs will not be permitted in Greater Cambridge'.

We also need to recognise that Cambridge is located in an environment where the land is flat and views are extensive. Ely cathedral, some 15 miles away, can easily be seen from a number of the communities along the A14 corridor. Such views need to be preserved. In this environment 'big boxes', with eaves heights of 24m, equivalent to a seven story building would be inappropriate.

Appendix H of the Draft Local Plan, Skyline and Tall Buildings Guidance, suggests "The Suburban/Low Rural Height Zone covers most settlements in South Cambridgeshire and suburban parts of Cambridge. It has a broad context height of up to 9m (up to 3 residential storeys) with a tall building threshold of 13m (4+ RST)."

The Newlands development is not included in the Draft Local Plan however we wish to make it clear that the proposed development does not meet the policy requirements relating to providing support for Greater Cambridge nor the implied restrictions on the size and scale of rural developments.

Any developments should be required to clearly demonstrate, at consultation phase, maximum size, including overall heights, of the buildings on developments and how through comprehensive landscaping their developments will not be visible beyond the site boundaries within, say, 10 years. Cambridge Services is a good example of how this can be achieved in a relatively short space of time. The development is practically invisible from the southern approach as a result of landscaping, including successful planting, shielding the view. Developers should be required to produce three dimensional representations of their developments in their local context and with existing landmarks and buildings included to demonstrate how the buildings will be accommodated within the landscape.

The supported logistic/commercial developments on the A14 corridor should directly address local needs and as such consist of small to medium size buildings. Eaves heights should be restricted and clearly set out as a precondition in the Draft Local Plan. In this context 10/12 m would seem appropriate.

We believe these conditions should be included in the site specific Policies.

Final mile delivery should support local needs only and not include provision of services outside of the Greater Cambridge area. Any final mile proposals should clearly demonstrate how this will be achieved without using local roads through surrounding villages as transit access to existing and future developments. For example, final mile delivery from the new logistics developments to the new and existing Cambourne, Cambourne North and Bourn Airfield conurbations should not be routed through the villages of Boxworth, Elsworth and Knapwell. Developers should be required to demonstrate how this will be achieved.