

Can Cambridge grow without losing what makes it special?



The Duke of Edinburgh visits Wandlebury
Picture: Keith Heppell

Our councils have set out a draft plan to build the equivalent of a new Cambridge in 20 years.

What could that mean for our green spaces and heritage of international significance?

A population increase of 100,000+ will result in more people and more transport in the historic city centre. Will streets be clogged with double-decker buses? And will that enhance or detract from our world class heritage?

Changes will inevitably be required to the fabric of the city centre to accommodate so many more people. That's where there's a risk to our heritage, because our councils are proposing the growth without any idea of what changes might follow – indeed they haven't even recognised that this is likely to happen, let alone how they might address it. For a city whose historic character is so central to its identity, this is an unacceptable risk, one that must be recognised and addressed before plans for such large-scale growth are taken any further.

The same problem exists in our countryside. Historic places like Wimpole and Wandlebury are already under visitor pressure, which is having a negative impact on their significance. The same is true of some nature reserves. What will happen when visitor numbers double? We believe the solution to this problem is to make the existing parks bigger, as well as creating large new attractive green spaces, to take some of the pressure off.

We know this can be done, in recent years both Wimpole and Wandlebury have increased the amount of land available for public benefit, but the funds and the land are needed to do it.

Cambridge has a good recent track record of using large new developments to create large new green spaces, such as at Trumpington. This strategy is continued in the latest draft Local Plan, with significant new green spaces attached to large new developments at Cambourne North, Cambridge Airport, Grange Farm (A11) and Cambridge Biomedical Campus.

This is very welcome and something that we support, but people living in these new

developments will visit other green spaces, especially those that are more attractive and established. That will be fine if people who are currently going to the established places, then went to the new ones, but will green spaces attached to new developments be sufficiently attractive to encourage lots of people from elsewhere to go there instead of places like Wimpole and Wandlebury?

As well as the large developments, we also have to think about the smaller ones. Around 30,000 people will be living in these. There's unlikely to be any large-scale new green spaces resulting from the smaller developments and therefore there will be more people putting pressure on existing places.

Given that our area lacks large tracts of woodland, downland, coast or upland, we believe that high levels of growth should be supported by making existing green spaces larger and creating new ones that are separate from development.

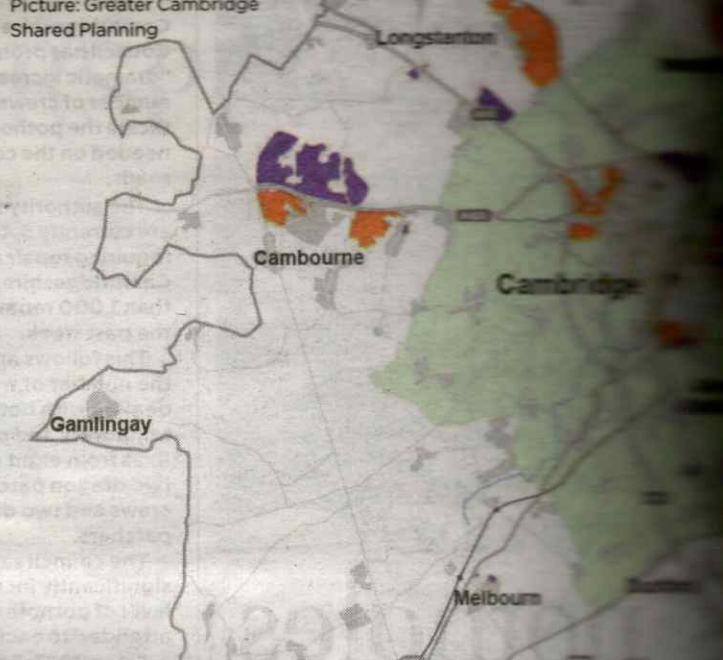
As an example, our charity has an ambition to create a large new nature reserve for Cambridge on its land on the western edge of the city, at Coton Countryside Reserve, with lovely views over Cambridge.

As well as supporting the wellbeing of the growing population, new green spaces like this would significantly benefit nature and are a central part of the ambition of the Cambridge Nature Network to double nature by 2050 through bigger and more joined up areas of habitat.

New green spaces like this would make Cambridge a great place to live, study and work and that, in turn, ensures it remains an attractive place to invest in.

So, one of Cambridge Past, Present & Future's asks of our councils and their planners is to ensure that new development and the growth of Cambridge supports not just new 'grey infrastructure', like roads and railways, but new 'green infrastructure' as well, and we also need to consider the cumulative impacts of population growth on nature and the world class heritage of the city centre.

You can have your say by Friday, 30 January, at greatercambridgeplanning.org/local-plan.



Final call for responses to 50,000-home plan

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The deadline for responses to the draft Greater Cambridge Local Plan is looming – and councils have issued a final call for members of the public to respond and help shape how the area grows over the next 20 years.

The plan sets out where about 50,000 new homes will be built by 2025 to support 73,000 forecasted extra jobs, along with services, green spaces and essential infrastructure.

More than 50 in-person and online events have been held by Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council, working together as the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service. Webinar records are available on its website.

Of the new homes, about 37,000 are already accounted for through existing planning permissions and sites identified in existing Local Plans from 2018.

The latest draft plan anticipates further growth in the new towns of Northstowe and Waterbeach, plus major new development at Cambridge Airport, once Marshall leaves the site.

Cambourne is also earmarked for significant expansion, with the town set to get a new railway station to its north when East West Rail is constructed.

The government's decision not to fund the relocation of the Cambridge Waste Water Treatment Plant, which would have unlocked land for thousands of new homes, means planners are now proposing a community of around 6,000 homes at Grange Farm, near Great Abington.

The site is beyond the Green Belt and the planning service says it offers strong potential for improved public transport links to nearby research

campuses and the Cambridge Biomedical Campus.

The Biomedical Campus, Babraham Research Campus, earmarked for growth under proposals, while rising demands for logistics and industrial space prompted the identification of new sites along the A14 corridor, and expanded lorry parking at Green Services.

Cllr Dr Tumi Hawkins, leader of planning at South Cambridgeshire District Council, said: "This consultation is your chance to help shape the future of our area. We know Greater Cambridge faces competing pressures – from the need for new homes and jobs to the requirement to protect our landscape and biodiversity."

"The draft plan responds to these challenges by proposing growth in what we think are the right places, supported by sustainable transport and natural spaces like woodland and nature-rich habitats. We want to hear from our residents, businesses, and partners to make sure this plan works for everyone and reflects what matters most to our communities."

The document acknowledges challenges around transport, energy supply and wastewater treatment associated with major growth, highlighting work under way with partners on the issues.

Cllr Katie Thornburrow, Cambridge City Council's cabinet member for planning and transport, said: "The Local Plan is about ensuring the thousands of new homes needed are built in a thriving, sustainable neighbourhood where people can live well and easily with less reliance on cars."

"The plan will help us balance the need for new homes alongside the pressures facing our area, such as economic growth, climate change