



Ramblers Association Cambridge Group

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Ramblers Association Cambridge Group response to Greater Cambridge Local Plan

This response is on behalf of the Ramblers Association Cambridge Group to the Greater Cambridge Local Plan. Our primary interest is in maintaining and improving access to the Public Rights of Way (PROW) network. The Public Rights of Way network is vitally important for meeting the needs of the population in terms of:

- Wellbeing and healthy lifestyles
- Creating the connections between green spaces for people and wildlife
- Infrastructure for non-motorised users
- Supporting modal shift from cars to active travel

As local Ramblers we want to work closely with other local users on PROWs such as horse riders, cyclists, carriage drivers, and the Local Access Forum. Our goal is to identify and realise potential extensions to the PROW network and connections within it. We want to learn from the shortfalls of the current development planning system for extending recreational access and we want to explore policies that will deliver much more in the future. We appreciate that neither District Councils nor the Local Plan can create PROW, but we note the very important role played through developer levies, such as section 106 agreements, Community Infrastructure Levy and Master Planning in improving recreational access. A summary of shortfalls of the recent and current development/local planning system in relation to PROWs:

- S106 funded schemes affecting PROW agreed and signed off by Council officers/developers without any consultation with statutory users or Councillors
- Developer levy funds initially earmarked for filling in gaps in PROW network transferred to cycleway schemes with a budget shortfall
- No priority list for funding recreational routes agreed
- Permissive paths approved in Northstowe which are open to cyclists, but not equestrians – at odds with policy
- Statutory user groups not involved in Master Planning

Leisure walking and active travel

As Ramblers we particularly support the use of Public Rights of Way for leisure walking. In a survey by Sport England published in 2024 they found that nationally 69% of the population walked every week, 55% of people this was for leisure purposes and 38% was for active travel, defined as 'utility' journeys to work, school, shopping etc. The data for South Cambs shows 77% people walk every week, 63 % for leisure purposes and 43% for active travel. In all rural districts of Cambridgeshire the proportion of people walking for leisure and recreation is nearly 20% greater than those walking for other travel purposes. A summary of the data collected over eight years 2016 to 2023 can be found at [Walking and cycling statistics, England: Local area](#)

[walking and cycling rates \(Active Lives Survey\) - GOV.UK](#) and the extract for Cambridgeshire can be found in appendix 1.

Although there is clearly a need for increasing active travel the volume of people walking for pleasure should not be ignored. Routes for active travel tend to be direct, destination focussed and have a hard surface. Routes for leisure walking tend to be circular, exploratory, take in places of interest, often immersed in nature away from speed noise and distraction and with a soft surface underfoot. The Greater Cambridge Local Plan needs to address both different and distinct needs: walking for leisure and for active travel. There are some 85 organised leisure walks in Cambridgeshire each week with anywhere up to 30 people on each walk. The walks are organised by The Ramblers Association Groups, U3A, National Trust, Cambridge University, Wellbeing walks and many village and social groups.

In addition to the organised walks some 36% of households own a dog 13.5 million dogs are owned in UK. During the pandemic 3 million dogs were adopted (Good Kennel Guide Sept 2025). Dogs are known for improving their owners' wellbeing, are a link for social contact and require the footpaths and green spaces for their own exercise. Dog owners use recreational routes on daily basis. There is not good compatibility for dog walkers and cyclists hence the need for hard surfaces for active travel purposes but softer green surfaces for leisure use on Public Rights of Way.

In making the case for promoting and safeguarding leisure routes with soft surfaces the Ramblers Groups echo the concerns of equestrians too. The primary requirements being the soft surface, the slower speeds, lots of good interconnections to make circular route options and close to a natural environment. Green infrastructure and green corridors for wildlife also require soft surface paths.

It is important that the Local Plan's maps show Public Rights of Way in relation to proposed areas of development. This is particularly important for all references to new developments and expanded settlements. But it is also important to show where there are deficiencies in the current network of paths – because this information can help direct and prioritise the provision of new links, opening up countryside access not only for new housing and workplaces but also for the existing population.

National and local policy framework

There are a large number of national and local policies which stress the value of the public rights of way network and we highlight just two.

National Planning and Policy Framework, Paragraph 105, December 2024

'Planning policies and decisions should protect and enhance public rights of way and access, including taking opportunities to provide better facilities for users, for example by adding links to existing rights of way networks, including National Trails'.

The Plan could recognise the Icknield Way long distance footpath and bridleway which runs through South Cambridgeshire. This links two National Trails, the Ridgeway and Peddars Way and there is considerable pressure to get the route recognised as the next National Trail.

Cambridgeshire Rights of Way Improvement Plan

SOA3: New Homes Guiding Principle GP3: 'New development should not damage countryside provision, either directly or indirectly. New settlements should be integrated into the rights of

way network and improved provision made for the increased population. Where appropriate, development should contribute to the provision of new links and/or improvement of the existing rights of way network.'

Responsible Authority's Strategy and links with the Greater Cambridge Local Plan

Currently Public Rights of Way are the responsibility of Cambridgeshire County Council as the Highways Authority; however, with the pending creation of Unitary Authorities in the next couple of years the Greater Cambridge Local Plan does need to have much stronger and coherent policies in relation to PROWs. There is a great opportunity to align highway and planning strategies in relation to the management of PROWs. If the Greater Cambridge Local Plan excludes PROWs now the risk is their maintenance and improvement would be set back many years.

What is needed is a vision, and a plan, for improving the footpath and bridleway network, both in town and countryside, for people to benefit from walking for leisure and recreation as well as active travel. Then development plans can be properly assessed against Policy I/ST. Currently, without a footpath and bridleway network plan, Policy I/ST has no teeth and planners are obliged to accept whatever the developers propose. It is particularly disappointing that the only reference to 'public rights of way' is in an appendix – the Glossary for Green Infrastructure. It is vital that the Plan policies recognise and state the importance of protecting and enhancing this network. The master plans for those areas identified for substantial development require, as a minimum, the creation of perimeter bridleways, linking wherever possible to the established public rights of way network.

The Cambridgeshire Local Access Forum can contribute to the creation of a vision and plan with the development of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan in 2026 including prioritising the current gaps in the network. The Local Plan would be greatly enhanced by including maps of existing PROWs, applications for Definitive Map Modification Orders (DMMOs) and Public Path Agreements (PPAs). These maps will enable gaps in the public path network to be identified – and assist, in consultation with the Highways Authority, on establishing a priority list for both Master Plans and use of developer levies.

There need to have council officers and councillors who clearly have public rights of way and green infrastructure as part of their responsibilities and are actively championing the benefits of the PROW network.

Funding PROW improvements

The Local Plan needs to address how the improvement of the PROW network can be funded. Is the funding route through section 106 agreements, Community Infrastructure Levy or through other grants? The creation of connections of PROWS tends to be discounted by developers and planners with the easy excuse it is outside the curtilage of the development. This is not a sustainable approach and leads to a fragmented PROW network.

It is important to recognise that new recreational routes are, wherever possible, PROWS rather than more restrictive 'permissive' paths. The responsibility for, and standard of path maintenance must be clearly identified.

Overview of the PROW network

Taking an overview of the network of PROWS between the main urban area of Cambridge to the villages and towns of South Cambs there are:

- A good number of PROWs to the west of Cambridge cross over the M11
- A reasonable number of PROWs to the north of Cambridge cross the A14. The proposal for a further PROW link between Histon and Girton is to be welcomed.
- There are very poor connections of PROWS to the east and south of Cambridge. Cherry Hinton is particularly poorly served, with no safe routes to Wandlebury, the Beech Woods, the Roman Road or Fulbourn. This area has already grown and is growing significantly. Providing a safe off-road bridleway access is a high priority
- The proposed major development at Grange Farm is currently served by just one dead end public footpath. It is essential that new links are provided to the Roman Road, offering a range of circular routes.

There are a number of proposals for PROWS have been drawn up by the Cambridge Ramblers Group based on our experience of organising and participating in regular walks locally See separate document. What is needed is a comprehensive map of existing PROWs and permissive routes in relation to areas identified for development and a systematic approach to making connections and extensions to the existing PROW network. They are intended as a starting point for a discussion with the Highways Authority and other organisations representing NMUs. Additional information would need to be gathered to review feasibility.

The Cambridge Ramblers Group would be keen to be consulted at the earliest stages of planning for large developments on the PROWs particularly for leisure use.

Summary

In summary the Cambridge Ramblers objections are:

- Omission of the importance of PROWs for wellbeing and green infrastructure
- Lack of recognition of the distinct and different needs for active travel and for leisure activities
- No policies for funding the improvement of the PROW network
- No mapping of the areas for growth with the gaps in the existing PROW network
- No mechanism to ensure developers contribute to addressing the gaps
- No proposals to engage with organisations and users of PROWs

Greater Cambridge Local Plan needs to acknowledge the importance of PROWS for leisure purposes. The areas that are a priority mentioned above are:

- Having a vision and plan based on a map of future growth with gaps in PROW network identified
- Having officers and councillors with responsibility for PROWS
- Having identified funding routes for improving the PROW network
- Consulting with non motorised users groups and organisations at an early stage of Master Planning

Appendix 1

Walking and cycling statistics, England: Local area walking and cycling rates (Active Lives Survey) - GOV.UK

				2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Cambridgeshire	Walking	Any	At least once per month	78.6	80.6	79.7	81.2	78.2	82.5	79.1	80.1
Cambridgeshire	Walking	Any	At least once per week	68.7	72.5	70.6	70.9	71	74.3	71.4	74.2
Cambridgeshire	Walking	Any	At least 3 times per week	41.5	45.5	41.8	45.8	46.7	45	44.7	48.2
Cambridgeshire	Walking	Any	At least 5 times per week	29.4	32.6	30.1	33.6	34.3	32.7	33	34
Cambridgeshire	Walking	Leisure	At least once per month	62.9	66.8	65.4	67.7	70.3	77.2	71.1	71.4
Cambridgeshire	Walking	Leisure	At least once per week	48.5	53	51.3	52.5	58.8	66.1	60.4	61.1
Cambridgeshire	Walking	Leisure	At least 3 times per week	20.5	22.3	22.5	24.6	32.9	34.8	31.6	28.4
Cambridgeshire	Walking	Leisure	At least 5 times per week	14.2	16.3	15.5	18.5	24.4	24.6	23.1	21.1
Cambridgeshire	Walking	Travel	At least once per month	50.7	52.1	48.2	50.3	37.1	35.1	41.2	47
Cambridgeshire	Walking	Travel	At least once per week	41.8	44.3	41.3	42.2	30.5	28.3	31.9	41.2
Cambridgeshire	Walking	Travel	At least 3 times per week	21.4	23.7	19.7	22.5	15.4	12.4	15.9	20.1
Cambridgeshire	Walking	Travel	At least 5 times per week	16.1	17.5	13.5	15.6	10.8	7	11.2	14.6
Cambridge	Walking	Any	At least once per month	87.9	83.8	88.7	85.9	80.7	87.9	77.7	85.5

Cambridge	Walking	Any	At least once per week	77.5	75.8	82.4	78.2	72.5	81.2	73	80.2
Cambridge	Walking	Any	At least 3 times per week	50	50.4	52.9	52.9	48.3	50.4	47.5	54.5
Cambridge	Walking	Any	At least 5 times per week	36.1	36.2	39.7	39.1	32.8	35.5	32.8	40.4
Cambridge	Walking	Leisure	At least once per month	60.6	63.3	68.3	67.6	67.7	82	67	72.5
Cambridge	Walking	Leisure	At least once per week	41.9	46.9	51.5	51.7	52.3	69.6	56.6	59.1
Cambridge	Walking	Leisure	At least 3 times per week	14.1	15.8	20.8	21.4	25.8	33.3	26.5	20.4
Cambridge	Walking	Leisure	At least 5 times per week	9.3	9.9	13.9	15.1	18	21.9	18	13.1
Cambridge	Walking	Travel	At least once per month	72.9	69.4	71	68.9	53.3	58	58.1	67
Cambridge	Walking	Travel	At least once per week	61.7	59.7	61.6	61.1	46	46.5	49.2	60.4
Cambridge	Walking	Travel	At least 3 times per week	32.9	32.3	33	34.6	22.5	18.3	24.6	35
Cambridge	Walking	Travel	At least 5 times per week	27.2	24.6	25.5	25.5	16.4	10.9	17.9	27.5
South Cambridgeshire	Walking	Any	At least once per month	79.4	86.9	78	83	77.4	82.8	82.2	83.8
South Cambridgeshire	Walking	Any	At least once per week	68.8	78.2	68.2	72.9	70	73.9	72.7	77.3
South Cambridgeshire	Walking	Any	At least 3 times per week	43.1	45.8	39.3	45.1	47.7	47.2	46.5	51.2
South Cambridgeshire	Walking	Any	At least 5 times per week	28.4	30	27.6	31.4	34.6	33.8	33.5	34.3
South Cambridgeshire	Walking	Leisure	At least once per month	65.3	76.3	64.8	68.6	72.7	78.7	73.6	73.5

South Cambridgeshire	Walking	Leisure	At least once per week	50.8	60.5	51.3	51.6	62.6	66.6	62.2	63
South Cambridgeshire	Walking	Leisure	At least 3 times per week	23.6	20.9	21.1	21.7	36.5	38.6	33.8	29.8
South Cambridgeshire	Walking	Leisure	At least 5 times per week	14.3	15.8	13.5	14.6	27.8	25.6	23.6	21.8
South Cambridgeshire	Walking	Travel	At least once per month	52	53.9	46.7	50	35.2	32.1	41.5	51.2
South Cambridgeshire	Walking	Travel	At least once per week	40.5	44.9	41.3	43.2	28.2	24.3	30.5	42.7
South Cambridgeshire	Walking	Travel	At least 3 times per week	21.2	21.6	17.6	23.7	13.4	10.9	14.4	20.3
South Cambridgeshire	Walking	Travel	At least 5 times per week	13.2	15.3	10.9	17.6	8.2	[u]	10.5	14
England	Walking	Any	At least once per month	77.3	78.4	78.2	79.6	74.9	77.4	76.7	76.5
England	Walking	Any	At least once per week	68	69.4	69.5	71.1	67.3	69.7	69.1	69.2
England	Walking	Any	At least 3 times per week	41.8	43.1	43.6	44.2	42.5	42.9	43.1	43.4
England	Walking	Any	At least 5 times per week	30.9	32	32.4	32.7	31.3	31.3	31.8	31.8
England	Walking	Leisure	At least once per month	60.6	60.8	61.1	63.8	65.5	70	66.9	65.9
England	Walking	Leisure	At least once per week	47	47.8	48.5	50.9	55.1	59.8	55.8	54.8
England	Walking	Leisure	At least 3 times per week	20.5	21.7	22.2	23.1	29.1	31.4	27.8	26.8
England	Walking	Leisure	At least 5 times per week	14.5	15.7	15.9	16.7	21.1	22.6	20.2	19.4
England	Walking	Travel	At least once per month	49.2	49.4	49.2	49.3	36.4	34.1	41.9	44.5

England	Walking	Travel	At least once per week	41.6	42	42.2	42.1	30.5	28	35	37.5
England	Walking	Travel	At least 3 times per week	22.7	22.9	23.1	22.7	15.1	13.1	17.4	18.6
England	Walking	Travel	At least 5 times per week	16.7	16.7	16.9	16.3	10.4	8.8	11.9	12.8
East Cambridgeshire	Walking	Any	At least once per month	73.4	81.4	81.4	82.5	85.3	78.3	78.1	77.4
East Cambridgeshire	Walking	Any	At least once per week	67.8	71.6	69.9	71.3	77.8	69.4	73.3	70.2
East Cambridgeshire	Walking	Any	At least 3 times per week	42.7	44.7	40.6	45.2	52.3	46.5	49	43.8
East Cambridgeshire	Walking	Any	At least 5 times per week	32.5	30.9	31.2	33.1	37	36	38.1	32.4
East Cambridgeshire	Walking	Leisure	At least once per month	65.5	67.7	69.7	70.2	78.3	74.7	70.2	71.5
East Cambridgeshire	Walking	Leisure	At least once per week	54.2	51.2	54.5	54.5	67.4	63.8	63.3	61.3
East Cambridgeshire	Walking	Leisure	At least 3 times per week	23.6	19.7	25.3	23	39.6	36.7	34.8	28.7
East Cambridgeshire	Walking	Leisure	At least 5 times per week	16.5	14	19.3	16.8	29	27.6	28	24.4
East Cambridgeshire	Walking	Travel	At least once per month	42.8	54.1	42.5	53.6	34.4	28.9	38.4	35.5
East Cambridgeshire	Walking	Travel	At least once per week	36.2	47.8	35.8	45.6	29	23.1	31.7	31.8
East Cambridgeshire	Walking	Travel	At least 3 times per week	19.3	25.1	16.1	20.8	15	9.6	16.9	14.4
East Cambridgeshire	Walking	Travel	At least 5 times per week	15.1	16.8	11.7	14.3	9.5	5.3	11.2	8.9
Fenland	Walking	Any	At least once per month	72.1	70.5	70.5	74.3	69.8	74.3	71.4	68.3

Fenland	Walking	Any	At least once per week	63.7	57.5	60.4	63	63.4	65.9	63.3	62
Fenland	Walking	Any	At least 3 times per week	37.9	35.2	33.8	44	40.6	30.3	37.6	36.8
Fenland	Walking	Any	At least 5 times per week	28.3	26	22.2	33.7	28.9	20.1	30.4	25.7
Fenland	Walking	Leisure	At least once per month	59.8	57.8	54.8	62.2	62.2	66.5	66.4	63.5
Fenland	Walking	Leisure	At least once per week	49.8	42.8	44.1	51.8	51.3	54.7	55.2	54.1
Fenland	Walking	Leisure	At least 3 times per week	21.9	22.9	21.5	31.2	29.7	21.7	26.9	28.8
Fenland	Walking	Leisure	At least 5 times per week	17.2	16.1	14.5	24.5	21.1	16.3	21.2	20.7
Fenland	Walking	Travel	At least once per month	37	36	32.1	36.2	26.7	28.5	27.7	31.1
Fenland	Walking	Travel	At least once per week	30.8	29.8	26.7	27.8	20.2	22.5	22	26.4
Fenland	Walking	Travel	At least 3 times per week	17.6	14.9	12.7	16.4	11.7	8.1	10.9	13.2
Fenland	Walking	Travel	At least 5 times per week	14.1	9.9	7.2	10.3	[u]	[u]	8.2	10.9
Huntingdonshire	Walking	Any	At least once per month	76.9	78.2	78.8	79.3	78.5	85	82.3	80.4
Huntingdonshire	Walking	Any	At least once per week	65	74.3	70.4	68	71.5	77.2	72.9	75.3
Huntingdonshire	Walking	Any	At least 3 times per week	34.8	47.7	41.2	42.7	45.2	46.7	43.1	49.1
Huntingdonshire	Walking	Any	At least 5 times per week	24.1	36.7	29.2	31.8	36.7	35.3	31.8	33.9
Huntingdonshire	Walking	Leisure	At least once per month	63	66.3	67.7	68.8	70.8	79.7	74.8	73

Huntingdonshire	Walking	Leisure	At least once per week	48.2	58.2	53.6	53.1	60.3	70.9	63	64.9
Huntingdonshire	Walking	Leisure	At least 3 times per week	20.3	29.3	24.4	26.5	33.4	39	34.1	33.6
Huntingdonshire	Walking	Leisure	At least 5 times per week	14.9	22.8	17	21.9	25.7	28.8	24.7	25.7
Huntingdonshire	Walking	Travel	At least once per month	44.1	45.6	44.8	43.5	34.2	28.2	37.8	41.3
Huntingdonshire	Walking	Travel	At least once per week	36.6	38.5	37.5	34	27.7	24.7	26.6	36.8
Huntingdonshire	Walking	Travel	At least 3 times per week	15.8	23	17.4	16.9	14.2	13.4	13.5	14
Huntingdonshire	Walking	Travel	At least 5 times per week	11.8	18.6	11.7	10.4	11.5	6.7	8.7	9.2

Source: An extract from

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/walking-and-cycling-statistics-england-2023/walking-and-cycling-statistics-england-local-area-walking-and-cycling-rates-active-lives-survey>