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Date: 29/01/2026

Planning Policy
Greater Cambridge Planning

Dear Sir / Madam,

REG 18-DRAFT GREATER CAMBRIDGE LOCAL PLAN CONSULTATION

DRAFT POLICY S/SEA/CBN- OBJECTION

On behalf of our client, Varrier-Jones Foundation (“VJF”), we are responding to the Regulation 18 consultation on the emerging Greater Cambridge Local Plan (“the Plan”). This representation objects to the proposed draft allocation (ref: S/SEA/CBN), which designates a large area of land to the east of Papworth Everard as non-developable in connection with the adjacent Cambourne North draft allocation (ref: S/CBN).

VJF owns and controls land in and around Papworth Everard. The proposed designation has significant implications for the landowner’s interests and the Plan’s ability to deliver sustainable growth.

Draft Policy S/SEA/CBN

Draft policy S/CBN requires development at Cambourne North to deliver a well-considered landscape buffer within the Strategic Enhancement Area (S/SEA/CBN), intended to respond sensitively to neighbouring villages and their Conservation Areas, deliver landscape and ecological enhancement, and avoid settlement coalescence.

The proposed Strategic Enhancement Area extends across a substantial area of open agricultural land and is designated as wholly non-developable. The emerging local plan states that this land is required to provide an appropriate setting for nearby Conservation Areas, support farmland birds and other species, and maintain a soft, green landscape between Cambourne North and surrounding settlements, including Papworth Everard, Elsworth, Knapwell, Bourn Airfield New Village and Childerley. While these aims are broadly reasonable, the Plan does not demonstrate that the full extent of the land designated is necessary to achieve them and does not account for landownership.

In heritage terms, the evidence indicates that the density of designated heritage assets north of the A428 is low, with the principal concentrations located at Elsworth, Knapwell and Childerley Park. In Papworth Everard, the conservation area and heritage assets are located primarily within the central and western parts of the village, rather than on the eastern edge closest to the proposed Cambourne North development. As such, there is no clear heritage-based justification for the extent of land included within the S/SEA/CBN designation in order to protect the setting of Papworth Everard.

The emerging local plan does not explain why more targeted landscape buffers, design-led mitigation, or selective development restraint could not achieve the same outcome. The designation of a broad, continuous non-development area risks acting as a precautionary constraint rather than a proportionate response to identified impacts. The supporting Topic Papers for the emerging Greater Cambridge Local

Plan do not include a dedicated study on settlement separation or strategic gap analysis for the S/SEA/CBN allocation. In this case there is no published Topic Paper demonstrating why the full extent of the S/SEA/CBN non-development area is necessary to prevent coalescence between Papworth Everard and Cambourne North, nor why smaller, targeted buffers or other landscape solutions were discounted.

As Cambourne North is delivered, Papworth Everard will become increasingly well connected to jobs, services and infrastructure, strengthening its role as a sustainable settlement capable of accommodating future growth. The blanket designation of extensive land as non-developable within S/SEA/CBN risks unnecessarily constraining longer-term development opportunities without clear evidence that such restriction is essential to maintain settlement separation.

Interest in Commercial Expansion

The land affected by the S/SEA/CBN designation sits in close proximity to existing employment uses, including the established Papworth Business Park, where a number of commercial tenants are currently operating successfully. It is understood that tenants have expressed interest in expanding their operations in the medium to longer term, reflecting the attractiveness of the location and the availability of an existing workforce.

The blanket designation of extensive areas of land as non-developable within the Strategic Enhancement Area risks constraining the future growth and expansion of these existing businesses. This is particularly concerning given that national and local planning policy seeks to support the retention and growth of employment uses, promote economic resilience, and ensure that Local Plans provide sufficient flexibility to respond to changing economic circumstances.

In particular, paragraph 85 of the adopted National Planning Policy Framework (2024) states that “planning policies and decisions should help create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt. Significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development”. Paragraph 86 further emphasises that planning policies should be “flexible enough to accommodate needs not anticipated in the plan, and allow for new and flexible working practices and spaces to enable a rapid response to changes in economic circumstances”. Together, these policies establish a clear expectation that Local Plans should provide sufficient flexibility to support business growth. The ongoing draft NPPF consultation reinforces this direction of travel, continuing to place strong emphasis on supporting economic resilience and adaptability.

The Strategic Enhancement Area (SEA) extends onto a swathe of land owned by VJF to the edge of Papworth Everard, yet there has been no discussion by the Council or promoter with VJF about this. Any policy dependency on the SEA land performing or delivering certain things across the VJF part of the SEA is not deliverable and cannot be relied on. The effectiveness of the policy and the degree of environmental enhancement promoted by the Cambourne North allocation is brought into serious question. The SEA must be rolled-back from Papworth Everard to avoid the VJF land if the Council wish to demonstrate a sound and deliverable Cambourne North allocation.

Summary

In summary, while the objective of avoiding coalescence is supported, the Strategic Enhancement Area S/SEA/CBN is not justified in its current form. The evidence base does not demonstrate that the full extent of the non-developable area is necessary, proportionate, or the most effective means of achieving settlement separation. A more flexible, evidence-led approach would better balance landscape, heritage and ecological objectives with the sustainable growth ambitions of the emerging Local Plan.

The SEA covers land not in the control of the Authorities or land promoter and so brings into serious question the environmental enhancement promoted by the policy and the soundness and effectiveness of the Cambourne North allocation.

The imposition of extensive designations across land owned and controlled by Varrier-Jones Foundation, without any engagement with the landowner, is unduly restrictive and risks prejudicing the ability of the emerging Local Plan to respond flexibly to future development needs.

The scale and large extent of the draft allocation is disproportionate and covers land that could sustainably accommodate future development without compromising the separation of Papworth Everard and Cambourne North.

We therefore request that the Council engage with the landowner and remove or revise the allocation.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Kind regards,

Sophia Nitschke
Senior Planner