Comments on the Landscape Buffer and Coalescence between Elsworth, Knapwell and Cambourne North

1. The vision for S/SEA/CBN Non-Development areas (the 'landscape buffer') embraces multiple purposes including:

(i) To screen Elsworth and Knapwell (which are both conservation areas in historic rural settings) from the urbanising elements that will be introduced by the coming of the EW Railway and the development of Cambourne North
(ii) To provide separation and avoid coalescence by creating a barrier between the villages and the development
(iii) To provide for habitat compensation and other ecological purposes
(iv) To be a recreation area for residents of Cambourne North and those from further afield

2. It is proposed that the landscape buffer would consist of multiple elements: (i) a forest; (ii) open spaces; (iii) areas of open arable fields; and (iv) unspecified recreation areas. It would also be crossed by cycle and footpaths, an extension to the C2C busway, and, hopefully, in order to avoid traffic passing through the villages, one or more new roads to take traffic from the north wanting to access the station or the town and traffic leaving the settlement to travel northwards (see paragraph 6).

3. Despite what is said in the Plan that the non-development area "ensures sufficient separation between neighbouring settlements"[1], serious concerns have been expressed already about:

(i) the proximity of the development area to the villages - Elsworth 400m, Knapwell 600m; and
(ii) the depth of the landscape buffer near the villages

In comparison there appears to be considerably greater depth between the development and Papworth Everard[2]. Moreover, in the Skyline and Tall Buildings Strategy and Historic Assessment it is indicated that the landscape buffer should preserve an open pastoral structure close to Elsworth with denser planting further from the village. However, because the development has been extended unacceptably close to Elsworth & Knapwell, the proposed buffer is now in the lowest part of the landscape. Taken together with the lack of depth, this creates doubt as to the effectiveness of the landscape buffer as presently envisaged to meet the purposes at 1 above and thus to provide mitigation of adverse impacts on the villages.

4. More specifically as regards the forest, there is the issue of funding and stewardship to enable the forest to be planted, nurtured and maintained in the years it will take to become established (and so that it doesn't end up as a forest of plastic tree guards!), while careful management will also be required to prevent the area becoming a focus for anti-social behaviour. The forest lays outside the site allocation area[3] and it would be unrealistic to place faith in the developer/s doing this. The suggestion has been voiced that an organisation like the Woodland Trust might take on the stewardship. Further detail would be appreciated about how this might actually work in practice and the degree of involvement and at what level the Parishes, Cambourne Town Council and the District Council might have. While it is appreciated that these matters require time to sort out, construction of the railway, the rail station and building in the development area will begin in the next few years and raises the question whether there exists a plan for the early planting of the forest element?

5. Also welcome would be an indication of how it is proposed the management of the residual arable fields and the open spaces which also lay outside the site allocation area is to be undertaken. The Call for Sites indicates that, while Crow Green was offered by the Davison family (Barford & Co) for development, a much more considerable area of land owned and farmed by them south of Rogues Lane would be required for the development and for the landscape buffer. If this additional land is acquired and once space is taken for development, the forest, open spaces, pathways, etc., it is not clear that whatever remains could prove viable to farm. The plan makes no mention of this, but would it be correct to presume that consideration will has been given to this already? If so, has this included the possibility that the residual land (which is both north and south of Rogues Lane) could be incorporated into Pitt Dene Farm (see also 7)?

6. The presumption throughout the Plan is that within Cambourne North and the immediate neighbouring areas, travel will increasingly be undertaken by active means rather than by private vehicle. However, with the recreational areas, cultural facilities, employment opportunities and the station[5], Cambourne North will inevitably attract car movements from people living further afield, and many of its residents will also make use of their own vehicles whenever active or public transport does not meet their travel needs. At the moment for travel to and from the north there are only the existing minor roads through Elsworth, Knapwell and Boxworth to take this traffic. It is difficult to see that what is said in Policy S/CBN about "…traffic calming measures in surrounding villages to prevent rat running and encourage sustainable travel"[6] will offer any real mitigation of the resultant problems. This is a vital issue for the surrounding villages and, in our view, almost certainly requires the construction of new roads (see 2 above) which would need to be accounted for and integrated by extensive screening into the landscape buffer.

The longer term

7. The matters touched on above are relevant to the very real danger of coalescence. Whatever ideas there are currently regarding the scale of development, in the longer term if further expansion is required and given the difficulty of finding land south of the A428, the move of the town centre to the north of the A428 and the proposed improvements to transport links, this residual farmland could be an attractive prospect for further development. Moreover, in this regard, the whole of Pitt Dene Farm has been offered in the Call For Sites in the last two Local Plan rounds. Should such a 'worst case' scenario of further expansion come to pass at some point in the future, it would see Elsworth sandwiched south and north by urban sprawl and deprived of its rural setting. It may also seem trite, but the designation of the landscape buffer as 'Cambourne' forest perhaps also sends the wrong message; more in keeping with the intentions mentioned in 1 and our local history, would Elsworth & Knapwell Forest not be more historically appropriate[4]?

8. There is another aspect relevant to the issue of coalescence. Taken together, the development and non-development areas cover about half of Elsworth parish and the greater part of Knapwell parish. With regard to the development area within the site allocation boundary, our presumption is that Cambourne Town Council, as the first tier of local government, will have responsibility for it as this is seen as an extension of existing Cambourne rather than as a new separate settlement. Assuming this is correct, a range of issues arise which, while it may be thought premature to consider at the present time, understandably parishes take an interest in now; for example:

- Has thought been given to the governance arrangements for the two parishes in the longer term?
- Will there be a community governance review undertaken by the DC?
- When would any changes to local government arrangements take effect?
- What would the position be with regard to S106/other monies arising from the construction of the development as it sits currently within the parishes of Elsworth, Knapwell and Boxworth?

Footnotes follow on page 4.

[1] New Settlements Policy S/CBN: Cambourne North

[2] As shown on Figure 77: Spatial Framework for Policy S/CBN and S/CB indicative map

[3] New Settlements Policies Map

[4] '*From earliest times, as the evidence of the its name suggests, this region was heavily wooded with native trees of oak and ash and a thick scrub area of hazel……The Anglo Saxons (sic) settled in family clans under their leaders, Eli, Buce, Lole and Pappa, in 'worths' or small clearings in the forest which were connected to each other by trackways and waterways.'* The Church and Village of Elsworth by Elizabeth Evans 1977 (reprinted by the Swavesey & District History Society 2006)

[5] Policy S/CBN, 3, 'Vision and identity' "Cambourne will become a destination in its own right"

[6] Policy S/CBN, 41b.