

5th October 2020
Our Ref: MC/14.623

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Greater Cambridge Shared Planning
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Sent via e-mail only

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Draft North East Cambridge Area Action Plan (AAP) - Consultation Response on behalf of RLW Estates

Introduction

These representations are submitted on behalf of RLW Estates. As you may be aware, RLW Estates are joint promoters of Waterbeach New Town, which is allocated as a strategic development site in the adopted South Cambridgeshire Local Plan, controlling the eastern part of the site. They currently have an outline planning application for up to 4,500 dwellings and a range of associated commercial, community and recreational uses that is under consideration by South Cambridgeshire District Council (SCDC), having already secured full planning permission for a new relocated railway station to serve the new and existing communities. An outline planning permission has already been granted for up to 6,500 dwellings on the western part of the allocation.

Given the proximity between Waterbeach New Town and the area covered by the North East Cambridge AAP, at less than 5km, there is a clear relationship between these, and therefore opportunities to ensure that development of each is brought forward in a mutually beneficial manner, having regard to the objectives of maximising sustainability and creating attractive and functional new communities. The functional relationship between the two areas, and the opportunities presented, are significantly enhanced by the direct rail connection between Cambridge North station and the relocated Waterbeach station, in addition to other direct non-car linkages, such as the proposed Greenway.

It is with this context in mind that the following comments are provided, largely by way of support for the emerging AAP and the vision for sustainable development that it presents.

Question 1. What do you think about our vision for North East Cambridge?

The vision for North East Cambridge as an inclusive, walkable, low-carbon new city district with a lively mix of homes, workplaces, services and social spaces, fully integrated with surrounding neighbourhoods is supported. In particular the principles of integration with surrounding communities, the inclusion of a mix of uses, and planning to discourage car use are considered to be appropriate and would contribute towards achievement of the vision.



In this regard the relationship between the new community at North East Cambridge and the new settlement at Waterbeach is considered relevant and to provide particular opportunities, given the proximity between the two strategic sites and the excellent non-car linkages (cycling and rail).

With regard to the contextual plan at *Figure 2: North East Cambridge in context*, it is considered correct that Waterbeach New Town is shown as a Strategic housing site. Notwithstanding that it contains an appropriately balanced mix of uses and facilities, its principal role has always been seen as that of delivering housing to address the shortfall in supply and to restore balance between jobs and housing within the sub-region, with the presence of the existing Cambridge Research Park at Waterbeach also appropriately highlighted in this regard.

Question 2. Are we creating the right walking and cycling connections to the surrounding areas?

The accessibility of the Cambridge North station to the whole AAP area is noted and rightly highlighted.

The connections shown on the various plans (specifically within *Figure 37*) are supported, including in particular the annotation of the “*Planned Waterbeach Greenway*” and associated proposed new underpass under the A14 (location 3). These connections are also picked up under the related *Policy 16: Sustainable Connectivity*, through reference to:

“e. Waterbeach Greenway (under A14) – Linear Park – new Guided Busway stop — Nuffield Road

f. Waterbeach Greenway (under A14) – Linear Park – District Centre – Cambridge North Railway Station/Station Approach Local Centre”

Policy 17 Connecting to the wider network also addresses these links in respect of the following measures to cross the A14:

“b. Existing underpass under the A14 – funding has been secured for a new strategic cycle path from Landbeach and Waterbeach via Mere Way.

c. New underpass under the A14 - Greater Cambridge Partnership Waterbeach Greenway route will enter the site to the north of the site adjacent to Milton County Park”

It is, however, noted that section 2.1.3 *Connections* does not fully reflect the full range of non-car links with Waterbeach New Town. Whilst reference is made to the potential for a Cambridgeshire Autonomous Metro (CAM) which may serve North East Cambridge and connect with central Cambridge and the wider area, including Waterbeach, and to planned strategic cycle links (along Mere Way and Waterbeach Greenway), no mention is made of the rail link between the two strategic development areas.

With anticipated travel time of just 5 minutes via rail, and planning permission already in place for the new relocated Waterbeach station, as well as the facility featuring as a policy requirement in the SCDC Local Plan and featuring prominently within the Cambridge to Ely Corridor Study, it is important that this omission should be addressed.

Question 4. Do we have the right balance between new jobs and new homes?

It is supported that the AAP recognises under *Section 6. Jobs, homes and services* that the principal role of North East Cambridge is as a strategically important economic driver for Greater Cambridge and further afield. In this regard it is noted that in allocating land at Cambridge Northern Fringe East as a Strategic Site under Policy SS/4, the SCDC Local Plan states at criteria 1 that this will “enable the creation of a revitalise, employment focussed area centred on a new transport interchange.

It is considered that, as such, the retention and availability of additional employment space should continue to be the primary focus of development within the area, building upon the existing reputation of Cambridge Science Park, St John’s Innovation Park and other commercial uses that are present. In this regard it is noted that the proposals could create up to 20,000 new jobs in the area through intensification of the existing business parks and the introduction of new business space on the east side of Milton Road, including integration with housing in this area.

The inclusion of new homes within the AAP area alongside the key employment growth objective is considered appropriate in principle, particularly in view of the desirability of capitalising on the proximity of the established Cambridge North railway station and in pursuit of maximising sustainability, as encouraged within Government guidance. However, it is felt that the quantum of housing proposed, at up to 8,000 dwellings, within a relatively small proportion of the overall AAP area is potentially excessive, resulting in particularly high densities, with the majority of the site at more than 300 dwellings per hectare (dph), and peaking at 385 dph.

It is noted that reference is made to the need for further analysis of the impacts of the building heights proposed, at up to 13 storeys, on the historic setting of Cambridge to be undertaken by or in conjunction with Historic England.

Whilst the general approach to vertical integration of mixed uses shown within Figure 31 is considered acceptable in principle, the inclusion of more traditional industrial and storage and distribution uses (B2 and B8), such as those close to the railway line and the aggregates railheads, alongside the new residential and community uses, may make for an uncomfortable relationship in some quarters.

In view of the issues set out above, it is considered that the capacity of the site for as many as 8,000 new homes remains to be fully established as appropriate or achievable. Certainly the incorporation of such large scale of residential development should not be to the detriment of Cambridge’s established status as a dynamic, historic city, and to the principal role of this area of change within the spatial strategy as a driver of employment growth.

In this regard it is considered relevant to have regard to the opportunities offered by the housing led development of Waterbeach New Town a short distance to the north, particularly in view of the extremely efficient travel times between the two, facilitated by the direct rail connection and consented new railway station (in addition to other proposed and potential non-car modes). Notwithstanding the desirability of both areas achieving an appropriate mix of housing and employment, the intention should remain for that balance to be focussed and skewed in preference of employment use in the case of the North East Cambridge AAP area, consistent with the established spatial strategy.

Question 9. Are we doing enough to discourage car travel into this area?

The encouragement given to use of sustainable travel modes, rightly combining the excellent accessibility to existing and proposed public transport, pedestrian and cycle connections with practical measures to reduce car use, is supported. The approach taken is considered compatible with that adopted in the proposals for Waterbeach New Town East, and indeed there are clear comparisons that can be drawn in this regard. These can be seen in respect of public transport access, and in particular the rail and multi-modal interchange facilities available, as well as the priority given to designing for pedestrian and cycle movement within the development and the wider area, in addition to the application of innovative measures to discourage car usage, such as incorporation of car barns/remote parking.

As noted above, in relation to Question 2, however, it is considered that section 2.1.3 *Connections* does not fully reflect the full range of non-car links with Waterbeach New Town. Whilst reference is made to the potential for a Cambridgeshire Autonomous Metro (CAM) which may serve North East Cambridge and connect with central Cambridge and the wider area, including Waterbeach, and to planned strategic cycle links (along Mere Way and Waterbeach Greenway), no mention is made of the rail link between the two strategic development areas. In the context of discouraging car travel, it is important that all available public transport opportunities are fully reflected within the AAP, with particular regard to this direct rail connection between these two growth areas.

Yours sincerely



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