

Cambridge Local Plan – Towards 2031

Pre issues and Options Consultation Workshop Summary

Background

Cambridge City Council is in the process of reviewing its Local Plan. The Cambridge Local Plan will set out the planning framework to guide the future development of Cambridge. It will comprise the core strategy, development management policies and site specific allocations which forms part of the City Council's Local Development Framework. The first stage in the production of the new Local Plan is the preparation of an evidence base to inform an issues and options document which will be subject to public consultation.

As part of evidence base preparation and in line with the Council's Statement of Community Involvement and Consultation and Community Engagement Strategy for the Local Plan Review (November 2011), a series of workshops were held between December 2011 and February 2012, with councillors, stakeholders, developers, agents and residents' associations. The purpose of the workshops was to explain how the Plan will be prepared, to encourage people to get involved and to hear their ideas and concerns.

Each workshop started with an introduction to the Plan. This was followed by discussions about: the future vision for Cambridge; planning challenges and issues facing the City; and the effectiveness of policies in the existing Local Plan (2006).

All of the written comments made at the workshops were recorded and detailed reports are available www.cambridge.gov.uk/localplanreview. This report draws out some of the main strands running through the workshops where there were broadly shared, though not always unanimous, ideas and aspirations. This does not mean that the alternative views are being ignored – they are many, varied and invaluable – rather the aim is to show where there is common ground on which the Plan can be built.

Vision

The workshops were asked to describe how they saw Cambridge now, how it would be in 2031 and what are the difficulties that will be faced on the journey there.

Cambridge in 2011-12 was seen both positively and negatively. On the plus side people saw it as: diverse and lively; beautiful and historic; prosperous and innovative; and green and rich in open spaces. On the minus side they saw it as: expensive; divided socially; congested with traffic and visitors; and under pressure for damaging change.

The workshops hoped that in 2031 Cambridge would be a City with: good transport; green open spaces; joined up communities; a strong innovative economy; affordable homes and services; and resources, such as water and energy, used sustainably.

The workshops were asked what are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (a SWOT analysis) that Cambridge has to address if it is to be the place they hope for in 2031. This showed two interesting things: people found it easier to identify weaknesses and threats than they did strengths and opportunities; and among the 130 points mentioned there was limited consistency. The table below shows some points where there is a degree of consensus. These indicate the importance of the economy and Cambridge's position as a high-tec centre; and the challenge of attitudes and government arrangements that may get in the way of managing change positively.

Cambridge Vision – SWOT Analysis

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong and vibrant economy • Education and the universities • Brainpower and skills • A world 'brand' 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local government structures and leadership • Congestion and infrastructure • Funding
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education and science based economy • More sustainable development and living 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pressure for growth • Negative attitudes to change and development • Relationship to London and the wider Region

Issues

People at the workshops were asked to identify and discuss challenges and issues that Cambridge faces and which might be tackled by the Local Plan. No limits were put on what could be raised and the full workshop reports show the richness in breadth and depth of the debate. Here we try to give an accurate summary of the key issues.

Housing

Critical concerns shared by all the workshops were: identifying and meeting housing needs; providing affordable housing; and getting the right mix of different types of homes. Other matters raised frequently included: finding sites for new houses; the importance of building communities, not just houses; the design and density of new housing; managing the growth in student accommodation; and regulating houses in multiple occupation.

Social and Leisure

With the exception of sports provision, especially for larger clubs, it is less easy to identify clearly shared concerns in this area, but matters raised frequently included: protecting existing facilities, including pubs; and providing better facilities where they are easily accessible (and provided on-site with new development).

Economy and Retail

Discussion of wider economy showed support for encouraging: development and investment; small and medium sized businesses; high-tech industry; wider job opportunities; and finding sites for business. For the retail sector there was support for: encouraging a wide range of shops; protecting local centres; providing more/better markets; and balancing in-town and out-of-town shopping. There was a call for tourism to be managed more effectively.

Environment

There was a strong consensus behind: protecting the unique character of Cambridge; the need for high quality design in new development; and providing and protecting open space. Other matters of shared interest included: the quality of streets and open spaces; the importance of iconic buildings; building height and density; and air quality and pollution.

Transport

Discussion of transport led to more general consensus about the issues (but not necessarily the solutions) than on any other matter. There was agreement about: the inadequacy to the existing infrastructure and the need for improvements; the necessity for managing traffic; the need for improved public transport; and the need for steps that favour cyclists and pedestrians. There were calls for a transport strategy that takes an integrated approach and embraces innovative solutions. Parking in the town centre, both public and private, and car parking standards in new development were contentious issues.

Sustainability and Climate Change

The workshops supported steps to address the challenge of climate change, with the possibility of Cambridge becoming an exemplar city. Attention was drawn to the need to tackle: energy use; water use; and flooding and drainage. Bringing existing buildings up to more sustainable standards was seen as a major challenge that must not be ignored.

Spatial Development

The question here is: if Cambridge is to grow in the future, where should that growth be? This was the one area where no consensus emerged from the workshops, indeed some people argued that there should be no further growth. The workshops did, however, identify the broad range of options, including: increasing the density and building higher in the City; developing large sites on the edge of Cambridge, e.g. the airport; reviewing the Green Belt for edge of City development; and dispersing growth into the surrounding area. There were arguments in favour of a compact City; and suggestions that Cambridge could become a City of multiple centres or hubs.

Other

Other significant points raised at the workshops included: improved working between the local authorities in the Cambridge area; the viability of development and the use of developer contributions; having flexible planning policies; and engaging the community in planning.

Existing Plan Policies

The workshops were asked to discuss the policies in the existing Local Plan and share their experiences of using them. This information will be used in considering if any existing policies should be taken forward into the new Local Plan and if so whether they need amending. At the end of the discussion people were asked to 'vote' with coloured dots on the policies indicating: those they thought were working well (green); those that worked fairly well, but with reservations (yellow); and those they thought were not working (red).

Across the workshops all policies received some attention, though there was a wide variation, for example, Policy 5/3 (housing lost to other uses) received on only one vote, whereas 36 people commented on Policy 3/13 (tall buildings and the skyline). Taking the number of policies into account, policies on design received the most attention. Only a handful of policies were thought to be exclusively working well, or working well with

reservations or not working; the great majority were the subject of mixed opinions and two-thirds had votes in all three categories, a graphic illustration of the diversity of views in planning. Only 20% of votes overall were in the 'working well' category. The top four policies in each category are given in the table below. There is no particular pattern to this, but it does reflect aspects of the issues discussions.

Cambridge Local Plan – Strongest responses to policies

Number	Policy
Policies working well	
3/4	Responding to context (16)
9/5	Southern Fringe (9)
4/11	Conservation Areas (7)
4/14	Air Quality Management Areas (7)
Policies working fairly well, but with reservations	
5/5	Meeting housing needs (12)
8/3	Mitigation measures (transport) (12)
7/9	Student hostels for Anglia Ruskin University (11)
7/10	Speculative student hostel accommodation (10)
Policies not working	
4/1	Green belt (23)
3/13	Tall buildings and skyline (21)
8/2	Transport impact (19)
7/11	Language schools (18)

As part of this exercise people were asked if they wanted to add policies. Three general concerns were expressed: the need to refine a number of existing policies; making sure the Plan deals with the implications of the changes to planning being introduced by the Government; and the consistent interpretation of policies and enforcement (a concern expressed particularly at the residents groups workshop). There were a number of specific suggestions that will be investigated.

Conclusions

The workshops showed that Cambridge is a good place in which to live, work and invest, though it is not without its problems, such as congestion and social division. The challenge for the whole community of Cambridge is to see how the inevitable changes over the next 20 years can be managed to build on the good qualities and tackle the problems. The Local Plan has an important part to play in this and the workshops have shown how the local community can shape and own the Plan. While there are differences to be reconciled, there is also clearly much common ground on which thinking about the future of Cambridge can go forward.