

OLD CHESTERTON RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

Comments on Cambridge City Council Issues and Options Consultation on the new Local Plan to 2031

East Chesterton

East Chesterton is an area of Cambridge which has already seen significant growth (e.g. an increase in its population of a third over the last ten years) and a loss of existing services, and where the pace of change is likely to accelerate. The proposed new station at Chesterton Sidings, while generally welcomed, will be a catalyst for this further change and development, and a growing realisation of this is a cause of anxiety to many people in the area. An indication of the strength of feeling among local people was made evident at the OCRA open meeting on 30th May 2012. A report on that meeting stated:

“There were some consistent themes which identify a sense of concern in the Chesterton community about the scale and scope of current change. Residents are clearly concerned that Chesterton remains a sustainable and diverse community with minimal requirements to travel outside for essential day to day goods and services. The gradual loss of facilities (land, buildings or services) has met with strong resistance but many people have, until now, felt they were fighting a losing battle. They wish to retain and enhance if possible what is available locally in a city which can often appear dominated by large vested interests with little interest in what goes on outside the city centre.”

The full report is annexed to this paper.

It is clear that although East Chesterton is part of the City of Cambridge, people who live there regard it as having a separate identity with its own community spirit. There is a wish to protect that identity and the community and social infrastructure on which it depends.

In writing this document, the authors have sought the views of OCRA committee members, and have endeavoured to remain on what they consider to be common ground from those who responded. Nonetheless, it is inevitable that in some instances a majority view will have been expressed. .

Chapter 2: Vision

The elements identified in Option 1 (Cambridge 2031 Vision) are, we believe, generally supported. We concur with the need to retain the vision of Cambridge as a compact city. We would emphasise that the seventh bullet point, namely the need to protect and enhance green spaces, trees, the River Cam and other water features, and to establish new green spaces is one which would find particular support across the City..

Chapter 3: Spatial Strategy

Questions 3.1 to 3.4: Level of Housing Provision

Yes, there clearly must be a policy addressing this issue. Of the options presented, we believe that the majority would favour Option 2 as representing sustainable growth. Time needs to be given to delivering and getting right the already agreed urban extensions before embarking on a further growth strategy. East Chesterton has seen too many examples of inappropriate high density housing, urban creep and the loss of local amenities as a result of housing development. The Green Belt should be preserved, and if additional housing numbers are required in the region, they should be sought in conjunction with South Cambridgeshire District Council outside the green belt. .

Questions 3.5 to 3.8: Level of Employment

We believe that most people who live and work in the area value Cambridge for the way it is, and would be concerned to see any major change in its character. There is an element of hubris in the vision of the city “as a world leader in higher education, research and knowledge based industries”, and it can be questioned whether these aims are in fact in the interests of the happiness and well-being of the majority of the people who live here.

In line with the preferred option for housing, we support Option 6.

Questions 3.9 to 3.12: Broad Locations for Development

As indicated above, we believe that an approach encompassing further releases from the green belt is fundamentally wrong and that further demands for housing growth should be met jointly with South Cambridgeshire District Council through a joint approach considering land beyond the green belt. The area identified as Option 18, “Broad Location 9”, namely land at Fen Ditton would particularly be opposed by OCRA as having an adverse effect on East Chesterton and the area immediately adjacent to it. The open and rural nature of the land between Chesterton on the fringe of the City, and Fen Ditton is highly prized as has been identified by local people as essential open space.

Chapter 4: Strategic Spatial Options

Questions 4.1 to 4.3: Green Belt

We would strongly support Option 20. .

Questions 4.4 to 4.6: Green Infrastructure

The proposal in Option 22 is eminently sensible and necessary. The development of a comprehensive strategy to protect and enhance green spaces within the city, and in relation to the wider network beyond, would be welcomed to counter piecemeal development and loss of public open space.

Questions 4.7 to 4.9: River Cam

A holistic study of the river corridor, along the lines of the Bedford Waterspace study, is essential and overdue. The river suffers from fragmented regulation by a number of separate bodies: the Cam Conservators, the City Council, the Environment Agency, and South Cambs District Council. Co-ordination and a comprehensive strategy are essential, not just on planning issues but on a range of other matters as well, for example:

- Mooring policies and their enforcement, including adequate mooring available for visiting boats.
- Balancing the interests of river use with the protection of wildlife
- Protection of green spaces along the river and views from and to the river.
- Better regulation of punting on the Middle River, and control of aggressive touting.
- Improved facilities for the boating community (both resident and visiting)
- Water quality and water abstraction
- Flooding.

We are aware that there is positive support for such a study within the Environment Agency and the Conservators, as well from elected members of all authorities and river user groups. We join in giving our support for this project as well.

Questions 4.17 to 4.23: Local Centres and Residential Communities

We believe that there is a need to retain the existing distinctive communities that exist in the City, of which East Chesterton is one. (Option 27). The ability to preserve existing local facilities for local people, and create new ones, should be inherent in the plan. With the creation of the new station, there will be an increased scope and need for East Chesterton to develop and enhance as a local centre, and planning should provide for this, not simply by way of linear development along the High Street and Green End Road (although the existing shops and pubs there are important), but by incorporating new facilities in the station planning.

We strongly oppose Option 26 which could remove the existing designation of a local centre to the shops in Green End Rd. We believe that the existing protection must be retained and greater protection needs to be given to both individual shops and groups of shops in neighbourhoods. With regard to the reference to Option 138, and a new policy to protect neighbourhood shops, any such policy must be strong enough to counter the recently enhanced permitted development rights from A1/A2 into residential use.

Questions 4.43 to 4.47: Northern Fringe East

OCRA endorses the proposals in the paper submitted by the Fen Road Steering Group, relating to planning and transport in the Fen Road area, insofar as they fall within the remit of the Cambridge Local Plan.

We broadly welcome the new station development. There are, however, concerns about the effect this will have on East Chesterton in the City and South Cambridgeshire administrative boundaries, in particular those areas which are adjacent to the station development.

Option 33 talks of an employment led development and “a vibrant new employment centre” but says nothing about the pressure on housing which the station is bound to cause and how that should be accommodated. We think that this need has been underestimated. .

We think that the new Station should meet the highest standards of design,. The initial plan produced by the County Council is unimaginative and a disastrous misuse of the space. Car parking should be multi-storey and, so far as possible, underground. The space above the station could be used for shops and offices. The road layout should be planned strategically and with the minimum use of space. The opportunity should be taken to provide separate road access to Chesterton Fen. Pedestrian and cycle access points should be carefully considered to minimise impact on existing residents and important green spaces such as Bramblefield LNR, Stourbridge Common and Ditton Meadows.

The adequacy of the existing infrastructure needs to be considered in the light of proposed development. For example, there is no mains sewerage east of the railway line in Fen Road, and surface water drainage in Water Street and Fen Road west of the line largely runs into the foul sewer which can be overwhelmed.

The impact of the station development on the river and its environs needs to be taken into consideration in order to protect precious green spaces and the current rural charm of the river environment.

We do not support the inclusion of a household waste recycling centre or inert waste recycling in this area, or the Camtoo proposal.

Option 33 does not provide an adequate strategic vision for the area. In the absence of an existing Area Action Plan, we consider that there needs to be a site-specific detailed analysis of the land use, transport, urban design and environmental planning options for its future use, and which should form the basis of a separate public consultation

Chapter 8 –Protecting and Enhancing the Historic and Natural Environment

We support Option 68, dealing with the protection and enhancement of Cambridge’s historic environment.

.We agree also with the need for effective protection of buildings of local interest, and would strongly support the sort of measures proposed in Option 69. It should be recognised that such buildings may not be of high architectural merit, but frequently are important in terms of local history, and can be part of the fabric of the life of local people. East Chesterton has lost too many such buildings recently to development. The current list of BLIs should be revisited.

One of the “key facts” noted on page 151, in relation to Nature Conservation etc, is that areas to the north of the city are deficient in natural green space. Policy should be directed towards ensuring that existing green space north of the river, or areas which

could be developed to provide additional green space, are not eroded by development for housing or employment purposes.

The options dealing with the protection of green spaces are mainly directed towards protecting sites of nature conservation importance (Option 77), or species and habitats, and biodiversity (Options 77 to 82). While supporting such proposals, we consider that sight should not be lost of the importance to local people of all green spaces and their vital importance to the quality of life and recreation of local people.

We welcome the proposed designation of Stourbridge Common as a Local Nature Reserve and the development of a management plan for the Common.

Chapter 9: Housing Delivery

East Chesterton is one of the less affluent areas of Cambridge and scores high on the Government's Index of Multiple Deprivation.. The high cost of buying or renting homes is a matter of concern to people in the area, and there is anxiety over the impact of the new station on local house prices.

Historically, it has also been an area of medium housing density, and this factor has contributed to its character as being more village than urban. However in the past decade East Chesterton has experienced the highest level of population growth in the City (14% of the City's total growth), and there have been examples of planning applications where developers have endeavoured to maximise their profits by trying to fit a quart into a pint pot, with plans that are totally at odds with the character and urban grain of the area. .

Questions 9.1 to 9.9: Affordable Housing

Provision for Affordable Housing in developments locally is essential. Option 90 would appear to be the most appropriate model. As to the threshold for Affordable Housing, we suggest that it must be informed by an analysis of thresholds across the sub region, and that it must be lowered from the current threshold of 15. A maximum of ten has been suggested, but that may well be too high as we note that other local authorities, such as South Cambridgeshire District Council, apply a threshold of two. .

We also support Option 95 which would require new student accommodation to contribute towards Affordable Housing.

Questions 9.10 to 9.20: Tenure mix, employment related housing, and housing mix.

We support a policy of both tenure mix and housing mix, in order to provide a variety of housing choice. Any policy would need to be flexible and capable of adjusting to other demands over the Plan period.. There is no point in building homes which cannot be sold or let. The policy should also be able to respond to the needs of particular areas where demand may well differ. As indicated above, the need in East Chesterton is to respond to the demand for market and affordable housing which will provide for existing families, and developers should be discouraged from aiming to build expensive homes for wealthy incomers or an overreliance on one and two bed

units. Tenure and housing mix should contribute to the overall social and community character of the area.

A policy as outlined in Option 99 for employment related housing is, in principle, sensible but would need to contain safeguards to ensure that there is provision for a full range of employees. North West Cambridge for example excludes most low paid workers from the planned university housing and this may well create an enclave which is not beneficial to the City or to a diverse and cohesive community.

Questions 9.21 to 9.23: Housing Density

As stated above, East Chesterton has been subject to some inappropriate high density planning applications, and its character is in part formed by its existing medium density housing stock. There may be opportunities in the North East Fringe Area to consider some higher density housing without it detracting from the overall character of the area. This is a further factor which makes overall strategic planning of the new station and its surrounds, with full consultation of local residents, to be essential.

Of the alternatives offered, we would propose Option 102 which does not impose any specific density policy requirements, rather than establishing minimum threshold densities. If anything there should be an expressed guideline that development should be in conformity with the surrounding area, unless there are compelling reasons to depart from that.

Questions 9.24 to 9.32: Minimum Standards and Lifetime Homes.

We agree that minimum space standards for new housing, including external private amenity space are necessary. Recent planning applications in East Chesterton which have in our view constituted over development have ignored the need for adequate internal and external private spaces. We do not support Options 109 and 110.

We think there is clearly a case for providing Lifetime Homes, and all new developments should be built to this standard (Option 111).

Questions 9.33 to 9.46: Small-scale development, HMO's, Specialist housing

While there is clearly scope for small-scale development on unused sites, East Chesterton has suffered from some rear of garden development to its detriment. As stated earlier, the area is deficient in open space and recreation areas and gardens can provide much needed private amenity space. We would echo the points made in paragraph 9.61. We support the development of back gardens only in exceptional circumstances and where it does not detract from the urban grain of the area.

With regard to HMO's, East Chesterton has many shared houses and HMOs. We agree that a policy is necessary and that there should be controls to prevent inappropriate multi-occupation where the building or location is unsuitable and to ensure that impact on an area is adequately assessed and considered.

We support a policy for specialist housing, in particular for older people. East Chesterton is already home to a number of such developments.

We agree with Option 118.

Questions 9.47 to 9.50: Traveller and Gypsy Provision

East Chesterton has an established traveller community on Chesterton Fen, which, while administratively separate as it largely falls within SCDC, is in many ways integral to East Chesterton. At present the only access is through the East Chesterton local road network, and people living on Chesterton Fen share local facilities such as schools, shops and pubs. It is a largely settled community, with numbers of families who have lived there for many generations.

At present the area falls far short of the criteria set out in Option 119. The continual designation of these sites as temporary has resulted in poor planning and inadequate service provision for the residents. There is inadequate and unsafe road access, no near access to public transport, no mains drainage, high flood risk, and site contamination. The area is adjacent to the planned new station development, and should be included in the overall strategic plan for the area and considered jointly by the three Authorities..

Questions 9.54 to 9.59: Residential Moorings

We do not understand question 9.54 and consider it is there in error. Boat dwellers come from a diverse range of cultures and backgrounds.

The assumption that living on a boat simply provides a cheap housing option is wrong. There are costs involved, some quite substantial, such as mooring fees, navigation licence fees, insurance, and boat maintenance. (It should be noted that the mooring licence fees charged by the Council are well below market rates) Maintaining an acceptable standard of living requires a measure of knowledge and experience of boating, and a discipline. Boats and their systems deteriorate rapidly unless properly maintained, and life can go downhill very quickly.

The present position in Cambridge is that there are 70 moorings available to residential boaters on Stourbridge and Midsummer Commons, as well as just below Jesus Lock. These were the most which could be accommodated, given the areas in which the Cam Conservancy prohibited mooring for navigational reasons. The area along Riverside has been unregulated up to now. However it has now been established that the City Council is the riparian owner and is thus in a position to regulate mooring there.

There is thus little, if any, scope for additional residential moorings. There is also a paucity of visitors' moorings, and inadequate provision for boaters generally, whether residential or visiting. All these matters need to be the subject of a strategic study as proposed in Option 23 and commented on above, and cannot be dealt with piecemeal though a policy as outlined in Option 120.

Chapter 10: The Economy

The vision for the Cambridge economy needs to be consistent with maintaining the essential character of the City and the quality of life of its inhabitants. The economy thus should be managed to meet those aims. It follows that of the options put forward, Option 122 is the one we would favour, namely continuing with the current selective management of the economy rather than expanding the scope (Option 123) or discontinuing a policy of selective management (Option 124).

The promotion of cluster development (Option 130) is practical and sensible. We recognise that the new station development, with its particular intention of serving the Science Park, will attract additional business to the area and expand the cluster development of the high tech industry towards the new station. This again underlines the need for proper strategic planning of the new station and surrounding area.

The neighbourhood shops in East Chesterton are of cardinal importance to its character, as well as providing a vital service to those who are of limited mobility. We agree that they should be protected and support Option 138. However any new policy to protect neighbourhood shops must be strong enough to counter the recently enhanced permitted development rights from A1/A2 into residential use.

The new station may give scope for an expansion of shopping outlets in the area and the development of a new shopping centre.

Chapter 11: Promoting Successful Communities

We support Option 163, the objectives listed on page 261, and Option 164

Questions 11.4 to 11.23: Open Space, Leisure, and Community Facilities

Paragraph 11.15 refers to the Open Space and Recreation Strategy 2011 as having identified East Chesterton as having lower quality open spaces, and neighbouring wards suffering similar deficiencies. The area north of the river is, in general, poorly served in that regard. We believe that every effort should be made for this deficiency to be redressed and would therefore support Option 165. We support Option 167 for the provision for open space and recreation on site though it should state explicitly that commuted sums be taken as an exception only.. Similarly we would support the protection of existing leisure and community facilities and development of new facilities (Options 168, 169 and 170) but consider that the options are unambitious in their scope. The approach to viability is a narrow market led approach which fails to consider the wider social and recreational needs of a community or accessibility of public transport.

There is concern about implementation where commuted sums are accepted.. An example in East Chesterton is where the Vie Development led to the significant loss of open space and sporting facilities which were previously available to local residents at the former Pye Factory. Section 106 money, which was believed to have been allocated to provide replacement, and to improve Logan's Meadow and Chesterton Recreation Ground, have not been forthcoming. The planning officer's recommendations in the recent planning application relating to the Cambridge City

Football Ground are not consistent with the proposals now being put forward. Policies are all very well, but fine words butter no parsnips.

We consider that clear reference must be made in the Local Plan to the Register of Community Assets which the City Council must put into place from this autumn, and that the Register should be included as an annex and updated at least annually. The City should also take a pro-active approach to inviting nominations to the Register and building up a comprehensive picture of each area through its compilation. The definition of community facilities under 11.29/11.30 should be broadened to encompass the Register of Community Assets which will also give flexibility to the definition and greater protection through the lengthy Plan period.

Questions 11.24 to 11.31: Public Houses

We share the concerns of many over the loss of pubs in the City. East Chesterton has one public house still open (the Green Dragon). Three former public houses are boarded up and their futures uncertain. The owners of one (the Penny Ferry), were granted planning permission, on appeal, to replace it with houses, but Conservation Area Consent to demolish the existing building was refused by the NAC on the 26th July 2012. The former Dog and Pheasant (aka the Golden Pheasant and Saigon City) has been subject to a planning application to build houses which has been refused, but the application is being, or has been, resubmitted. The future of the Haymakers is uncertain. Other pubs in East Chesterton have been lost in the recent past. Paragraph 11.3 expresses the role public houses play, and underlines the loss this area has suffered.

There are reasons other than those set out in paragraph 11.34 for the closure of public houses. With the pressure to provide housing, owners of public houses have seen where their fortunes lie. It is very easy to run down a pub or restaurant and then declare that it is no longer viable.

We support Option 173 but consider that the narrow market led approach to viability outlined in the Option fails sufficiently to take account of the wider social and community role which public houses can play and that any consideration of alternative public houses should be on an area wide basis and encompass how many public houses there are or have been lost in an area (defined by ward but flexible over boundaries) over at least the previous five years. . We consider that the Penny Ferry/Pike and Eel should be included in the list in Appendix I: it was been prematurely excluded because of one successful planning appeal but Conservation Area consent to demolish has since been refused. .

We also support Options 174 and 175.

Chapter 12: Transport and Infrastructure

Questions 12.1 to 12.6: Transport

There is certainly a need to promote non-car use and so we would support Option 183 in principle. However, there are several riders:

First, such a policy requires an efficient public transport system which is far from the case at present. For example, the Citi 2 route serving East Chesterton provides a theoretical ten minute interval, but in practice it varies widely, and cannot be relied upon by people who have fixed appointments without a considerable degree of latitude. Public transport needs to be available for longer periods, by starting earlier and ending later, in particular to serve those who work in the service economy. The cost of public transport can also be prohibitive for younger people, particularly those with children.

Existing cycle routes need major improvement in the north of the City. Many designated cycling routes in and around Chesterton are confusing or obstructed, leading to cyclists preferring to ride on the road or on pedestrian paths. It is notable that when anti-social cycling was discussed at the NAC meeting on the 26th July 2012, it was apparent that even the police were confused by whether cycling was or was not permitted in certain places.

Pedestrians are poor relations when it comes to non-car transport modes. Increasingly, paths are becoming dual use for pedestrians and cyclists. With the expansion of cycling, and the increasing speed at which cyclist are able, and do, travel, it can be intimidating to pedestrians, in particular the elderly, the infirm, and those with small children or dogs. There should be a policy to segregate pedestrian and cycle routes.

Finally, it must be recognised that, in many circumstances, private motor transport can be essential. The disabled and workers who need access to tools and other equipment are but examples.

In regard to Option 184 we question what is meant by the term “appropriate” in practice. The infrastructure needs to serve the traveller, but be consistent with the interests of the local community. Again, we would refer to the new Chesterton station development and the need for integrated strategic planning in consultation with local residents. The plan of the station layout recently produced by the County Council showed a poor road layout that is wasteful of space. We consider that the provision of any new transport infrastructure along land corridors must recognise, and minimise the impact on sensitive ecological environments such as the River Cam, Stourbridge Common and Ditton Meadows. Some green space is protected by statute and of enormous significance to the area. We consider that no extension to the Guided Bus across the meadows can be permitted in the Plan and any cycle routes, including the Chisholm Trail, must be the subject of full and meaningful consultation with the local community and Common users.

Questions 12.7 to 12.17: Car and Cycle Parking

We consider that any policy adopted should be sufficiently flexible to deal with the parking requirements of a major new development such as the new station. While we anticipate that planning of the station will concentrate on non-car use as far as possible, there needs to be sufficient provision of car parking to take account of the likely expected passenger through-put. East Chesterton wants to avoid the commuter on-street parking suffered by areas close to Cambridge station, and would not welcome residential parking restrictions in order to prevent it. The parking provision

in the station plan produced by the County Council, showing a large open car park, is clearly inadequate, inappropriate and a waste of valuable space.

Appendix J does not seem to accommodate a development such as the new station, and any policy should be sufficiently flexible to take the needs of such a development into account. Otherwise, of the three options, we think that Option 187 is the most appropriate.

The current residential car parking standards which require a maximum but not a minimum number of parking spaces for new developments has often led to overspill parking on nearby roads when developers maximise density and land use for units and provide insufficient car parking spaces. An example of this is the Vie development on Church St and recent proposals for the site of the Dog and Pheasant on the High St. Residential parking standards should be reviewed and a minimum requirement set just as happens with cycle parking.

There is clearly a policy necessary for cycle parking in new development and we support Option 191. Our past experience, however, is that actual provision is deficient and this is where developers will skimp if they can. We also support Option 192.

We do not comment on the remaining issues in this Chapter.

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