

OLD CHESTERTON RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION

Comments on the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan Issues and Options Report (SCDC/LP/V2/01.07.2012)

East Chesterton

While East Chesterton lies within the boundary of the City of Cambridge, the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan will have a direct effect on people living in the area, either because of the impact on the City of Cambridge generally, or because of proposals for areas adjoining East Chesterton. The purpose of this paper is to respond to those matters.

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.”

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. It can therefore be likened to a village community. At its boundary with South Cambridgeshire it retains a semi rural character in many parts.

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.

In answering the South Cambridgeshire consultation we have restricted ourselves to areas of likely impact on East Chesterton.

Chapter 2: Vision

Questions 1 and 2:

While we would generally support the vision in Issue 1, and the objectives in Issue 2, we do question the drive to be a “world leader” expressed in Objective A. This seems to be driven by hubris on the part of certain special interest groups. While the economic success of the region is important to the well-being of the people who live there, rapid and excessive economic growth is not, nor is it compatible with Objective B.

Objective B should also recognise the impact of development in the region on the City of Cambridge itself. Accordingly, the objective should not only be to protect the character of South Cambridgeshire, but also to recognise its importance to the setting of the City of Cambridge. It should seek to protect the built and natural heritage in both areas.

Chapter 3: Development Needs:

Questions 3 and 4:

Following on from what we have said above, we would support the lower jobs growth of 14,000 additional jobs in Question 3 and the lower housing provision of 4,300 additional dwellings in Question 4.

Chapter 4: Spatial Strategy:

Questions 9 to 12 inclusive:

We consider that the Green Belt around the City should be preserved and protected from any further erosion. We believe that most people who live and *work in and around Cambridge City* value Cambridge for the way it is, as a compact city, and would be concerned to see any major change in its character. It follows that, other than sustainable development within the existing City boundary, if additional housing numbers are required in the region, they should be sought outside the Green Belt.

Accordingly, in answer to **Question 9**, we strongly oppose option 1. and consider option 2, that focus on providing development through one or more new developments, as the most viable of three unattractive options. Furthermore, in answer to **Question 10**, we think that the Green Belt purposes and functions are not only appropriate, but vital for the well-being of Cambridge and the surrounding region.

It also follows, in response to **Question 11**, that we would not support more land being released beyond that already committed.

With regard to the broad locations identified in **Issue 12**, the area identified as “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 and has been identified by local people as essential open space.

Chapter 8: Protecting and Enhancing the Natural and Historic Environment:

The countryside surrounding Cambridge is a vitally important amenity to those living within the City, and so they have a vested interest in its protection and enhancement. East Chesterton has a deficit of green spaces, and so residents are particularly reliant for outdoor recreation on open spaces outside the area, including Stourbridge Common and Ditton Meadows.

Of particular importance is the green corridor formed by the River Cam which defines the character of the City and its environment. 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, South Cambridgeshire District Council, and the Environment Agency. Co-ordination and a comprehensive strategy are essential, not just on planning issues but on a range of other matters also. 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.

In response to some of the specific questions in this Chapter, we regard a policy outlined in **Question 30** as vital. We agree with the policy in **Question 31**. We agree with both parts of **Question 32** (this would be an important part of the waterspace study referred to above). We give affirmative answers to **Questions 33A and 34**. With regard to **Question 41**, namely a policy for proposals affecting waterways, we would again refer to the proposed waterspace study.

On Question 42, we support separate policies addressing historic landscapes, archaeological sites, listed buildings and their settings and Conservation Areas. On Question 43 we agree that where local communities designate Assets of Local Importance or create a Community Asset Register this should be recognised and included to support appropriate consideration of their contribution to the local environment.

Chapter 9, Question 57:

The provision of accommodation for Gypsies, Traveller and Travelling Showpeople should include a reference to the quality of site provision for this group who are often marginalised and suffer from lack of infrastructure such as drainage or transport. This is the case with sites adjacent to East Chesterton where the needs of a settled traveller community have not been met or considered. In particular, the policy should address the long-standing need for adequate and unrestricted access for heavy vehicles, and the provision of mains drainage, to Chesterton Fen. These should be regarded as important priorities to be met during the Plan Period.

Cambridge Northern Fringe East

This is an issue raised in Chapter 10 (**Question 59**) relating to new employment provision, and is one of the site specific issues in Chapter 13 (**Question 110**). It is convenient to take the two together.

While we broadly welcome the new station and development based on and around it, there are many concerns about the impact this will have on East Chesterton in both the City and South Cambridgeshire administrative boundaries, in particular those areas which are adjacent to the station development. Planning for additional employment provision in isolation to any impact on adjacent land use, be that housing or agricultural, is short-sighted.

Issue 110 purports to be a “vision” for the area. In the absence of a detailed masterplan, the statement is clearly deficient as anything other than a series of generalised principles.

Our strongly-held opinion is that the new station at Chesterton Sidings should meet the highest standards of urban design. The initial plans produced by the County Council are unimaginative and a disastrous misuse of the available land.. Car parking should be multi-storey and, so far as possible, underground. The space above the station could be used for shops and offices.

When considering additional housing in the area, there may be pressure to provide pied a terre, as there has been at Cambridge station, and it may be appropriate to meet that need by higher density housing than would be acceptable in other parts of the district.

The road layout should be planned strategically and with minimum land take. An alternative road access to Chesterton Fen Road should be incorporated. Pedestrian and cycle access points should be carefully considered to minimise their impact on existing residents, and environmentally 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 the proposed development. For example, there is no mains sewerage east of the railway line in Fen Road.

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.

We have yet to see 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, which should form the basis of a further and joint public consultation by all three local authorities – South Cambridgeshire DC, Cambridge City and Cambridgeshire County Council.

Chapter 12: Transport Strategy

Transport within the region affects everybody, including those living in the City, and we shall be separately commenting on the County Council consultation. We have the following comments to make on the issues in this Chapter:

Question 97: We broadly agree with the principles in Issue 97. The loss of facilities in villages, however, making residents dependant on transport in order to exist, is a contributory factor. Referring back to **Question 81**, it is vitally important to protect village services and facilities. There is a distressing trend for large settlements to be without a shop, pub or post office, and therefore be dependant on the nearest town.

We agree with the need to promote non-car modes of travel. The planning of cycle ways in the country, however, needs to be done with sensitivity to the environment. Replacing naturally worn footpaths with cycle ways is frequently detrimental.

Question 98: The requirement for Transport Assessment and Travel Plans is sensible. We do not propose a different threshold.

Question 104: We support any policies which will promote the use of rail freight and reduce the amount carried by road.

Question 106: Marshalls is one of the most important businesses in Cambridge and one of the largest employers. For the aeronautical engineering side of the business, an airport is essential. The decision of Marshalls to remain in Cambridge was accordingly greeted with relief by many people. Apart from supporting the core business, the airport has the potential to be a small regional airport providing fast business travel to the City. It also has a long history of flying training, and remains the most significant centre for this activity in the region. It is therefore essential for the business to be supported by relevant planning authorities, and while, clearly, environmental and residential concerns must be taken into account, and safety must be paramount further development to support the business should be sympathetically considered.

Question 107: Infrastructure is clearly essential, and no development should be permitted without ensuring that adequate infrastructure to support it is, or will be, in place.

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September 2012.