

South Cambridgeshire District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee held on
Tuesday, 21 September 2021 at 4.30 p.m.

PRESENT: Councillor Judith Rippeth – Chair
Councillor Sarah Cheung Johnson – Vice-Chair

Councillors: Henry Batchelor (substitute) Anna Bradnam
Dr. Martin Cahn Nigel Cathcart
Graham Cone Dr. Claire Daunton
Peter Fane Geoff Harvey
Steve Hunt Dr. Aidan Van de Weyer
Dr. Richard Williams

Officers in attendance for all or part of the meeting:
Jonathan Dixon (Planning Policy Manager), Paul Frainer (Assistant Director
(Strategy & Economy)), Ian Senior (Scrutiny and Governance Adviser) and
Liz Watts (Chief Executive)

Councillors Paul Bearpark, Sue Ellington, Dr. Tumi Hawkins, Pippa Heylings, Bridget Smith
and Heather Williams were in attendance, by invitation.

1. Chair's announcements

In the absence of Councillor Grenville Chamberlain, Councillor Judith Rippeth took the
chair and made several brief housekeeping announcements.

By affirmation, committee members appointed Cllr Sarah Cheung Johnson as Vice-Chair
of the meeting.

2. Apologies

Councillors Grenville Chamberlain and Sally Ann Hart sent apologies for absence.
Councillor Henry Batchelor substituted for Councillor Hart.

3. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Public questions

There were two public questions.

Question from Daniel Fulton

The audio feed of the council's planning committee meeting on 8 September terminated
abruptly just as a member of the public began to accuse the council of serious
malfeasance in regards to the issue under consideration.

After several delays, the council eventually stated that it was unable to restore functionality

to the audio system, and the committee decided to abandon the meeting.

Certainly, one would normally assume that the occurrence of the apparent audio malfunction at the very moment that serious allegations of wrongdoing were being made was merely coincidental.

However, since that time, the council has declined to provide any contemporaneous evidence about the purported audio fault to members of the public—no software error codes or error logs and no contemporaneous emails or other documentation. The council has not even provided a vague description of the type of system being used to broadcast the council's meeting—a system that we understand was obtained by the council earlier this year at considerable expense. All that has been provided is a technical note from the council's A/V supplier, which was produced after the fact and doesn't actually offer any clarity as to the cause of the audio malfunction.

If the council were to provide contemporaneous evidence as to the specific nature of the audio fault (and if events did actually happen as the council has described them), then members of the public could verify that the termination of the audio feed during the meeting was due to a technical fault, allaying the concerns of those affected by the abandoned meeting.

To provide some reassurance to the public, could the council please state if it has instructed any officer not to provide any evidence or information relating to the audio/video system or the events that transpired on 8 September to any party or to delay providing any evidence or information to any party?

Answer on behalf of South Cambridgeshire District Council

As you know, you have contacted several officers at the council about this matter and been provided with a written explanation on the 10 September as to the underlying cause about the technical failure. You then subsequently rang and spoke directly with the external engineers last week who provided verbal confirmation of the running order of the faults and the support they provided."

There was no supplementary question.

Question from Phil Grant

The proposed direction for Policy S/DS Development Strategy, set out in First Proposals document, correctly places significant weight on aligning new development with investment in public transport. The Transport Strategy on page 42 confirms "*Our proposed strategy is heavily informed by the location of existing and committed public transport schemes.*"

However, a comparison of Figure 6 showing proposed sites for inclusion in the Plan, and Figure 11 showing existing and proposed major transport projects, illustrates that the spatial strategy is disproportionately reliant on the delivery of significant levels of new major and complex transport infrastructure projects such as the Cambourne to Cambridge (C2C) transport link and East West Rail, the provision of the latter being outside the control of the Authority and does not have the level of certainty on delivery timeframes necessary to support a robust Local Plan.

The independent audit review of the C2C [Cambourne to Cambridge] project recognised that housing developments in Cambourne West and Bourn Airfield require the C2C project to be opened by 2025 to provide reliable public transport services, otherwise that planned

growth will be put at risk.

The Committee should be aware that no proposed growth has been aligned to *existing* public transport routes and committed investments to the Southwest of Cambridge, for example, along the A10 corridor and national rail network, which will benefit from the Melbourn Greenway and Foxton Travel Hub, the latter due to be operational in 2024. These projects are in the direct control of the Greater Cambridge Partnership, delivery of which would enable sustainable growth to be realised in the early part of the plan period.

In the light of these facts, what does the Committee think about such reliance on uncertain, complex and third-party infrastructure projects to deliver significant levels of growth, as opposed to aligning growth with existing and inherently sustainable public transport infrastructure, is it a sound strategy, and when in the plan period would this growth be expected to be realised?

Answer on behalf of South Cambridgeshire District Council

Our First Proposals for the new Local Plan draw on testing of a range of spatial options to identify an appropriate preferred strategy that our evidence bases and Sustainability Appraisal show to be sustainable when compared with the other options tested. This evidence included transport considerations, but also explored the other components of what makes a location sustainable.

Beyond the strategy options focused on Cambridge, our evidence showed that the combined benefits of East West Rail and C2C would make Cambourne a highly sustainable location in transport terms. In addition to transport considerations, our evidence showed that providing further development at Cambourne would be substantively more sustainable than allocating a 'new' new settlement in a brand new location, given that it would grow an existing town to become larger, enhancing the existing critical mass of population, employment and services; this would speed up delivery of development in comparison with starting afresh in a new location with no existing infrastructure and services. In comparison with locating development close to an existing rail station, development here would provide an opportunity to design a sustainable community built around the new station.

In terms of reliance on transport schemes, to inform the locations and delivery assumptions included in the First Proposals strategy, we took an informed view about proposed new transport schemes including their certainty and timing of delivery. In doing so we worked with relevant partners including the Combined Authority, County Council, Greater Cambridge Partnership and Network Rail. The delivery assumptions included in the plan draw on published information provided by the bodies leading relevant schemes, as well as being informed by the delivery rates and lead in times identified in our Housing Delivery Study, August 2021.

The key locations included in our proposed strategy rely in significant part on schemes which are in the direct control of Greater Cambridge Partnership and therefore have an agreed delivery vehicle and committed funding. In relation to C2C, this has progressed since 2018 through several stages of refining options. At the GCP Executive Board meeting on 1 July 2021 the Board approved the Outline Business Case and asked the project team to go ahead with the next stage of the application process: to undertake a full Environmental Impact Assessment.

For East West Rail which is currently at an early stage but which is expected to progress as we go through the plan-making process and to be delivered half way through the plan period, we have given weight to this at the First Proposals stage, but made clear that we

will review the position at each stage of plan-making to confirm whether we have sufficient evidence of delivery at the later formal stages of plan-making.

The First Proposals Strategy includes some village growth at the most sustainable locations, including at Melbourn in the south west of the district, drawing on our evidence which identified villages located on existing railway stations, but which also considered wider sustainability criteria such as the range of shops and services available.

In summary, our evidence shows that the First Proposals strategy is sustainable when considered in relation to transport and other impacts. Our approach to committed and emerging transport schemes on which the First Proposals development locations would rely is evidence based and proportionate in relation to this stage of the Local Plan, recognising the opportunities that those schemes present. We will keep progress on those transport schemes under review at each formal plan-making stage.

In response to a supplementary question, Councillor Dr. Tumi Hawkins undertook to investigate options for economic growth along the London Liverpool Street and London King's Cross railway lines, and to provide a written answer. She said that the evidence base used had been robust but that the Council could re-visit that evidence where necessary.

5. Greater Cambridge Local Plan: Preferred Options (Regulation 18) - For consultation

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee received a presentation from officers, and considered a report seeking its comments on the proposed content of, and the participation and communication strategy for, the next formal round of consultation for the Greater Cambridge Local Plan, being prepared jointly with Cambridge City Council, and a mirror of this report was also being considered by the City Council.

The Committee considered the report under five themed headings, namely:

- Housing and jobs numbers, and overall strategy
- Site allocations
- Green Belt
- Environmental impacts
- Infrastructure implications

Members accepted though that these categories were for ease of process only and were not rigid or stand-alone. The Scrutiny and Overview Committee supported the recommendations in the officers' report and made the following comments in response to the First Proposals and supporting documents.

Councillor Dr. Tumi Hawkins was in attendance.

Homes and jobs numbers and overall strategy

Committee members

- noted the uncertainties and therefore judgement involved in identifying how many jobs had actually been provided and in forecasting future jobs growth.
- queried the approach taken in identifying the most likely forecast, noting the relative differences for Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire.
- asked whether different household sizes, including trends over time, had been

taken into account.

- asked if COVID impacts had been taken into account when gathering housing needs and employment evidence.
- Regarding the Sustainability Appraisal of growth options, one member queried why the medium growth scenario has been preferred, given that it was not the best performing of the identified growth options.
- queried whether there was a risk of the Council providing more houses than were needed bearing in mind the buffer that had been applied to the housing need figure informing the number of homes being planned for.
- asked that it be made explicit how many homes were being proposed in the administrative districts of Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire, while recognising that it would be a Greater Cambridge Local Plan.
- queried the distribution of allocations between Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire when compared with the distribution of the identified housing need.
- asked for further clarity about the number of homes included in the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2018, and the homes permitted in addition to this which were now included in the committed supply.
- Queried the criteria for defining windfall sites
- queried whether there was robust evidence justifying reliance on large scale infrastructure schemes with uncertainty of the timing of delivery, including East West Rail and Cambourne to Cambridge.

Councillor Dr. Tumi Hawkins made the following responses to the above points, supplemented by additional officer advice for specific questions:

- the Councils had taken a thorough approach to examining employment forecasting. COVID impacts are being seen on the ground - future evidence reviews would address these impacts.
- The Sustainability Appraisal was an important part of the evidence base. The Sustainability Appraisal of the strategic spatial options highlighted differences for growth and spatial scenarios but also identified uncertainties, depending on how that growth was met. The First Proposals sought to locate growth in sustainable locations to bring positive social, economic, and environmental benefits.
- The buffer had been applied to provide a flexible plan. The approach would be reviewed at each stage of plan-making.
- The plan was a joint plan which rightly responded to functional geographies rather than being bound by administrative boundaries.
- The response made to the public question from Mr Grant was relevant to the question about reliance on large scale infrastructure schemes.

Site allocations

- For Policy S/RSC/HW (Land between Hinton Way and Mingle Lane, Great Shelford), one member asked whether an estimated capacity should be specified in the event that an additional access to the site was provided.
- For Policy S/CE I (Cambridge East) the potential impacts of development on nearby communities were noted, including on Teversham.
- Regarding Policy S/RRA/MF (Land at Mansel Farm, Station Road, Oakington) concern was expressed that this allocation would impose additional development on a village already very significantly impacted by development at Northstowe.

Councillor Dr. Tumi Hawkins made the following responses to the above points, supplemented by additional officer advice for specific questions:

- Identifying appropriate capacities on sites had been a design-led process

- accounting for site specific issues.
- Cambridge East had been identified as suitable for development in previous plans, and was therefore not a new site.

Green Belt

Committee members

- queried whether there was evidence of a robust approach taken to addressing National Planning Policy Framework paragraph 141 which identifies steps needing to be taken before concluding that exceptional circumstances exist to remove land from the Green Belt, in particular referring to the justification for removing village sites from the Green Belt.
- queried whether the First Proposals should make further reference to the relocation of the Cambridge Water Treatment Plant to a Cambridge Green Belt location, as a corollary of the Plan's proposals.

Councillor Dr. Tumi Hawkins made the following responses to the above points, supplemented by additional officer advice for specific questions:

- The process followed by the Councils in addressing National Planning Policy Framework paragraph 141 was set out in the Strategy Topic Paper
- the relocation of the Cambridge Water Treatment Plant was a separate process from the Local Plan, led by an external body.

Environmental impacts, including climate and biodiversity, and infrastructure implications

- Regarding Policy CC/NZ: Net zero carbon new buildings, several Members expressed support for the high environmental building standards proposed in the First Proposals, noting that these exceed national standards. Discussion was held regarding: the risks of going above national standards; ensuring that the policy doesn't allow offsetting to be used to avoid delivering high standards on site; the differing energy needs of residential and commercial development; whether it is advisable to promote electric-only development; the proposed policy approach in relation to an alternative of requiring Passivhaus standards; the need to promote a 'fabric-first' approach to environmental building standards; the desirability of promoting the reuse of buildings to limit carbon emissions, and the limitations of the planning system in influencing existing housing stock.
- Regarding the water supply challenge noted at various points in the First Proposals, Members welcomed the strong message set out in the plan that its proposals are contingent on sustainable provision of water, and made various comments on this topic, including: one member queried why the preferred housing growth level has not been lowered to respond to this challenge; one member noted that at application stage water companies have a statutory duty to provide water and as such water supply is not a reason for refusal, and expressed concern as to whether this was the case for the plan itself; one member noted the impact of existing abstraction licences on water supply and queried whether anything could be done on this issue.
- Regarding wastewater, concern was expressed that additional development around Cambourne might worsen existing challenges at Uttons Drove Water Treatment Plant, with knock-on effects for nearby villages, including Swavesey.
- Regarding biodiversity, the importance was emphasised of policies ensuring the retention of existing biodiversity assets as a starting point for the design of development.

Councillor Dr. Tumi Hawkins made the following responses to the above points, supplemented by additional officer advice for specific questions:

- The Local Plan process involved identification of objectively assessed needs for development, which then must be met if possible. As such, the Councils were not at liberty to lower the proposed growth level in relation to water supply
- The Integrated Water Management Study had explored in depth water supply and waste water issues. On water supply the Councils were engaging with the Environment Agency, Water Resources East, and the Water Companies to help address the challenge regarding future supply and associated impacts on the natural environment.

Comments on other topics

- policy wording should reflect the importance of protecting heritage assets on village high streets
- Regarding Policy H/ES (Exception sites for affordable housing) the question was posed whether exception sites should be allocated in the Local Plan or in neighbourhood plans.
- Regarding Policy I/ST (Sustainable transport and connectivity) consideration should be given to encouraging the provision of new public rights of way as well as the enhanced connection of existing ones.
- Regarding Policy I/EV (Parking and electric vehicles) hope was expressed that the draft local plan policy would include further design requirements.

Councillor Dr. Tumi Hawkins made the following response to the above points, supplemented by additional officer advice for specific questions:

- Exception sites were, by definition, identified outside of a plan-making process.

Recommended changes to the documents

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee **recommended** that the following changes be made to the First Proposals Plan and supporting documents ahead of public consultation:

- In relation to Figure 4 (Illustrative map showing the locations of proposed new development, make changes to this figure and any numbers provided relating to it, differentiating between locations proposed for densification, and locations proposed for increased delivery rates.
- For Policy S/NS (Existing new settlements), and in relation to increasing delivery rates at Waterbeach New Town, make explicit reference to the agreed trip budget for the site, and confirm that the higher delivery rates on all phases of development will be contingent upon meeting this.
- For Policy S/CE (Cambridge East) make explicit that the proposed additional homes and jobs relate only to the Cambridge Airport site, and not to the consented developments at Marleigh and Land North of Cherry Hinton.
- For Policy S/CBC (Cambridge Biomedical Campus) consider whether the policy can be strengthened to ensure that no development takes place within the blue line area proposed for Green Belt enhancements.
- In Policy S/SCP/WHD (Whittlesford Parkway Station Area, Whittlesford Bridge) include reference to the Red Lion pub and Duxford Chapel listed buildings, requiring that the design of any development should sensitively address these heritage assets.
- For Policy S/RRA/MF (Land at Mansel Farm, Station Road, Oakington) add further justification for why this site has been proposed, noting the flood risk in this area and its location adjacent to development at Northstowe.
- For Policy CC/FM (Flooding and integrated water management), strengthen the

policy to include additional wording to require that the risk of flooding in the greater Cambridge area is not increased as a result of new development (Cllr Bradnam and Cllr Heylings to provide proposed wording for consideration).

- For Policy H/SH (Specialist housing and homes for older people) revise the policy to differentiate clearly between specialist housing across all age groups and housing for older people and place more emphasis on “whole life housing” and down-sizing.

6. To Note the date of the next meeting

The next scheduled Scrutiny and Overview Committee meeting would be on Thursday 14 October at 5.20pm.

The Meeting ended at 8.15 p.m.
