

South Cambridgeshire District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee held on
Thursday, 12 January 2023 at 5.20 p.m.

PRESENT: Councillor Stephen Drew – Chair
Councillor Graham Cone – Vice-Chair

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| Councillors: | Anna Bradnam | Tom Bygott |
| | Sue Ellington | Sally Ann Hart |
| | Helene Leeming | Judith Rippeth |
| | Richard Stobart | Dr. Aidan Van de Weyer |

Officers in attendance for all or part of the meeting:

In the Council Chamber: Aaron Clarke (Democratic Services Technical Officer), Jonathan Dixon (Planning Policy Manager), Caroline Hunt (Strategy and Economy Manager), Stephen Kelly (Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development), Stuart Morris (Principal Planning Policy Officer), Ian Senior (Scrutiny and Governance Adviser), Liz Watts (Chief Executive), Rory McKenna (Monitoring Officer) and Jeff Membery (Head of Transformation, HR and Corporate Services)

Climate and Environment Advisory Committee (CEAC) members in the Council Chamber: Councillors Paul Bearpark, Ariel Cahn, Dr. Martin Cahn, Geoff Harvey, Pippa Heylings, Dr Lisa Redrup, Peter Sandford

Others in the Chamber: Councillors Heather Williams, Henry Batchelor (Lead Cabinet Member for Environment), Peter McDonald (Lead Cabinet Member for Economic Development) and Bridget Smith (Leader of the Council) were in attendance, by invitation.

In attendance remotely: Councillors Peter Fane, Dr James Hobro, Dr Richard Williams, Bunty Waters, Bill Handley (Lead Cabinet Member for Communities) and Brian Milnes (Deputy Leader)

1. Chair's announcements

The Chair made several brief housekeeping announcements.

2. The late Councillor John Loveluck

Councillor Stephen Drew (Chair of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee) and Councillor Pippa Heylings (Chair of the Climate and Environment Advisory Committee) paid tribute to the late Councillor John Loveluck (one of the Members for the Cottenham ward) who had been a member of both committees.

3. Apologies for absence

Councillor Libby Earle sent apologies.

4. **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Richard Stobart declared an interest as a Director of both the South Cambridgeshire Investment Partnership and South Cambridgeshire Project.

Councillor Heather Williams declared an interest as a member of the Greater Cambridge Partnership Joint Assembly.

5. **Minutes of Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 December 2022 would be presented to the Scrutiny and Overview Committee meeting on 28 February 2023.

6. **Public Questions**

Jennie Conroy asked the following question

“The GCP [Greater Cambridge Partnership] Integrated Water Management Study informing the Development Strategy Spatial Options Report Nov 2020 identified that in the case of water supply, over-abstraction of the chalk aquifer is having a detrimental impact on environmental conditions, particularly during dry years and that even without any growth, significant environmental improvements are unlikely to be achievable until major new water supply infrastructure is operational (5.2.25).

Given that AW do not anticipate even their interim measure of transporting water into the region much before 2030 how then can the existing commitments in the Local Plan to 2031 be fulfilled ahead of any further plans for development amongst the key strategic sites identified to take forward in the Development Strategy Update?”

and supplementary question

“Given the sustainable transport initiatives underway led by GCP and the recent announcement in the government’s autumn statement confirming East West Rail, would it not be prudent at this time to include the extension of Cambourne as one of the key strategic sites forming the ‘central building blocks’ of any future strategy for development as identified in the Development Strategy Update and at least quantify the potential allocation of housing numbers that have yet to be specified?”

Councillor Dr. Tumi Hawkins (Lead Cabinet Member for Planning) was on extended leave of absence. In her place, Councillor Henry Batchelor (Lead Cabinet Member for Environment) gave the following answer to the first question

“Water Resources East and Cambridge Water are planning a range of measures that address both water supply and demand to seek to achieve abstraction reductions to protect the environment whilst also accommodating development needs. We are engaging with the water companies and the Environment Agency as consultees in relation to planning for committed development. Planning permissions that have been granted will continue to be implemented and we have

been advised that the demand from these permissions is factored into the emerging water resources management plan of Cambridge Water being considered by the EA and DEFRA at the present time prior to publication. We expect to consider that plan further once it has been published for consultation.

In terms of the Greater Cambridge Local Plan and the report on this agenda, we will not confirm a full strategy, including reconfirming delivery timings for existing commitments, until such a point as we have clarity on water supply, as set out in the Development Strategy Update at paragraph 3.11: “Further detail on the quantum of water supply and how that relates to housing and non-domestic growth will be provided in the Water Company WRMPs. These were due to be published around the same time as the Regional Plan but have been delayed. Until such time as they are published and we are able to analyse the detailed proposals it is not clear how water supply will compare with current commitments, the First Proposals growth levels, or the new increased needs for jobs and homes.”

To the supplementary question, Councillor Henry Batchelor responded thus:

“North East Cambridge, Cambridge East and Cambridge Biomedical Campus are confirmed as central building blocks’ of any future strategy for development drawing on their unique features: the Development Strategy Update identifies North East Cambridge and Cambridge East as the first and second most sustainable locations for strategic scale development available within Greater Cambridge; Cambridge Biomedical Campus is an important location for the City, of national and international importance for health, life-sciences and biotechnology. The Strategy [topic paper](#) supporting the Development Strategy Update at para 2.71 identifies that there are no other strategic sites available for development in these broad spatial locations.

Noting the uncertainties set out in the Development Strategy Update including in relation to water supply, the Councils have not ruled any other sites, including Cambourne, either in or out of the strategy at this point. The Development Strategy Update is clear at 4.4 that the Councils will “define ... appropriate housing and employment targets, having regard to all material factors including water supply and housing delivery” and, as may be appropriate, “will identify further sites beyond North East Cambridge, Cambridge East and Cambridge Biomedical Campus if needed to meet our identified targets... [and will] reach a view on the sites included in the First Proposals as a first step. East West Rail company have also not yet confirmed a clear alignment for the railway, and location for the proposed station at Cambourne. The Council does expect to renew its engagement with E-W rail during 2023 to understand these potential parameters, as well as delivery timescales and the potential role that the railway might play in the future spatial strategy.”

Daniel Fulton (Fews Lane Consortium) had been expected to make a statement but was not present either in person or by video link.

7. Greater Cambridge Local Plan: Development Strategy Update (Regulation 18 Preferred Options)

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee reviewed a report recommending that Cabinet confirms selected elements of the Greater Cambridge Local Plan development strategy via a Development Strategy Update (Regulation 18 Preferred Options) as set out in Appendix A to that report, namely

- Updated needs for jobs and homes
- Exploring provision of employment and housing – what is deliverable and how we will determine what is appropriate in terms of environmental, social and economic impacts – in particular water supply
- Confirming our development strategy
- Confirming key strategic sites
- Development strategy next steps

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee Chair specifically invited members of the Climate and Environment Advisory Committee (CEAC) to this meeting.

On the subject of water, Scrutiny and Overview Committee members expressed concern about the challenge of water supply and consequent impacts on the chalk aquifer. They discussed the issues set out in the Development Strategy Update regarding the sequencing and timing of development in relation to water infrastructure, and the connected issue of realistic rates of housing delivery in the period following provision of water supply infrastructure.

Also in relation to water, CEAC members emphasised the importance of the two Councils' (South Cambridgeshire District Council and Cambridge City Council) independent water cycle study exploring all relevant issues in full. They expressed a desire to use all policy levers possible to influence high water efficiency, and carbon, standards in new development. They called on central government to support accelerated delivery of water supply infrastructure.

A concern raised was that South Cambridgeshire District Council and Cambridge City Council might be obliged by water constraints to refuse preferred strategic-scale sites while not having the ability to refuse smaller scale development. Dispersal of development to villages would be unacceptable and Councillor Bridget Smith (Leader of the Council) assured those present that South Cambridgeshire District Council was committed to the current spatial strategy. She added that water capacity would determine the extent to which such development could be permitted.

With reference to jobs, those present discussed

- the robustness of the employment forecasts in relation to the level of scrutiny officers had had regarding the assumptions made
- specific queries about the forecasting model and methodology
- the forecasts' statistical bases
- commuting patterns; and
- comparison of the employment forecasts with those for other comparable locations such as Oxford.

Comments from Scrutiny and Overview Committee members included:

- Concern regarding the impact of proposed national policy changes on the appropriateness of identifying updated needs at this point
- Question regarding what could be done to encourage the mid-tech sector in Greater Cambridge. Officers confirmed that this was an issue being explored through the plan

Scrutiny and Overview Committee members then considered the development strategy.

They said that South Cambridgeshire District Council and Cambridge City Council should seek reassurance that, in considering sustainability impacts to identify a development strategy, the environment would be given priority in relation to the three elements of economic, environmental, and social - each of which was dependent on water resources.

They added that consideration was needed of the likely implications of not delivering enough homes to support the expected increase in the number of local jobs.

Members noted central Government's use of the phrase 'gentle density', in relation to its proposed revision of national planning policy, and Councillor Tom Bygott asked officers to provide a written explanation of what that phrase might mean in reality.

Members explored the rationale for considering whether exceptional circumstances existed for releasing Green Belt at land south of the Cambridge Biomedical Campus, and the potential benefits of providing a better range of uses on the site. There was a desire that a new Cambridge Biomedical Campus Masterplan be prepared to improve amenity and effective functioning of the site.

Speaking as Chair of the Climate and Environment Committee, Councillor Pippa Heylings supported the climate-focused development strategy principles set out in the First Proposals, and sought confirmation that South Cambridgeshire District Council and Cambridge City Council would follow such principles when considering additional sites, rather than the housing delivery study's conclusions that a change towards a more dispersed spatial strategy could support higher annual housing delivery rates if that was the councils' priority, which she said would be unacceptable from a climate perspective. She said that CEAC would like to be involved in confirming the definition of unacceptable environmental harm referenced at paragraph 3.13 of the Development Strategy Update.

Other comments made at the meeting included:

- Concern about the risks to South Cambridgeshire District Council's 5-year housing land supply of identifying a high objectively-assessed need that may not be deliverable. Discussion followed regarding the proposal to manage this risk through the production of a stepped housing target as set out at 3.20 of the Development Strategy Update.
- Anxiety about the balance of development between South Cambridgeshire and Cambridge and support for engaging with other neighbouring district councils about those districts potentially meeting some of Greater Cambridge's identified development needs.

On housing, discussion ensued about the desirability that infrastructure such as electricity, transport, healthcare, schools, green space, and community facilities (including Faith provision) be delivered ahead of or alongside market and policy-compliant affordable housing.

Scrutiny and Overview Committee members emphasised the importance of

- creating communities, not just jobs and housing
- ensuring that healthcare facilities were placed close to where new housing would be built
- minimising the impact of building new homes
- providing for key workers

CEAC members raised concerns about the impact of proposed national changes to

infrastructure funding mechanisms on infrastructure and affordable housing delivery and about the ability of the South Cambridgeshire District Council and Cambridge City Council to support delivery of a diverse range of housing types in the current economic climate. In response to a specific concern raised by Councillor Geoff Harvey, Councillor Bridget Smith (Leader of the Council) said that the Cabinet would be considering the question of electricity capacity and battery storage. The Chief Executive would also write to OFGEM about those same issues.

Having reviewed the draft Cabinet report and Appendix A, and subject to the comments made during the meeting, the Scrutiny and Overview Committee **noted and supported** by affirmation the submission of the Greater Cambridge Local Plan to Cabinet on 6 February 2023.

8. Standing Order no. 9 - Duration of meetings

During the course of Minute no. 7 (Greater Cambridge Local Plan) and in accordance with Standing Order no. 9, the Chair proposed, Councillor Anna Bradnam seconded, and the Committee agreed by affirmation that the meeting should continue beyond the four-hour mark.

9. Work Programme

Members noted the work programme attached to the agenda.

10. To Note the Date of the next meeting

Members noted that the next Scrutiny and Overview Committee meeting would be on Thursday 19 January 2023.

The Meeting ended at 9.50 p.m.
