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Greater Cambridge Local Plan

Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report: Non-Technical Summary

Prepared by LUC
September 2019

Project Title: Greater Cambridge Local Plan Sustainability Appraisal

Client: South Cambridgeshire District Council and Cambridge City Council

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Introduction

- 1.1 South Cambridgeshire District Council and Cambridge City Council are jointly preparing a 'Local Plan', a document that will set the framework for development in both districts (described together as 'Greater Cambridge') over the next 20 to 30 years. Plans and strategies such as the Local Plan are subject to a process called Sustainability Appraisal, which assesses the potential impacts of a plan on social, economic, and environmental issues. The first stage of Sustainability Appraisal is to prepare a Scoping Report, which provides the context for and determines the scope of the Sustainability Appraisal. This document is a Non-Technical Summary of the Scoping Report.

The Greater Cambridge Local Plan

- 1.2 South Cambridgeshire District Council and Cambridge City Council previously prepared individual Local Plans. However, the Councils have committed to preparing a joint local plan for their combined area, referred to as 'Greater Cambridge'. The existing Local Plans, which will be replaced by the Greater Cambridge Local Plan, were both adopted in 2018 and set out development needs for each area up to 2031.
- 1.3 The decision to produce a joint plan was made so that issues such as infrastructure, economic growth, housing needs and the location of new settlements could be dealt with on the most appropriate scale. The plan period for the Greater Cambridge Local Plan has yet to be decided.

Sustainability Appraisal, Strategic Environmental Assessment and the Scoping Process

- 1.4 South Cambridgeshire District Council and Cambridge City Council are required by law to carry out both Sustainability Appraisal and a process called Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Greater Cambridge Local Plan, and have appointed LUC to do this on its behalf. Strategic Environmental Assessment is the process of assessing the likely environmental effects of a plan or programme (such as the Local Plan) and the requirements for this are set out in the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 (known as the Strategic Environmental Assessment Regulations). The Government recommends that the requirements for both Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment are met through one integrated process, referred to as Sustainability Appraisal.
- 1.5 The Sustainability Appraisal also includes a Health Impact Assessment to determine the impacts of the Local Plan on people's health and well-being, and an Equality Impact Assessment to identify if any groups of people with 'protected characteristics' within Greater Cambridge may be disproportionately affected.
- 1.6 The purpose of Sustainability Appraisal is to promote sustainable development through by better integrating sustainability considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans. It should be viewed as an integral part of good plan making and an ongoing process, involving ongoing iterations to identify and report on the

potential social, economic and environmental effects of the Local Plan and alternatives to the Local Plan to consider how well sustainable development will be achieved.

- 1.7 The Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report for the emerging Greater Cambridge Local Plan sets out the social, economic and environmental baseline for both South Cambridgeshire District Council and Cambridge City Council on eight different sustainability ‘topics’, as well as setting out the relevant policy context and identifying key sustainability issues in the area. The subsequent stages of Sustainability Appraisal will assess the options for the plan, as well as the plan itself, against this baseline. The scoping stage also sets out the ‘Sustainability Appraisal Framework’, which is made up of a series of sustainability objectives against which Local Plan options will be appraised. The Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report will be published for consultation with the statutory consultees (Natural England, the Environment Agency and Historic England), other stakeholders and the public. The comments received during the consultation will then be reviewed and addressed as appropriate in the subsequent stages of Sustainability Appraisal.

Policy Context

- 1.8 The Greater Cambridge Local Plan should reflect the contents of other plans and programmes where relevant, to support their implementation. It must also conform to environmental protection legislation and the sustainability objectives set at the international, national and regional levels. It is a requirement of the Strategic Environmental Assessment process that relevant international and national plans are reviewed in relation to their objectives, targets and indicators and their implications for the Local Plan and the Sustainability Appraisal. For this reason, the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report includes a review of relevant international, national and sub-national policies for each sustainability ‘topic’.
- 1.9 The most significant national policy context for the Local Plan is the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which was originally published in 2012 and revised in 2018, then again in 2019. The Local Plan must be consistent with the requirements of the NPPF, which states:
- “Succinct and up-to-date plans should provide a positive vision for the future of each area; a framework for addressing housing needs and other economic, social and environmental priorities; and a platform for local people to shape their surroundings.”
- 1.10 The NPPF requires local planning authorities to set out the strategic priorities for the area in the Local Plan. This should include strategic policies to deliver:
- “Housing (including affordable housing), employment, retail, leisure and other commercial development;
 - Infrastructure for transport, telecommunications, security, waste management, water supply, wastewater, flood risk and coastal change management, and the provision of minerals and energy (including heat);
 - Community facilities (such as health, education and cultural infrastructure); and
 - Conservation and enhancement of the natural, built and historic environment, including landscapes and green infrastructure, and planning measures to address climate change mitigation and adaptation.”

- 1.11 The NPPF also promotes well-designed places and development, and plans should “at the most appropriate level, set out a clear design vision and expectations.”
- 1.12 Non-strategic policies should be used by local planning authorities and communities to set out more detailed policies for specific areas, neighbourhoods or types of development, including qualitative aspects such as design of places, landscapes, and development.
- 1.13 The NPPF also states that:
“Local plans and spatial development strategies should be informed throughout their preparation by a sustainability appraisal that meets the relevant legal requirements. This should demonstrate how the plan has addressed relevant economic, social and environmental objectives (including opportunities for net gains). Significant adverse impacts on these objectives should be avoided and, wherever possible, alternative options which reduce or eliminate such impacts should be pursued. Where significant adverse impacts are unavoidable, suitable mitigation measures should be proposed (or, where this is not possible, compensatory measures should be considered).”
- 1.14 At the sub-regional level, Cambridge forms part of the Oxford-Cambridge Arc, which the Government is promoting as a single, knowledge-intensive cluster that competes on a global stage, whilst protecting the area’s high quality environment, and securing the homes and jobs that the area needs. The Oxford-Cambridge Arc forms a broad arc around the north and west of London’s Green Belt, encompassing Northampton, Daventry and Wellingborough to the north, and Luton and Aylesbury to the south. Central to the Arc is a proposed new East-West Rail line connecting Oxford and Cambridge by 2030 and the development and construction of the Oxford-Cambridge Expressway.

Baseline Information

- 1.15 It is a requirement of the Strategic Environmental Assessment process that consideration should be given to the current state of the environment; and, for the Sustainability Appraisal process, social and economic information should also be taken into account. Baseline information provides the context for assessing the sustainability of proposals in the Local Plan and it provides the basis for identifying trends, predicting the likely effects of the plan and monitoring its outcomes.
- 1.16 The baseline information contributed to the identification of a set of key sustainability issues facing Greater Cambridge, which in turn helped to develop a locally appropriate framework of sustainability objectives that the Sustainability Appraisal will use as the basis for appraising the emerging Local Plan policies.

1.17 **Table 1** below sets out the key sustainability issues identified for Greater Cambridge, as well as how these are likely to evolve if the new Local Plan were not to be implemented. The Sustainability Appraisal is concerned with how the proposals within the Local Plan are likely to affect this future baseline.

Table 1: Key sustainability issues for the Greater Cambridge Local Plan and the likely evolution of these without the plan

| Key issues | Likely evolution without the Local Plan |
|---|--|
| <p>Population, health and wellbeing</p> <p>The population structure of South Cambridgeshire reflects an ageing population. This has the potential to result in pressure on the capacity of at local services and facilities including healthcare and ensuring the right type of homes are provided. However, Cambridge has one of the 'youngest' populations in the country which needs different housing and social needs. To accommodate future provision of student accommodation more student rooms will need to be built by 2026.</p> | <p>While existing policies address the issues identified to some extent, the new Local Plan provides an opportunity to deliver the required services and facilities in a coherent, sustainable manner alongside new development.</p> |
| <p>Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire are some of the least affordable areas in the country outside of London. House prices in Cambridge are high comparable to the regional and national average and sustained population and employment growth has led to a housing shortage within Cambridge, with high house prices and low levels of housing affordability.</p> | <p>While existing policies address the issues identified to some extent, the new Local Plan provides an opportunity to facilitate and expedite the delivery of affordable housing and private market accommodation and to help meet the needs of more specialist groups including older people and help support the provision of a more appropriate mix of new homes to meet the requirements of local families.</p> |
| <p>Overall, Greater Cambridge is not a deprived area. However, there are disparities between the least and the most deprived areas in Greater Cambridge. Two wards within Cambridge are within 20% of the most deprived in the UK.</p> | <p>While existing policies address the issues identified to some extent, the new Local Plan provides an opportunity to build on these policies to ensure that indicators of disparity such as access to housing, income deprivation, health deprivation, employment deprivation, living environment deprivation and education skills deprivation are appropriately addressed. This approach will also allow for changing circumstances in the sub-region to be more appropriately addressed.</p> |
| <p>Health in Greater Cambridge is generally recorded as being at reasonably good level or higher. However, there are inequalities displayed between the most and least deprived areas of Greater Cambridge in terms of health.</p> | <p>While existing policies address the issues identified to some extent, the new Local Plan provides an opportunity to address health deprivation in the sub-region by supporting the provision of healthcare facilities and other relevant improvements at areas of most need.</p> |

| Key issues | Likely evolution without the Local Plan |
|---|--|
| <p>The provision of green space varies throughout the sub-region. For example, open spaces are not evenly distributed, with many suburbs experiencing a relative paucity of open space in comparison with the City Centre and the west of the City. A deficiency in recreational or open space provision has been identified in a number of specific areas including provision for informal play space and outdoor sports. There is also potential for new development to result in loss of access to open spaces and elements of green infrastructure as well as impacts upon their quality.</p> | <p>While existing policies address the issues identified to some extent, the new Local Plan provides an opportunity to better address the changing circumstances in the plan area by ensuring the protection and enhancement of access to and quality of open space and services and facilities. The process will also allow for new local green spaces to be planned and incorporated alongside new development.</p> |
| <p>In general Greater Cambridge is a relatively safe sub-region in which to live. In recent years however certain types of crime such as violent crime, anti-social behaviour and illegal drug use have increased in Greater Cambridge.</p> | <p>While existing policies address the issues identified to some extent, the new Local Plan provides an opportunity to build on the requirement of these policies to encourage aims to make the local environment and streets safer, for example through relevant approaches to ‘designing out’ crime. Any new policy would make a contribution to achieving this aim alongside other local and national measures.</p> |
| Economy | |
| <p>Cambridge needs to ensure that it is able to continue its vital role as a world class centre for higher education, research and knowledge based industries as the regional, national and global economies rely on it.</p> | <p>While existing policies address the issues identified to some extent, the new Local Plan provides an opportunity to create and safeguard jobs through the allocation and promotion of employment generating uses including office and industrial spaces.</p> |
| <p>Greater Cambridge needs to ensure a future supply of jobs and continued investment to ensure identified employment development opportunities are taken forward and deprivation issues tackled. Although the main focus of employment is in Cambridge, there is a need to ensure a diverse range of employment opportunities are available across Greater Cambridge, for example, in the smaller settlements. Within Cambridge, despite the focus on higher education, research and knowledge based industries, there is a need for a variety of</p> | <p>While existing policies address the issues identified to some extent, the new Local Plan provides an opportunity to create and safeguard jobs through the allocation and promotion of employment generating uses including office and industrial spaces and the promotion of the rural economy, as well as promoting access and opportunity for all.</p> |

| Key issues | Likely evolution without the Local Plan |
|--|--|
| <p>employment opportunities, both skilled and lower-skilled across a range of economic sectors.</p> | |
| <p>Significant development is planned within the realm of the Oxford-Cambridge Arc with the role of Cambridge acting as a key component. However, this development must be done sustainably to ensure the long term success of the area.</p> | <p>While existing policies address the issues identified to some extent, the new Local Plan provides an opportunity to help shape the Arc to create the necessary infrastructure, from public transport to housing, in the most sustainable way.</p> |
| Transport Connections and Travel Habits | |
| <p>Both highway and bus networks suffer from limited capacity, which is unlikely to be able to cater for significant increases in traffic volumes without worsening congestion and lengthening journey times.</p> | <p>While existing policies address the issues identified to some extent, and proposals set out in the emerging Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Local Transport Plan will also help to address these issues, the new Local Plan provides an opportunity to address this by providing clarity for infrastructure providers and also to strengthen policy to promote the use of alternative modes of transport. It also has the potential to direct new development to the most sustainable locations as to minimise the need to travel by private vehicle on the local network. This approach can be used to complement measures taken by highways authorities to combat congestion on the strategic road network.</p> |
| <p>Given the rural character of much of the South Cambridgeshire District a large proportion of the District's residents drive to work and some have limited access to bus services and other public transport links.</p> | <p>While existing policies address the issues identified to some extent, the new Local Plan provides an opportunity to further address the issue of car dependency especially within South Cambridgeshire. This can be achieved by promoting sustainable and active transport (based on sufficient population densities), sustainable development locations, and integrating new and more sustainable technologies, as new development is to be provided in Greater Cambridge.</p> |
| Air, land and water | |

| Key issues | Likely evolution without the Local Plan |
|---|--|
| <p>Greater Cambridge has two AQMAs, one within South Cambridgeshire alongside the A14 and the other covering the entire city centre area of Cambridge. Additional development within Greater Cambridge has the potential to exacerbate air quality issues at AQMAs within Greater Cambridge and could have impacts on AQMAs in neighbouring authorities. Similarly there is potential for a cumulative impact of development in neighbouring authorities alongside development in Greater Cambridge in terms of air quality at AQMAs in the sub-region.</p> | <p>While existing policies address the issues identified to some extent, the new Local Plan provides an opportunity to contribute to improved air quality in the sub-region through the sustainable siting of development and the promotion of alternative travel modes to the motorised vehicle, in line with national policy aspirations.</p> |
| <p>The majority of the sub-region contains best and most versatile agricultural land with a mix of classified agricultural land, Grades 1, 2 and 3. New development should, where possible, be delivered as to avoid the loss of higher grades of agricultural land.</p> | <p>While existing policies address the issues identified to some extent, the new Local Plan provides an opportunity to strengthen the approach and ensure these natural assets are not lost or compromised. This may involve the prioritisation of use of brownfield sites and lower quality agricultural land for development.</p> |
| <p>Greater Cambridge contains safeguarded mineral resources which, where possible, should not be lost or compromised by future growth.</p> | <p>Without the Local Plan it is possible that development could result in unnecessary sterilisation of mineral resources which would mean they are not available for future generations to use.</p> |
| <p>Some of the water bodies which flow through the sub-region have been identified by the Environment Agency as having 'bad' or 'poor' ecological status. There are also areas in the sub-region which are covered by a Source Protection Zone.</p> | <p>While existing policies address the issues identified to some extent, the new Local Plan provides an opportunity to ensure that development is located and designed to take into account the sensitivity of the water environment. It will also provide further certainty in terms of planning for adequate wastewater infrastructure to address development requirements over the plan period.</p> |
| <p>There is a finite supply of water in the region, and irrespective of climate change, action is required now to ensure the availability of water for future uses, including potable water supply and food production, without having a detrimental impact on the environment as low rainfall and over abstraction in rivers is causing serious concern.</p> | <p>While existing policies address the issues identified to some extent, the new Local Plan provides an opportunity to secure long term sustainable development, which will be essential in ensuring that all new development implements water efficiency standards.</p> |
| <p>Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation</p> | |

| Key issues | Likely evolution without the Local Plan |
|---|--|
| <p>While carbon emissions from all sectors have fallen in both districts since 2005, given the rural nature of South Cambridgeshire there has been little progress on transport emissions, which still accounted for 50% of the total as of 2016. Both Councils committed to meet net zero by 2050 at the latest, and to meet this will need to make significant shifts in energy efficiency of new and existing buildings, transport trends, and the further deployment of a range of renewables infrastructure.</p> | <p>While existing policies address the issues identified to some extent, the new Local Plan provides an opportunity to strengthen policies which act positively in terms of climate change, especially those that limit the need to travel through the appropriate siting and design of new development.</p> |
| <p>The effects of climate change in Greater Cambridge are likely to result in extreme weather events (e.g. intense rainfall, prolonged high temperatures and drought) becoming more common and more intense.</p> | <p>While the new Local Plan will not influence extreme weather events, it can built upon the approach of current policy to better respond to current circumstances as evidence and techniques develop.</p> |
| <p>Greater Cambridge will need to become more resilient to the increased risk of flooding in particular. Given the low-lying nature of the plan area, it is at significant risk of fluvial and surface water flooding, especially in the north, which is likely to be exacerbated by climate change.</p> | <p>While existing policies address the issues identified to some extent, the new Local Plan provides an opportunity, alongside national measures, to mitigate the effects of potential future flooding through appropriate siting of development and flood resilient design. It will also allow policy to respond to the update evidence based regarding flood risk in the plan area.</p> |
| <p>Biodiversity</p> | |
| <p>Greater Cambridge contains and is in close proximity to a number of both designated and non-designated natural habitats and biodiversity. This includes those designated for their national and international importance. Not all SSSIs are in favourable condition.</p> | <p>While existing policies address the issues identified to some extent, the new Local Plan provides an opportunity for new development to come forward at the most appropriate locations in order to avoid detrimental impacts on biodiversity assets, as well as to update planning policy in relation to future policy direction such as biodiversity net gain. The findings of the HRA will be incorporated into the Sustainability Appraisal and will provide further insight into biodiversity impacts specifically at designated sites, presenting the opportunity to limit adverse impacts at these locations.</p> |

| Key issues | Likely evolution without the Local Plan |
|---|---|
| <p>Although designated sites represent the most valued habitats in the plan area, the overall ecological network is also important for biodiversity as a whole and helps to support the health of designated sites, allowing species to migrate in response to climate change. The fragmentation and erosion of habitats and the wider ecological network in Greater Cambridge, including the identified sparse woodland cover, is an ongoing threat to biodiversity.</p> | <p>While existing policies address the issues identified to some extent, the new Local Plan provides an opportunity to facilitate further biodiversity improvements. Increasing biodiversity and green space is also likely to provide other benefits, such as, carbon storage, flood reduction and health benefits.</p> |
| <p>Historic Environment</p> | |
| <p>There are many sites, features and areas of historical and cultural interest in the plan area, a number of which are at risk and identified on the Heritage at Risk register. In the context of significant ongoing pressures for development locally, these assets may be at risk of adverse effects from poorly located or designed development.</p> | <p>While existing policies provide some protection for heritage assets, without the new Local Plan it is possible that these assets will be adversely affected by inappropriate development. This is because the new plan will be developed on the basis of a different baseline of expected growth, which may put these assets (including their setting) under increased pressure.</p> |
| <p>Landscape</p> | |
| <p>While the plan area is not in close proximity to nationally designated or highly sensitive landscape areas, it contains a diverse range of nationally recognised landscape character areas that could be harmed by inappropriate development. For example, the fenlands on the northern boundary of Greater Cambridge are particularly sensitive to development. If development was to be allocated there it could threaten losses to a distinctive wetland landscape.</p> | <p>While existing policies address the issues identified to some extent, the new Local Plan provides an opportunity to update the current policy position in response to the ongoing evolution of development pressures and their impact on the landscape in Greater Cambridge as a whole.</p> |
| <p>The distinct historic character of the South Cambridgeshire villages, and in particular the sensitive historic landscape setting of Cambridge requires protection as development comes forward, particularly in maintaining key views into Cambridge.</p> | <p>While existing policies address the issues identified to some extent, the new Local Plan provides an opportunity to ensure that, in the context of ongoing development pressures, development coming forward does not adversely affect the setting or sensitive villages and lie sympathetically within the existing landscape and townscape.</p> |

Sustainability Appraisal Framework

- 1.18 The review of other relevant plans, policies and programmes and the collation of baseline data helped to identify key sustainability issues for Greater Cambridge, as set out above. These key sustainability issues fed into the identification of a set of Sustainability Appraisal objectives, which will be the main tool used during the Sustainability Appraisal for assessing the likely effects of the options being considered for inclusion in the Local Plan. These Sustainability Appraisal objectives constitute the Sustainability Appraisal framework, which is presented in **Table 2**. The final column of the table shows how all of the topics that are required to be assessed by the Strategic Environmental Assessment Regulations are addressed within the Sustainability Appraisal framework.

Table 2: Sustainability Appraisal Framework for Greater Cambridge

| Sustainability Appraisal Objective | Strategic Environmental Assessment Regulations Topics |
|---|--|
| SA 1: To ensure that everyone has the opportunity to live in a decent, well-designed, sustainably constructed and affordable home. | Population, Human Health and Material Assets |
| SA 2: To maintain and improve access to centres of services and facilities including health centres and education. | Population, Human Health and Material Assets |
| SA 3: To encourage social inclusion, strengthen community cohesion, And advance equality between those who share a protected characteristic (Equality Act 2010) and those who do not. | Population, Human Health and Material Assets |
| SA 4: To improve public health, safety and wellbeing and reduce health inequalities. | Population, Human Health and Climatic |
| SA 5: To conserve, enhance, restore and connect wildlife, habitats, species and/or sites of biodiversity or geological interest. | Biodiversity, Flora, Fauna and Human Health |
| SA 6: To conserve and enhance the character and distinctiveness of Greater Cambridge's landscapes and townscapes, maintaining and strengthening local distinctiveness and sense of place. | Landscape, Biodiversity, Flora, Fauna and Cultural Heritage |
| SA 7: To conserve and/or enhance the qualities, fabric, setting and accessibility of Greater Cambridge's historic environment. | Cultural Heritage, Architectural and Archaeological Heritage |
| SA 8: To make efficient use of Greater Cambridge's land resources through the re-use of previously developed land and conserve its soils. | Soil and Material Assets |

| Sustainability Appraisal Objective | Strategic Environmental Assessment Regulations Topics |
|---|---|
| SA 9: To conserve mineral resources in Greater Cambridge. | Material Assets |
| SA 10: To achieve sustainable water resource management and promote the quality of Greater Cambridge's waters. | Water, Biodiversity, Fauna and Flora |
| SA 11: To adapt to climate change, including minimising flood risk. | Water, Material Assets, Climatic Factors and |
| SA 12: To minimise Greater Cambridge's contribution to climate change | Air, Human health, air and Climatic factors |
| SA 13: To limit air pollution in Greater Cambridge and ensure lasting improvements in air quality. | Air and Human Health |
| SA 14: To facilitate a sustainable and growing economy. | Population and Material Assets |
| SA 15: To deliver, maintain and enhance access to diverse employment opportunities, to meet both current and future needs in Greater Cambridge. | Population and Material Assets |

Next Steps

- 1.19 The Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report and this Non-Technical Summary will be published for consultation alongside the Council's Issues and Options document. Any comments received will be taken on board and addressed in the next stage of Sustainability Appraisal.

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