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Greater Cambridge Local Plan

Sustainability Appraisal of Issues and Options: Non-Technical Summary

Prepared by LUC
October 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 This Sustainability Appraisal Report has been prepared by LUC on behalf of South Cambridgeshire District Council and Cambridge City Council (the Councils) as part of the Sustainability Appraisal (incorporating Strategic Environmental Assessment, Health Impact Assessment and Equalities Impact Assessment) of their Local Plan.
- 1.2 This Non-Technical Summary relates to the Greater Cambridge Local Plan Issues and Options document, and it should be read in conjunction with that document as well as the Sustainability Appraisal Report. The Issues and Options consultation is the first stage in the plan-making process, which seeks the opinions of stakeholders and local people as to what the key issues are that the Local Plan should seek to address. Given the broad nature of this consultation, the Sustainability Appraisal Report that this Non-Technical Summary relates to, contains a high level commentary on the sustainability considerations for the Local Plan, in relation to the 'big themes' and spatial options discussed in the Issues and Options document.

The Greater Cambridge Local Plan

- 1.3 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.
- 1.4 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 and Strategic Environmental Assessment

- 1.5 South Cambridgeshire District Council and Cambridge City Council are required by law to carry out both Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Greater Cambridge Local Plan. The Councils have appointed LUC to do this on their behalf.
- 1.6 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.
- 1.7 The Sustainability Appraisal will also include 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.
- 1.8 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.

- 1.9 A brief overview of the stages of Sustainability Appraisal is set out below.

Stage A: Scoping

- 1.10 The Sustainability Appraisal process began in September 2019 with the production of a Scoping Report for the Greater Cambridge Local Plan.
- 1.11 The Scoping stage of the Sustainability Appraisal involves understanding the social, economic and environmental baseline for the plan area as well as the sustainability policy context and key sustainability issues. The Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report also sets out information about the methodology for this and later stages of the Sustainability Appraisal, including the 'Sustainability Appraisal Framework' - the sustainability objectives against which Local Plan options and policies have been appraised. The sustainability objectives making up the Sustainability Appraisal framework are presented in **Table 1**.
- 1.12 The Scoping Report will be consulted upon alongside the Issues and Options document and this Non-Technical Summary and accompanying Sustainability Appraisal Report and comments received will be addressed at the next stage of Sustainability Appraisal.

Table 1: Sustainability Appraisal Framework for the Greater Cambridge Local Plan

Sustainability Appraisal Objective
SA 1: Housing To ensure that everyone has the opportunity to live in a decent, well-designed, sustainably constructed and affordable home.
SA 2: Access to services and facilities To maintain and improve access to centres of services and facilities including health centres and education.
SA 3: Social Inclusion and Equalities 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.
SA 4: Health To improve public health, safety and wellbeing and reduce health inequalities.
SA 5: Biodiversity and geodiversity To conserve, enhance, restore and connect wildlife, habitats, species and/or sites of biodiversity or geological interest.
SA 6: Landscape and townscape To conserve and enhance the character and distinctiveness of Greater Cambridge's landscapes and townscapes, maintaining and strengthening local distinctiveness and sense of place.

Sustainability Appraisal Objective
SA 7: Historic Environment To conserve and/or enhance the qualities, fabric, setting and accessibility of Greater Cambridge's historic environment.
SA 8: Efficient use of land To make efficient use of Greater Cambridge's land resources through the re-use of previously developed land and conserve its soils.
SA 9: Minerals To conserve mineral resources in Greater Cambridge.
SA 10: Water To achieve sustainable water resource management and promote the quality of Greater Cambridge's waters.
SA 11: Adaptation to climate change To adapt to climate change, including minimising flood risk.
SA 12: Climate change mitigation To minimise Greater Cambridge's contribution to climate change.
SA 13: Air quality To limit air pollution in Greater Cambridge and ensure lasting improvements in air quality.
SA 14: Economy To facilitate a sustainable and growing economy.
SA 15: Employment To deliver, maintain and enhance access to diverse employment opportunities, to meet both current and future needs in Greater Cambridge.

Stage B: Developing and Refining Options and Assessing Effects

- 1.13 Developing options for a Local Plan is an iterative process undertaken by the local planning authority, usually involving a number of consultations with public and stakeholders. Consultation responses and the Sustainability Appraisal can help to identify where there may be other 'reasonable alternatives' to the options being considered for a plan (e.g. additional or alternative sites that may be suitable for development).
- 1.14 The Sustainability Appraisal can help decision makers by identifying the potential positive and negative sustainability effects of each Local Plan option being considered, and therefore where there are opportunities to enhance positive effects and avoid or reduce negative ones.
- 1.15 However, the Strategic Environmental Assessment and Sustainability Appraisal findings are not the only factors taken into account when determining a preferred option to take forward in a Local Plan. Factors such as public opinion, deliverability, conformity with national policy will also be taken into account by plan-makers when selecting preferred options for their Local Plan.
- 1.16 The Issues and Options document seeks opinions on big themes for the Local Plan, and therefore detailed options have not yet been prepared for assessment. As

such, the Sustainability Appraisal Report provides general commentary on sustainability based on each of the big themes in the Issues and Options report. The spatial options presented in 'Towards a Spatial Plan' chapter have been assessed in more detail. These options are as follows:

- Option 1: Densification.
- Option 2: Edge of Cambridge – Outside the Green Belt.
- Option 3: Edge of Cambridge – Green Belt.
- Option 4: Dispersal – new settlements.
- Option 5: Dispersal – villages.
- Option 6: Public transport corridors.

1.17 A summary of the assessment results is presented below.

Stage C: Preparing the Sustainability Appraisal report

- 1.18 This Non-Technical Summary summarises the process that has been undertaken to date in carrying out the Sustainability Appraisal of the Greater Cambridge Local Plan. It sets out the findings of the appraisal of options set out in the Issues and Options document.
- 1.19 As described previously, the nature of the Sustainability Appraisal Report that this Non-Technical Summary accompanies reflects the high-level nature of the Issues and Options document as an early stage in the development of the Local Plan. Once more detailed options have been worked up, these will be subject to Sustainability Appraisal and the results of this will be published in future Sustainability Appraisal Reports.

Stage D: Consultation on the Greater Cambridge Local Plan and Sustainability Appraisal Report

- 1.20 This document is subject to consultation alongside the Sustainability Appraisal of the Issues and Options document to which it relates, and the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report. Comments received will be taken on board and addressed at the next stage of the Sustainability Appraisal process.

Stage E: Monitoring implementation of the Local Plan

- 1.21 At this early stage in the plan making process, the Councils are seeking views on what issues should be addressed through the Local Plan. Recommendations for monitoring the likely significant social, environmental and economic effects of implementing the Greater Cambridge Local Plan will be included in later stages of the Sustainability Appraisal, once the Local Plan has been drafted.

Appraisal methodology

- 1.22 The findings of the Sustainability Appraisal are presented as colour coded symbols showing a score for each option against each of the Sustainability Appraisal objectives along with a concise justification for the score given, where appropriate. The use of colour coding and symbols allows for likely significant effects (both positive and negative) to be easily identified, as shown in **Figure 1** below.

Figure 1: Key to symbols and colour coding used in the Sustainability Appraisal of the Greater Cambridge Local Plan

++	Significant positive effect likely
++/-	Mixed significant positive and minor negative effects likely
+	Minor positive effect
+/-	Mixed minor effects likely
-	Minor negative effect likely
--/+	Mixed significant negative and minor positive effects likely
--	Significant negative effect likely
0	Negligible effect likely
?	Likely effect uncertain

- 1.23 Due to the high level nature of options assessed at these stage, all potential effects identified are uncertain. Where this uncertainty is considered to be particularly significant, a question mark is added to the relevant score (e.g. +? or -?) and the score has been colour coded as per the potential positive, negligible or negative effect (e.g. green, blue, orange, etc.).
- 1.24 The likely effects of options need to be determined and their significance assessed, which inevitably requires a series of judgments to be made. The appraisal has attempted to differentiate between the most significant effects and other more minor effects through the use of the symbols shown above. The dividing line in making a decision about the significance of an effect is often quite small. Where either (++) or (--) has been used to distinguish significant effects from more minor effects (+ or -) this is because the effect of an option or policy on the Sustainability Appraisal objective in question is considered to be of such magnitude that it will have a noticeable and measurable effect taking into account other factors that may influence the achievement of that objective. However, scores are relative to the scale of proposals under consideration.

Sustainability Appraisal Findings

- 1.25 The big themes set out in the Issues and Options document discuss a number of ideas that would have positive effects regarding sustainability. However, whether such effects come forward and the significance of these effects depend on the exact policies that come forward in the Local Plan. Given the broad nature of these themes and the fact that they did not present specific options, it was not possible to

express clear likely significant effects in line with the symbols and colour-coding presented in **Figure 1** above. Nonetheless, in general terms, it was considered that many of themes are likely to result in positive effects across all the SA objectives, although there could be some negative effects for those themes relating to increased growth in homes and jobs on the environmental SA objectives.

- 1.26 The spatial distribution options have been assessed at a high level against each Sustainability Appraisal objective. However, many of the potential effects identified are dependent on the exact location, layout and design of development. In summary, the Sustainability Appraisal found that:
- Option 1 (Densification) performs well against the Sustainability Appraisal objectives compared with many of the other options, but not against all Sustainability Appraisal objectives.
 - Option 2 (Edge of Cambridge – Outside the Green Belt) performs well against most of the SA objectives, with no potential significant negative effects identified.
 - Option 3 (Edge of Cambridge – Green Belt) also performs well against most SA objectives, although not quite as well as Options 1 and 2 but generally better than Options 4, 5 and 6.
 - Option 4 (New settlements) and Option 6 (Transport corridors) perform similarly, although the effects against individual objectives differ.
 - Option 5 (Dispersal: villages) is likely to be the least sustainable option, as it consistently scores poorly against a number of Sustainability Appraisal objectives compared with the alternatives.
- 1.27 In practice, the actual effects are heavily dependent upon the precise location and scale of development, the quality of design and the delivery of supporting infrastructure. Therefore, these high level results need to be treated with a considerable degree of caution.
- 1.28 A summary of how these options performed against each Sustainability Appraisal objective is presented in Error! Reference source not found..
- 1.29 Option 1 (Densification) performs well compared to most of the other options, as development would be able to take advantage of the existing infrastructure in the city and would facilitate travel by sustainable modes of transport. However, it is unlikely that this option would be able to meet all of Greater Cambridge's development needs and could still lead to likely significant negative effects, particularly with regards to the historic environment of Cambridge. It would also restrict meeting the economic potential of the Greater Cambridge, if it were unable to meet identified growth needs in full, and would bring limited opportunities for provision of new infrastructure, and therefore may result in capacity issues at existing services and facilities.
- 1.30 Option 2 is considered to perform very well, because it is a brownfield site, and it is relatively well located to the jobs, services and amenities of the city compared to most of the other options. It is of a scale that would allow for a good range of homes, employment, services and facilities to be delivered to create a cohesive community. It is also not particularly affected by biodiversity or heritage designations, although negative effects on these assets cannot be ruled out. It would, however, lead to the permanent loss of the airport itself and its economic and educational activity at this location.

- 1.31 Option 3 also performs well as extensions on the edge of Cambridge would provide new services and facilities and would benefit from the existing services, facilities, transport links and employment in Cambridge. However, the range of facilities provided would likely depend on the size of the extension, and smaller extensions could lead to capacity issues at existing services and facilities. Extensions to Cambridge are likely to have significant impacts on the landscape and the historic environment setting of Cambridge, although this depends on the location and design of development. Of critical importance in achieving the sustainability objectives is how new development on the edge of Cambridge integrates with the existing city and with neighbouring communities, in order to become part of the city rather than separate districts. Genuinely mixed development with clear access by public transport, cycling and walking linked into neighbouring areas would help to achieve this, with green infrastructure and networks playing a key role.
- 1.32 Option 4 performs well against social and economic objectives, as a new settlement is expected to provide new services and facilities. In addition, new settlements provide a greater opportunity to incorporate sustainable design, such as creating walkable neighbourhoods and including district heating systems. Although there is no guarantee best practice would be delivered, the Local Plan could require sustainable design to be incorporated. The new settlements would have to be of sufficient scale to become coherent new communities, with a good range of services and facilities, such as healthcare and a secondary school, as well as to become attractive to business investors in order to provide a range of jobs. New settlements have a longer lead-in time and therefore would be unable to provide new housing and employment earlier on in the plan period. New settlements are also more likely to have environmental impacts, particularly in terms of landscape, as they are necessarily large developments that may be less able to avoid sensitive features. They may also be some distance from the main centre of economic activity, Cambridge, leading to longer journeys for commuters and a temptation to travel by car. However, there is potential for public transport links to be provided as a prerequisite to new development.
- 1.33 Whilst Option 5 could help to support local services, the lack of access to services, facilities and jobs in larger settlements is likely to be an issue. It is likely to lead to high levels of car dependency, increasing carbon emissions, and significant expansion of smaller settlements could harm their character and historic assets. As such, it is likely to be the least sustainable option, although it could form a smaller part of the overall strategy.
- 1.34 Option 6 would enable residents and businesses to have good access to services and facilities, whilst providing more opportunity to protect the historic environment of Cambridge. However, there is potential for adverse effects on environmental objectives, depending on where development is located, and it may prove challenging to create distinctive new communities with a sense of place, depending on where particular developments come forward under this option and their relationship to existing communities.
- 1.35 In practice, there are pros and cons with all of the options, and so the challenge for those preparing the Greater Cambridge Local Plan will be to take those aspects from each of the options that perform well against the Sustainability Appraisal objectives to create a coherent spatial strategy that performs well in sustainability terms. The options will need to be developed in more detail, including identification of potential specific locations for development, with a greater understanding of the scale, type and mix of development that can be delivered on site, the identification

of the infrastructure requirements required for delivery, and the relationship with existing settlements and networks. The Sustainability Appraisal will be able to assess these options in more detail and with greater certainty helping to lead to the most sustainable strategy overall.

Next steps

- 1.36 The Sustainability Appraisal Report to which this Non-Technical Summary refers will be available for consultation alongside the Issues and Options document. Following this consultation, the responses received and the findings of the Sustainability Appraisal will be considered and incorporated into the next iteration of the Greater Cambridge Local Plan.

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Table 2: Summary of likely effects of the spatial distribution options

SA Objective	Option 1 Densification	Option 2 Edge of Cambridge – Outside Green Belt	Option 3 Edge of Cambridge – Green Belt	Option 4 Dispersal – new settlements	Option 5 Dispersal – villages	Option 6 Public transport corridors
SA 1: Housing	++/-?	++/-?	++?	++?	++/-?	++?
SA 2: Access to services	++/-	++	++/-?	++/-?	+/-	+/-
SA 3: Social inclusion	+	++?	++/-?	++/-?	+/-	+/-
SA 4: Health	++/-	++?	++?	++?	-	+/-
SA 5: Biodiversity and geodiversity	-?	+/-?	+/-?	+/-?	--?	--?
SA 6: Landscape and townscape	+/-?	+/-?	--?	+/-?	--?	--?
SA 7: Historic environment	--?	-?	--?	--?	--?	-?
SA 8: Land	++	++	-?	-?	-?	-?
SA 9: Minerals	-?	0	-?	-?	-?	-?
SA 10: Water	0?	0	-?	-?	-?	-?

SA Objective	Option 1 Densification	Option 2 Edge of Cambridge – Outside Green Belt	Option 3 Edge of Cambridge – Green Belt	Option 4 Dispersal – new settlements	Option 5 Dispersal – villages	Option 6 Public transport corridors
SA 11: Climate change adaptation	-?	++/-?	-?	-?	-?	-?
SA 12: Climate change mitigation	++	++/-?	++/-?	+/-	--	++/-?
SA 13: Air quality	++	++/-?	++/-?	+/-	-	++/-?
SA 14: Economy	+/--?	++/-?	++/-?	+/-?	+/--?	++/-?
SA 15: Employment	++/-	++/-	++/-	+/-?	+/--?	++/-