

Appendix 1

The First Conversation – Initial Feedback from the Consultation

Introduction

1. On Monday 24 February 2020 a six week consultation ended on the [Greater Cambridge Local Plan – The First Conversation](#). We asked about the kind of place we want Greater Cambridge to be in the future. It explored the ‘big themes’ – climate change, biodiversity, social inclusion and great places - that will influence how homes, jobs and infrastructure are planned, and where growth might go.
2. The First Conversation explored important issues that will influence how the Local Plan is developed, giving people the opportunity to inform and shape the direction of the Local Plan before it is drafted.
3. This paper is an initial overview of the reach and findings of the Issues and Options consultation based on interim analysis. We are still inputting comments received via email to the database and a full report with in-depth analysis will be made available, along with the datasets, when this process is complete.

Reach and success of consultation methods

4. The First Conversation consultation reached far more people than ever before. We are still compiling final verified statistics but at this stage we estimate that:
 - Over 300,000 people saw a social media post about the Local Plan
 - Our specially commissioned videos about the Local Plan had over 396,964 views across social media platforms including Youtube, Facebook and Instagram.
 - We had nearly 5,000 unique visitors to the Local Plan webpages during the consultation period, who spent an average of 4 minutes exploring the website. In total we achieved over 32,000 unique pageviews¹ of the website content.

¹ Unique pageviews counts a unique user visiting a specific page. The user may visit that page more than once, but the additional visits are not counted.

- We reached over 6,000 people through our pop-up 'roadshow' events, and many more were reached through other meetings and briefings, including two events for the Gypsy and Traveller community, presentations to residents associations and parish councils, and to other stakeholder groups.
 - 300 people attended the Big Debate at the Corn Exchange in Cambridge.
5. At this stage, we estimate that the following numbers of representations have been received:
- Around 1000 comments via the Local Plan website (each comment is a single answer to a single question, one respondent may answer many questions)
 - Around 3,000 comments submitted via email (a comment is a single answer to a single question, one respondent may answer many questions.)
 - Around 2,800 comments submitted through our Opus 2 Consult system by registered users, mainly planning agents. Agents acting for different clients have frequently submitted identical wording several times as a response to a question. This is not unusual and it is worth noting that weight of numbers alone does not determine the weight ascribed to a particular view expressed.
 - 266 detailed comments taken down at the roadshow events.
 - Over 350 comments on social media.
 - Around 200 new sites submitted through the Call for Sites questions as part of the consultation – this will be added to the sites submitted earlier in the process, which total around 550.
6. We also measured the diversity of our respondents, through a voluntary survey to collect demographic data. This shows that we reached a good representation from protected characteristics, including 12% reporting mixed or non-white ethnic backgrounds, and particularly a disproportionately high number of people who reported either physical or mental health conditions – 22%. This confirms what is already widely understood, that digital engagement is more inclusive of those who have differing physical and mental needs as it can be accessed in their own time and space, and using different technologies (e.g. screen readers) to suit

individual requirements. It is, however, worth noting that this is a relatively small sample size, of 193 respondents, as the survey was voluntary. We will be using this as a baseline to measure further engagement against.

Initial findings from feedback

7. The following feedback is based on analysis of the approx. 1000 comments received via the Local Plan website, and an initial overview of the comments received via the Opus 2 consult system and via email, although this analysis is not yet complete.

The Big Themes

8. The framework for the First Conversation included seven 'big themes' grouped into two sets – those which were considered to cover the 'how' of the Local Plan (Climate Change, Biodiversity and Green Spaces, Wellbeing and Inequality and Great Places) and those which were considered to cover the 'what' of the Plan (Jobs, Homes and Infrastructure).
9. Overall among the themes, more people visited the webpages for Infrastructure than any of the other six themes – by a substantial margin. The second most visited theme was Homes, followed by Climate Change. The least visited page was Great Places, with less than half the number of pageviews compared to Infrastructure. This is reflected in the much higher number of responses to questions in the Infrastructure section placed across all platforms, than to questions in the other 'big themes' sections. It is clear from the responses, that primarily the 'infrastructure' that respondents were seeking information about, and to comment on, was transport infrastructure.
10. We asked respondents whether they agreed with the proposed seven big themes for the plan. This was broadly supported, with over two thirds of respondents on the 'agree' side and one third on the 'disagree' side of the response scale. There was little difference in the range of responses received via the website, and via Opus 2 Consult and email.

11. We asked respondents how they would rank the themes in the first group. Views were very varied. Across all kinds of comment, answers ranked Climate Change top, followed by Wellbeing and Social Inclusion, Biodiversity and Green Spaces and Great Places. However, website comments [a small number of the total for this question] favoured Great Places and Biodiversity and Green Spaces, with Climate Change dividing opinion. Comments via email and Opus 2 Consult very strongly favoured Climate Change, and strongly disfavoured Great Places.
12. There were several comments which disagreed with the way the themes had been grouped, and felt that housing, jobs and infrastructure were not qualitatively different from climate change, biodiversity and green spaces, wellbeing and social inclusion, and great places. These comments suggested that the opportunity should have been given to rank all seven in terms of priority so that those who considered that jobs, homes or infrastructure were a priority over the other themes, could have expressed this view. Several comments also stated that the themes clearly overlapped a great deal so prioritising them was not possible.

Where to Build

13. We asked respondents to tell us their preferences for where new development should be located. Densification of existing urban areas was ranked most highly – twice as many people ranked it as their top preference, compared to the next most popular option, which was Public Transport Corridors. Overall, if a first or second place ranking is taken as indicative of a preference, the order of preference was:
- Densification (27%)
 - Public transport corridors (20%)
 - Edge of Cambridge – not in green belt (19%)
 - Dispersal – Villages (14%)
 - Edge of Cambridge – in greenbelt and Dispersal – new settlements (both 10%)

14. Respondents felt as strongly about where they did not want to see new development as where they would like to see it – many options saw more respondents ranking them 6th, than ranked them first, indicating that respondents might be unsure about their preferred option but felt strongly about their least preferred. Dispersal – New Settlements was ranked 6th most often, with Dispersal – Villages as the second least preferred.
15. Many agents and statutory consultees commented that a blend of the different locations for growth will be required to meet the level of housing growth anticipated, and for that to be achievable under the tests for housing delivery. Comments also highlighted that public transport would be a key consideration for any sites for growth.
16. Comments around villages were strongly polarised, with some respondents strongly in favour of sustainable growth in rural areas, while others objected strongly to any dispersal of growth outside the city and city fringe areas. Several respondents raised the lack of facilities, including transport links, into villages, and noted that some sustainable growth could help support and provide these services.
17. New settlements also divided opinion, with some commenting that the length of time they take to build out, and the quality of place that was created, did not result in a sustainable community but made residents car-dependent.
18. Comments on the Green Belt were very varied. While overall, views from members of the public and community groups appear to view Green Belt release negatively, this was not universal and some members of the public were strongly in favour due to sustainability arguments, if locations with good sustainable transport accessibility was chosen. Overall, across all responses, Green Belt release which provided a more sustainable development option by reducing travel distance, helping to reduce climate impacts (question 37) was in fact supported. Several responses stated that if Green Belt release was to take place, new areas should be incorporated into the Green Belt to compensate, or that green corridors into the city centre should be retained.

Other key questions

19. We asked respondents to tell us if we had chosen the right proposed end date for the new Local Plan. This was well supported by respondents via the website, of whom 70% responded 'agree' and a further 12% 'strongly agree'. Of responses via email and the Opus system, responses were more mixed, although on balance, more agreed with the end date than disagreed. Overall, 48% of respondents either 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' with the end date, 28% either 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed' and 10% neither agreed nor disagreed.
20. We asked respondents how important they felt continuing economic growth was to the Local Plan. Respondents via both the website and Opus 2 consult answered that strongly that it was important – nearly 60% responded 'very important' and a further 14% that 'somewhat important'. However, this is interesting as many written comments throughout the consultation questions raised questions around whether growth was desirable. These respondents perceived an inherent contradiction between continuing growth, reaching net zero carbon, wellbeing of residents, or preserving the character and landscapes of the area, or all three. The perception that the city is already 'choked' and could take no more growth, was expressed. Some respondents felt that the 'standard method' for calculating the housing growth required, should be challenged. Some comments stated that wellbeing, including mental health and happiness, was a priority above growth, while others expressed the view that economic growth was the means to raise quality of life.

Key emerging issues

21. Climate change and the net zero carbon target are clearly seen as highly challenging and also contentious. Some comments expressed the view that meeting the net zero carbon was fundamentally incompatible with continued growth, and that the 'existential threat' of climate change should be the overriding priority to address. Others expressed the view that prosperity could only be assured by addressing climate change.
22. Transport is clearly a very high priority and concern. The need for public transport improvements and a reduction in road congestion was raised in many comments.

Cycling infrastructure also attracted a lot of comments, asking for the protection existing cycle routes and extending the cycle network. While the Councils are not the transport planning authority, this highlights the need for a clear and coherent transport plan for Greater Cambridge which can, from the perspective of our communities, be fully joined up with the emerging Local Plan.

Lessons Learned for Future Consultations

23. The consultation showed that with the right approach we can achieve much wider reach and a broader level of engagement than we have done historically. Investment in social media promotion was clearly useful and we received positive feedback on the plain English approach and quality of graphic and online presentation, as well as some criticism that it was still too complex and difficult to understand. It is clear that there is a huge appetite from communities and stakeholders to engage and participate in shaping the Local Plan. Some comments were received that the six week consultation period was too short for everyone to be able to absorb the information and participate. In the future, to maximise participation, where practicable it may be possible to consider a longer period, and to do even more pre-publicity and communications in the lead-up to the formal start of consultation.
24. We experimented with the format of questions and how easy it was to submit responses. We have not completed a full analysis yet but it appears that providing an easier 'user journey' did result in more responses being submitted, but there was still some criticism that the process of commenting could be easier, and that there were too many questions to answer. We are learning from this for the upcoming North East Cambridge Area Action Plan consultation, working with our IT providers, to develop a more seamless 'user journey' within their system and a shorter list of ten key questions that we aim to be easy to answer.
25. We would like to encourage as many representations as possible to be submitted online. Whilst we cannot refuse representations that do not follow a particular format or use the web based systems, we need to continue to encourage some planning agents who submit large volumes of material to make their submissions

easier to process. Receipt of this material by email is time consuming and resource intensive. We will raise the issue at a future agents forum.

26. We received positive feedback on the roadshow and Big Debate as well as some comments that the 'traditional' format of drop-in exhibitions was missed. We have learnt which venues for pop-ups are most successful and where we could have done more in certain geographic areas.

27. The team's view is that the wide reach and signposting to the online content did attract a more diverse range of respondents, and online content is more accessible to users with varying physical and mental conditions. We can build on this through using other new tools such as Facebook Live, webinars, more video content and more outreach through channels of communication run by community groups, particularly as a level of social distancing looks to be normal for a significantly longer period. This presents some challenges in terms of monitoring and data gathering as well as meeting statutory requirements to evidence that comments have been sought and received from the groups required under the regulations. We are working on methods and messaging to assist with this.

28. However in broadening reach and aspirations for our engagement across our communities we must be aware that comments were also received about consultation fatigue and confusion between the many different consultations ongoing across different statutory authorities in the area. Respondents who were not professional agents or representatives of statutory bodies, evidenced some confusion and lack of understanding about the statutory context for the Local Plan – not surprising given the complex nature of local government in the region. In particular, there was evidence of confusion between the Greater Cambridge Partnership and the Greater Cambridge Local Plan. It is also clear that some respondents do not understand which authority manages which area of responsibility, for example transport, education or health planning.

29. It is challenging to respond both to the demand for more and better quality information and opportunities to comment, alongside mitigating consultation fatigue when the many issues and schemes being consulted on are each very complex and interrelated. Increasing the broad understanding of planning issues

in the community through clear information and education about how planning works, and seeking deeper engagement from a smaller number of representatives from the wider community through focus groups and similar, could address this somewhat and are issues we are considering in our wider programme of community engagement around the Local Plan and other planning frameworks.

Next Steps

30. We are preparing a full analysis of all the representations, both quantitatively and qualitatively. This will include a summary report, with graphics to visually represent findings, alongside a full analytical report, for publication along with the background information that support them. This will be available to support the stakeholder engagement planned in Autumn 2020, will be published on our website, and we will notify those who requested to be kept informed of local plan stages. We will also be publicising this via social media.