

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Planning Portfolio Holder

2 March 2010

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CAMBRIDGESHIRE GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY PUBLIC AND STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

Purpose

1. The purpose of this report is to provide information on the Cambridgeshire Green Infrastructure Strategy consultation and seek approval for the Council's response.
2. This is a key decision because it is likely to be significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in an area of the District comprising all wards.

Recommendations

3. It is recommended that the Council's reply to the Green Infrastructure Strategy consultation should be:
 1. The Council supports the role that an effective strategy will have in the protection, creation and management of green infrastructure.
 2. The Council supports the development of a strategy which will provide a robust and defensible basis for green infrastructure planning and delivery, for both existing communities and the growth areas.
 3. The Council has significant concerns about the approach and content of the draft Green Infrastructure Strategy as set out in this report and previous officer comments to Cambridgeshire Horizons.
 4. The Council will require major changes to the strategy addressing its concerns before it will be able to endorse it.
 5. Council officers will work with Cambridgeshire Horizons and other partners to achieve the changes required.

Background

(a) Green Infrastructure

4. Green Infrastructure describes a network of public open spaces, routes, wildlife habitats, landscapes and heritage sites. It includes a wide range of different types of element such as rivers and streams, country parks, rights of way, woodlands and historic landscapes, and combines a range of functions.
5. Green Infrastructure provides an environmental support system and is set within and contributes to a high quality natural, historic and built environment. It helps create places that are attractive, healthy and give a good quality of life, and deliver a range of other social, economic and environmental benefits.

6. The Green Infrastructure approach is endorsed at national, regional and local levels. It is included in PPS 12: *Creating strong, safe and prosperous new communities through spatial planning* and is promoted in Natural England's *Green Infrastructure Guidance* (2009) and CABE's *Grey to Green* (2009). The *East of England Plan* (May 2008) gives policy support for green infrastructure.
7. Green infrastructure elements and approaches are included in Local Development Documents such as Area Action Plans, the Development Control Policies DPD and Site Specific Policies DPD, as well as Supplementary Planning Documents for Biodiversity, Open Space, Landscape and Design.
8. The policy framework supports the planning, delivery and management of green infrastructure at county, district and community or neighbourhood scales. Green infrastructure is necessary to meet the needs of existing and new communities and is a crucial part of successful new development. It should be protected and well managed, and existing and new green infrastructure should be an integral part of development and its surroundings, and link with wider green infrastructure networks.
9. Cambourne is an example of the successful provision of green infrastructure within the context of housing growth and through development. Cambourne also demonstrates how attractive places can be created, and a range of benefits combined such as sustainable drainage, flood management, biodiversity, and routes which encourage people to walk, cycle and enjoy their surroundings.

(b) The existing Green Infrastructure Strategy

10. In 2006 Cambridgeshire Horizons and its partners (including South Cambridgeshire District Council) produced the first Green Infrastructure Strategy for the Cambridge Sub-Region (www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/environment/countryside/natureconservation/delivering/greenvision).
11. The Strategy covers a period of 20 years and sets out an integrated network, comprising green corridors, major sites and wider area initiatives. The Strategy has raised the profile of green infrastructure and highlighted its role in delivering successful, sustainable communities. It has helped to secure Growth Area Funds for projects such Trumpington Meadows where green infrastructure, which will increase biodiversity and public access, is related to new housing on the southern fringe of Cambridge.
12. Criticisms of the existing strategy include its failure to fully include historic environment and landscape or see green infrastructure within its wider context. It is also, arguably, over-ambitious.
13. Other weaknesses with the existing strategy were highlighted by the Inspectors' Reports on the Local Development Framework in 2007. The Inspectors did not support the Northstowe Area Action Plan's proposals for new strategic open space and country parks at the new town, or a strategic open space target intended to apply to all development across the district. The Reports highlighted the fact that green infrastructure needed to be supported by a strategy which had community involvement and a strong evidence base.
14. The current consultation on a proposed revised strategy will help address the lack of community involvement but a key requirement for the new strategy is to provide the

necessary robust evidence base and analysis to support any proposals. (It should be noted that national and regional policy support for green infrastructure has increased since 2007. In addition, if Northstowe is given eco-town status it will be required to deliver particular approaches and higher standards set out in recent guidance.)

(c) The new Green Infrastructure Strategy

15. It was intended that the current strategy would be regularly reviewed in order to learn lessons from its use, respond to new needs and opportunities, and reflect changing agendas. More recently it was decided that the scope of the strategy should be extended to cover the whole of Cambridgeshire.
16. As a result, a second edition of the strategy has been developed. This has been commissioned by Cambridgeshire Horizons and produced by LDA Design. The development of the strategy has been directed by the Cambridgeshire Green Infrastructure Officer and a sub-group of the Green Infrastructure Forum that includes representatives from this Council. Officers contributed to the development of the strategy through a workshop and interview and have given comments on Baseline and Delivery Reports produced by the consultants in November and December 2009.

(d) The consultation

17. A consultation draft of the new strategy has now been produced and Cambridgeshire Horizons are asking residents and stakeholders for their views. The consultation runs from 25th January to 7th March and information on the consultation draft of the strategy is available on www.cambridgeshirehorizons.co.uk/greenvision. We have promoted the consultation on our website and have staffed three events in the District with Cambridgeshire Horizons (at Sawston Village College, Milton Country Park and Sackville House, Cambourne). Information has been distributed to all Parish Councils and libraries.

Considerations

(a) The approach of the consultation draft of the strategy

18. The second edition of the strategy is intended to be better integrated with the planning process and deliver new objectives such as achieving healthy communities and climate change adaptation and mitigation. The content and impact of the existing strategy has been reviewed, along with other baseline information and links to neighbouring strategies. Current and new projects have been considered for inclusion.
19. The Strategy sets out four green infrastructure objectives for Cambridgeshire:
 1. Reverse the Decline in Biodiversity
 2. Mitigate and Adapt to Climate Change
 3. Promote Sustainable Growth and Economic Development
 4. Support Healthy Living and Wellbeing
20. The measures given to achieve each of these objectives, such as promoting place making and protecting and enhancing cultural heritage and landscape character, give a fuller idea of the thrust and range of the strategy.

21. The Strategy has three main categories of initiative:

1. There are four **Investment Opportunities**:

1. Biodiversity Enhancement
2. Sustainable Movement
3. Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation
4. Economic Investment

These are generic programmes within which projects will be taken forward by appropriate deliverers as opportunities arise.

An appendix details local projects which relate to the four Investment Opportunity Programmes. A majority of these are at least partly in South Cambridgeshire: Coton Countryside Reserve, Fowlmere Nature Reserve, Chalk Rivers Project, West Cambridgeshire Hundreds, Gog Magog Countryside Project, North Cambridge Heritage Trail, Wicken Fen Heritage Trail and Cambridge Sports Lakes.

2. There are ten **Strategic Projects**:

1. A14 Green Infrastructure
2. Cambridge Green Wheel
3. The Fen Waterways Link
4. Great Fen Project
5. Wicken Fen Vision
6. Great Ouse Wetland
7. Fenland Country Parks
8. Ely Country Park
9. Cambridge East Country Park
10. Northstowe Green Network

These are site specific initiatives of strategic importance.

3. **Area Frameworks** are a new approach and will apply to areas within the county where a high degree of change is planned, primarily as a result of housing and economic development. Specific Area Frameworks are still to be identified and described.

(b) Response to strategy development reports and the consultation draft

22. The Baseline and Delivery Reports marked major stages in the development of the strategy. Officer comments on the reports noted that there were positive aspects to the documents but listed numbers of weaknesses and gaps. Our responses were divided between detailed and general comments and the latter are included as Appendix A.

23. The reports, comments on them, and the consultation draft were produced over three months and that limited the time available to Cambridgeshire Horizons and the consultants to make changes.

24. We welcome the inclusion of Northstowe Green Network as a Strategic Project in the consultation draft following our input. The Area Framework concept recommended in the strategy would allow the development of a green infrastructure initiative in Cambridge and the surrounding area. This could both help promote a green

infrastructure network to serve the city as a whole and help co-ordinate the green infrastructure required in relation to the growth sites on the edge of the city (for example, in line with Area Action Plans), and the links between it and the wider countryside and green infrastructure network. Officers consider that there may be merit in including within the Area Framework the Cambridge Green Wheel and Cambridge East Country Park Strategic Projects identified in the strategy. More work would be needed to clarify what an Area Framework for Cambridge would comprise and contribute, and to identify the sources of resources to plan and deliver it. Further consideration is also necessary on the scope and description of the Cambridge East strategic project and whether one should be identified for the Cambridge Southern Fringe.

25. The potential for a Cambridge Area Framework and general reactions to the strategy have been discussed and agreed with officers at Cambridge City Council. The City Council's Development Plan Steering Group is considering the consultation document at its meeting on 23 February and the City Council's conclusions on the strategy and the Area Framework approach will be reported orally at the meeting.
26. Despite the positive changes to, and potential of, parts of the strategy just described, most of our criticisms of the Baseline and Delivery Reports do, however, still apply. Some of the most important points are:
 1. The strategy does not provide the required robust evidence base, analysis and rationale to support the green infrastructure proposals it contains. The Investment Opportunities would be better used as part of the evidence base and rationale for identifying green infrastructure priorities (and implemented alongside the strategy) rather than as initiatives in their own right. Historic environment, landscape, open/green spaces, and visitor sites and gateways should be considered fully as part of the evidence base and rationale and expressed in the priorities. The document should give more weight to the importance of growth in terms of the challenges and opportunities created by development, the need to make successful new places, and the impact of major increases in population, particularly in and close to South Cambridgeshire.
 2. The use of Investment Opportunity, Strategic Project and Area Framework (plus local project) categories gives a complex message. The whole does not create an understandable or successful network which is multi-functional and connected.
 3. The strategy concentrates too much on proposals which are to be implemented in the future and which (arguably) have a good chance of being achieved. It should also include existing green infrastructure and projects, which are a major part of the network and need to be completed, added to, protected and managed. It should establish a network which will direct future action as opportunities, often not known or realisable today, arise.
 4. The initiatives and their graphic representation appear divorced from the area to which they are being applied. The lack of connection is accentuated by what appears to be a demotion of 'local projects'. For example, the existing strategy shows the Farmland Museum and Denny Abbey as a 'Historic

Cultural Centre' with proposed green corridors linking it to Cottenham and Northstowe to the west and a crossing over the River Cam and the Wicken Fen Vision to the east. The role of the Museum and Abbey as important visitor sites and a potential gateway to the countryside is not highlighted in the new strategy, apart from a reference to Denny Abbey in the Wicken Fen Heritage Trail.

5. The strategy does not provide an approach, spatial framework and methodology which will encourage and support green infrastructure planning and action at district and community levels.
 6. The strategy suggests that further documents will be needed to secure green infrastructure planning, implementation and funding but it is not clear what is needed and how and when it will be provided. Given the resources local authorities have and the need to make progress with green infrastructure it is important that this strategy fulfils as many of these requirements as possible. For example, it should be able to support the case for a community infrastructure levy or tariff contribution to green infrastructure.
 7. The strategy must be able to act as an effective tool, which can be justified and carries sufficient weight, for policy and development control planners, and developers and their agents, as well as those planning, managing, securing funding for and delivering green infrastructure inside and outside planning and development. Currently we do not believe that this is the case.
27. There are many aspects of the strategy that have value and which we support such as the influence of the biodiversity mapping exercise and the successful case studies from South Cambridgeshire. However, in our opinion, the document will require major changes to make it acceptable and fit for purpose.
28. Following the publication of the consultation draft, there have been discussions with the Cambridgeshire Green Infrastructure Officer which have allowed us to explain further some of our concerns and he has responded positively to our suggestions.
29. In the light of our concerns, and the ambitious timetable for the preparation of the consultation draft, officers believe that it is important that time is taken now to reconsider in detail the approach to the strategy and the way it is presented in the document. Officers are prepared to help Cambridgeshire Horizons and other partners agree and inform the changes required with the aim of producing a document which can be endorsed by this Council.

Options

30. There are 3 possible options for the Council:
1. To accept the consultation draft and not request changes.
 2. To object to the consultation draft.
 3. To respond to the consultation draft with comments and recommended changes and say that officers will work with Cambridgeshire Horizons and other partners to help make the required improvements.

Implications

31. Results of the different options and potential reactions to them are:
- (a) A green infrastructure strategy which is not robust, defensible or otherwise fit for purpose
 - (b) The lack of a current green infrastructure strategy which has been endorsed by the Council
 - (c) Incomplete endorsement of the strategy by local authority and other partners which will affect its credibility and implementation
 - (d) Disagreement with Cambridgeshire Horizons and possibly some other partners on the changes needed

Consultations

32. The strategy consultation including information on the Council's website has been described above. Members and parish councils were told about the consultation in their bulletins. Officers in the Planning and New Communities Services were asked for their views on the reports and strategy.

Effect on Strategic Aims

33	Commitment to being a listening council, providing first class services accessible to all.
	The strategy consultation has actively sought the views and ideas of the public and stakeholders. Green infrastructure is delivered by partnerships between the public, private and voluntary sectors, and by local communities, groups and volunteers.
	Commitment to ensuring that South Cambridgeshire continues to be a safe and healthy place for all.
	Green infrastructure supports the Council's approach of "promoting active lifestyles and increasing opportunities for sport and recreation to improve the health of all age groups".
	Commitment to making South Cambridgeshire a place in which residents can feel proud to live.
	Community green infrastructure projects involve working with local people and promote community cohesion. Green infrastructure has a key role in helping to address the causes and impacts of climate change and promoting low carbon living and growth. The Strategy highlights climate change mitigation and adaptation as an Investment Opportunity.
	Commitment to assisting provision for local jobs for all.
	Green infrastructure is delivered in partnership with and contributes to local businesses and promotes economic development. The Strategy targets economic investment opportunities and areas of deprivation. Green infrastructure supports cultural activities and tourism including through strategic projects such as the Wicken Fen Vision.
	Commitment to providing a voice for rural life.
	Green infrastructure supports all the approaches which contribute to this strategic aim: <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ protecting existing communities, villages and the countryside○ working more closely with Parish Councils and local Groups○ implementing planning policies to achieve successful new communities○ maximising planning gain for neighbouring communities○ playing our part in improving rural services including transport links Green infrastructure protects and improves the quality of life of existing communities and creates successful new places. It helps provide a network of routes for walking, cycling and riding.

Conclusions/Summary

- 34 Green infrastructure helps give quality of life, healthy and attractive places, and a range of other benefits. It is a key way of maintaining and creating successful, sustainable communities and is supported by policy at all levels.
- 35 The existing Green Infrastructure Strategy produced in 2006 has highlighted green infrastructure and help attract funding but has a number of fundamental weaknesses.
- 36 The new Green Infrastructure Strategy is being consulted on by Cambridgeshire Horizons which will cover the whole of Cambridgeshire and addresses new agendas and opportunities. It identifies new types of initiative and specific projects and will have greater weight as a result of the consultation.
- 37 Officers have commented on reports produced as part of the development of the strategy and raised a number of concerns. Some points have been addressed in the strategy but major issues remain outstanding.
- 38 The strategy will need significant changes before officers could recommend endorsement by the Council. Officers are prepared to help agree and make those changes.

Recommendations

- 39 It is recommended that the Council's reply to the Green Infrastructure Strategy consultation should be:
- (a) The Council supports the role that an effective strategy will have in the protection, creation and management of green infrastructure.
 - (b) The Council supports the development of a strategy which will provide a robust and defensible basis for green infrastructure planning and delivery, for both existing communities and the growth areas.
 - (c) The Council has significant concerns about the approach and content of the draft Green Infrastructure Strategy as set out in this report and previous officer comments to Cambridgeshire Horizons.
 - (d) The Council will require major changes to the strategy addressing its concerns before it will be able to endorse it.
 - (e) Council officers will work with Cambridgeshire Horizons and other partners to achieve the changes required.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

- Cambridgeshire Horizons (May 2006) *Green Infrastructure Strategy*
- LDA Design (December 2009) *Cambridgeshire Green Infrastructure Strategy, Delivery Report*
- LDA Design (November 2009) *Cambridgeshire Green Infrastructure Strategy, Baseline Report*
- Officer comments on Baseline Report (23 November 2009)
- Officer comments on Delivery Report (5 January 2010)

- Cambridgeshire Horizons and LDA Design (January 2010) *Cambridgeshire Green Infrastructure Strategy, Second Edition Green Infrastructure Strategy: Draft for Public and Stakeholder Consultation*

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