

8. Conserving and Enhancing the Natural and Built Environment

- 8.1. South Cambridgeshire has over a hundred villages with many beautiful buildings and landscapes. Within the District the underlying geology has created a number of distinctive landscapes. South Cambridgeshire has a lot of good quality agricultural land and medium to large-scale arable farmland dominates the landscape. Within the fields and hedgerows are a variety of habitats for plant and animal species. The Council wants to make sure these landscapes with their biodiversity are protected for the future.
- 8.2. The Council regards the Cambridge Green Belt as vital to retaining the rural character of land and villages around Cambridge City. Within villages are green spaces of particular importance to local communities or views into open countryside which all help to create what is special about the villages in South Cambridgeshire. These special features need to be protected. The Cambridgeshire Green Infrastructure Strategy highlights opportunities for improving landscapes and creation of accessible countryside recreation.
- 8.3. There is a long history of people living and working here dating back to Neolithic times. This can be seen in the landscape, for example crop marks in fields and thatched cottages. Buildings need to be used and there are challenges about adapting older and/or listed buildings for modern living whilst retaining their character.
- 8.4. South Cambridgeshire has many heritage assets, ranging from the statutory designated Scheduled Monuments and Listed Buildings, to undesignated, but nevertheless important, archaeological remains and historic sites. Conservation areas within villages in South Cambridgeshire help to protect the character of these settlements and also the setting of the listed buildings within them. These historic assets should be cared for.

Key Facts:

- Five distinctive landscape characters in the district – from the Fens in the north to the chalklands and clay to the south.
- The waterways flowing through the district are important wildlife corridors but other uses for recreation may put pressure on these environments. The River Cam is identified as a County Wildlife Site.
- South Cambridgeshire is rich in wildlife sites some of which are officially recognised for protection. Farming can threaten the future of some habitats.
- The Green Infrastructure Strategy highlights the parts of South Cambridgeshire where there is a shortage of natural green space that is open to the public. It targets projects in Northstowe, Cambourne and the West Cambridgeshire woodlands.
- The area of the Green Belt in South Cambridgeshire comprises 23,000 hectares covering 25% of the district.
- There are 2,668 listed buildings; 120 Scheduled Monuments; 12 historic parks and gardens and 85 Conservation Areas in South Cambridgeshire. 53 of these listed buildings and 26 scheduled monuments are at risk (2009-10);
- Historic landscapes are particularly important in South Cambridgeshire where they add interest and variety to an intensively farmed countryside.

Protecting and Enhancing Landscape Character

- 8.5. Five out of the 159 'National Character Areas' identified by Natural England can be found in our district. A key issue within South Cambridgeshire is that the distinctive character and quality of the district's landscape has been eroded by changes made to the land as a result of agriculture or development.

Issue 28: Landscape Character

To protect the distinctive landscape characters, the Local Plan could include a policy to require development proposals to reflect and enhance the character and distinctiveness of the landscape. This should include consideration of the relevant National Character Area, and other available information including landscape character assessments. Further information could continue to be provided in a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) (currently the Landscape SPD).

Question 33: Should the Local Plan include a policy requiring development proposals to reflect and enhance the character and distinctiveness of the landscape?

Please provide any additional comments.

Protection of Agricultural Land

- 8.6. Within the district are large areas of high quality agricultural land. Much of the best agricultural land lies around Cambridge and the larger settlements, which may be the most sustainable locations for future development. The need to identify and maintain a large supply of land for development means there is pressure for development of agricultural land. The Local Plan needs to balance these competing demands.

Issue 29: Agricultural land

National Policy requires the Council to take into account the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land. The Local Plan could seek to protect the best agricultural land within the district from significant development unless sustainability considerations and the need for the development outweigh the need to protect the agricultural value of the land.

This has already been taken into consideration in developing the site options within the development options chapter (chapter 5).

Question 34: Should the Local Plan include a policy seeking to protect high quality agricultural land?

Please provide any additional comments.

Biodiversity

- 8.7. National legislation and planning guidance place a duty on Local Authorities to consider biodiversity through their Local Plans. South Cambridgeshire has a range of important sites and habitats for biodiversity, recognised through designations, from international to local importance, and through local Biodiversity Actions Plans. Some of these are also of geological importance. The Local Plan needs to provide appropriate protection, having regard to the importance of these sites, and seek opportunities for biodiversity enhancement and the creation of new habitat through development. For example, where habitats would be fragmented by new developments, it may be possible to create biodiversity corridors for animals linking habitats areas.

Issue 30: Biodiversity

An option for the Local Plan is to include policies to ensure that development proposals minimise negative impacts on biodiversity and provide net gains in biodiversity where possible, taking account of the status of the designation.

This could include the aim to maintain, enhance, restore or add to biodiversity. It could also involve reducing habitat loss and fragmentation, the achievement of biodiversity action plan targets, and creating areas that link habitats.

The Local Plan can continue to identify map components of the local ecological network, including the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity or geodiversity.

Further guidance could continue to be provided in a Supplementary Planning Document.

Question 35: Should the Local Plan seek to protect and enhance biodiversity, and to protect designated habitats and species?

Please provide any comments.

Green Infrastructure

- 8.8. Green Infrastructure is a relatively new term in planning, and refers to the network of multi-functional green spaces and green links, which can include country parks, wildlife habitats, rights of way, commons and greens, nature reserves, waterways and bodies of water and other open spaces.
- 8.9. In 2011 a partnership of local organisations, including the Council, produced the Cambridgeshire Green Infrastructure Strategy. This highlights shortages in certain parts of the district regarding access to countryside open space. The level of growth planned for South Cambridgeshire and Cambridge will also put pressure on existing green infrastructure and will require investment to develop the green infrastructure network. Delivery of green infrastructure can contribute to improving links between different areas of green space and links; including wildlife corridors, areas of landscape

character and biodiversity enhancement, climate change adaptation, as well as delivering public access to countryside open space.

8.10. The Green Infrastructure Strategy identifies a range of opportunities for enhancement in and around the district, including:

- Wicken Fen Vision
- West Cambridgeshire Hundreds Habitat Enhancement Project
- Wimpole Cycle Link
- Cambourne and Northstowe Large-scale public open space provision
- Coton Countryside Reserve
- Gog Magog Countryside Project
- North Cambridge Heritage Trail
- Cambridge Sport Lakes
- Trumpington Meadows Country Park
- Chalk Rivers project
- Fowlmere Nature Reserve extension and development of facilities
- Linear monuments
- Woodland linkage project
- Fens Waterways Link
- The Environment Agency Ouse Washes Habitat Creation Project

8.11. A bid has been made to the government to recognise a Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Local Nature Partnership, which would have a key role in implementing the Green Infrastructure Strategy.

Issue 31: Green infrastructure

An option for the Local Plan could be that all new development should be expected to contribute towards the provision of additional green infrastructure and the protection and enhancement of the district's existing green infrastructure. Specific opportunities may be identified in the Local Plan in relation to major development proposals, subject to the viability of the development and local opinion.

Question 36: Should the Local Plan include a policy relating to providing opportunities for Green Infrastructure?

Please provide any additional comments.

The Green Belt

8.12. As detailed in the Chapter 4: Spatial Strategy, the Green Belt is a key designation in the district, designed to protect the setting and special character of Cambridge. This section looks at how the rural character can be protected and enhanced, and the particular opportunities offered by the Green Belt for recreation.

8.13. Even where a development proposal is considered an appropriate form of development in the Green Belt, it still needs to be designed and landscaped to ensure it does not have an adverse impact on its rural character and openness.

Issue 32: Impact of Development on the Green Belt

The Local Plan could require that, where appropriate, development takes place in or adjoining the Green Belt; it is designed and appropriately landscaped so that it minimises its impact on the rural character and openness of the Green Belt.

Question 37: Should the Local Plan include policies to ensure that development in and adjoining the Green Belt does not have an unacceptable impact on its rural character and openness?

Please provide any additional comments.

8.14. The Council's existing plan identifies a small number of 'major developed sites' in the Green Belt (Babraham Hall, Fulbourn and Ida Darwin Hospital, and Girton College), where national policy allowed limited infilling to support their continued economic use.

8.15. The new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) no longer refers to identifying specific 'major developed sites', but instead refers to appropriate development in the Green Belt including '*minor limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed sites (brownfield land), whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt and the purpose of including land within it than the existing development.*'

Issue 33: Redevelopment in the Green Belt

The NPPF now enables limited infilling on, or complete redevelopment of, previously developed sites in the Green Belt. An issue for the Local Plan is whether to rely on this national guidance, or whether more detailed guidance should be included in the Local Plan, addressing issues such as floor area, footprint, height and degree of impact from development.

Question 38: Regarding infilling on, or complete redevelopment of, previously developed sites in the Green Belt, should the Local Plan:

- a. Rely on National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) guidance for determining planning applications; or
- b. Include more detailed guidance regarding design, such as scale and height of development?

Please provide any additional comments.

8.16. The Cambridge Green Belt plays an important role in providing opportunities for access to the countryside for the people of Cambridge. This is recognised in the Cambridgeshire Green Infrastructure Strategy (see section on Green Infrastructure above). The major urban extensions already planned around Cambridge will create additional demands at the same time as providing opportunities to deliver new areas of

Green Infrastructure. Any planned new development could create further opportunities.

- 8.17. The NPPF guidance on Green Belt continues to allow for the provision of 'appropriate facilities' for outdoor sport and recreation where it does not conflict with Green Belt purposes. With the growth proposed in the extensions around the City in the Cambridge Green Belt it is likely that land will become more intensively used, which could result in uses such as playing fields being relocated to, or specifically developed on, Green Belt land. It is important this is done in a way which protects the overall rural character of the Green Belt, rather than creating a character more associated with the built environment.

Issue 34: Green Belt and Recreation Uses

The Local Plan could continue to support recreation uses in the Green Belt, but require the cumulative impact of sports pitches and recreation development to be considered, to avoid the over-concentration of such sports grounds where it would be detrimental to the character and setting of the Green Belt.

Question 39: Should the Local Plan include a policy requiring the cumulative impact of sports pitches and recreation development to be considered, to avoid the over-concentration of such sports grounds where it would be detrimental to the character and setting of the Green Belt?

Please provide any comments.

Protected Village Amenity Areas

- 8.18. The Council's existing plan identifies open areas that are considered important to the amenity and character of villages, known as Protected Village Amenity Areas (PVAA). They include land in a variety of uses, such as allotments, playing fields or recreation areas, but also some private areas such as gardens. In these areas development which would have an adverse impact on the character, amenity, tranquillity or function of the village will not be permitted. PVAA's are only identified within village frameworks where the risk of harm is greatest.

- 8.19. The existing policy has successfully protected these areas and an issue for the plan will be to consider whether to review the existing areas protected within villages and consider if any additional ones should be identified. See also issue 36 below on local green space.

Issue 35: Protected Village Amenity Areas

The Local Plan could retain the approach to Protected Village Amenity Areas, in order to protect the character, amenity, tranquillity or function of valued open space in villages.

The plan making process can offer the opportunity to review the sites included, or for new ones to be suggested.

Question 40: Should the existing policy for Protected Village Amenity Areas be retained in the Local Plan?

Please provide any comments, including if there any existing PVAAs in villages (as shown on the Proposals Map) that you think should be removed or any new ones that should be identified.

Please provide any additional comments.

Local Green Space

8.20. An issue for the Local Plan is to consider whether to include a policy for the new designation of Local Green Space, introduced by the NPPF, and whether any particular spaces should be identified. There are some similarities between PVAAs and the new Local Green Spaces (LGSs), although the level of protection given by the PVAA policy is not as strong and not all PVAAs would be suitable for the LGS designation. A LGS could also be located on the edge of a village beyond the development framework, whereas PVAAs have been identified within villages only.

Issue 36: Local Green Space

The NPPF has introduced a new designation of Local Green Space, to identify and protect green areas of particular importance to a local community. An issue for the Local Plan is whether it should identify Local Green Spaces, and the issues and options consultation is an opportunity for local communities to suggest where such spaces should be identified that meet the tests set out in the NPPF which state that “the designation should only be used: where the green space is in reasonably close proximity to the community it serves; where the green area is demonstrably special to a local community and holds a particular local significance, for example because of its beauty, historic significance, recreational value (including as a playing field), tranquillity or richness of its wildlife; and where the green area concerned is local in character and is not an extensive tract of land.

Question 41: Should the Local Plan identify any open spaces as Local Green Space and if so, what areas should be identified, including areas that may already be identified as Protected Village Amenity Areas?

Please provide any comments, including particular sites, with a map if possible.

Important Countryside Frontage

8.21. In South Cambridgeshire there are many villages where parts of the village are open to views of the wider countryside or where open countryside separates two parts of the built up area. These areas have been identified in existing plans to show that the frontage and the open countryside beyond should be kept open and free from development to protect the setting, character and appearance of the village.

Issue 37: Important Countryside Frontages

The Local Plan could continue to protect important countryside frontages, because such land enhances the setting, character and appearance of the village by retaining a sense of a rural connection within a village.

The plan making process also offers the opportunity for people to comment on the frontages currently identified, or suggest new ones that warrant protection.

Question 42: Should the existing policy for Important Countryside Frontages be retained in the Local Plan?

Please provide any comments, including if there are any existing Important Countryside Frontages in villages that you think should be removed or any new ones that should be identified.

Community Orchards

8.22. South Cambridgeshire District Council is supporting local people to establish or restore community orchards. They provide a range of benefits, including biodiversity, landscape enhancement, and fruit for local communities and a catalyst for the community to come together.

Issue 38: Community Orchards

An option for the Local Plan is to include a policy to support the planting of community orchards or new woodland in or near to villages. New development could also be required to utilise opportunities for enhancing existing or delivering new orchards, as part of landscaping and open space proposals.

Question 43: Should the Local Plan should include a policy seeking to encourage the creation of community orchards or new woodland areas in or near to villages and that existing sites be protected.

Please provide any comments.

The River Cam and other waterways

8.23. Rivers and streams are particularly important features in South Cambridgeshire in contributing to the biodiversity of the district. However, these waterways are also a major recreation and tourism resource, and careful management is required to preserve the special qualities that attract users.

Issue 39: River Cam and other waterways

An issue to be considered in the Local Plan is whether a policy should be developed for the waterway networks in the district given their importance in providing wildlife corridors.

This would need to be balanced between biodiversity, landscape, and the role for tourism and leisure.

Alternatively the Plan could have no specific policy relating to waterways within the district, and rely on other policies within the plan.

Question 44: Should a policy be developed for the waterways within the district that seeks to preserve and enhance the special qualities of waterways, whilst supporting their use as a recreation resource?

Please provide any additional comments.

Heritage Assets

8.24. The high quality of life enjoyed within South Cambridgeshire owes much to the historic environment within the district which makes it a special place, with different areas having distinctive characters. There is a wealth of 'heritage assets' in the district, ranging from listed buildings, areas rich in historic character identified by Conservation Areas, as well as historic landscapes and features influenced by centuries of occupation by man. The Local Plan will have a valuable role in providing a positive strategy for the conservation, enhancement, and enjoyment of this historic environment that balances the importance of protecting heritage assets with ensuring they are able to adapt to modern living.

8.25. 'Heritage assets' is an all-embracing term used to describe a significant building, monument, site, place, area or landscape. The NPPF says that such assets should be conserved in a 'manner appropriate to their significance', so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of this and future generations.

8.26. The Local Plan is important for implementing the NPPF principles, ensuring local character and distinctiveness of different areas of the district are protected and reinforced, and contributes to place-making. Development proposals using traditional and modern approaches need to respect the local identity of a village and its surroundings. The Local Plan will establish policy principles, supported by Supplementary Planning Documents, which elaborate on policy, and provide information including on historic character and significance, to assist applicants to develop their proposals.

Issues 40: Heritage assets

The Local Plan needs to include policies to provide appropriate protection and enhancement of the historic environment, having regard to the importance of these sites.

Existing planning policies in the district consider historic landscapes; archaeological sites; listed buildings and their settings and Conservation Areas as separate policies.

An alternative option for the Local Plan is to follow the lead provided by the NPPF and cover all types of heritage assets in a single policy.

Further information and guidance will continue to be provided in Supplementary Planning Documents, (currently the District Design Guide SPD, Conservation Areas SPD and Listed Buildings SPD).

Question 45: Taking account of the importance of the heritage asset, should the Local Plan include:

- a. Individual policies addressing historic landscapes; archaeological sites; listed buildings and their settings and Conservation Areas; or
- b. A single policy regarding the protection of heritage assets

Please provide any additional comments.

8.27. Many heritage assets within South Cambridgeshire have national statutory protection. Others are still of significant local historic importance that should be given proper weight in considering proposals that affect their historic interest. A formal list of some of these assets, such as locally important historic buildings, could be created / recorded, subject to the availability of resources.

Issue 41: Assets of local importance

An option for the Local Plan is to consider protecting undesignated heritage assets to support appropriate consideration of their contribution to the local environment. This could include assets identified in neighbourhood or parish plans identified as locally important.

A list of these assets and further guidance on their consideration could be provided in a Supplementary Planning Document.

Question 46: Do you consider the Local Plan should protect undesignated heritage assets?

Please provide any comments.

Heritage Assets and Adapting for Climate Change

8.28. Historic buildings can be good examples of sustainable layouts and construction, and an efficient use of energy and local resources. Their survival reflects their success and adaptability. Conserving and re-using historic buildings retains their materials and 'embodied energy' which is the energy used in the materials and construction.

8.29. The energy efficiency of buildings is covered in Chapter 6 (Sustainable Development, Climate Change, Water and Flooding). However, the implications of energy efficient measures for historic buildings need particular consideration. There are opportunities in most historic buildings to improve energy conservation without causing harm, through measures such as secondary glazing, improved loft insulation using natural materials, low energy lighting, and use of fuel efficient boilers. In some situations, renewable energy technologies can also be installed without causing harm. Where harm would be caused by energy conservation or renewable energy measures, then less harmful measures should be considered. Where conflict is unavoidable, the benefits of the energy conservation measures and the extent of harm to the heritage significance should be weighed against public benefits.

8.30. The South Cambridgeshire Listed Building SPD provides guidance on general sustainability, improving energy efficiency and renewable energy relating to listed buildings. An issue for the Local Plan is how climate change mitigation can be carried out on historic assets. Future detailed guidance could be provided in an SPD.

Issue 42: Heritage Assets and adapting for climate change

An option for the Local Plan is to include a policy that considers how listed buildings can be adapted to improve their environmental performance. The preferred method would be the one that causes the least harm to the heritage significance of the building. The Council would welcome / encourage the use of innovative design solutions to mitigate climate change whilst making every effort to preserve the historic fabric by the use of traditional construction methods to achieve the adaptation.

Question 47: Should the Local Plan should include a policy to guide how listed buildings can be adapted to improve their environmental performance?

Please provide any comments.