

Greater Cambridge Local Plan Strategic Spatial Options Assessment: Landscape & Townscape Supplement Report (July 2021)

Introduction

This Greater Cambridge Local Plan Strategic Spatial Options Assessment: Landscape & Townscape Supplement Report assesses with regard to Landscape & Townscape, the working assumption Greater Cambridge Local Plan preferred option development strategy, and a new blended Edge of Cambridge: Green Belt alternative, in the same way as was completed for the strategic spatial options in November 2020.

Alongside other evidence assessments and Sustainability Appraisal, consideration of the preferred option and Edge of Cambridge: Green Belt alternative alongside the strategic spatial options assessments ensures consideration of a range of reasonable alternative strategies.

Context

For the strategic spatial options stage we completed assessments of the three growth levels and eight strategic spatial options.

Further to this, ahead of the Preferred Options Plan consultation taking place in autumn 2021, officers from Greater Cambridge Shared Planning on behalf of the two councils shared with us a working assumption preferred option development strategy, including preferred growth level and distribution assumptions for dwellings, jobs and associated population growth.

Please note that use of the working assumption preferred option development strategy to inform this evidence base does not confer formal support by either council for that strategy. No decisions will be taken on development strategy assumptions until relevant member committees meet and approve documents for the Local Plan preferred options consultation. Such decisions will be informed by appraisal of reasonable alternatives. Setting out working assumptions in this and other notes does not prejudice those decisions.

Growth level

Following consideration of the November 2020 strategic spatial options evidence bases and Sustainability Appraisal, Greater Cambridge Shared Planning have determined that the medium level of homes associated with the central employment scenario represents the objectively assessed need for homes in Greater Cambridge. Having determined this, the previously assessed alternative growth options of minimum and maximum are no longer considered to represent reasonable alternatives.

Further to the above, the Greater Cambridge Local Plan Preferred Option growth level is the medium homes level, including a 1:1 commuting ratio for housing growth generated by additional jobs above those supported by the Standard Method, in line with the councils' aims of limiting longer distance commuting and thereby limiting carbon emissions (described as medium+). We, and other evidence base consultants, did not assess the medium+ level of growth for the Strategic Spatial options, but we do not consider that rerunning the evidence testing of the strategic spatial options against a new medium+ housing figure would result in materially different outcomes to our November 2020 conclusions.

Drawing on the above, we are testing the new spatial options of preferred option and Blended Strategy including Edge of Cambridge: Green Belt based on the medium+ growth level, and have not assessed the impacts of the previous alternative growth levels in relation to these new spatial options.

Spatial distribution

The Councils' working assumption preferred option is a blended strategy including a number of broad supply locations. To ensure that the preferred option is tested against reasonable alternatives, an assessment of the preferred option blended strategy has been completed, so that it can be compared against:

- The strategic spatial options tested last year
- Other reasonable alternative blended strategies.

Some of the spatial options tested last year were blended strategies and others not. The Councils reviewed the strategic spatial options tested in November to see whether these included a range of reasonable alternative blended strategies, noting that they don't need to test every possible reasonable alternative. The conclusion to this assessment was that the only alternative blended strategy not yet tested was one including development at Edge of Cambridge: Green Belt. The Councils therefore identified a blended strategy development distribution for this spatial option, which is directly comparable to the preferred option and broadly comparable to the strategic spatial options from November 2020.

Spatial options tested

- Preferred option growth level: Preferred Option Spatial Strategy
- Preferred option growth level: Blended Strategy including Edge of Cambridge: Green Belt

Methodology

This Supplement Report assesses the above spatial options using the same methodology as completed for the Greater Cambridge Local Plan Strategic Spatial Options Assessment: Landscape & Townscape. See that report for further detail.

Findings

The findings of the supplementary assessment are set out below.

Analysis

Preferred Option Growth Level: Preferred Option Spatial Strategy

The working assumption Preferred Option Spatial Strategy comprises the densification of Cambridge (5,100 homes), development at Cambridge Airport on the edge of Cambridge outside of the Green Belt (2,900 homes), development in the Western Cluster as an extension to Cambourne (2,000 homes) and in the Southern Cluster (600 homes), and the dispersal of development to the villages (900 homes). The potential landscape and townscape character considerations of these distributions and levels of growth are set out below.

Densification of Cambridge:

- North East Cambridge
- North West Cambridge
- Other smaller urban sites

The capacity of existing urban areas to accommodate growth on previously developed brownfield land without weakening distinctive local townscape characteristics/features is a key consideration, as are potential changes to key views and the landscape setting of the City experienced in approaches to and from the Cambridge Urban Area, particularly where tall buildings are proposed associated with densification.

In addition to the historic townscape characteristics of the Cambridge Urban Area, the landscape types that provide the setting and context for growth focussed around North East Cambridge and North West Cambridge are:

- The Fen Edge Claylands to the north - the peaceful, rural, open character of the landscape, surviving traditional orchards, pockets of high ecological value landscape features and the historic linear villages are inherent sensitivities of this landscape that are vulnerable to change.
- The Cam River Valley extending north-eastwards to the Fens - the tranquil, intimate landscape and dense scattering of trees and scrub and small-scale pastoral fields along the river courses are inherent sensitivities of this landscape that are vulnerable to change (relevant to North East Cambridge only)

	<p>Densification of the Cambridge Urban Area is likely to include the potential for additional tall buildings, which could further alter the townscape of Cambridge and may have greater impacts on open views across the surrounding landscape towards the City. Impacts on the historic townscape character of Cambridge and views of heritage significance are considered by the Greater Cambridge Strategic Heritage Impact Assessment study.</p> <p>The provision of appropriate strategic landscape/townscape mitigation and enhancement measures for integrating urban development within the Cambridge Urban Area would be a key policy consideration for the new Local Plan. Such an approach is likely to be based on the following principles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain strategic countryside gaps to protect the distinct rural character and separate identity of the outlying villages • Create a strong landscape structure to screen/soften the edges of built development as experienced in long, open views across the Fen Edge Claylands and intimate Cam River Valley landscapes • Strengthen the character of linear landscape features to create biodiverse and accessible green corridors connecting developments to the surrounding urban edge countryside (informed by the findings of the Green Infrastructure Study) • Ensuring high quality and distinctive design that is responsive to local character and creates a strong sense of place through sustainable building/urban design and appropriate landscaping and green infrastructure provision
<p>Edge of Cambridge non-Green Belt:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cambridge Airport 	<p>The Fen Edge Chalklands landscape type to the east of Cambridge provides the landscape setting and context for growth focussed around Cambridge Airport. The peaceful, rural open character of the landscape, long open views across the landscape towards Cambridge, scattered features of ecological and historic value, and the traditional vernacular and linear form of village settlements are inherent sensitivities of the Fen Edge Chalklands landscape that are vulnerable to change.</p>

	<p>Due to the open character of the Fen Edge Chalklands landscape context for Cambridge Airport, it is likely that the new urban edge would be a prominent feature in the landscape.</p> <p>The provision of appropriate strategic landscape mitigation and enhancement measures for integrating an urban extension on the edge of Cambridge into the surrounding countryside would be a key policy consideration for the new Local Plan. Such an approach is likely to be based on the following principles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain a strategic countryside gap to protect the distinct rural character and separate identity of the villages to the east of Cambridge (including Teversham, Little/Great Wilbraham) • Create a strong landscape structure to screen/soften the edges of built development as experienced in long, open views across the Fen Edge Chalklands landscape • Strengthen the character of linear landscape features to create biodiverse and accessible green corridors connecting developments on the edge of Cambridge to the surrounding countryside (informed by the findings of the Green Infrastructure Study) • Ensuring high quality and distinctive design that is responsive to local character and creates a strong sense of place through sustainable building/urban design and appropriate landscaping and green infrastructure provision
<p>Western Cluster (focus on transport):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extension to Cambourne (East West Rail) 	<p>The Wooded Claylands landscape type provides the setting and context for growth focussed at Cambourne. The rural tranquillity, distinctive pattern of hedgerows and woodland including parkland estates, rural settlement pattern of vernacular villages and dispersed farms, and long, framed views from elevated landform are inherent sensitivities of the Wooded Claylands landscape that are vulnerable to change.</p> <p>The provision of appropriate strategic landscape mitigation and enhancement measures for integrating the extension of Cambourne into the surrounding countryside would be a key policy consideration for the new Local Plan. Such an approach is likely to be based on the following principles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain strategic countryside gaps to protect the distinct character and separate identity of the rural villages

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a strong landscape structure to screen/soften the edges of built development as experienced in views across adjacent landscape types • Strengthen the character of linear landscape features to create biodiverse and accessible green corridors connecting new settlements to the surrounding countryside (informed by the findings of the Green Infrastructure Study) • Ensuring high quality and distinctive design that is responsive to local character and creates a strong sense of place through sustainable building/urban design and appropriate landscaping and green infrastructure provision
<p>Southern Cluster (integrating jobs and homes):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For supporting jobs cluster in the southern part of Greater Cambridge, net zero carbon, and rural communities/small sites 	<p>The landscape types that provide the setting and context for growth focussed within the jobs cluster area around the south of Cambridge include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Lowland Claylands – the rural tranquillity, scattered pattern of small woodlands, surviving moated sites and the dispersed, rural settlement pattern are inherent sensitivities of this landscape that are vulnerable to change. • The Cam River Valley – the tranquil, intimate landscape, and the dense scattering of trees and scrub and small-scale pastoral fields along the river courses are inherent sensitivities of this landscape that are vulnerable to change. • The Chalk Hills – the distinctive, elevated and undeveloped hills and ridges, open, panoramic views across Greater Cambridge and beyond, scattered woodland including ancient woodland on summits and slopes, and the tranquil often remote landscape character are inherent sensitivities of this landscape that are vulnerable to change. <p>In general terms, the River Valley and Chalk Hills have sensitive landscape characteristics that are likely to be more vulnerable/susceptible to changes from development focussed on the southern cluster than the Lowland Claylands landscape type within this part of Greater Cambridge. Key views experienced from the Gog Magog Chalk Hills that frame the landscape to the south of Cambridge are also sensitive to changes from development in this area.</p>

	<p>The provision of appropriate strategic landscape mitigation and enhancement measures for integrating development into the surrounding countryside would be a key policy consideration for the new Local Plan. Such an approach is likely to be based on the following principles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain strategic countryside gaps to protect the distinct character and separate identity of surrounding villages and the Cambridge Urban Area • Create a strong landscape structure to screen/soften the edges of built development as experienced in views across adjacent landscape types • Strengthen the character of linear landscape features to create biodiverse and accessible green corridors connecting new settlements to the surrounding countryside (informed by the findings of the Green Infrastructure Study) • Ensuring high quality and distinctive design that is responsive to local character and creates a strong sense of place through sustainable building/urban design and appropriate landscaping and green infrastructure provision
<p>Dispersal to villages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small element for supporting rural communities/small sites requirement 	<p>The capacity of existing rural villages to accommodate growth without weakening distinctive local landscape or townscape characteristics/features is a key consideration, as are potential changes to key views experienced in approaches to and from the villages. The villages within the Greater Cambridge area vary considerably in size and character reflecting their landscape type, setting/context and historical development. While some of the larger villages have distinctive historic cores, the overall townscape character of these settlements is often dominated by extensive late 20th Century development. In contrast, the townscape character of many of the smaller villages is dominated by their distinctive historic cores with more limited late 20th Century development.</p> <p>In general terms, the smaller villages dominated by historic cores with distinctive landscape settings have sensitive townscape/landscape characteristics that are likely to be more vulnerable/susceptible to changes from growth than, typically, the larger villages within Greater Cambridge where their character is dominated by 20th/21st Century peripheral estate development.</p>

This element of the preferred option spatial strategy focussing on dispersal of growth to the villages could result in impacts on distinctive local characteristics/features that contribute to the distinctive historic character and landscape setting of Greater Cambridge's rural villages.

The provision of appropriate strategic landscape mitigation and enhancement measures for integrating growth on greenfield land around the edges of villages into the surrounding countryside would be a key policy consideration for the new Local Plan. Such an approach is likely to be based on the following principles:

- Maintain strategic countryside gaps to protect the distinct character and separate identity of the rural villages
- Create a strong landscape structure to screen/soften the edges of built development on edges of villages as experienced in the wider landscape
- Strengthen the character of linear landscape features to create biodiverse and accessible green corridors connecting villages to the surrounding countryside (informed by the findings of the Green Infrastructure Study)
- Ensuring high quality and distinctive design that is responsive to local character and creates a strong sense of place through sustainable building/urban design and appropriate landscaping and green infrastructure provision

Where the focus is on infill development to accommodate growth, the provision of appropriate mitigation and enhancement measures for integrating built development sensitively into the townscape character of the villages would also be a key policy consideration for the new Local Plan. Such measures should be informed by the building and landscape design principles identified by the 2010 South Cambridgeshire District Design Guide SPD, and any successor documents, and also the relevant Village Design Guides published by South Cambridgeshire District Council in 2020 and emerging Neighbourhood Plans where available.

<p>Preferred Option Growth Level: Blended Strategy including Edge of Cambridge: Green Belt</p> <p>The alternative Blended Strategy is identical to the working assumption Preferred Option Spatial Strategy, except for the inclusion of non-site specific development on the edge of Cambridge within the Green Belt (2,000 homes) in place of development in the Western Cluster as an extension to Cambourne (2,000 homes). The potential landscape and townscape character considerations of these distributions and levels of growth are set out below.</p>	
<p>Densification of Cambridge:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • North East Cambridge • North West Cambridge • Other smaller urban sites 	<p>The landscape and townscape considerations identified for the Preferred Option Spatial Strategy are also applicable here.</p>
<p>Edge of Cambridge non-Green Belt:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cambridge Airport 	<p>The landscape and townscape considerations identified for the Preferred Option Spatial Strategy are also applicable here.</p>
<p>Edge of Cambridge Green Belt:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Edge of Cambridge Green Belt – non site specific 	<p>This element of the spatial strategy is non-site specific in terms of location of development around the edge of Cambridge within the Green Belt. The landscape types that provide the setting and context for growth focussed on the edge of Cambridge are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Fen Edge Claylands to the north – the peaceful, rural, open character of the landscape, surviving traditional orchards, pockets of high ecological value landscape features and the historic, linear village cores are inherent sensitivities of this landscape that are vulnerable to change. • The Cam River Valley extending north-eastwards to the Fens and southwards – the tranquil, intimate landscape, and the dense scattering of trees and scrub and small-scale pastoral fields along the river courses are inherent sensitivities of this landscape that are vulnerable to change.

- The Fen Edge Chalklands to the east – the peaceful, rural open character of the landscape, long open views across the landscape towards Cambridge, scattered features of ecological and historic value, and traditional vernacular and linear form of village settlements are inherent sensitivities of this landscape that are vulnerable to change.
- The Chalk Hills to the south-east – the distinctive, elevated and undeveloped hills and ridges, open, panoramic views across Greater Cambridge and beyond, scattered woodland including ancient woodland on summits and slopes, and the tranquil often remote landscape character are inherent sensitivities of this landscape that are vulnerable to change.
- The Lowland Claylands to the south-west – the rural tranquillity, scattered pattern of small woodlands, surviving moated sites and the dispersed, rural settlement pattern are inherent sensitivities of this landscape that are vulnerable to change
- The Wooded Claylands to the west – the rural tranquillity, distinctive pattern of hedgerows and woodland including parkland estates, rural settlement pattern of vernacular villages and dispersed farms, and long, framed views from elevated landform are inherent sensitivities of this landscape that are vulnerable to change.

In general terms, the Fens (to the north-east and east), the Cam River Valley to the north-east and south-west), the eastern part of the Western Claylands and Lowland Claylands (to the west) and the Gog Magog Chalk Hills (to the south) have sensitive landscape characteristics that are likely to be particularly vulnerable/susceptible to changes from major urban extensions around the edge of Cambridge.

The use of greenfield land on the edge of the Cambridge Urban Area could result in landscape changes that would alter the setting of the city, particularly in relation to the historic core. This could include impacts on the wider landscape setting of Cambridge – including potentially on key views of the City (such as from the Gog Magog Hills and Wimpole Ridge) and from an increased sense of coalescence with the necklace of rural villages surrounding Cambridge.

	<p>The provision of appropriate strategic landscape mitigation and enhancement measures for integrating urban extensions on the edge of Cambridge into the surrounding countryside would be a key policy consideration for the new Local Plan. Such an approach is likely to be based on the following principles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain strategic countryside gaps to protect the distinct rural character and separate identity of the outlying necklace of villages surrounding Cambridge (including Waterbeach, Teversham, Little Wilbraham, Great Wilbraham, Great Shelford, Little Shelford, Hauxton, Grantchester, Coton, Girton, Histon, Milton) • Create a strong landscape structure to screen/soften the edges of built development as experienced in views across the adjacent landscape types • Strengthen the character of linear landscape features to create biodiverse and accessible green corridors connecting developments on the edge of Cambridge to the surrounding countryside (informed by the findings of the Green Infrastructure Study) • Ensuring high quality and distinctive design that is responsive to local character and creates a strong sense of place through sustainable building/urban design and appropriate landscaping and green infrastructure provision
<p>Southern Cluster (integrating jobs and homes):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For supporting jobs cluster in the southern part of Greater Cambridge, net zero carbon, and rural communities/small sites 	<p>The landscape and townscape considerations identified for the Preferred Option Spatial Strategy are also applicable here.</p>

<p>Dispersal to villages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Small element for supporting rural communities/small sites requirement	<p>The landscape and townscape considerations identified for the Preferred Option Spatial Strategy are also applicable here.</p>
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Conclusions

Taking into account the findings of the Greater Cambridge Landscape Character Assessment study where appropriate, a high level analysis of the potential landscape and townscape character considerations of the following spatial strategy options has been undertaken as presented in the above tables:

- Preferred Option Spatial Strategy
- Blended Strategy including Edge of Cambridge: Green Belt

The following conclusions from the assessment of the different distributions and levels of growth are applicable to both options:

- **Densification of Cambridge (5,100 homes)** – densification of the Cambridge Urban Area is likely to include the potential for additional tall buildings, which could result in changes to historic townscape characteristics and on key views towards the City across the open landscapes of the Fen Edge Claylands and Cam River Valley.
- **Edge of Cambridge: non-Green Belt (2,900 homes)** – development at Cambridge Airport on the edge of Cambridge outside of the Green Belt is likely to create a new urban edge that would be a prominent feature in the landscape due to the open character of the Fen Edge Chalklands landscape context for Cambridge Airport.
- **Southern Cluster (600 homes)** – development in the Southern Cluster is likely to result in localised changes to the character of the River Valley, Chalk Hills and Lowland Claylands landscape types within this part of Greater Cambridge, and may have an impact on key views experienced from the Gog Magog Chalk Hills.
- **Dispersal to Villages (900 homes)** – dispersal of development to the villages is likely to result in localised changes to the townscape character and landscape setting of some of Greater Cambridge's rural villages

In addition to the above, the following conclusion is applicable to the Preferred Option Spatial Strategy only:

- **Western Cluster (2,000 homes)** – development in the Western Cluster as an extension to Cambourne is likely to result in localised changes to the character of the Wooded Clayland landscape around Cambourne, which is considered to offer potential opportunities to accommodate growth.

The following conclusion is applicable to the Blended Strategy only:

- **Edge of Cambridge: Green Belt (2,000 homes)** – development within the Green Belt could result in landscape changes that would alter the setting of the City, particularly in relation to the historic core. Depending on the location of development, this could include impacts on the character of the Fens, Cam River Valley, Western Claylands, Lowland Claylands and Gog Magog Chalk Hills landscapes, and potentially on key views of the City such as from the Gog Magog Hills and Wimpole Ridge. It may also contribute to an increased sense of coalescence with some of the rural villages in close proximity to the City.

Overall, both spatial strategy options would result in changes, negative and positive, in terms of conserving and enhancing the character of Greater Cambridge's landscapes and townscapes, maintaining local distinctiveness and strengthening sense of place.

The Preferred Option Spatial Strategy would result in impacts on the Wooded Clayland landscape from development in the Western Cluster as an extension to Cambourne, compared to the Blended Strategy which would have no impacts on these landscapes.

The Blended Strategy would result in greater impacts on sensitive landscapes and key views that contribute to the distinctive historic character and landscape setting of the City from development on the edge of Cambridge within the Green Belt, compared to the Preferred Option Spatial Strategy.

Recommendations

To support the preferred option spatial strategy, it would be advisable to consider developing suitable landscape policies in the new Local Plan that require provision of strategic landscape mitigation and enhancement measures for integrating new development within and around the edges of the Cambridge Urban Area and rural villages in South Cambridgeshire into the surrounding countryside. The policy approach should be informed and supported by the relevant landscape management objectives and landscape planning guidelines identified by the new Greater Cambridge Landscape Character Assessment, taking into account the principles highlighted in the above table as appropriate and in line with the Greater Cambridge Green Infrastructure Opportunity Mapping.