

Development Strategy

Topic Paper

Appendix 5: Alternative approaches considered for jobs opportunities



Greater Cambridge Local Plan

Topic Paper published as part of the Proposed Submission Local Plan - Regulation 19 consultation (August 2026 - September 2026)



Development Strategy Topic Paper 2026 Appendix 5: Alternative approaches considered for jobs and homes

1.1 This section describes alternative approaches considered throughout the preparation of the Greater Cambridge Local Plan development strategy, not just at Proposed Submission stage. The councils have explored a wide range of alternative options in considering the preferred development strategy, refining the approach as each stage of the plan making process

First Conversation Consultation January 2020

2.1 Consideration of alternative strategy options began in the First Conversation consultation 2020. Six spatial options were identified and views were sought on their role in meeting future development needs. The options were also subject to sustainability appraisal, which was published to accompany the consultation. A wide range of comments were received.

Developing our Strategic Spatial Options

3.1 Building on the First Conversation consultation we began to explore more specific development quantity and strategy alternative options.

3.2 We initially identified three growth level options for homes and jobs (minimum, medium and maximum), and in addition to the six spatial options we identified in the First Conversation we added two further blended spatial strategies, resulting a total of eight spatial options as listed below.

- Spatial option 1: Densification of existing urban areas
- Spatial option 2: Edge of Cambridge - outside Green Belt
- Spatial option 3: Edge of Cambridge - Green Belt
- Spatial option 4: Dispersal - new settlements
- Spatial option 5: Dispersal - villages
- Spatial option 6: Public transport corridors

- Spatial option 7: Supporting a high-tech corridor by integrating homes and jobs (southern cluster)
- Spatial option 8: Expanding a growth area around transport nodes

3.3 Each spatial option was tested against each of the three growth levels. We published this evidence in November 2020, including a further Sustainability Appraisal.

First Proposals Consultation 2021

4.1 At this stage we identified our preferred approach to the objectively assessed need for jobs and homes, rejecting the other alternatives. This was referred to as the ‘medium+’ scenario of 58,500 jobs, and 44,400 homes. This reflected the outcome of our evidence exploring the need for homes and jobs.

4.2 At this point, critical evidence findings relevant to determining our development strategy were that: location is the biggest factor in impacts on carbon emissions; but that it would not be deliverable to focus all development in any one broad location. As such, we rejected spatial options listed above that were “single-spatial choice” development strategies, as they did not form reasonable alternatives, and identified an emerging preferred “blended” spatial strategy comprising a hybrid of single spatial options to meet a variety of needs, that drew on elements of, but did not fully reflect any one of the blended strategies previously tested. Having identified an emerging preferred blended strategic spatial option, we identified a further blended alternative strategic spatial option, and tested both of these in a way that was consistent with the testing completed for spatial options 1-8:

- Spatial option 9: Preferred options spatial strategy (Blended strategy including Cambourne).
- Spatial option 10: Blended Strategy including Edge of Cambridge: Green Belt.

4.3 Spatial option 9 focused on the strategic sites of North East Cambridge,

Cambridge East and Cambourne to meet the majority of our objectively assessed needs. Our evidence showed that these performed well when considered against our key aims of:

- Reducing climate impacts through compact development located to connect homes and jobs and where active and sustainable travel can be maximised
- Making best use of suitable safeguarded and brownfield land
- Making best use of existing and proposed key sustainable transport infrastructure
- Supporting rural communities to thrive and sustain services.

4.4 Spatial option 10 was similar to option 9, with the exception that it did not include Cambourne, but instead included non-site specific locations on the edge of Cambridge in the Green Belt. This enabled us to ensure we had fully considered the alternative of releasing Green Belt land on the edge of Cambridge and the consequences for sustainable development, as referenced in the National Planning Policy Framework (paragraph 148).

4.5 Both were tested in a comparable way to the eight earlier spatial options, so ten spatial options were tested in total prior to confirming the final preferred strategy.

4.6 Spatial option 9: Preferred options spatial strategy (Blended strategy including Cambourne) was selected as our preferred strategy, and this formed the basis of the policy proposals in the First Proposals consultation.

4.7 The edge of Cambridge Green Belt sites performed in a similar way in many respects to Cambridge East, but they would have significant Green Belt impacts. Given the relatively good performance of Cambourne, which is not in the Green Belt and would maximise the benefits from East West Rail consistent with NPPF guidance to make best use of new infrastructure, weighing these factors in the planning balance, we considered there to be no exceptional circumstances for releasing land on the edge of Cambridge to meet our general development needs as a matter of principle and that spatial option was not preferred for the

First Proposals.

4.8 Site specific exceptional circumstances for releasing land from the Green Belt were identified at the Cambridge Biomedical Campus and Babraham Research Campus.

4.9 Consideration was given to the provision of a range of sizes and types of sites to give flexibility and help with delivery over the plan period. Drawing on our evidence, a wide range of sites were considered but many were not preferred due to their impacts, with only a limited number of sites being preferred in Cambridge, close to centres of employment in the southern cluster, and in villages well served by public transport in the rest of the rural area. Allocating large numbers of sites in villages was not a preferred approach, as evidence demonstrated how poorly a dispersed strategy performed with regard to a number of issues, but particularly in relation to transport and carbon impacts.

4.10 In summary, drawing on our evidence and feedback to the First Conversation consultation, alternatives to the First Proposals preferred option were not preferred as they would either distribute development to less sustainable locations that are distant from Cambridge or without the benefit of very high quality public transport (existing or proposed) that would generate greater car use contrary to our climate change theme, or would require the release of large areas of Green Belt on the edge of Cambridge which would cause significant harm to the purposes of the Cambridge Green Belt. Full information regarding the testing of these alternatives can be found in the Sustainability Appraisal accompanying the First Proposals.

Development Strategy Update 2023

5.1 In January 2023 we published a Development Strategy Update which, drawing on representations to the First Proposals consultation alongside our evidence, we confirmed among other things:

- The inclusion of North East Cambridge, Cambridge East, and

Cambridge Biomedical Campus as central building blocks of any future strategy for development, noting the sustainability of these locations.

- that the following development strategy principles that informed the First Proposals development strategy remained valid, and that we would build on these to inform the identification of any additional sites if they were needed for the next stage of the plan: “the proposed development strategy is to direct development to where it has the least climate impact, where active and public transport is the natural choice, where green infrastructure can be delivered alongside new development, and where jobs, services and facilities can be located near to where people live, whilst ensuring all necessary utilities can be provided in a sustainable way. It also seeks to be realistic around the locational limits of some new jobs floorspace which is centred upon national and global economic clusters”.

Draft Local Plan December 2025

6.1 After some delays in the plan making process caused by a range of external matters, we published a draft Local Plan for consultation in December 2025. The draft Local Plan built of the First Proposals, but was informed by consideration of comments received and updated evidence. The plan period was also amended from 2020 to 41, to 2024 to 45.

6.2 Informed by updated evidence regarding the need for homes and jobs, and an updated standard method for calculating housing need published by the government, we identified a revised higher objectively assessed needs of 73,300 additional jobs and a minimum of 48,195 homes.

6.3 At this stage we refined and subjected to Sustainability Appraisal our development strategy principles to read as follows:

- a. limit our climate impact and support thriving communities – locate development where active and public transport is the natural choice, with jobs, services and facilities located near to where people live, and

responding to opportunities created by existing and proposed major new transport infrastructure;

- b. protect and enhance our natural environment – maximise opportunities to use brownfield land, and ensure green infrastructure can be delivered alongside new development;
- c. enable our national and global economic employment sectors to flourish – provide employment space of the right type in the right location to meet sector needs;
- d. reinforce the distinctive character of our city, towns and villages – protect the Green Belt, and develop sites that can be well-integrated with existing communities, can be developed at densities, and using appropriate forms and patterns of development, which make best use of land while creating well-designed, characterful places; and
- e. support all necessary utilities in a sustainable way – ensure that the development strategy can be supported by utilities in a way that protects and enhances the environment.

6.4 Having regard to the refined development strategy principles, representations to the First Proposals consultation, and updated evidence as relevant we confirmed that, subject to the removal of two smaller sites, the sites included within the First Proposals remained suitable, available and achievable. In addition to existing supply provided by commitments, these sites met the majority of the draft plan development needs.

6.5 We focused the next stages our assessments on identifying and testing the impacts of updated growth options to meet the additional needs beyond those met by the First Proposals. We could not identify sufficient additional sites within the Cambridge urban area to meet the additional needs.

6.6 We reviewed whether there was further potential at villages, but we did not identify any additional sites that would not cause a level of harm that we considered justified in the context of other available options, and the strategic options testing above concluded that dispersing substantial development to smaller sites is not sustainable.

6.7 Two alternatives for meeting the additional needs were identified - to allocate land on the edge of Cambridge by releasing Green Belt land, or allocation of an additional new settlement.

- a. Spatial option 9a: 2025 growth option: Hybrid spatial strategy including new settlement, and expanding Cambourne
- b. Spatial option 10a: 2025 growth option: Hybrid spatial strategy including Edge of Cambridge: Green Belt, and expanding Cambourne

6.8 Informed by representations, we also identified a further previously untested strategic spatial option at Royston that could be seen as an alternative to Cambourne, given that it also involves expansion of an existing settlement. As such we identified the need to retest the performance of Cambourne against other reasonable alternative strategic spatial options, in order to ensure we had a consistent understanding of Cambourne's performance against those alternatives.

- c. Spatial option 11a - 2025 growth option: Hybrid spatial strategy including expanding an existing market town: Royston and a new settlement
- d. Spatial option 11b - 2025 growth option: Hybrid spatial strategy including expanding an existing market town: Royston, and expanding Cambourne

6.9 All four options were tested in a comparable way to the previous 10 spatial options. Site specific options were also identified and tested at these locations.

6.10 Options involving expansion of Royston were not considered to be well located to meet Greater Cambridge's growth needs, and had a number of disadvantages. These options were therefore not preferred. Additional Edge of Cambridge sites benefited from proximity to Cambridge, but would have significant Green Belt, landscape and historic environment impacts.

6.11 New settlements on a public transport corridor offered relatively good in-principle performance and merited further site specific exploration. The new

settlement options available were assessed on a comparable basis. Land adjacent to A11 and A1307 (referred to as Grange Farm) was identified as the preferred option, being a site in the Rural Southern Cluster, outside of the Green Belt, with potential for high quality public transport connections and proximity to nearby employment sites.

6.12 Noting the sustainability merits of an expanded Cambourne and Grange Farm alongside the Green Belt impacts of releasing land from the Green Belt on the edge of Cambridge and elsewhere, we considered there to be no exceptional circumstances for releasing land from the Green Belt to meet development needs as a matter of principle and that spatial option was not preferred.

6.13 Site specific exceptional circumstances for releasing land from the Green Belt were identified at the Cambridge Biomedical Campus and Babraham Research Campus.

6.14 In August 2025 the Government's announcement that it would not be funding the relocation of the Cambridge Waste Water Treatment Plant, resulting in uncertainty that housing could be delivered in the North East Cambridge site. That uncertainty was reflected in the draft plan, but the development strategy still met the objectively assessed need for homes, providing 6.5% headroom above that need without any delivery from North East Cambridge.

Proposed Submission 2026

7.1 After consideration of representations received and further evidence updates, the Councils prepared the Proposed Submission version of the Local Plan.

7.2 Having reviewed representations to the draft version of the Local Plan, the Councils consider that the draft Local Plan's development strategy principles set out above remain valid. The objectively assessed housing and employment needs have been subject to minor updates, but remain similar to those identified at draft plan stage.

7.3 Reflecting the change in circumstances regarding the North East Cambridge site, with the withdrawal of funding to relocate Cambridge Waste Water Treatment Plant away from the site, the Proposed Submission development strategy does not rely on the delivery of housing through the relocation of the Waste Water treatment Plant.

7.4 North East Cambridge and the development opportunities provided by the Waste Water Treatment Plant relocation was included as a consistent component of all the strategic spatial options tested by our evidence bases and via Sustainability Appraisal at draft plan stage, reflecting our evidence that, when available, it formed the most sustainable strategic-scale opportunity for development within Greater Cambridge.

7.5 Removing the proposed allocation at North East Cambridge from the development strategy is therefore a change to the options previously tested. To understand the effect of this change, our evidence bases and Sustainability Appraisal were updated to test strategic options 9b, 10b, 11ai, and 11bi, which are new variants of the preferred options considered at the draft plan stage without the allocation at North East Cambridge. Having reviewed representations to the draft plan consultation alongside updated evidence, we did not identify any further spatial strategy options beyond these.

7.6 The effect in options 9b, 10b, 11ai and 11bi of removing the allocation at North East Cambridge is that it adjusts the balance of development between the broad locations such that all four options include proportionally less development within and on the edge of Cambridge, and more at expanded and 'new' new settlements. However, this testing did not change our understanding of the performance of the broad locations previously tested.

7.7 We also considered new sites proposed at the Reg 18 Draft Plan consultation, and reconsidered sites where additional information was provided, testing any identified as reasonable alternatives. Drawing on this, the Councils reviewed and reconfirmed the draft plan development strategy position as follows:

- We reconfirmed that options involving expansion of Royston were not preferred for the reasons set out at Draft Plan stage;
- We reconfirmed the suitability of an expanded Cambourne and Grange Farm for development, noting that their sustainability merits have not changed since Draft Plan stage;
- We reviewed the case for exceptional circumstances to release land from the Green Belt both to meet general development needs and to meet site-specific circumstances, and having done so – including based on updated Green Belt evidence - we reconfirmed the conclusions identified at draft plan stage, as set out above;
- as for previous stages, in addition to strategic-scale sites we considered the provision of a range of sizes and types of sites to give flexibility and help with delivery over the plan period, reflecting our evidence, and reconfirmed the principle of including a modest element of housing on smaller sites within the strategy. A number of sites were preferred in Cambridge, close to centres of employment in the southern cluster, and in villages well served by public transport in the rest of the rural area.

Summary

8.1 In summary, drawing on our evidence and consultation feedback, the Proposed Submission Local Plan strategy is effectively the same as the strategy consulted upon at Draft Plan stage, with the exception that North East Cambridge is not proposed for allocation. Alternatives to this preferred option would either focus development on less sustainable locations further away from Cambridge and/or without the benefit of high-quality public transport (existing or proposed), contrary to the climate objectives of the Plan, or would require the release of large areas of Green Belt on the edge of Cambridge leading to significant harm to the purposes of the Cambridge Green Belt. Full information regarding the testing of these alternatives can be found in the Sustainability Appraisal accompanying the Proposed Submission Local Plan.