



Campaign to Protect
Rural England

CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH

**Campaign to Protect Rural England
Cambridgeshire and Peterborough
Branch
Response to EERA's Review of the
East of England Plan › 2031
Consultation, September 2009**

Submitted 23 November 2009

CPRE Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, The Town Hall,
Market Hill, St Ives, PE27 5AL

01480 396698

cambsbranch@cpreeast.fsnet.co.uk

CPRE Cambridgeshire and Peterborough

Response to Review of East of England Plan > 2031 Consultation, September 2009

Introduction

1. CPRE Cambridgeshire and Peterborough (Campaign to Protect Rural England) exists to promote the beauty, tranquillity, diversity and vitality of rural England by encouraging the sustainable use of land and other natural resources in town and country. It aims to raise awareness of countryside issues in the county and to help people protect their local countryside, to enhance it and to keep it beautiful and enjoyable for everyone.
2. CPRE Cambridgeshire and Peterborough (Campaign to Protect Rural England) (referred to hereafter as Cambridgeshire CPRE) has members throughout Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Unitary Authority.

Response to Review of East of England Plan > 2031 Consultation

3. As the recession eases, there is a likelihood that pressure will return for the 'Cambridge phenomenon' to reassert itself with this subregion being once again one of the region's (and the country's) principal growth areas, based on the knowledge economy associated with Cambridge University. In reality, the Cambridge subregion will struggle to accommodate the quantity of growth anticipated in the current regional plan to 2021, let alone that anticipated for 2021-31. This is not so much because of a deficiency in job creation potential (though there is uncertainty about that too) but because of the practicalities of providing the housing, services, transport and other investments to enable such growth to be achievable. In addition, the considerable erosion of quality of life for the people of Cambridge and the impact on the environment must also be considered.
4. Steps have been taken through the promotion of new settlements, particularly Northstowe, and new infrastructure, particularly the Cambridge Guided Bus system as far as Huntingdon, to enable the growth, but there remain major difficulties. These include:
 - uncertainty still about the future of Marshalls Cambridge Airport and whether the site will be released for the planned 12,000 dwellings – and if not where those dwellings might be provided;
 - the significant gap of perhaps £1bn between the funds needed for infrastructure to deliver the intended growth and the funds likely to be available;
 - the reduced land values during the recession, threatening a key source of funding for new infrastructure;
 - the challenge of growth to Cambridge City, including in terms of the pressure on the city centre; erosion of the city's historic character; the difficulty of increasing the numbers of people moving daily into and out of the city for work; limited capacity for new physical infrastructure; and the threat of urban sprawl within and beyond the city's green belt.
5. Cambridgeshire CPRE considers it both highly desirable, as well as unavoidable, that development should be distributed away from Cambridge, particularly in the period 2021-31 (on which this review focuses). Even so, the towns to the north and west of Cambridge already have their own growth commitments, and accommodating additional overspill from Cambridge would pose a major challenge to

the character, integrity and functioning of the towns in question. All of them have centres too small to accommodate large scale expansion of employment and housing continued over two decades, in addition to the urban expansion schemes already planned. Cambridgeshire CPRE therefore shares the view of Cambridgeshire County Council in its section 4(4) response that “there will be very significant challenges in implementing the current strategy itself” (paragraph 9.0) with the planned growth to 2021, and that spreading growth on the 75,000 plots already identified over the longer period to 2031 would be more realistic.

6. The option of a major new settlement of 20,000 or more houses has been assessed by Arup for EERA (*Regional Scale Settlement Study*, January 2009). For the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough subregion this study concluded that a new settlement was unlikely to be the best option: “The combination of existing ambitious RSS growth targets and the predominantly rural character of the subregion would suggest that development of a regional scale settlement is not necessarily the most appropriate way to deliver long term development across the area” (section 7.5.2). Cambridgeshire CPRE agrees.
7. If pressed to identify a new settlement location, the Arup study opted for the Huntingdon area, probably based on the former Alconbury airfield well to the north-west of the town. However, a development at this location would be closer to Peterborough than Cambridge and could well put at risk the economic strategy for the regeneration and growth of Peterborough by diverting development away from it. The Alconbury location would require a massive diversion of investment away from existing urban areas to effectively a greenfield site, and in doing so could threaten the agreed provision of 10,000 dwellings at Northstowe. It also has poor public transport at present.
8. Cambridgeshire CPRE agrees with Cambridgeshire County Council’s section 4(4) submission (summary point (k)) that more generally on new settlements:

“There are considerable doubts about the viability of any further new settlements because:

 - it will be very costly to provide suitable infrastructure;
 - they are unlikely to be sustainable for jobs, services or transport;
 - they will divert from the delivery of the current strategy up to 2031;
 - the scale of housing growth likely to be deliverable does not justify further new settlements at this stage.”
9. Cambridgeshire CPRE also agrees with Cambridgeshire County Council’s section 4(4) submission (summary point (l) on the overall strategy) that there is no need for further review of the Cambridge Green Belt. This has been subjected to such intense scrutiny in recent years that a period of stability is now required. Numerous proposals to release land from the Green Belt have been rejected by recent studies, and in any event we note that there is no support from any of the Cambridgeshire Authorities for an additional Green Belt review in the near future.
10. While further urban expansion within the Cambridge subregion is becoming as impractical as it is environmentally undesirable, the scope for significant economic growth in Peterborough has not been properly explored. This city would benefit from major economic investment and the urban redevelopment that would accompany this. Environmentally it is particularly well-placed to absorb development, having 943 hectares of previously developed land available spread around the city, of which a remarkable 858 hectares are suitable for housing. It has a Unique Selling Point of aiming to be the Environment City, leading the way in green infrastructure particularly.

11. While Peterborough has suffered during the recession, the City Council has put forward in its Section 4(4) advice a credible strategy for returning to significant growth by 2016, beginning with regeneration in the city centre (and improving the capacity of the railway station). Cambridgeshire CPRE agrees with the City Council that its regional growth potential has been understated. Such growth could:
 - improve the quality of life and opportunities for existing residents;
 - accommodate significant development largely within an already built-up area;
 - raise the economic performance of Peterborough relative to the Cambridge subregion, (and also thereby avoid further risk of an expanding economic divide between the areas in future);
 - accommodate a significant part of the subregional growth 2021-2031;
 - Ultimately link the success of Peterborough with the success of Cambridge, through the spreading out of the subregional knowledge economy and Peterborough's own expertise in engineering.

12. The limiting factor in the recent and planned growth of Peterborough has been regional vision. Instead, the scope for short term economic gain has been swept up in the rhetoric of the 'Cambridge phenomenon' a few miles to the south. Arup's *Regional Scale Settlement Study* commented: "Whether or not jobs and population generated elsewhere in the sub-region could be re-directed further north would depend upon strong policy direction, coordination and leadership" (section 7.3.1). This surely is something which EERA and its successors should supply. The Arup study acknowledged that "There is also the possibility – and certainly the support, for the extension of the high-tech and knowledge based industries northwards towards Peterborough", and quotes both the Peterborough Sub-Regional Economic Strategy of 2008 and the Government's own growth corridor study of 2004 in recognition of the potential (section 7.3.2).

13. The issue in regional planning terms is the extent to which Peterborough could absorb the overspill growth from Cambridge which might otherwise be accommodated in the St Neots-Huntingdon-St Ives area. This would involve not the warehousing and lower value development which might otherwise be attracted to Peterborough, but employment in high-tech and other modern industries. Cambridgeshire CPRE firmly believes that this is entirely practicable. If the Arup study can contemplate a new settlement of 20,000 houses just 20km to the south, then there is clearly scope for major investment in Peterborough. After all, the Arup study rightly argues that "Peterborough has the potential for strong economic growth, given its strategic location and position as a gateway into the East Midlands and South East. The city already has a small but growing engineering cluster as well as an emerging environmental technology cluster that would integrate well with the high-tech and knowledge based industries further south...Greater focus on the city through new development would therefore help to consolidate its position as a Regional Centre by helping to facilitate improved economic performance, employment opportunities and regeneration."

14. Cambridgeshire CPRE therefore encourages major growth in Peterborough as an alternative to a cluster of developments in the greater Cambridge subregion. This growth in Peterborough should be planned more vigorously. The Green Grid and the villages fringing the city should be sacrosanct; any development should be on the existing urban footprint. There should be no release of greenfield sites for housing outside the city in return for contributions towards city centre renewal. Development should focus strongly on bringing back into use the substantial quantity of previously developed land. The faster this land is used, the more quickly Peterborough will shed any image of being run-down. Developers should understand that capturing value from the existing high quality environment around the City will not be

acceptable: instead value should be added by turning previously developed land acquired at low cost into fine new environments that can sell at a premium. This is how new development can make Peterborough a better place, not a devalued one.

15. Probably the most effective and well-tried mechanism for achieving this, shaping the pattern of development across the City and its surroundings, is by establishing a Green Belt for Peterborough; the establishment of a Green Belt around Peterborough will meet all the requirements of Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 2. This should be drawn up to encourage development on previously developed land but to severely curtail development in and around the villages and on city edge sites which would simply be sprawl.

16. Taking these findings together, Cambridgeshire CPRE concludes that none of the housing development options proposed by EERA for either Cambridgeshire or Peterborough is exactly appropriate. Instead we generally support the submissions by Cambridgeshire County Council and Peterborough City Council, and propose:
 - housing requirements determined on the basis of employment creation;
 - a Plan, Monitor and Manage approach to development in Cambridgeshire;
 - the avoidance of free-standing new settlements;
 - a higher concentration of growth in Peterborough, based primarily on recycling previously developed land, at a rate greater than anticipated on the basis of any of: pre-recession development rates, household projections, employment projections, or the current Regional Plan: in view of the recession, the rate of development proposed by the City Council should be realistically achievable;
 - a reduced rate of house building in the Cambridge subregion, far less than proposed in Scenario 1, spreading out the development anticipated by 2021 over much of the period to 2031;
 - diversion of part of the growth pressure from Cambridgeshire to Peterborough, recognising that:
 - physical proximity to Cambridge is not necessary in all cases;
 - the economic contributions from the two cities are well matched;
 - the economic gap between the two cities needs to be narrowed;
 - Peterborough has the land, water and desire for growth which much of Cambridgeshire lacks;
 - infrastructure investment to facilitate growth in Peterborough as an existing city will have far wider benefits than equivalent investment to enable the growth of Cambridge;
 - the substantial footloose development, suggested in one study as suitable to be concentrated at Alconbury, would be beneficial if located at Peterborough but harmful if diverted to a new settlement.
 - the maintenance of the Cambridge Green Belt with no further incursions and the creation of a new Green Belt to assist the future shaping of growth at Peterborough.

17. Cambridgeshire CPRE fully endorses the response submitted, separately, by CPRE East of England region, and fully supports the thrust of its arguments and the issues it raises.

Submitted 23 November 2009

CPRE Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, The Town Hall, Market Hill, St Ives, PE27 5AL
01480 396698
cambsbranch@cpreeast.fsnet.co.uk