

Big Issues for the Cambridge Area – Quality of Life

06 December 2017, Kate Kirk, Howard Biddle

What makes up quality of life?

RAND Europe QoL survey included housing, traffic, community, leisure facilities, schools, GPs and employment.

Culture, sport, green spaces and other signifiers of QoL appeal to different groups of people and at different times in their lives – QoL for the U3AC generation not the same as for 16-24 year-olds. The former keen on outdoors, suitable sports and culture, the latter don't visit museums, complain of not enough to do, and that the events and facilities available to them, such as the Junction, cost too much. Teenagers who are too old for the playground and too young for the pub are particularly poorly served, especially in the villages.

Transport/Access

Access to activities that contribute to QoL is crucial, and transport one of worst factors in RAND Europe survey.

Those coming in to Cambridge to attend events, visit museums etc find getting back out to the surrounding villages and towns on public transport difficult at the best of times and not well served late in the evening and at night. Mum and Dad taxi service for the younger age groups not always available. Parking charges are very high.

Cycling not always the answer for those living in town – cycling in Cambridge can be dangerous. Boy racers on bikes don't help – we do not have the same cycling culture as Amsterdam, which is much more sedate.

London is near, but not always easy to get back if attending a late show. While there are keen theatre, ballet and opera-going groups, they tend to go at times not suitable for those still working.

Access also tied up with health – those who are disabled, house-bound or unable to drive themselves rely on help from others to get out and about. Technology can help – for instance U3AC efforts to widen participation – but that requires the right equipment and broadband, which is not always a given.

Sport

Health critical – so that one can enjoy all the other things that make up QoL. Various groups – Forever Active, Camrowers, U3AC – have sports sessions for those who are older or need help due to health problems.

Sports facilities for younger age groups felt to be lacking – especially affordable options. But this is the group that needs encouraging to live healthy lifestyles now to set them up for the future.

Schools unable to encourage involvement in sport by opening up their facilities to the public after hours – would require volunteer help from staff, and volunteers from outside would have to be DBS checked. There are plenty of after-school activities for school-age children, but parents have to pay for them.

Housing

One of the biggest problems according to the RAND Europe QoL survey and hard to solve.

Cambridge already has significant amounts of purpose-built student accommodation with more being built. Local resistance to more student accommodation may force colleges to buy more houses (ie take them off the family market) if they don't get planning permission to convert existing properties.

Houses and flats, some car-free, are being crammed in wherever there's space, including garden grabbing. This can lead to over-crowding, and more parking and transport problems but this might be mitigated if car sharing becomes commonplace.

Are people disconnected from the University?

Cambridge is different to most other cities because the University is so dominant a force in the culture of the city. Numerous events, lectures and museums in the University are open to all, and performances, concerts etc liberally advertised on posters attached to any and all available railings. The University website also has a daily diary that lists events open to the public.

But while some people move to Cambridge so they can participate in University events, others from outside the University don't engage because 'it's not for them', they feel intimidated, or they don't know how to access this information. Posters do not specifically advertise that events are open to all.

Our changing world

Over the coming decades, urbanisation, rise of 'city living', changing ways of working, technology and other factors may impact QoL, and the factors deemed important to QoL. For instance, better broadband connections might encourage more home-working and reduce commuting into Cambridge, car-free housing developments might reduce traffic.

Generous provision of green spaces will be important – perhaps by making some or all of the green belt into permanent park land or providing more public footpaths across farmland.

Need for people to drive initiatives

Successful efforts to improve QoL – the Junction, Camrowers, U3AC – require the people to drive them, almost certainly volunteers initially, and community fundraising. Larger pots of funding may be accessible subsequently – eg City Council, Lottery and Sport England funding for Camrowers.