

## **2030 vision for the Cambridge sub-region**

### **Topic summary: Agriculture and Green Spaces**

#### **Issues**

- We cannot separate ourselves from the global scene: food security is a key issue. We have an increasing population yet we grow only 60% of our own food (and discard 20%).
- Soil is being eroded and compacted, water availability is uncertain and fuel prices are rising.
- We live in an agrarian region. Both its scale and products are very diverse. It depends on an ability to produce food for people and animals which, for economic viability, must be exported out of the region. Good transport links are essential.
- The EU's Common Agricultural Policy skews the market.
- Farms are bound to continue getting larger and more specialised and intensive. Land ownership is becoming more remote and relying on local management by professionals.
- All farms are at the mercy of the supermarkets. Traditional farmer-owners are seeking alternative (local) markets. Smaller farms are more sustainable but economically weak.
- Farmers are concerned by the increasing number of protected predators and by the problems caused by public access to agricultural land – particularly in the Green Belt.
- There are huge health and social advantages in having green space within easy reach.
- Many urban dwellers with increasing access to the countryside do not feel 'connected' to the green environment and lack information about where they can go.
- We have no way of valuing open space. The planning authorities have not appreciated the benefits of green spaces.
- Possible erosion of the Green Belt is a major concern to many. Unfortunately, the land closest to the city is the most valuable to its owners.

#### **Propositions**

- Agricultural yields must be increased – sustainably – with the aid of massive increases in genetic modification and other plant biotechnologies. Conventional farming could learn from the organic approach – even though the latter is vulnerable in a recession.
- Agriculture is about more than food production. It relates to land use, water use, carbon capture, and landscape and design. Besides land for growing food, there should also be land for eco services. Green space managers will have to work with farmers.
- Cambridgeshire has excellent agricultural land. Build as far as possible on brown land.
- Concentrate animal production in key areas and modify the land to improve quality. Increase animal weight by making sward sustainable. Use land to manage, store and release water. Use landfill tax to create wetlands. Consider establishing a market in water. Balance the needs of food production with those of energy for agriculture. Use only buildings and low-grade land for energy generation through solar farms and so on. Farms should act as village energy centres.
- Rather than competition between agriculture, urban development and nature conservation, we need to develop a strategic approach embracing different synergies and skills for multi-functional landscapes with different connected activities. Green space planning should be integrated with development – a balance needs to be established between development and green infrastructure. See the [Cambridgeshire Green Infrastructure Strategy](#).
- Improve countryside access and enhance environmental awareness through education.
- Use low-grade land for green spaces. Focus on small deliverable projects that can be linked. Encourage the creation of community orchards and allotments. Exploit small bio-diverse urban spaces. Localism will allow money to be raised for site purchases.
- Encourage children to learn more about farming. Develop the possibilities, such as apprenticeships, for bringing skilled young people into agriculture.
- Involve the LEP and major landowners such as the Colleges.
- Universities have a major role to play. The older University should establish a virtual agriculture school to lead a local cluster of agricultural research firms capable of exporting and selling expertise and exemplars.
- Establish a local forum to review the role of technology in agriculture and another in which different practitioners and land managers can exchange ideas.