

2030 Vision for the Cambridge sub-region

Workshop summary: Land Use

Thought

- In terms of GVA per head of population, Cambridge is punching well above its weight in comparison with Reading, Milton Keynes, Guildford and Oxford. Growth in economic activity (number of employees) should avoid crowding and congestion: this suggests the adoption of high-density 'nodes' in the city and sub-region, linked by fast public transport.

Issues

- Key questions are by how much and where to grow the sub-region.
- Current growth strategy is employment-led. Housing land is worth a lot more than land for other uses. It is therefore hard for planners to allocate land for uses other than housing.
- For a city of its international cultural reputation, Cambridge lacks the expected facilities. The loss of Cambridge East with its capacity for major city-scale amenities is a problem.
- The Cambridge high-tech cluster may have reached a plateau (owing to lack of finance).
- Research activities funded by the public and charitable sectors are finding funding difficult.
- Retail development in the city centre has reached its limit for the foreseeable future.
- The public sector (a major employer in city) is in decline.
- Tourism has growth potential (hotel operators seem to think so) but there is unease about its impact on historic city centre.
- Housing packages in the 2003 Structure Plan (only now being gradually implemented) are very large and dependent on the urban extension sites – giving little flexibility.
- Pricing of office space is not based on demand but on taxation issues.
- Business sees itself as constrained by planning bureaucracy and hampered by class use restrictions.
- Everybody wants to 'be in' Cambridge.
- Localism has undermined the ability of local politicians to develop long-term visions.
- Greater clarity is needed on the purpose and progress of the LEP (and Alconbury EZ). Can the LEP coordinate economic policies in local plans?

Propositions

- Up to now the focus has been on where to locate additional housing. Housing is still required but we now need to give land for employment the same attention.
- A programme of initiatives is needed to change perceptions (of both 'outsiders' and 'locals') as to what the 'Cambridge' area constitutes and as to what are central city locations. In the case of the former, the LEP Peterborough/Alconbury/Cambridge/Stansted spine is a potential 'driver' while at Cambridge city level it is the proposal for a new station and the growth of Addenbrokes and the northern fringe that have potential for reshaping the city.
- Economic activity thrives in concentrations ('nodes'). Future expansion on successful, fully developed areas (such as the Science Park) should be vertical. Instead of 2 stories, 4 or more should be possible. Greater flexibility on permitted use should be exercised.
- Sites (or 'nodes') for employment at attractive locations – central and peripheral – with good access to public transport need to be given priority in land allocations. The surroundings of Chesterton and Ely railway stations are obvious areas of growth.
- Business start-ups should be integrated into the city. The Mill Lane area is a possibility.
- The guided-bus route should be exploited (and expanded with spurs) as a spine on which to locate additional housing settlements and small business hubs.
- The present housing delivery system is failing to deliver in terms of quality and time. Local authorities should be given a greater role and power to control their finances.
- The market towns should be expanded as business locations (also 'nodes') in order to create better two-way commuting flows. The towns' capacity to absorb more housing without losing their quality and character may be limited.
- Despite current difficulties, the public sector should develop an attractive vision, inspire confidence that policies will be maintained and ease the process of planning consent. Likewise, master-planning is essential if the public is not to be surprised by developments.
- The Green Belt was subject to significant changes in the 2003 Structure Plan. That is an argument for not tampering with it next time round. However, the issue of ARM's expansion could conflict with such an approach. This, like the City's rejection of IBM in the mid 1960s, could be a defining moment in the sub-region's development. Without growth it will decline.