

2030 Vision for the Cambridge sub-region

Topic summary: Social cohesion

Thought

- Despite areas of deprivation, the sub-region is one of the wealthiest parts of the country. But ageing, social isolation, immigration and unemployment are creating ever-greater challenges.

Issues

- Life expectancy continues to increase. Half the growth in population in the sub-region is due to ageing (70+). Fewer potential carers. Huge impact on social services. But older people are fitter than their parents' generation and can therefore contribute more to community for longer. But there remains a huge potential problem of ever-older people caring for vulnerable young.
- There is a danger of generations growing even further apart.
- Immigration, both national and international, will continue. Potential conflicts exist both with existing population and among immigrant groups. Proliferation of first languages is a major community and education challenge. Sense of dislocation can cause significant stress.
- There is a huge gap between expectation and provision for social services. The voluntary sector is important but maintaining continuity and funding in this sector can be difficult.
- Weak social cohesion with poor informal social control leads to disorder and crime. Those living in problematic areas have no solutions. Support for change has to come from outside.
- Being in employment is biggest factor in well-being. But those in work may have little time for their community, and even communicate with neighbours by email.
- Society is becoming more individualistic. Digital communication exacerbates this tendency.
- Loneliness is a big killer.
- Villages have varying problems. Isolation is an issue in older villages; the prevalence of a younger, growing population can create tensions and shortages (eg school places) in new ones.

Propositions

- We need to re-engage with the political system – possibly through new technology.
- The national and local economies need rebalancing. Local government needs to be more creative in support of community efforts. Business needs to accept that it has much to gain from employee involvement in the community, assisting younger employees to enjoy vibrant communities. Social enterprise, which constructs its business model on community interests, should be encouraged.
- Policy-making should be evidence-based. We need data on effects of living longer and should 'paint pictures' and create narratives of the future that can be challenged.
- In proposing changes, we must take account of the fact that we do not all start from the same base. Government policies may be lessening the life-chances of some poor. Funding should reduce concentrated disadvantage. Care provision should be tailored to the needs of particular communities rather than uniformly provided – and could be cheaper.
- Work opportunities need to be redistributed and working hours should be reduced to allow greater family and community engagement. Consider lower wages in return for flexible hours.
- People need to come together face-to-face as well as on-line. Inter-generational and neighbourhood contact – for mutual benefit – is needed, particularly for young. Needs constant renewal. Areas of collaboration include allotments, gardening, shopping and decoration.
- A strengthened rhetoric is needed for shared aims and the public good. Opportunities for projects to celebrate diversity – archaeological digs, celebrations, clean-ups – should be exploited.
- We need to value each other's cultures. As our society becomes more diverse, educational and community activities should help develop a sense of shared heritage and place.
- There should be opportunities for community involvement in the curriculum and schools should be used as a focus for wider community activity (like village colleges). But there are big problems – H and S, insurance and so on – where professional expertise can be invaluable.
- Older people should be given more active encouragement to volunteer to do things to help the community.
- The loss of pubs and village stores needs to be compensated for by community buildings which could include post offices. (In Cambourne 300 groups have just 6 meeting places). Section 106 money tends to come in too late for new communities. Unbuilt green space is just as important.
- Changing economic and employment conditions mean that we need to think more creatively about housing types and forms of tenure. New (and old) housing must be cheaper to run.
- Communities need to take ownership of their locality, recognising that it is not always reasonable to expect local authorities to provide services which the community could reasonably handle itself (or, by more appropriate behaviour, eliminate the need for).
- Community leaders need to be spotted and supported. Key persons should live locally – vicar, police, head teacher, community nurse