



East Cambridgeshire Local Plan (2014-2036) Proposed Submission - November 2017

Hearing Statement prepared on behalf of the National Trust

22 May 2018

Mary Marston, Planning Adviser (East of England Regional Office)

Matter 1: Legal Compliance, including Duty to Co-operate.

Issue 1: Whether the plan has been prepared in line with the relevant legal requirements and procedural matters?

Matters of concern to the National Trust Planning

1. Matter 1 raises issues which are of direct concern to the National Trust. They bear directly on the Trust's long term management plans for Wicken Fen, and on the Trust's wider obligations to protect places of conservation importance in its care. By way of background, Wicken Fen has been in the care of the National Trust since 1899; it comprises a mosaic of undrained fen (known as the Ancient Fen), reed bed and wet grassland and supports nationally important numbers of wetland birds, including large numbers of waterfowl, breeding waders such as lapwing and golden plover, and other scarce species such as bittern and marsh harrier, as well as many rare plants.
2. The Wicken Fen Vision (the National Trust's 100 year vision for the Wicken Fen nature reserve and adjacent land) has increased the area managed for nature conservation to more than 800ha, of which 255ha are designated SSSI/ SAC and Ramsar, and the Trust's 100 year Vision is to extend the reserve to a maximum of 5,300ha.
3. Public access is integral to the delivery of the Wicken Fen Vision and visitor numbers have grown steadily in recent years. The data shows that visitors are drawn principally from locations in both East and South Cambridgeshire within a 10 mile radius, and in 2017/18 a total of 65,000 visits were recorded. The intention is to restore natural processes across a large part of the vision area and to open up new natural greenspace close to places where people live. A key element of the access plan is a spine route running from Wicken Fen in the north of the Vision area to Waterbeach and Anglesey Abbey in the south.
4. Delivery of the Trust's ambition will require a long term commitment and significant resources, and implementation will be phased alongside a programme of ongoing conservation measures.
5. In the comments which follow we address the specific issues identified in Questions 8, 10 and 13.

Question 8

Is it the Council's intention to seek to address the recommendations of the Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) Methodology and Screening document which was produced to accompany the Local Plan? If not, what are the implications of not responding to, and acting upon all the recommendations set out within the HRA?

6. The Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) initially screened out all elements of the East Cambridgeshire Local Plan and concluded that the Plan would not be likely to have a significant negative effect on a Natura 2000 or Ramsar site alone, or in combination with other plans or projects. The re-screening of effects in response to Natural England's feedback identified a number of potential risks and The National Trust welcomes the resulting recommendations. In particular we support the recommended revisions to Policies 20 and 30, aimed at strengthening these policies and avoiding any adverse impact on Natura 2000 sites. This would align with our suggested text change to Policy 30 which identified the possible need for further assessment, and for mitigation where appropriate.
7. Specifically, Question 8 seeks to understand the implications of not responding to, and acting upon all the recommendations set out within the HRA. Our chief concern is that parts of Wicken Fen may be at risk from a significant growth in visitor numbers the likely effects of which have not been fully assessed, and for which there is inadequate mitigation.
8. Green infrastructure in the form of accessible natural greenspace (ANGS) provides effective mitigation where specific adverse effects can be attributed to new development, and responsibility rests with developers to make appropriate provision, either within the scheme or through contributions to offsite provision, or possibly both. Where such provision is lacking then harm could result and mitigation costs could fall disproportionately on existing greenspace providers.

Question 10

Is there sufficient evidence to support the conclusion, that there is unlikely to be additional recreational use of Devil's Dyke, Ouse Washes, Wicken Fen and Chippenham Fen, as a result of new developments, and therefore, there would not be consequential significant adverse effects. If there is not, and taking the precautionary approach, what would be the appropriate mechanism to mitigate the impacts of the proposed development within the 8 km zones of influence of accessible European sites and throughout the wider district?

9. As stated above, the potential for adverse effects on Wicken Fen arising as a result of recreation pressure are a concern to the National Trust. The National Trust is currently looking at the available evidence in relation to both visitor numbers and the potential impacts of increased footfall at Wicken Fen, with a view to informing future decision making.
10. In terms of existing evidence, we note that 8km is considered an appropriate distance inside which recreational pressure impacts could require mitigation measures. Whilst this draws on published data collected elsewhere, notably studies of the Thames Basin

Heaths and Breckland SPA, and takes account of advice from Natural England, we question whether this assumption is applicable in all instances.

11. Our records indicate that a significant number of visitors to Wicken Fen (in the region of 20- 25%) travel from postcodes located at a distance of more than 8km, and that for 49% of visitors drive times are in excess of 30 minutes. This suggests that adverse impacts could arise as a result of increased visitor pressure from development locations both within East Cambridgeshire, and in combination with development locations in South Cambridgeshire. Read together, our comments at paragraphs 8 and 14 would offer an appropriate mitigation mechanism, by linking new green infrastructure to developer contributions and adopting a cross boundary approach.

Question 13

Notwithstanding that no prescribed body has made any representation, either during or outside of a formal consultation stage, which states that they have a specific concern under the Duty to Co-operate, has the Plan been prepared in accordance with the Duty to Co-operate? Specifically, has the Council discharged its duty to maximise the effectiveness of the plan- making process in relation to strategic matters, including development and infrastructure requirements, flooding and other cross- boundary issues and strategic priorities, including those of the Greater Cambridgeshire Greater Peterborough Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and Natural Cambridgeshire (LNP), as well as other prescribed bodies such as Highways England (HE), the Environment Agency (EA), Historic England (Hist E) and Natural England (NE)?

12. The National Trust submitted representations in relation to Policy LP20, in which we welcomed the supportive approach taken to the Cambridgeshire Green Infrastructure Strategy. We note that para. 5.7.5 of the Submission Plan document highlights potential opportunities for the delivery of green infrastructure at Wicken Fen, as set out in the Cambridgeshire Green Infrastructure Strategy (2011). However, we consider that Local Plan should further acknowledge that green infrastructure crosses local authority boundaries, and that joint working is necessary to respond effectively to these opportunities.
13. Whilst the current Green Infrastructure Strategy, published in 2011, provides helpful strategic guidance, we consider that, in the light of recent Government consultations, in particular proposals to strengthen the duty to co-operate, and to introduce a new Strategic Infrastructure Tariff, a formalised joint approach is required. Such an approach should take account of the emergence of devolved governance across the sub-region, and in our view, the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority is well placed to co-ordinate joint working. We are supportive of the non-statutory Spatial Framework prepared by the Combined Authority and published earlier this year, and note that a high level review of current green infrastructure strategies is underway, led by Natural Cambridgeshire (the Local Nature Partnership/ LNP). Strategic Spatial Objective 9 of the Spatial Framework sets out the Authority's intention to work with partners, including the LNP, and to focus on strategically important sites with valued public access opportunities.

14. The Wicken Fen Vision already enjoys the cross boundary support of the relevant local authorities and LNP partner organisations and some of the settlement policies in Section 7 of the proposed submission Plan indicate that development proposals should give consideration to contributing towards infrastructure projects, including cycleways and footpaths within the Vision area. To help deliver these strategic aspirations a fully coordinated approach is needed which effectively embeds green infrastructure priorities for future developer contributions in new and emerging supplementary planning documents.