

Cambridgeshire Local Investment Plan – East Cambridgeshire

East Cambridgeshire district

East Cambridgeshire is a predominantly rural district located to the north-east of Cambridge. The district covers an area of 655km² and has a population of almost 81000. The population has increased significantly in recent years and growth is expected to continue with an estimated population increase of 28.4% from 2012 to 2031 (Cambridgeshire CC Research Group).

There are three main settlements: the Cathedral City of Ely and the market towns of Soham and Littleport. Together, these comprise 47% of the District's population, with the remaining population spread between approximately 50 villages. Ely is the largest urban area and acts as a retail, service and administrative centre for a wide rural catchment. Soham is a small market town with a range of shops catering for day-to-day needs, and Littleport is a fenland town with a very localised service catchment, due to its proximity to Ely.

The District is a favoured business location and employment rates are higher than the national average, with key sectors including construction, professional/technical services, agriculture, and the horseracing industry (in the south of the District around Newmarket). Despite increases in the number of jobs in the District over the last decade, there are high levels of out-commuting to the wider Cambridgeshire area.

East Cambridgeshire benefits from an attractive rural environment and has a good level of overall prosperity. However, a number of specific issues need to be addressed. In recent years, the District has experienced considerable population and housing growth due to its location in a growth area. In particular, the success of the Cambridge economy has had a profound effect, due to the relative affordability of housing in East Cambridgeshire compared to Cambridge. This has meant a significant increase in out-commuting, and also in local house prices.

The local housing market

The Cambridge subregional Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA: <http://www.cambridgeshireinsight.org.uk/shma>) has identified housing affordability as one of the key challenges in East Cambridgeshire. The ratio of average house prices to average income is 9.1:1 (National Housing Federation 2013), and the SHMA estimates that 42% of residents cannot afford an “entry level” property purchase and that 31% cannot afford lower quartile private rents. Each year, more households that will be unable to afford market housing will form, or will migrate into the

District. The draft Local Plan considers the housing need identified by the SHMA; and to meet fully the needs of existing and newly forming households, (taking into account relets and resales of existing affordable housing), it is estimated that 135 new affordable homes per annum should be built from 2011 to 2031.

The Local Development Framework

East Cambridgeshire's Core Strategy was adopted in 2009, and the District is currently preparing a replacement Local Plan, which is expected to be adopted in early 2015. The draft Local Plan sets out that 11,500 new homes will be built from 2011 to 2031. This level of growth will help to facilitate the delivery of appropriate levels of affordable housing to meet local needs over the Plan period. The draft Local Plan proposes a scheme threshold of 5 units to trigger the inclusion of affordable housing, with a percentage requirement of 40% in the south of the District, and 30% in the north. Full details can be found in the Plan and supporting documents at:

<http://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/local-development-framework/local-development-framework>

Sustainable Development

The draft Local Plan describes how housing growth will be concentrated in the main settlements of Ely, Soham and Littleport, but there are also housing land allocations in many of the smaller settlements. Some of these sites have been proposed by local people as part of the "Village Visions" consultation during the Plan preparation. Additionally, East Cambridgeshire DC actively pursues affordable housing development on Rural Exception Sites and through Community Land Trusts: see policies HOU4 and GRO6 in the draft Local Plan. New developments in the District are expected to contribute to the achievement of the outcomes described in our Sustainable Community Strategy which can be found at:

<http://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/sites/default/files/sustainablecommunitystrategy20112031.pdf>

Equalities

Many of the affordable housing schemes to be developed in East Cambridgeshire will be "general needs" rented and low-cost home ownership, i.e. not specifically for occupation by people with any relevant protected characteristic as defined by the Equalities Act 2010. However, new housing for particular groups, including (but not confined to) older people and those with disabilities, will make a significant and positive contribution to the District. All affordable housing developments are expected to address the principles set out in the Council's Single Equality Scheme:

<http://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/east-cambs-district-council/single-equality-scheme>.