

AGENDA item 557

Greater Cambridge Local Plan: Response from Great Wilbraham Parish Council

Note: this draft includes (in green) responses in individual sections, each of which is limited to 100 words.

In the Biodiversity and Green Spaces section there is some additional text (in red) that can be placed behind and enables some expansion.

In blue, starting on page 3 there is a longer narrative that we can put behind one of the first sections. The headings below relate to the main sections in the Plan

Summary

Great Wilbraham Parish Council (GWPC) is concerned that the Local Plan disadvantages our residents and 60k residents in 'Group and Infill' villages in favour of those in new developments and larger, better-connected villages. SCDC is one of the most rural populations in the country, but when considering infrastructure to make communities viable and sustainable and fulfil key strategic themes we are being ignored. Great Wilbraham has close historic, social and geographic links with Little Wilbraham and Six Mile Bottom. The two Parish Councils would like to work together informally and with the Council to develop a strategy for sustainability. (99)

About the plan

The "joint" planning clearly prioritises development in Cambridge City with wider sites as dormitories to serve it. There is no priority given to the needs of Great Wilbraham residents and the more than 60k people living in villages in South Cambridgeshire and the plan clearly establishes a very one-sided relationship that sets a worrying precedent for the planned unitary authority where the rural areas around Cambridge are seen only to serve it rather than having an opportunity to develop themselves. (80)

Development Strategy

The strategic priorities state that planning should meet the need of "our diverse communities" but in later sections of the plan unfair prioritisation is given for urban centres and the communities that become dormitories for them, whilst rural communities such as Great Wilbraham are disenfranchised. If development in smaller villages is to be severely limited the Plan should include strategies for proactively working with villages to develop more sustainability and viability for residents even if this means that services such as buses, schools or shops require extra support and are not, in themselves cost effective. (96)

Settlement hierarchy

Great Wilbraham PC disagrees with the concept of the settlement hierarchy, which contradicts the aim of making communities viable by putting a stranglehold around villages such as Great Wilbraham and preventing them developing to fulfil their own needs. It consigns our 660 residents and more than 60k others to living in 'unviable communities'. Rather than preserving our characteristic villages (which are historic and have evolved over time) they become 'dormitories', requiring households to have their own transport and depriving all non-car drivers (including all children and many older people) of freedom. (93)

Defined development extent

The defined development extent for Great Wilbraham leaves almost no potential sites and prevents further housing even though of a scale, density and character appropriate to the village. We note that developments outside these extents may be allowed where it would support other policies in the plan; we argue that an explicit reason might therefore be to help make local communities sustainable. A small village such as Great Wilbraham does not have the finances or manpower to undertake a Neighbourhood Plan. The Council should be obliged to work with us to assess need and develop a plan. (97).

Cambridge Green Belt

The Green Belt is intended to protect Cambridge City and the distribution, character, setting and scale of surrounding small rural villages; specifically, to prevent merging. We believe this is too tight around Great Wilbraham village, mainly following property boundaries. Great Wilbraham cannot maintain its community character if it loses amenities such as the school through low and ageing population. The nearest properties in Fulbourn are 1.5 miles from the edge of Great Wilbraham. Some development on plots within the relatively open structure of the village is very far from the 'ribbon development' which the Green Belt is designed to prevent. (100)

Climate Change

Great Wilbraham would also like to contribute to climate change reduction but is again sidelined through this plan. 1) It is important to maintain/increase our current hourly bus service. 2) Low carbon transport can be achieved by shifting to EV cars; there is a need for charging facilities for those without offroad parking at home, at transport hubs and incentives such as cheaper parking for EVs are important. 3) Rural housing often has more space for the technologies that mitigate climate change including ground source heat pumps and solar power. (89)

Biodiversity and green spaces

Great Wilbraham has important local green spaces and nature habitats. However, our SSSI at Great Wilbraham Common has no safe access route from the village; and the Little Wilbraham River, a chalk stream arising in Great Wilbraham is endangered by reduced water in the chalk aquifers and requires pumping to local springs at Wilbraham Temple. The GWPC is concerned that, with no local development, there will be no 'planning contributions where funding can be used to enhance the wider network' – so Great Wilbraham nature habitats will miss out. Could planning contributions be pooled and then allocated more widely? (98)

Great Wilbraham is surrounded by a wide rural landscape. However, this does not necessarily mean that the sorts of access to high quality green spaces and a biodiverse landscape envisaged by the Plan is available:

- The Green Belt is tightly drawn around the backs of the village houses.
- The fields around the village are not necessarily biodiverse, being largely intensively farmed
- There are only four public footpaths out of the village but the land they traverse is tightly controlled by the farmers and there is no local government plan to improve active transport routes out of the village
- Access to the starting point of one of the Public Rights of Way (PROW) is from a busy road beyond the outskirts of the village with no footpath to it.
- The routes are not properly maintained – for example, one of the Byways is so overgrown that it cannot be used by horse-riders
- There are few circular routes – PROW do not connect anywhere.

We feel that small villages such as GW are being disregarded whilst all the planning emphasis is placed on developing these assets in 'more sustainable' places. We hope that some developments in villages could be supported that would improve this situation.

Great places

Great Wilbraham residents have a huge love for their village, its historic homes and buildings and, crucially, a shared knowledge of the families who have lived in them over the years. This is based on continuity of people and place over hundreds of years and enables rapid integration of newcomers. We believe this ethos exceeds anything in a new development and is very hard to replicate. It should be cherished in all the South Cambridgeshire villages. However, it requires some refreshment or people and planned, thoughtful small development in the villages, rather than simply preservation of the *status quo*. (99)

Well-being and social inclusion

Great Wilbraham is an inclusive and caring community, in touch with a high proportion of its residents. However, our current facilities (School, Memorial Hall with social activities, Recreation Ground and sports facilities, public house, shop, quarterly magazine etc.) are jeopardised by a dwindling number of volunteers. Old people prefer to stay in the village, and with a policy of highly restricted development there is little refreshing of the population; our village community seems condemned to unmanaged decline. There are also poorer households in Great Wilbraham, but there is no indication through the strategy of how they will be assisted. (98)

Travel and Transport

The GC policy accepts that people can essentially only live in smaller villages such as Great Wilbraham if they have access to a car. This policy impacts children, non-drivers and people without a car, consigning them to dependency and social isolation- and is unfair. Rather than prohibiting because of lack of transport, the Local Plan should be ambitious about improving rural connectivity – for example, for Great Wilbraham a rural transport hub in Fulbourn with car and bike parking, a more frequent connecting bus route to the nearby larger villages, safe cycle routes to adjacent villages and support for EV charging.(100)

Supporting information for the Great Wilbraham response to the Local Plan

Great Wilbraham Parish Council is supportive of many of the aspirations in the Local Plan and congratulate the planners on completion of a major piece of work. However, in our response we felt we needed to set out the particular issues that the Plan raises for Great Wilbraham, which is a small village, relatively close to Cambridge and classified as a Group Village. We set out here further information about Great Wilbraham a strong, historic community, but one which we feels requires some development to maintain its viability and sustainability in the modern world.

Great Wilbraham has a population of 660. It has a strong historic relationship with our neighbouring village, Little Wilbraham and with Six Mile Bottom (which together form a parish). The three villages share many amenities, including the Primary School and the Wilbrahams Memorial Hall and Recreation Ground, and interest groups such as the Wilbrahams Environment Group, and our wellbeing group, the Well-brahams; there is a shared Wilbrahams community publication (The Warbler) and the two parish councils work closely together. We are a strong community that over the years has demonstrated that it is inclusive and caring (eg our joint community provision of support during the Covid pandemic), in touch with a high proportion of its residents and integrates newcomers rapidly.

Whilst some residents of Great Wilbraham have lived in the village all their lives, there are many who have moved here to access work in Cambridge and the various business, enterprises, research etc in the surrounding area which are described so clearly in the *GCP* document. Thus, we see ourselves as very much part of the wider Cambridge environment – both contributing to it and participating in it and it seems only fair that we should also benefit from the developments and improvements put forward in the Local Plan.

As it stands, the Local Plan dismisses any consideration of change in Group and Infill villages. We feel that this condemns these villages to unmanaged decline and is unfair. It is at odds with the South Cambridgeshire Corporate Plan where all residents will be equal partners in their community because it intentionally restricts communities who already suffer from loss of local amenities, lack of public transport, no safe cycle routes and pressure on the many social and sporting activities that are maintained, not by the Council, but by hard-working volunteers.

Like other communities and society, Great Wilbraham has changed over recent years:

- Changes in the village population – including more families with two working parents, smaller families and an increasingly old demographic as many older people remain in large and often unsuitable properties rather than leaving the village- has meant that our facilities are becoming unsustainable with smaller class sizes, lack of trade in the shop, increasing difficulties in finding volunteers to help run the local activities.
- A static housing stock has also meant houses gradually increasing in size (through individual extension) and are now very expensive and our last housing needs survey showed a lack of small 1 or 2 bed roomed homes or homes adapted for people with disabilities.
- A dwindling and, until the last few months, almost non-existent public transport (although after much campaigning there is now have an hourly bus service during the day (the T4 service) connecting to Addenbrooke's campus).

We consider that, to remain viable, our Great Wilbraham community needs:

- An economically diverse population
- Spread of age groups
- Primary school
- Shop
- Public House
- Church
- Access to healthcare by active travel and either public transport or supported community transport
- Access to social activities
- Access to range of cultural experiences
- Access to high quality green space

As custodians of important wildlife sites in our Parish we would like the opportunity, means and support to enhance them for the wider good.

We also wish and would aim to share and contribute to the beauty and importance of Cambridge City and its environs. We draw attention to the fact that we are one of the closest villages to Cambridge, the Biomedical Campus and the business development sites south of Cambridge.

We believe that a small expansion (eg 50) in housing would enable much of this to happen by bringing in new people and families, enabling older people to stay in more suitable housing, and some poorer emerging families of residents and those with local connections to stay in the village.

We do not consider that the Green Belt exception sites mechanism is enough to achieve this and, as a small community, we would find it difficult to find the resources of time and money to undertake such work or to develop a Neighbourhood Plan. Instead, we would like to work with Little Wilbraham and Six Mile Bottom Parish Council **and with SCDC to** look at our needs and identify some suitable locations broadly within the villages (although not necessarily within the Development Boundary and Green Belt) that could allow a small number of high-quality houses, including some affordable ones.

With respect to **travel and transport**, we note that the ban on development in small villages such as the Wilbrahams is justified on the basis that the Greater Cambridge planners do not want to encourage development where there is no public transport. The GC policy thus accepts that people can essentially only live in Great Wilbraham if they have access to a car. We believe that such a policy is unfair. It particularly impacts children, non-drivers and people without access to a car, consigning them to dependency and social isolation. It also prevents our residents from moving towards sustainable and active travel. A recent survey in the context of recent proposals for a new Tiger bus service showed just how much some independence of travel means to many people. Our new T4 service hourly service hugely

appreciated and should continue, hopefully with greater frequency and the addition of an evening service.

Rather than simply prohibiting development because of lack of transport, the Local Plan should be more ambitious about ways that rural connectivity can be achieved for all – for example, for Great Wilbraham a rural transport hub in Fulbourn with car and bike parking, a more frequent connecting bus route to the nearby larger villages, safe cycle routes to adjacent villages and support for electric vehicle charging.

Regarding **Biodiversity and Green Spaces**, Great Wilbraham is surrounded by a wide rural landscape. However, this does not necessarily mean that the sorts of access to high quality green spaces and a biodiverse landscape envisaged in the Plan are available:

- The Green Belt is tightly drawn around the backs of the village houses.
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- Access to the starting point of one of the PROWs is from a busy road beyond the outskirts of the village with no footpath to it – thus it is not connected to Great Wilbraham
- The routes are not properly maintained – for example, one of the Byways is so overgrown that it cannot be used by horse-riders
- There are few circular routes – PROW do not connect anywhere and there is no local government plan to improve active transport routes out of the village along these footpaths

In conclusion, our two Parish Councils of Great Wilbraham and Little Wilbraham & Six Mile Bottom would like the opportunity to work together informally, and with the Greater Cambridge planners, to examine our needs and develop a plan to achieve a joint viable and sustainable community going forward.