

Dear Cambridge Strategy Unit,

Please find below Friends of the Cam's response to the Greater Cambridge Development Corporation consultation.

**1. What do you think about the current delivery of infrastructure and homes in Greater Cambridge?**

*Housing*

Housing has become steadily less affordable in Cambridge, and the claim that more houses need to be built in order for them to become cheaper has been shown to be a fallacy. In fact, data shows that as more housing units have been built in the region, their cost has increased (and the drop in house building in 2024 coincided with a price drop):

2021: 406 housing units built, av price £452,932

2022: 601 housing units built, av price £486,633;

2023: 833 housing units built, av price £491,393

2024, 249 housing units built, av price £479,573

(Cambridge City Council, Housing Key Facts, March 2025)

Housing affordability could be resolved by expanding alternative models of providing social housing such as Community Land Trusts and co-operatives, as well as increased levels of council home building. The so-called 'affordable homes' required of (but sometimes evaded by) developers are not affordable, as house prices in the city and immediate environs to which 'affordability' is pegged are an average of £486,000 (December 2025). Moreover housebuilders have a long history in Cambridgeshire of promising a high number of "affordable" homes and social amenities and then renege on these commitments - claiming they are no longer viable.

CB1 - the Cambridge Station development - and new build on Rustat Road are infamous examples of broken developer promises. Northstowe is another classic example where promised amenities never materialised. The government should accept the private sector is not interested in solving the area's housing crisis, it is interested in profit. Hence Hill & Co - a supposed blue chip private sector partner of Cambridge City Council - marketing Cambridge new builds in Hong Kong. Currently, where housing is being built in Cambridge, much of its stock is (a) marketed overseas; (b) remains empty. This indicates that there is not a housing shortage in Cambridge, but a shortage of truly affordable homes.

We therefore don't need a growth company "leveraging" private capital, we need tough penalties for companies breaking affordability and other promises plus state funding for public and other social housing.

*Infrastructure*

One of the key current infrastructural barriers is the lack of water. The chalk aquifer is being over-abstracted, and alternative water supplies are temporary and dependent on water availability at the point of origin (eg the Grafham pipeline). Anglian Water and Cambridge Water have reported in their documentation for Consultation III for the Fens Reservoir that it will provide 100 million litres a day, sufficient for 250,000 homes Anglian Water and Cambridge Water 'A Proposed Reservoir in the Fens, October 2025). However, this will not be adequate for the proposed AI and

data centres which the Government is keen to develop in the region, as well as new housing units proposed. AI centres consume in the region of 7.6 million litres a day each (the equivalent of 55 thousand people's consumption). Moreover, the reported sources of water are couched in provisional terms ('could be' implying that this is conditional on water availability). The three sources identified by AW/CW are the River Nene; the Great Ouse at Earith; The Ouse Washes. The latter is tidal and saline and therefore inappropriate; the Great Ouse at this point is also potentially saline. However, RAPID, a partnership between the three water regulators Ofwat, the Environment Agency, and the Drinking Water Inspectorate, sent a [letter](#) to Anglian Water and Cambridge Water In January 2026 saying more work is still needed on this issue before the next phase of planning the reservoir can begin.

Waste water treatment is patchy within the Cambridge region, with 25 sewage releases on the River Cam and Ely Ouse monitored by [The Rivers Trust](#) in 2024 numbering 1304, over a total of 20,204 hours. This is a conservative estimate. Live data from [Surfers Against Sewage](#) reported 19 hours of untreated sewage released from storm overflows into the River Rhee in January and February, 2026, and 16 hours and 45 minutes untreated sewage released into the Cam at Milton during the same time.

The region's greenhouse gas emissions are higher than average, by c25% per person. On this basis, The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Independent Commission on Climate reported in 2021 that the region will have used up its allowed share of the carbon budget up to 2050 by 2027. High car dependence leads to congestion in the city centre. There has been a consistent under-investment in bus services. The road surfaces are appalling - creating dangerous conditions for cyclists. Local train services are poor (eg hourly services to Norwich or to Peterborough). New infrastructure provides little improvement (eg guided busways).

Parks and open spaces are being eroded, for example on St Matthew's Piece where some of the land covenanted in perpetuity to the community (but later part sold by the County Council to a private land owner) has been built on; and where council homes are being demolished and rebuilt, taking valuable open space for example in Arbury Court.

Much of the problem has to do with the steady erosion of powers and funding of local government (LG) and, in the case of sewage pollution, Government regulators; meanwhile extractive water companies are allowed to continue pursuing profit. Where LG has objected to developments on ecological or social grounds, central government has over-ruled. Already private institutions have too much unaccountable power in local areas (eg water companies; developers, Cambridge University)

## **2. What do you think about the proposal to create a centrally-led urban development corporation (UDC) in Greater Cambridge?**

It's a terrible idea. This was a bad idea in the 1980s when it was enacted in UK cities by a Conservative Government; it remains a bad idea today. Decisions made which directly concern people and households should be made by democratically elected, and therefore challengeable, governments. The European Union principle of subsidiarity, requiring decisions to be made at the most local level feasible, should be applied. There are already significant levels of apathy/resignation amongst potential voters that individuals and households have no power in decisions that affect them; an unelected body will make that worse, increasing the 'democratic deficit'. The sovereignty issue that eventually led to Brexit pertains at the local level as well. Taking decisions out of local, accountable, control is a (further) erosion of sovereignty.

*Friends of the Cam* disagrees with the fundamental premise on which the GCDC rests: to accelerate economic growth. Economic growth is a poor metric to measure the quality of people's, household's and community's lives - let alone all other aspects of nature. Cambridge already ranks as a city with higher than average economic growth and yet also contains some of the poorest households in the UK, having been recently ranked most unequal city by the Centre for Cities. More economic growth will not address this as the failure of trickle down economics has proved.

Growth in an era of climate breakdown is self-destructive, and hopelessly outdated. Typical 'growth' indicators, developed in the immediate aftermath of WWII, were only ever expected to be temporary by their architects. Contemporary metrics such as wellbeing, which focus on social equality, accessibility to care, and environmental sustainability, are being increasingly discussed in countries which understand and are trying to avert the climate, water and biodiversity catastrophes facing us.

It is insane to be planning growth in the hottest and driest part of the UK, which combines with its vulnerability to flooding by increasing sea levels. Land around the city of Cambridge is valuable agricultural land, which is becoming increasingly needed to achieve a higher degree of food security. Currently the UK is one of the least food-secure countries in Europe (see the [UK Food Security Report, 2026](#)). Higher levels of development - as well as housing, offices and lab space, there will be data and AI centres, renewable energy infrastructure such as solar arrays, and reservoirs - will take valuable agricultural land out of production. It also seems to be insane to be investing money in an already wealthy part of the country, when there are higher levels of unemployment in areas that are also wetter, cooler and higher in elevation. The Government needs to be concerned with reducing inequality on a regional and national level - this plan seeks to exacerbate it.

### **3. What matters most to you about the future of Greater Cambridge?**

That the rivers and the rest of nature are protected; that low income people can afford housing and find fairly paid work; that there is sufficient food and clean water; that we are not inundated by sea level rise; that we do not suffer drought and heatwaves; that the gap between the richest and poorest households is minimised. We also want policies that look at wellbeing in a holistic way which links access to health and social care; meaningful jobs and a clean environment.

As *Friends of the Cam* we demand a free flowing chalk river system with a fully charged chalk aquifer supporting what should be a rich biodiversity; a river free from pollution (both from sewage and from agriculture); adequate supplies of water without the need to pipe in water from elsewhere as those supplies will become scarce in due course.

### **4. Do you have any views on the objectives of the Greater Cambridge Development Corporation, as set out in the consultation document?**

As we do not support the replacement of local government functions with an unelected Greater Cambridge Development Corporation, we do not support its objectives.

### **5. What do you think about the proposed boundary of the Greater Cambridge Development Corporation, as set out in Annex B?**

As we do not support the replacement of local government functions with an unelected Greater Cambridge Development Corporation, we do not support its proposed boundaries.

### **6. What do you think about the phased approach we have proposed in regard to plan making powers?**

As we do not support the replacement of local government functions with an unelected Greater Cambridge Development Corporation, we do not support its phased approach.

**7. What do you think about the proposals to give the Development Corporation plan making powers as set out in the consultation document?**

As we do not support the replacement of local government functions with an unelected Greater Cambridge Development Corporation, we are categorically opposed to plan-making powers to be in unelected hands.

**8. What do you think about the proposals to give the Development Corporation powers to determine planning applications as set out in the consultation document?**

As we do not support the replacement of local government functions with an unelected Greater Cambridge Development Corporation, we are categorically opposed to plan-making powers to be in unelected hands.

**9. Do you agree with using thresholds for the Development Corporation taking decision making powers? Which minimum thresholds for determining planning applications do you think are appropriate?**

As we do not support the replacement of local government functions with an unelected Greater Cambridge Development Corporation, we are categorically opposed to decision-making powers to be in unelected hands.

**10. Do you have any other views on the proposed approach to the Development Corporation's powers and functions?**

That they are totally inappropriate.

**11. What do you think about proposed local representation on the Development Corporation Board, as set out in the consultation document?**

As we do not support the replacement of local government functions with an unelected Greater Cambridge Development Corporation, we are categorically opposed to token local representation.

**12. What do you think about the board having expertise in areas such as planning, property development, design, environment, finance, and infrastructure delivery?**

As we do not support the replacement of local government functions with an unelected Greater Cambridge Development Corporation, we are categorically opposed to any of these functions being in unelected hands.

**13. Do you have any views on the impacts of the above proposals for anyone with a relevant protected characteristic?**

Removing any decisions from a local accountable body, all needs of local people will be less considered than they currently are.

a) If so, please explain who, which groups, including those with protected characteristics, may be impacted and how.

b) Is there anything that could be done to maximise benefits or address any concerns you have identified?

Abandon the plan to impose an unelected, unaccountable decision-making body in Cambridge.

We would like to point out that this consultation is woefully inadequate as it makes no provision for respondents to oppose the transfer of power from local government to an unaccountable development corporation nominated by central government. We have no confidence that community responses will have any impact on the government's decision to move forward with this ill-conceived plan. We look forward to your acknowledgement of the safe receipt of this response.

Yours sincerely,

Susan Buckingham

Co-founder and Steering Group member

on behalf of [Friends of the Cam](#)

