



Cambridge Local Plan – Towards 2031 – Issue and Options Report

This Document represents the views of The Friends of The Cherry Hinton Brook (FCHB) Committee on The Lakes and Cherry Hinton Brook Green Corridor

July 2012

The stretch of land and water that runs between Wandlebury and the Gog Magogs and the Cam is one of the lesser known but enormously valuable Cambridge City green corridors, linking the countryside with the City Centre. It was identified for its importance as a corridor in the City Council and Wildlife Trust's Cambridge City Nature Conservation Strategy of 2006. It is perhaps unique among the City's green corridors in that it is essentially a blue-green corridor as a result of the presence of the three large Cambridge Lakes. Parts of the corridor have existing protection or have been identified as being important as nature reserves or open spaces (see below). However the area as a whole has no statutory designation or Plan to ensure that the corridor functions are maintained for the benefit of wildlife and the public.

The FCHB Committee therefore strongly believes that a policy for the Opportunity Area identified under Option 40 (Cambridge City Council's *Issues and Options Report for the Cambridge Local Plan*) is needed. The National Planning Policy Framework states that Local Plans should be based upon and should reflect a presumption in favour of sustainable development, with clear policies that will guide how the presumption should be applied locally. We consider that a Local Plan is ultimately needed for this Opportunity Area, and this document is a contribution towards this and recognises the important role that the Area can play in the sustainable development of Cambridge. The need for a planning policy for the "Chalk Pits Complex" as it was previously known was identified in the 1986 Romsey Local Plan.

The FCHB Committee considers that the general principles of a policy for the Opportunity Area addressed in Option 40 should be that:

- the lakes, with their surrounding area and the open spaces that are linked with them, be maintained as a green and blue nature corridor, enhanced with open access to the lakes and those landfill sites that are currently undeveloped, for appropriate leisure activities.
- housing development be considered inappropriate on any of the open spaces in this area, as identified in the *Issues and Option Report*.
- public access be enhanced both for the benefit of local residents and in order to promote local buy-in and support for the wildlife conservation functions of the area.

The FCHB Committee fully endorses the following proposed strategic objectives listed in the *Issues and Option Report* which support the principles above:

2. To ensure that all new developments have a neutral impact on water, contribute to an overall flood risk reduction and help improve the quality of the River Cam and other water features in the city;

6. To protect and enhance the landscape setting of the city and the green corridors penetrating the urban area;

7. To protect and enhance the network of green spaces in the city;

14. To maintain a high quality of life by maintaining and enhancing provision for open space, sports and recreation as well as ensuring that the city has a broad range of community facilities and leisure activities, including arts and cultural venues that serve Cambridge and the Sub-region;

The Opportunity Area and its immediate surrounds contain a wide variety of “open spaces”, the importance of which have been clearly identified in the Cambridge Local Plan 2006: recreation grounds, Parks and Gardens (i.e. Cherry Hinton Hall), sites with nature conservation designation, outdoor sports facilities, provision for children and teenagers, semi-natural green spaces, allotments, and urban spaces. As noted in the Local Plan 2006, open spaces in the site are often contiguous and have a crucial linking role as conduits for wildlife, for access by foot and cycle and for recreation opportunities. Many have dual importance, for the contribution they make to leisure provision and for their environmental importance, and some still retain evidence of significant historic land use patterns. As laid out in *Policy 4/2 Protection of Open Space* in the Cambridge Local Plan 2006:

Development will not be permitted which would be harmful to the character of, or lead to the loss of, open space of environmental and/or recreational importance unless the open space uses can be satisfactorily replaced elsewhere and the site is not important for environmental reasons.

In considering future uses of the Opportunity Area, the FCHB Committee believes that there are four issues that will need to be addressed:

- wildlife and the natural environment;
- public access;
- recreational use;
- and long-term maintenance and management.

Wildlife

Chalk is the defining feature of the corridor, contributing to the distinctive wildlife found here and the significant industrial history of the area as the source of building material for the City. Chalk streams (a priority habitat under the European Habitats Directive and in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan), of which Cherry Hinton Brook is one, are a globally threatened and rare habitat, with only about 200 left in the world, of which 50-60 are in England. The brook supports a good range of stream and streamside fauna and flora: kingfishers, rails, coots, moorhens, water voles, chub, sticklebacks and other fish. The Wildlife Trust is currently submitting a proposal to the Environment Agency’s Catchment Restoration Fund, for funding to improve the brook and its wildlife diversity by creating new riffles that will

improve flow, remove silt and create better fish habitat, and by creating open spaces along the banks to let more light in.

The three “lakes” provide a prime habitat for waterfowl. This large body of water is visible from a distance making it ideal for birds to use it as a stop over: tufted ducks over-winter there; terns, great crested grebes and other birds use it year round; migrant song birds and warblers use or nest in the surrounding vegetation. Sparrow hawks nest in the taller trees along Burnside; the cuckoo generally passes through in early summer. Recently, a nightingale has been heard. There are links between stream and brook e.g. kingfishers feeding in one and nesting in the other. The land around the lakes and in the landfill area has small patches of chalk grassland with distinctive plants and flowers. Bats are seen over the lake and along the brook, and the water vole (a UK Biodiversity Action Plan priority species) has been sighted in the brook. The brook also provides a critical breeding habitat for a large population of toads, frogs and newts that make use of it each year, now helped by the low “toad kerbs” that have been installed along Burnside with the support of FCHB.

The blue-green corridor from the Cam to Cherry Hinton contains the following open spaces (*Cambridge City Council Open Space and Recreation Strategy 2011; Cambridge City Council Nature Conservation Strategy 2006*), all of which are linked and dependent on each other and all of which provide critical habitat for wildlife:

- The three Cherry Hinton Pits Nature Reserves managed by the Wildlife Trust: West and East Pits (SSSI) Lime Kiln Close Local Nature Reserve
- Giant’s Grave
- Cherry Hinton Hall (City Wildlife Site)
- The Spinney and Hayster Open Space (City Wildlife Site)
- Cherry Hinton Brook (City Wildlife Site) and associated footpaths: Snakey Path (designated cycle and foot path), designated footpath between Burnside and Sainsbury’s
- Two areas of allotments at either end of Snakey path: Blacklands allotments in the south and Burnside allotments in the north
- The three lakes (also known as Normans Pits) and surrounding land (City Wildlife Site), the northern one of which is owned or leased by the Territorial Army
- Coldhams Brook, Coldhams Common (part of which is a Local Nature Reserve) and Barnwell East and Barnwell West Local Nature Reserves (all City Wildlife Sites)
- The Leper Chapel and surrounding land administered by Cambridge Past, Present and Future
- Stourbridge Common

Option 40 is concerned with the central part of the corridor and the FCHB Committee considers that in identifying how it should be used the following principles should be adhered to:

- The wildlife and nature of the green and blue corridor should be maintained and enhanced.
- Existing policies on wildlife must be maintained and reinforced where necessary.

- Recreation in many cases will be compatible with the wildlife of the area, but in developing such activities, care must be taken as some locations are very sensitive; there may be some areas with species and habitats that may need protection.
- The green and blue corridor must be maintained and enhanced as a complete corridor, as its value lies in continued un-interruption along its length.
- The Lakes and Brook are tightly linked, with some wildlife dependent on both habitats, so the lakes should be integrated into the green corridor.
- Wildlife experts, particularly the City Wildlife officer and Wildlife Trust, should always be consulted when any proposals are put forward for activities that might affect wildlife e.g. through noise, damage to vegetation, alteration to habitat, other disturbance.
- Since the lakes are included in the 2006 Cambridge City Council Nature Conservation Strategy as one of a number of potential new Local Nature Reserves to be designated by 2016, and since many of the leisure activities described below would be compatible with such a designation, the alternative of a Local Nature Reserve designation should be assessed for this particular part of the Opportunity Area.

Access

The area is already an extremely important access route for pedestrians and cyclists via:

- The Tins Path (to the Business Park, Cherry Hinton and Teversham)
- Snakey Path (to Cherry Hinton)
- Footpath to Sainsbury's

These routes are used by people going to work, for shopping and other daily activities, but also intensively at the weekend for leisure. The routes are promoted in brochures by the Wildlife Trust, the City Council, and the Cambridge Cycling Campaign. FCHB with the City Council has installed interpretive sign boards along Snakey Path.

The open spaces in the Opportunity Area should be made accessible, recognising that, although historically separate, the lakes are now essentially part of the urban life of the City but contribute very little to its public amenity. The rationale for increasing public access to the area includes the following:

- Provision of new open space for a part of the city which is currently under-served; Romsey Ward has the second lowest area of protected open space per capita of all Cambridge Wards (*Cambridge City Council Open Spaces Strategy 2011*).
- High likelihood of reduction in safety and trespass issues – public access would provide more "eyes on the ground" (from dog walkers, recreational walkers, bird and wildlife watchers and cyclists) and this would make the lakes safer and easier to police.

Recognising the current importance of the area for access, and the need for improved public access to the green/blue spaces in the area, the FCHB Committee considers that the following points should be borne in mind:

- Existing access (cycle and footpaths) should be maintained, and access from the City to the Opportunity Area should be made easier for pedestrians and cyclists, a general

need recognised in the Cambridge City Transport Policy, and as recommended more specifically in the *Cambridge City Council Open Spaces Strategy* (2011). Pedestrian access to Cherry Hinton Brook and the green corridor as a whole should be improved.

- Any increase in access must take into account the interests of local residents, but should also be equitable to those who would wish to access the lake at different locations (e.g. Sainsbury/TA end and Cherry Hinton).
- Equally, any increase in access must nevertheless be done in such a way as to preserve the function of the area as a wildlife corridor.
- The lakes and surrounds should not be promoted as a large-scale magnet or "destination" and development should focus on local use.
- Recognising the points above, the FCHB Committee has the following comments on specific access points:
 - Car access should be **only** from Coldhams Lane on the north side of the railway line. The public car park around the Business Park (adjacent to David Lloyd Gym and Holiday Inn) is likely to be sufficient, although some improvements may be necessary.
 - Actual access to the lakes themselves should be in a limited number of places and the locations will need to be discussed with all those with involvement in the area. Cycle racks will be needed. Consideration may need to be given to a new bridge over the railway. The existing railway bridge will need improvement as the blind corner on the Business Park side is dangerous for both cyclists and pedestrians.
 - There should be no access from The Spinney School, Daws Lane and Blacklands Allotments (given the need to maintain a quiet, secure environment around the school, and the past history of anti-social behaviour in this area).
 - Access from Burnside should be by foot and cycle only (recognising the parking limitations in this area). The traditional access by anglers through their gate at the far end of Burnside could be retained.
 - Pedestrian and cyclist safety at the junction of Brookfields and Perne Road should continue to be improved, to make the entrance to this open space more attractive and in keeping with the concept of the blue-green corridor.
 - A pedestrian and cycle path should be created from the Sainsbury's end of Coldhams Lane across the land fill area (exact route to be determined) to the Business Park/end of Tins Path. This would reduce traffic on Snakey Path and provide a much safer alternative for cyclists using Coldhams Lane.
 - Sainsbury's should be involved in discussions on access and asked to help to improve and maintain the part of the footpath that runs through the car park and alongside the store.
 - Given the narrowness of Snakey Path and its use by large numbers of cyclists and pedestrians, careful consideration should be given to either widening this or creating a parallel second path.

Recreation

Recreation is already one of the primary uses of the Opportunity Area and is already identified in the Issues and Option Report as the preferred option for this area. FCHB has the following views on recreation:

- Since it is essential that recreation activities are sympathetic to wildlife needs in the area, the Council's Conservation Officer and Wildlife Trusts should be closely involved in planning of such activities.
- Organised sporting activity: such activities could be encouraged, but should be restricted to the quarry land fill area to the north of the railway, with access from Coldhams Lane and the Business Park, to minimise disturbance to wildlife and residential areas. In terms of specific activities:
 - BMX bikes are a popular activity but their use should be limited to an appropriate area and this should not spill into other parts more sensitive locations. Five-a-side football and possibly tennis courts would be appropriate.
 - Motorised boats of any form, and motorised sports of any kind, are inappropriate and should not be considered, from the point of view of the wildlife, local residents and other recreational activities currently underway or planned in the area.
 - Seaside themed attractions, such as donkey rides, kiosks etc are not considered appropriate as these would potentially destroy the peace and tranquillity of the site, where nature and wildlife, and the enjoyment of local people are considered priorities.
- The following recreational activities would probably be acceptable in and around the lakes, provided they are appropriately managed:
 - Walking the existing paths plus new paths to be created in the newly opened areas.
 - Dog walking should continue to be allowed on existing paths, and consideration should be given to providing areas where dogs can be safely allowed off the leash.
 - Bird watching (RSPB) and quiet enjoyment of the natural history of the area.
 - Education: nature trails that local schools could use, industrial history trail with information panels etc. This area has a rich past in coprolite and chalk quarrying and was the industrial fringe of Cambridge in days gone by.
 - Swimming: the south-east lake has been used for swimming for many years but this has been controversial and has entailed trespass and safety issues. "Wild" swimming in part of the lakes might well be compatible with the other activities planned. Safety equipment would be needed, and modest wooden platforms to enter the water could be considered; the emphasis should be on the philosophy of "wild" swimming rather than sport or organised leisure swimming, in keeping with the natural surroundings and wildlife focus of the area. Only a few areas of the lakes are suitable for swimming (in terms of access from the bank, depth and safety in general), notably the south east bank of the lake at the Cherry Hinton end – swimming should probably be restricted to a designated area once this has been defined.
 - Lakeside leisure: picnic spots, sitting areas and a refreshment area, if appropriately sited and with litter bins etc, could be a compatible use of part

of the area, perhaps restricted to the south-east lake. However, the creation of an artificial beach, with the implication of imported sand, is not considered to be appropriate to a lakeside bathing place

- o Angling: the fishing club should be able to continue its activities, as these help to preserve the wildlife and peaceful nature of the area. Part of the lakes could be made available to them for their equipment etc, and consultation should be held about which are the most suitable areas for fishing, and which activities can be run in parallel with angling (walking, bird watching etc are considered compatible with angling in many locations). Most anglers use the main central lake, although a small number are known to use the southern lake.
- o Diving: Cambridge diving clubs (e.g. BSAC) may be interested in using the lakes.
- o Boating: Non-motorised forms of boating would need to be considered very carefully; under certain circumstance this activity might be compatible, but it would need a thorough investigation before being considered permissible. Permanently stationed boats are probably not appropriate although a boat would however need to be available for emergency situations and for maintenance.
- Allotments (Burnside and Blacklands allotments): these provide a valuable contribution to the amenity and wildlife of the area, as well as to the green corridor and should be maintained, with security enhanced to prevent trespass and damage.
- The land east of Norman Way Business Park is identified in Option 40 as an “opportunity for development”. This area is a City Wildlife Site and contributes to the green corridor. Consideration should therefore be given to retaining part or all of this as open space with public access, and integrating it into the broader scheme for making this area overall a focus for recreational use but developed in such a way as to maintain the wildlife interest of the area. This would fit well with, and provide added value to, two of the operations in the Business Park - the gym and the hotel.

Long term maintenance and management

Ownership

A key issue to resolve is the complex land ownership situation which is at the heart of the current lack of public access. High priority should be given to resolving this. The mixed ownership of the lakes and surrounding land makes it difficult to plan and manage. We encourage the council to support any moves towards unified ownership, particularly public local ownership and management, perhaps in conjunction with some kind of trust-based ownership which would guarantee appropriate use of the area in the long term. Whichever approach is taken, it is essential that there is local involvement in management planning and decision making, with all those stakeholders with an interest in the area (see list at end of this document).

Management

Options for long-term management of the various components of the Opportunity Area will need to be carefully considered and will vary according to ownership, use and physical characteristics. Models that could be studied and that might provide indications of the way forward include Milton Country Park, Grantchester Meadows and other public spaces along the upper Cam which are used for swimming.

Issues that will need to be considered are:

- Safety – the depth of the lakes means that safety will be need to be a major consideration in plans to open them to public access, in order to provide reassurance to parents and others.
- Reduction and prevention of anti-social behaviour – the area is and has been subject to a variety of anti-social behaviours. Appropriate long-term measures will need to be put in place to mitigate against unsocial behaviour and to prevent access to those intending to use the lakes and surrounding areas for activities that would disrupt the enjoyment of others.
- Litter – many parts of the area are subject to both littering and dumping. FCHB carries out two clean-ups each year which removes large quantities of debris from the brook. Individual members remove litter on a regular basis between the clean-ups and report dumping of large items to the City Council for removal. Increased public access will help to draw attention to the problem of littering and dumping but also may potentially result in an increase. Appropriate bins and signage would need to be provided. An important issue to address will be the role of Sainsbury's in preventing rubbish from reaching the brook and public areas, given that the public footpath through Sainsbury's will be one important access to the Opportunity area.
- Noise – sound carries easily over water and is magnified. It will therefore be important that measures are in place to ensure that noise levels associated with increased use of the area do not become a problem for residents, hotel users, business people etc.

Other stakeholders in the area

Listed below are some of the organisations and bodies with a known interest in maintaining the characteristics of this area. Groups and individuals with a remit to ensure its long-term survival as a blue-green corridor of value to wildlife and for recreation by local residents and the general public include:

FCHB

Friends of Cherry Hinton Hall

Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire

Spinney School

RSPB

Peterhouse

East Mill Road and Romsey Action Group/EMRAG

City Council Nature Conservation Officer

Bat Conservation Trust

Cambridge Past, Present and Future
Vinery Road Allotment Society (for Burnside allotments)
Blacklands Allotments
Cambridge Cycle Campaign

Local Residents