

Thakeham and the Greater Cambridge Local Plan: What options are left for ‘South West Cambridgeshire’?

What just happened with the Local Plan?

The long process of putting together a Local Plan – the statutory framework for population growth and house building – included a ‘Call for Sites’ period which saw over 690 sites submitted for consideration. These were then assessed over a two-year period, during which ‘late’ submissions were legally required to be accepted.

The final closing date for late submissions was August 31, because on Sept 1 the Local Planning Authority announced its ‘First Proposals’ based on the assessment of all sites submitted in the Call for Sites window.

Out of that assessment, 19 of the 690+ sites were taken forward to the next stage, with proposals centred primarily around established growth site of Cambourne, where the gradual process of infrastructure development has been taking place over a period of decades. Climate change and water resource are the headline considerations in these First Proposals. The Local Plan in essence provides protection for sustainable development.

All local authorities must align their Local Plans with central government parameters. Greater Cambridge as a nationally important economic growth area must in its Local Plan support the whole population with particular regard for lower paid key workers who require affordable homes, and with the necessary infrastructure for development that is ‘sustainable’ including things like travel to work.

All information is here:

<https://www.greatercambridgeplanning.org/emerging-plans-and-guidance/greater-cambridge-local-plan/>

Where does Thakeham fit in?

Thakeham announced its 25,000 homes vision in December 2020, following a two year period in which it had been accumulating land options. Thakeham said it would make a late submission to the Call for Sites process by Easter.

But, Thakeham made no submission at all. Instead, on September 1st, it launched a new website for its proposed South West Cambridgeshire new town: <https://www.southwestcambridgeshire.com/>

At 25K homes, Thakeham’s proposed development is twice the size of the new homes proposed in the Greater Cambridge Local Plan and nowhere near the geography identified by the Local Plan as the most sustainable, low carbon location for significant new population growth.

The only routes now open to Thakeham are:

- 1) planning application, which would stand little chance as it would fall totally outside Local Plan principles, or
- 2) via senior members of the Government and influencers within the Conservative Party, which it supports financially.

SCDC Planning Portfolio Holder Cllr Tumi Hawkins: Where do the Local Plan numbers come from?

“On Sept 1st the two Councils [South Cambs and Cambridge City] published the First Proposals = Preferred Options for the new Greater Cambridge Local Plan. The new Local Plan is not starting from scratch, it is taking the current adopted local plan which is valid from 2011 to 2031, and rolling it into a new plan period of 2020 to 2041.

In the current Cambridge City adopted local plan, there is provision for 14,000 homes to be built between 2011 and 2031 to meet the objectively assessed need as required by Government.

The current adopted local plan for South Cambs provides for 19,500 for the same period of 2011 to 2031. Remember that this was the local plan that the previous Conservative administration in South Cambs created and submitted to Government in March 2014.

So 33,500 in total already in the pipeline due to current adopted local plans.

During the period between 2014 and 2018 when South Cambs Conservative administration did not have a 5-year housing land supply, 3000+ more planning permissions were granted by the Planning Inspectors in South Cambs. There have also been some "windfall permissions" in the time being in both areas.

This means the permissions in the current local plans for both councils is for 37,198 houses already.

Government requires all Councils to provide housing based on what it calls Objectively Assessed Need (OAN) as stated in the National Planning Policy Framework. This OAN uses the Government's standard method as a baseline, and takes account of additional factors such as population growth/demographics, household projections, employment growth, expected levels of economic activity, and affordable housing needs.

This means in areas with a growing economy care must be taken to ensure the right level of housing is provided, otherwise the Planning Inspectors that examine the plan will demand to see the evidence base for the plan and may find it "unsound", and send it back to the drawing board if it does not meet the OAN. South Cambs already went through that under the Conservatives and we don't want that to happen again.

The number of additional new houses being proposed for the new local plan period 2020-2041 using the OAN and allowing a small 10% buffer is 11,596.

The current adopted plans for both councils already has 37,198 which is being carried forward, giving a total of 48,794.

That means 76.23% (over three quarters) of the housing requirement is already in the pipeline of the current adopted local plans. Just under one quarter, 11,596 is new proposed allocations that we are making.”

Next Steps for the South West Cambridge Action Group (SWCAG)

1. Make new Freedom of Information requests to Homes England & the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government on discussions between government and Thakeham about its proposed new town (previous requests have been rejected as ‘not in the public interest.’)

2. Request Anthony Browne MP to ask the Housing Minister to comment specifically on the status of Thakeham's plans.
3. Ask Thakeham to now withdraw their proposal as it is at complete odds with the principles of sustainable development in South Cambridgeshire.
4. Ask Thakeham if they intend to submit a planning application to the South Cambs District Council.
 - If so, lobby SCDC Planning Committee for outright refusal.
 - If not, ask SCDC to move forward and ratify its Local Plan without Thakeham.
5. Respond to the government's OxCam Arc consultation with the benefit of sustainable development principles now set out in the Local Plan's First Proposals.

Note: Please refer to the South West Cambridge Action Group website for comprehensive information learned since the months since Thakeham's December 2020 new town announcement.
www.swcag.org.uk

To join the SWCAG mailing list please write to info@swcag.org.uk

South West Cambridge Action Group
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