



G R O W I N G
F E N L A N D

Chatteris:

An Aspirational Community

Final Report



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Introduction

What is Growing Fenland?

The recently published Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Independent Economic Review (CPIER) identified that within the Combined Authority there are three distinct sub-economies. There is the Greater Cambridge economy, which includes the many towns where people commute from into Cambridge. There is the Greater Peterborough economy, and its surroundings. But in an important classification, there is also the fen economy, which includes much of our district of Fenland, as well as parts of East Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire.

A lot of strategy has historically focused on making cities work well, and assuming the rest will follow. But because our economy is separate, and in some ways quite isolated with sub-standard transport links, this approach won't work for us. We need a strategy for each of our towns, which helps them prosper, and delivers best quality of life for people who live here. This must acknowledge where we have links to other towns or cities, while seeking to build strength in our places. The Combined Authority is committed to doubling economic output across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough by 2040 – to do this, all areas are going to have to succeed, not just the Cambridge economy.

To make this happen, following the CPIER analysis, the Combined Authority has decided to support a process of creating market town plans for each town in our district – Chatteris, March, Whittlesey, and Wisbech. These plans will be used to bid for funding from the Combined Authority and other funding providers, based on the vision for the town.

To develop these plans, each town has established a town team, consisting of representatives from business, local government, schools, and others. The town team has looked at life in the town from every angle, and has developed a vision for each town. They have also worked on ideas which could make a real difference.

The Growing Fenland project tries to capture a balance. On the one hand, each of these towns is unique, with its own particular opportunities, as well as challenges. On the other hand, there are some areas where, by working together, we can have more of an impact. Therefore, we are publishing four separate reports for each of the towns, but under the same banner – and if you read all four, you will see some crossover.

The Overall Strategy for Fenland

Because some of the challenges we face are common across all four towns, we have published alongside this a Fenland-wide strategy to set out what some of the real “game changers” will be for our district. They key ideas coming forward from this are:

1. Nene River Barrier
2. Opportunity for full bus franchising



3. A47 Dualling
4. Wisbech Garden Town
5. A New Deal for Education
6. A New Partnership for Skills
7. Early Years Support
8. A Health Action Area
9. An Advanced Manufacturing Launchpad
10. Cambridgeshire Jobs Compact
11. A Mayoral Implementation Taskforce

It is at this level that we hope to tackle challenges around some of the bigger, people-based factors, such as health and education, where the opportunities from acting at a district level are much greater.

The process to produce this report

To produce this report, we have gone through several stages of information gathering to ensure our recommendations will work for Chatteris. These are:

- 1) Data collection, using a variety of sources.
- 2) Meetings with the Chatteris town team, which has had representation from the town and district councils, businesses, and educational establishments.
- 3) Public meetings to allow residents to express views on the town, and ideas as they have developed
- 4) Interim reports, which set out a summary of key ideas for the town
- 5) Continued consultation and an online survey to refine and develop ideas, and
- 6) Production of final reports, to generate support for our plans and leverage in funding from the Combined Authority and other funding providers.

Chatteris – an overview of the town

A Committed Community

A strong sense of community spirit is a defining feature of Chatteris. This can be seen most obviously at some of the bigger community events – like the Christmas light switch on, the midsummer festival, or last year’s Remembrance Parade – but also in the many interest groups and clubs we have in our town. Our local businesses are also very committed to our community – with two business groupings (Chatteris in Business, and the Chatteris Business Cluster).

Our population is growing – having increased by 5.4% (566 people) since 2012¹ – with some new developments around the fringes of our town. This is forecast to continue, though our population will continue to age – while over-65s are 20% of the population now, this is expected to rise to 25% in 2036².

“We’ve learned to stand on our own two feet” – Chatteris resident

A Struggling High Street

However, the High Street at the heart of our town has seen a decline in recent years. Local retailers have noticed a big decline in footfall, particularly since Budgens left the town. The weekly markets have become smaller, though committed traders remain. Banks have also moved away, now only visiting with temporary pop-up shop style provision. As the two major supermarkets in the town (Aldi and Jack’s) are out of the centre of the town, people use these more often, and don’t come into the town – we have also seen (like much of the UK) some of the damaging effects of increased online shopping.

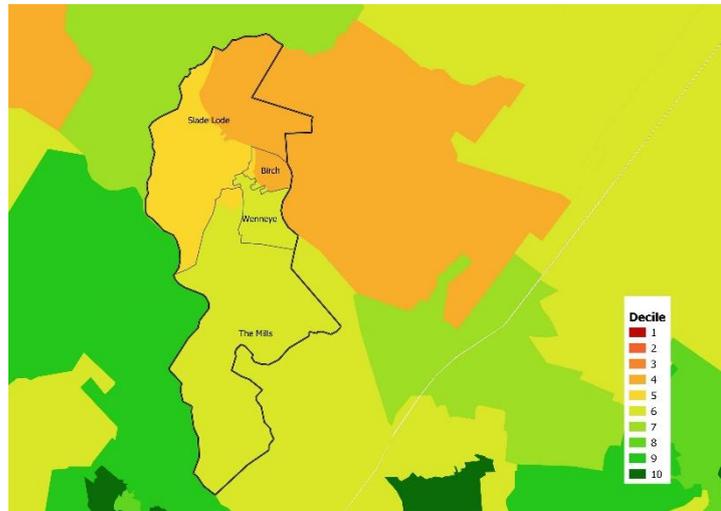
“The High Street is dying off” – Chatteris Business

Some residents have perceived these changes to the High Street to reflect increasing levels of deprivation in the town. This is not necessarily correct, however – the evidence shows Chatteris is about average for a town in terms of levels of deprivation.

¹ ONS population estimates

² Cambridgeshire County Council Population Forecasts

Chatteris – Index of Multiple Deprivation



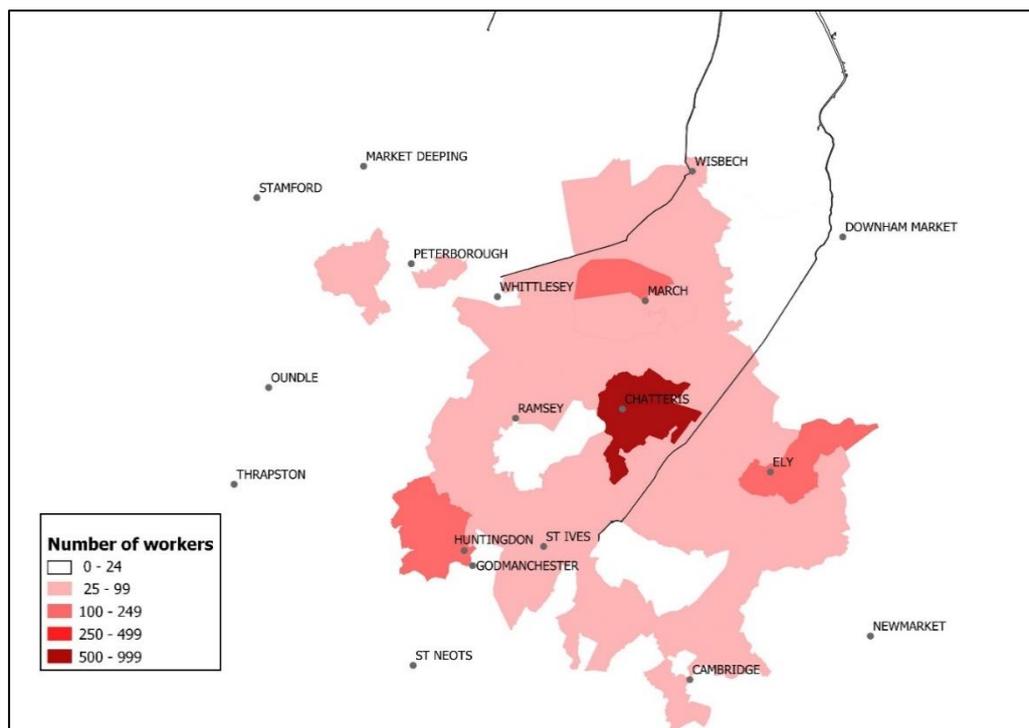
Source: Analysis of Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government Data (2015).

While the proportion of households in poverty (20.3% after housing costs) is above Cambridgeshire levels, it is about average for England and Wales.

A central location, but poor transport connectivity

Chatteris “looks in all directions” – with workers commuting to March, Ely, Huntingdon, and to a lesser extent, Cambridge and Peterborough.

Where Chatteris Residents Work (Census 2011)



Source: Analysis of Census 2011 data

This central location is a real strength for the town, but currently public transport options let Chatteris down. Buses are infrequent, and some key destinations (such as Peterborough) require changing, leading to lengthy journeys (over two hours). This makes commuting via public transport an impossibility in many ways. As a result, Chatteris is very car dependent – 74.7% of Chatteris workers use their cars to get to work, compared to 60.4% for Cambridgeshire and 57.0% for England.

Levels of cycling to work are also low (2.5%), with no good cycle lanes out of the town. Cars drive very quickly down our local A-roads, and they are very exposed to the wind, meaning it can feel unsafe to travel by bike.

More positively, stops at our closest station (Manea) have increased, meaning it is easier to get to Cambridge and Peterborough by rail than before (though we need to improve our links to Manea station).

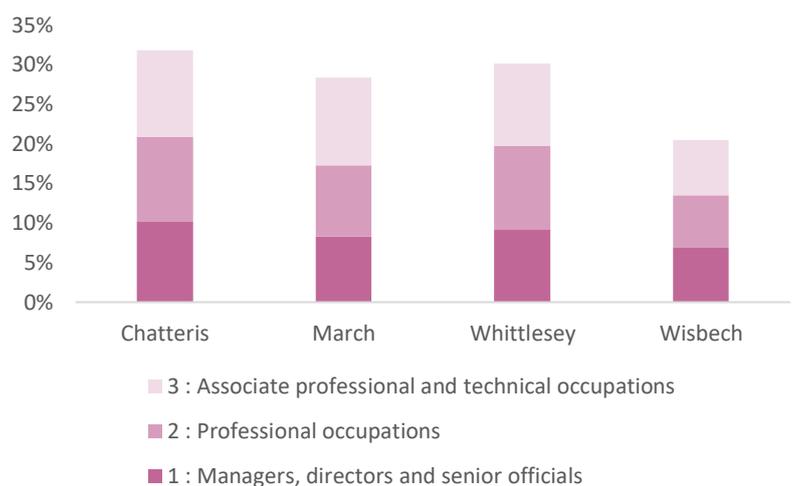
“Overwhelmingly, the use of public transport was for non-work related activity such as shopping, leisure trips or medical appointments” – Chatteris Community Plan 2018

A highly skilled, professional class

Of the four market towns in Fenland, Chatteris has the largest proportions of residents working in the top three occupational categories. 20% of the local employment falls in the “Professional, Scientific, and Technical” sector (ONS Business Register and Employment Survey).

These jobs are provided by some of the high-end businesses around the town, including the emerging Advanced Manufacturing Cluster of high-end firms.

Similarly, 17.9% of Chatteris residents have degree-level qualifications – well above the Fenland average of 14.8%.

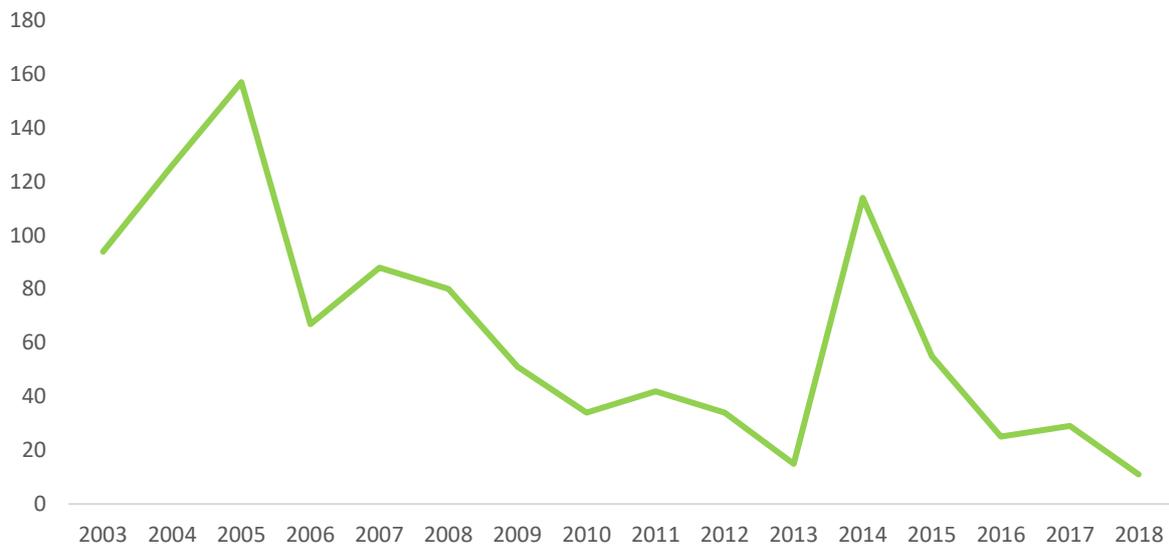


Source: Annual Population Survey

Difficulties in bringing forward development, but affordable housing

There has been some building of new properties in Chatteris recently, however the general trend over the last fifteen years has been downward, with only a temporary recovery following the financial crisis.

Housing completions in Chatteris, year ending March



Source: Cambridgeshire County Council

What is behind this, when plenty of land has been allocated for housing in the Local Plan? The big issue is low land values, meaning there is less of an ‘uplift’ for a developer who wants to build. This also makes it challenging to get developer support for some of the infrastructure needed to build more houses – like roads and utilities. In the longer term, we may find we are also constrained by flood zones.

However, this does also feed through to lower house prices, which are an attractive factor to people – in the recent Chatteris Community Plan consultation, 234 people reported that they moved to Chatteris because housing costs were lower than elsewhere.

Many outdoor activities, but difficulties accessing the countryside

There are many opportunities for outdoor pursuits in and around Chatteris, including fishing, boating, and walking. This is a real strength of the town which we can and should shout more loudly about. The recent Pocket Park initiative at Little Acre Fen is a great new space, which has had community involvement in its creation.

However, there are some challenges in accessing the local countryside. Generally, the number of rights of way is somewhat limited. In a recent consultation “access to more parks and green spaces” was highlighted as the biggest priority for local residents.

This may be connected to some health outcomes in Chatteris being worse than national and local averages:

		Healthy Eating Adults	Obese Adults
Chatteris		24.8%	25.9%
Cambridgeshire		32.4%	20.9%
England	28.7%	24.1%	

Education – a good, and improving picture

The town’s high school – the Cromwell Community College – is a real asset for the town. It has a good reputation, and by September 2020 will be the county’s first state school offering education all the way through from four to eighteen years. Rates of students achieving 5 A*-Cs in their GCSEs, at 42% is above the national average of 40%. 97.1% of A-levels which are started are completed, above the England average of 95.4%.



However, the town’s primary schools are performing slightly less well, with one being identified by Ofsted as requiring improvement at the most recent inspection, with only 33% of pupils meeting the expected standard (Cambridgeshire – 61%, England – 64%) – though these are improving.

Chatteris – what residents are telling us

Our work consulting the community brought out the following key themes.

Likes

People mostly express affection for the community spirit, and the aesthetic appeal of the town, with comments like “Sense of community” being common. One resident noted that the affordability of housing was an attractive feature of the town, something we have picked up elsewhere, while another commented the town was “positioned well” – again relating to feedback we have heard about the beneficial geography of the town.

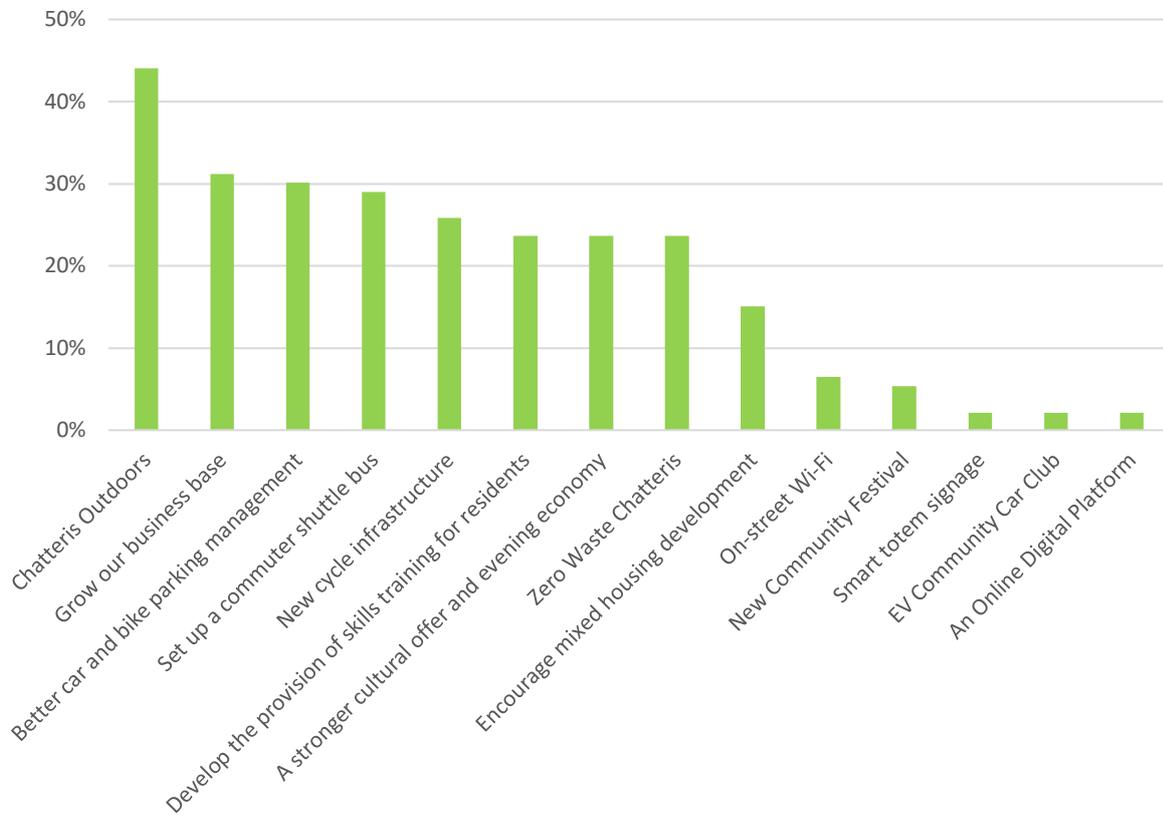
Dislikes

These comments fell into a few categories. The High Street was the predominant concern: “No decent shops”, “demise of high street”, and “Could do with some good shops” were typical. Public transport was another major issue, people feeling the bus service had got “worse and worse”, and linking this to isolation. One commented that there was a real need for more cycleways. Finally, there were also those who felt the town was overlooked relative to other towns, with comments such as “It has not developed as much as surrounding Fenland towns”, and “lack of investment”.

Improvements

This gave a very wide range of responses – with no clear agreement. Again, the high street was the most often mentioned. Improved doctor’s services, support for youth activities, police services, leisure services (including a concern about selling the swimming pool), and local transport were all mentioned.

Favourite ideas from the interim report



Source: Analysis of Fenland District Council data. Height of bars shows the proportion of residents who chose an idea in their top three.

Clearly, the Chatteris Outdoors concept was the most popular of the ideas given, with almost half of respondents putting it in their top three. Many of the transportation-themed interventions were also popular, as well as those which focused on business and skills – helping our residents to access opportunity. We have taken forward the key ideas identified for development.

Chatteris – A vision for an aspirational community

Chatteris brings together high-tech manufacturing, glorious countryside, nationally significant agriculture, and a new national museum in one place. Very few towns of our size can make such claims. We have grown our own industries, learned independence and worked hard to create a successful town.

Now, we need to combine these strengths to turbo charge our town and grow our prosperity, providing good jobs, excellent education and green access. It is time for a step change in how our town works, thinks about itself, and is thought about by others. We need to show people that Chatteris is the place to be to start a business, buy a home, and bring up a family.

At the centre of our vision for Chatteris is that it will be home to **an aspirational community**.

This captures two things. Firstly, we want our town to be full of aspirers, those who want to succeed, flourish, and make a difference. We want those who live here to have opportunities – and take them. We want to see high quality career pathways, a variety of activities, and excellent schools, making our town attractive for young families and entrepreneurs looking for a place to live.

But secondly, we want our town to be a community. Community spirit is already one of Chatteris' key strengths – we want this to continue to develop and grow. We want to see a bustling high street where people bump into each other, where cultural events give people the opportunity to throw themselves into the life of the community, and where people never feel lonely or unwelcome.

Nine key proposals for Chatteris

We have nine areas where we know that interventions will make a transformative difference in Chatteris. We recognise that not all of these will be immediately deliverable. Some are areas where an immediate funding boost can help get things moving – others will take time. But over time, we need all of these to come to fruition for our town to prosper.

These ideas are:

1. Grow our business base

An Advanced Manufacturing Launchpad and a potential Agri-tech Launchpad facility with scope to support and grow our existing businesses and increased resource for economic development will help us bring more high quality employment to the town.

2. Develop the provision of skills training for residents

Local provision associated with industrial development, adult courses, and connections to other skills providers will make sure members of our aspirational community can access the opportunities on offer.

3. Promote mixed housing development

To grow and develop our town, we need places for people to live at different stages of their lives. Mixed housing development, along with support for necessary infrastructure to make it happen, will bring people to our town.

4. Set up a commuter shuttle bus

Chatteris suffers from poor public transport provision, particularly to centres of employment. A shuttle bus connecting into key transport nodes on the rail network (Ely, Manea) will help us connect residents to opportunity.

5. Develop the Chatteris Outdoors platform

Chatteris Outdoors was our most popular idea in the interim reports. We will improve access to and use of our countryside, and develop this as a key attractor for our town.

6. Develop a stronger cultural offer and evening economy

High streets are changing, we need to adapt. By encouraging business to trial early evening opening, and encouraging more creative uses in the town, we will restore the popularity of our high street.

7. Create new cycle infrastructure

People avoid active travel in the town because it is seen as dangerous. Links to Somersham and Ely will encourage people to exercise more, tackling our town's health challenges.

8. Provide better car and bike parking management

To make our high street more attractive and encourage cycle commuting, we need to better manage parking facilities.

9. Create a community project funding pot

Our community needs to take ownership of the town to drive improvements. By creating a small fund, we can support local projects, including improvements to the visual amenity of the town.

We unpack each of these below in a summary case for making the investment.

1. Grow our Business Base

We have excellent businesses. We need to support them, and attract other companies to make Chatteris their home.

Strategic Case

The Advanced Manufacturing Launchpad

The **advanced manufacturing launchpad** will build upon the presence of Metalcraft, a large business working in the nuclear and medical sectors. This can become the “anchor” by which to attract smaller companies to base themselves in the area, looking to tie into the manufacturing process here. By doing so we can create a dense web of supply chains, to create an innovation ecosystem here. This will increase efficiency, create jobs, and raise the profile of our town.

The mechanism we propose for this idea is to provide capital grants to firms in these sectors which can prove their offering qualifies as advanced manufacturing, and which offer high-paid, high-quality jobs. This will ensure funds are allocated to strengthening the local economy of the town.

This idea is of such significance that it has been recognised as one of the key strategic actions for Fenland District as a whole. This is because it will significantly raise the jobs profile of the district, and, by working with other manufacturing companies across the district, will help other manufacturing firms move up the value chain.

Support for our Agri-Tech businesses

The land around Chatteris is of extremely high quality, and generates a significant proportion of the vegetables eaten by UK consumers. “Agri-Tech” is the big opportunity to drive up the value of this sector. But wafer-thin margins make it difficult for agricultural businesses to invest in better technology. The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Local Industrial Strategy (LIS) states a key intervention as “expansion of the Eastern Agri-tech Research, Development and Prototyping Growth Initiative, enabling direct funding support to more firms”³ and looks to develop an Agri-Tech launchpad facility or facilities within the Combined Authority.

We need to support our local agricultural businesses in applying the latest technologies and encouraging engagement with existing support and funding initiatives, such as the Agri-Tech fund. We know that with the right approaches we can improve crop yields by tailoring the application of water and fertiliser at the crop level. There have also been successful examples elsewhere of support for glass houses and water management to allow higher value crops, such as fruit and flowers, to be grown.

More proactive economic development to bring companies to new sites

To bring businesses in, we need to tell them why Chatteris is a great place to invest. To do that, we need greater investment in economic development. The Combined Authority has set out plans to

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/818886/Cambridge_SINGLE_PAGE.pdf p42

create a Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Growth Company, to support the growth of business in the district. This needs to promote Chatteris with the following key themes:

- A highly skilled workforce
- A network of leading companies in the advanced manufacturing and agricultural sectors
- A high quality of life offer, with good countryside and location
- Available land on which to develop

Related to this last point, we note there are key growth opportunities on the Jack's site, and land around the South Fens Business Park, which are primed for commercial development. We want this to come forward, in a way that doesn't take people away from our high street, but rather **creates high value jobs for people to then spend money on the high street.**

Financial Case

The **advanced manufacturing launchpad** will, by creating new commercial sites on the launchpad, increase local business rates. As is being trialled at Alconbury Weald, it may be possible to split these benefits in order to include provision for marketing the site and attracting more companies. This will also help to offset the cost of small capital grants to move companies to the area.

Support for Agri-Tech business will involve finance on a project by project basis to develop key elements of infrastructure. This conversation needs to be taken forward with local agri-businesses to understand what can drive most value without causing damaging environmental impact.

More proactive economic development requires funding for extra staff for the District Council to promote the offer of the area.

Management Case

We look to the Combined Authority to lead on the work on the first two points, as it takes forward work following the Local Industrial Strategy (LIS) process. Fenland District Council will lead on more proactive economic development, but we will use our local resources to frame the Chatteris offer in a way which can be clearly and easily promoted to interested parties.

2. Develop the provision of skills training for residents

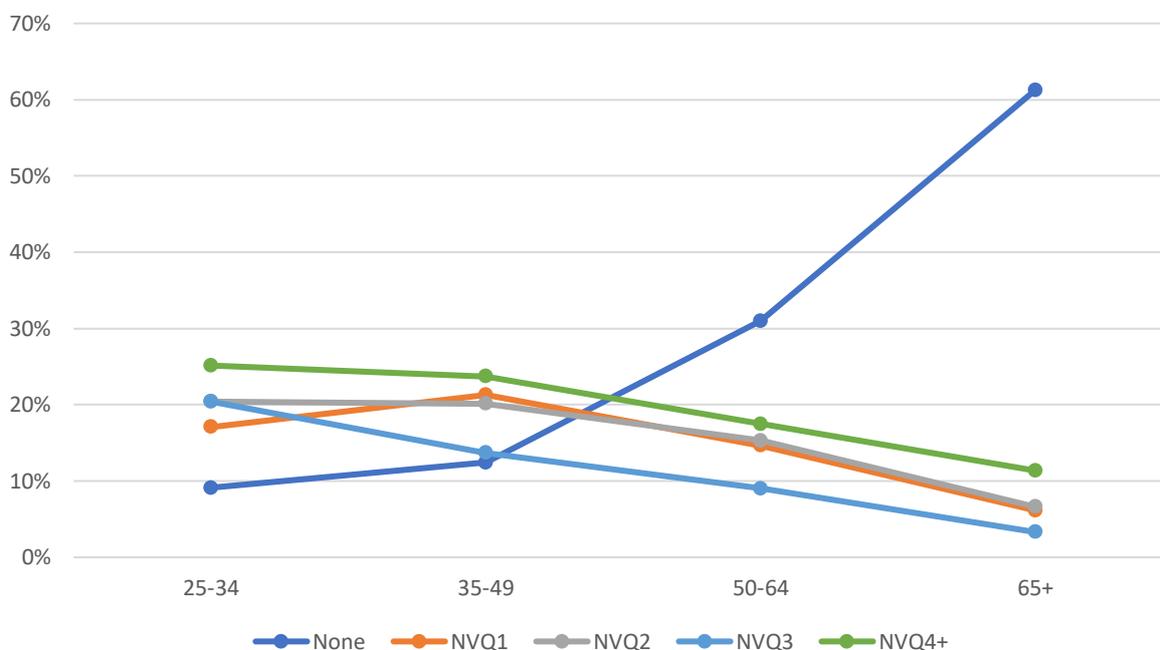
Strategic Case

Attracting new companies to base themselves in Chatteris will help us provide highly skilled and well-paid employment. However, this, in and of itself, will not be enough to guarantee jobs for local people – if they lack the skills to take up this employment. Therefore, it is vital that we find ways of improving skills provision to our residents, so that they can share in the opportunities coming forward in the town.

Firstly, this means bringing new local provision associated with industrial development. The advanced manufacturing launchpad has training facilities “designed in” alongside a commitment from the companies involved to providing support for local people (particularly those entering the workforce) to get the training they need. The LIS includes a plan to “Create a Skills, Talent and Apprenticeship Hub: connecting employers, providers, and learners”. Our plans for provision on the launchpad must be embedded in this programme, and by working with the Cromwell Community College we can ensure there are good connections with our young people as they come to the end of their schooling.

We will also work with existing training providers in order to create more short courses within the town. These will include adult education courses to help those in older age brackets upskill. We have identified that skills levels in the town are lower among those of older age brackets – with more than three in ten of those aged 50-64 having no qualifications. At the same time people are working longer.

Proportion of population by qualification levels and age group



Source: Analysis of ONS Annual Population Survey

In addition to all of this, we realise that there are other excellent further and higher education facilities in our area, and that we will never be able to (nor should we aspire to) provide all the training which our people need within the town – however, efforts should focus on providing a broad mix of academic and vocational qualification pathways which will provide a much greater choice, currently lacking in the town. Other key providers include the College of West Anglia, Cambridge University, iMET at Alconbury Weald, and the forthcoming Technical University at Peterborough.

This means that, as discussions around the approach to transport in the district are taken forward, including the overall approach to bus services, **a top priority must be securing fast access to key local training centres**. Part of this will be met through a shuttle bus to key transport hubs such as Manea and Ely, from where it is possible to get a direct train to either Cambridge or Peterborough (see proposal 6).

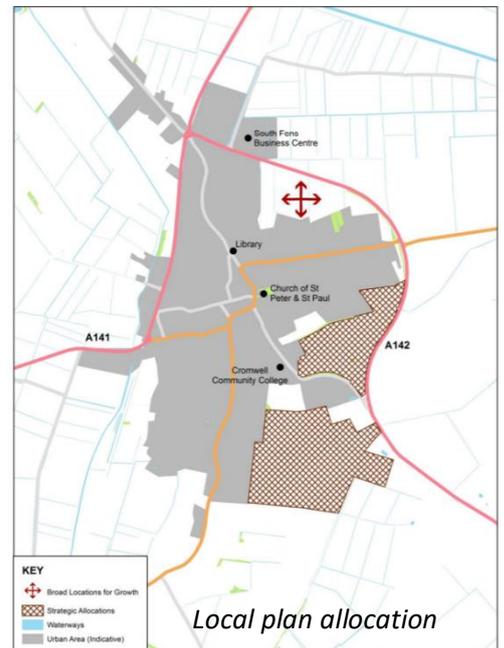
3. Promote mixed housing development

Strategic Case

We know that to grow our aspirational community, and keep presenting opportunities to new people, we need to give people desirable places to live. Different people will be looking for different things – young people may focus on affordability (already a strength of our town), while there is a need to begin to promote “executive housing” for those looking to move up to a more luxurious offer.

There are two key ways we can start to develop more housing in the district:

- 1) Densification.** This means building more in and around the town centre. This will help to support our town centre, by bringing more people to live in it. We propose a programme of engagement with shop owners about the space over shops to understand what options there are to improve residential provision here. Where retail units have remained vacant for a long time, we will look to work to develop residential units.
- 2) Building around the town.** Key sites around Chatteris are mostly to the East (see local plan map). Some of these have been optioned for a long time. We ask the Combined Authority for some capital funding to help move on the infrastructure requirements to make these a reality, in negotiation with developers.



These things can all help, though we acknowledge that many of the challenges in bringing forward the housing we need comes down to economic and environmental factors, over which we often have little control. Developments struggle to come forward because the uncompetitive nature of housing delivery means big developers often aren't interested in areas like ours where returns are lower. Chatteris is also surrounded by flood zone 3 land – which in the long run will prevent us from developing.

Our aims around growing our business base will increase demand, and therefore help tackle the viability issue. But we also recognise – as set out in the strategy paper – that new approaches to housing are needed. The innovations in housing being brought about through the Wisbech Garden Town programme – most notably modular build (where costs are lower) and sophisticated flood modelling – will help our housing market to pick up, enabling us to grow our aspirational community.

Financial Case

To establish costs involved in allowing infrastructure to develop for housing sites will require convening developers around proposals for specific sites. This will require developers being willing to share the viability calculations they have done to conclude that a site cannot come forward at the present time – to understand how much of this is tied up in delivery of required infrastructure. From this point, it can be established whether a small capital grant or loan will enable a site to come forward.

Management Case

This work will have to be overseen by Fenland District Council (FDC) as the planning authority. This requires partnership working with developers, which will take time to develop. FDC will also be able to work across the towns to ensure that the lessons learnt through work on other projects, most notably the Wisbech Garden Town, can be shared with Chatteris to help remove the other barriers to development within the town.

4. Set up a commuter shuttle bus

Strategic Case

At the moment, public transport is used almost exclusively for non-work travel in Chatteris. At the time of the last census (2011) less than 2% of the employed population in Chatteris used the bus to get to work – compared to almost 75% who used the private car. This is unsustainable into the long term, and discourages younger people from moving to our town (as a shrinking proportion of young people now drive). A service which focused on employment destinations (Ely, Huntingdon) or other public transport nodes (Manea station) could make using public transport on a day to day basis more viable for our commuter class.

This would be a shuttle bus service (ideally an electric vehicle) to connect with trains to Cambridge and Peterborough at working hours. In Chatteris, for example, a minibus could leave the town at 6.45, dropping people off at Manea at 7, to catch the 07.08 train to Peterborough. It would then return to the town to pick up another load for the 07.39 Manea train to Cambridge. It would do one final run, this time to Ely, to drop people off for the 08.33 service to Cambridge, or the 8.16 to Peterborough.

Financial Case

The cost of the vehicle for this scheme will depend upon what model is chosen (see below). If the option chosen is to work with existing operators, the capital cost will be zero, but there may be an ongoing revenue cost in the form of a subsidy.

Because some parents choose to send their children to sixth form in Cambridge, there should automatically be some demand for the service – as it will provide an easy link to travel into Cambridge in time for morning lessons. This will help improve the commercial viability of the service.

Management Case

There are a few approaches to providing a shuttle bus in the town which should be considered:

Approach	Benefits	Disbenefits
Work with existing operators to provide the service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Doesn't require the procurement of new infrastructure - Could be a means of "testing" the popularity of the service without incurring sunk cost - There is the potential to build the shuttle into existing routes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Existing operators have little incentive to co-operate if they do not wish to - The fare to the user is likely to be higher (or a greater ongoing subsidy will be required).
Provide own service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Complete control over the route and timings - Ability to "brand" the bus as a Chatteris commuter shuttle, to show people clearly how the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - May require navigating legal issues in relation to providing municipal bus services in the Bus Services Act 2017 – particularly if the service is run on a commercial basis. This could be navigated by providing the bus on a

	service is meant to be used	Community Transport (i.e. free) basis.
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Which option is preferable largely depends upon the policy context. At the present time, it may be best to open up discussions with the current operator in the area, Stagecoach. However, if as the Fenland Strategy paper recommends, bus franchising is taken forward in Fenland, it will be possible to designate this route as one which needs to be provided – either on its own, or as part of a package of bus routes for the area.

We are also exploring this idea for Wisbech as part of establishing immediate connectivity to transport hubs (Wisbech being the other Fenland market town without a railway station), therefore, if the option is to provide the services ourselves, running these two services in tandem will provide economies of scale, reducing the overall cost for both.

5. Develop the Chatteris Outdoors platform

Chatteris Outdoors was the most popular idea with the public. It involves both a) developing the provision of outdoor amenity to residents of the town, and b) using our links into the countryside to develop a real selling proposition for the town.

Strategic Case

For place branding to be successful, it needs to offer three key things:

1. A unique identifier of a place
2. Something which builds on genuine strengths – i.e. has a grounding in reality
3. Something which future ambitions for the place can also be tied to.



An example of what the platform could look like

The Chatteris Outdoors brand does all of these.

Firstly, it identifies something unique about Chatteris. The outdoor environment is a key attractive feature of the fens, and distinguishes Chatteris from market towns in other parts of the country. It is also not something which other towns in the area have particularly sought to capitalise upon in any branding (heritage is a much more common angle) and therefore, it gives Chatteris a unique selling point.

It is also grounded in reality, and seeks to build on what is there. Many of these activities are based around our waterways, including **angling, boating, and canoeing**.

While **cycling** is represented in Chatteris by the local cycling club, roads are too busy and unsafe for families to cycle, and cycling to work lags behind national levels. We will kickstart a cycling revolution in Chatteris by turning the old railway to Somersham into a cycle path, extending the current bike path from Ely – Sutton – Chatteris, and creating new cycle parking facilities in town.

There are **walking** opportunities at the new pocket park in Little Acre Fen, and many areas around the town (though accessibility is often a challenge, and we need to promote these opportunities more). **Birdwatching** is a related opportunity at the nearby Block Fen where a Nature Reserve exists, and work is ongoing by Cambridgeshire County Council to develop wetland habitats.

And there are already opportunities for more adventurous sports, such as **skydiving** at the North London Skydiving Centre.

Financial case

The key element of this, from a cost point of view, will be the online digital platform. It is estimated that this will cost between £5k and £10k to set up (drawing on experience in a nearby and similar size town, Ramsey). If this can then be run on a volunteer basis, this will keep running costs to a minimum. There will be a need for ad hoc developer support to stop the site become clunky.

Management case

The overall oversight for establishing the website should be with Fenland District Council, who can ensure that the website is of sufficient quality and ties into other developments going on through the Growing Fenland programme. The plan is then to hand it over to volunteers within the town who can manage and run the site, ensuring it also promotes other goings on within the town.

6. Develop a stronger cultural offer and evening economy

Strategic Case

What people are looking for from their towns is changing. High streets are no longer a place people *need* to go to – online shopping and supermarkets have put an end to that. The high streets which thrive are those where people *want* to go there. That means giving them things to do, and places to dwell in and see friends.

This is especially true of the young. A recent report by the events website Eventbrite found that: “this generation [millennials] not only highly values experiences, but they are increasingly spending time and money on them: from concerts and social events to athletic pursuits, to cultural experiences and events of all kinds. For this group, happiness isn’t as focused on possessions or career status. Living a meaningful, happy life is about creating, sharing and capturing memories earned through experiences that span the spectrum of life’s opportunities.”⁴

This also means we need to think again about how and when our high street operates. In general, most of our shops open the standard hours of 9-5. However, for those who work during the week, particularly if they are commuting to cities like Cambridge or Peterborough, this is no good, and means that the income they earn (in sometimes well-paying jobs) does not end up benefitting our local retailers at all. But it is challenging to get to this place as it requires a cultural change – and co-ordination. If only one shop or café opens later, then it will be hard to succeed, as footfall will be lower.

How can we achieve this in a town of our size? There are some concrete steps we can take:

- **Co-ordinate on one night a week when shops and cafes will be open longer.** This can be administered through the Chatteris in Business Cluster, to ensure co-ordination between businesses. Thursday night would be a natural choice generally used in these initiatives – it is later in the week so people are happy to be out later, but not at the weekend when people are more likely to be away. Businesses may also want to co-ordinate to not be open for a couple of hours earlier in the day to compensate for this. In order for this to work it will need to be well publicised.
- **Development of a virtual high street for Chatteris.** One of our media businesses is exploring the option to develop a virtual high street for Chatteris, as has been developed in an area of East London and Aberdeen. This would allow people visiting the town to go online ahead of time and scroll through a panorama of the available shops, with business cards popping up as they clicked on individual outlets. This could be promoted through the town’s Chatteris Outdoors platform (see above).
- **Use planning powers to turn unused retail space into new uses.** The Grimsey review of the High Street sets out this key recommendation: “Accept that there is already too much retail space in the UK and that bricks and mortar retailing can no longer be the anchor for thriving high streets and town centres. They need to be repopulated and re-fashioned as community hubs, including housing, health and leisure, entertainment, education, arts, business/office space and some shops”⁵. We therefore need to:

⁴ Eventbrite, 2015. Millennials: Fueling the Experience Economy.

⁵ <http://www.vanishinghighstreet.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/GrimseyReview2.pdf> p8

- Identify local artists/entrepreneurs who want to try out interesting things in new spaces, and help them move into vacant spaces, possibly with rent relief for a short period (this could include sixth formers looking to develop business skills). We can work with local arts organisations, such as Market Place and Babylon Arts to develop proposals around specific spaces.
- Work creatively with the planning authority (FDC) to ensure spaces can have the use classes needed for this to happen. Converting unused spaces to planning categories which allow a wider range of uses – such as D2 and Sui Generis will enable this to happen.

This will work best if we trial it with one building to see what can work. One example might be the recently closed Barclays Bank on Park Street. Bringing together a group to develop a more creative use for this space would be a stand of defiance against high street decline, by positively embracing new usage for the building.

7. Create new cycle infrastructure

This proposal breaks down into three separate elements:

- 1) A cycle lane on the old course of the railway line joining Chatteris to Somersham
- 2) A cycle lane connecting Chatteris to Sutton – which would link to the continuing cycle lane to Ely
- 3) New cycle parking facilities in the centre of town

Strategic Case

Cycling has multiple advantages over driving as a means of transport. These include:

- 1) **Health benefits.** According to the NHS, “Regular cycling can reduce the risk of chronic illnesses such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes and stroke. It can also boost your mood and keep your weight under control.” They also note that a regular cycle, such as a work commute, contributes towards the recommended exercise target of 150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity per week. It has been estimated that in the UK, if we cycled at the same rates as prevail in Denmark, we would save the NHS £17 billion within 20 years.⁶

Health outcomes in Chatteris are generally poorer than national and local comparators. 25.9% of adults in Chatteris are obese – compared to 20.9% in Cambridgeshire and 24.1% in England. And in Fenland as a whole, physical activity rates are estimated at 60.7%, which compares unfavourably to England on 66.1%.⁷

- 2) **Environmental benefits.** The importance of finding alternatives to fossil-fuel based transport at both a local and global scale cannot be overstated. Locally, switching to cycling will dramatically reduce air pollution. Globally, the World Health Organisation reports that: “the transport sector is the fastest growing contributor to climate emissions. Growth in energy use is higher for the transport sector than any other end-use sector.”⁸ Cycling, by contrast, neither pollutes the air, nor contributes to global warming.
- 3) **Social benefits.** The private car is an isolating form of transport, with many journeys taken alone. Cycling can easily take place in groups, and at slower speeds it is easier to interact with people while making the journey. The lack of a physical windshield as a barrier between the driver and the environment makes social interaction easier.

Within Chatteris, at the time of the census in 2011, rates of cycling were 2.5% - lower than England (3.0%) and much lower than Cambridgeshire (9.7%).

A lack of decent cycling infrastructure has been highlighted as a cause here. This is particularly important, as the Fen roads are wind swept and very open, increasing the sense of vulnerability felt

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https://www.britishcycling.org.uk/zuvvi/media/bc_files/campaigning/BENEFITS_OF_INVESTING_IN_CYCLING_DIGI_FINAL.pdf

⁷ Figures from Public Health England’s data tool

⁸ <https://www.who.int/sustainable-development/transport/health-risks/climate-impacts/en/>

by the cyclist. The main roads leaving our town are all A-roads – which can be a very off-putting factor, particularly for families with children.

The three elements included are:

1) A cycle lane on the old course of the railway line joining Chatteris to Somersham

Chatteris used to lie on a branch line between March and St Ives, which was closed during the Beeching cuts. This means there is a clear straight line which is unbuilt on between Chatteris and Somersham, which leaves the town at the South West, off the Huntingdon Road. At current, there is a footpath here.

This would be transformed into a joint footpath/cycle path to attract people to cycle to Somersham. This, in turn, could be connected through to Huntingdon and St Ives in future, in co-operation with Huntingdonshire District Council.

2) A cycle lane connecting Chatteris to Sutton – which would link to the continuing cycle lane to Ely

At the moment, there is a cycle lane from Ely to Sutton, which runs alongside the A142. This stops in Sutton, and does not continue on to Chatteris. Ely is one of the key towns we want to develop better connections to, along with Huntingdon. Therefore, we will increase the ease of cycling to Ely by creating an adjoining cycle route for the next section of the A142.

3) New cycle parking facilities in the centre of town

While crime is fairly low in Chatteris, 2% of the crimes reported in Chatteris in 2018 related to bicycle theft⁹, and reports of the theft of a bike will discourage people from leaving their bike in town. This in turn will discourage cycle commuting. We want to install secure cycle facilities in the town to give people the confidence to commute to work by bike.

Financial Case

We have estimated approximate costs for each of these interventions.

1) A cycle lane on the old course of the railway line joining Chatteris to Somersham

The Department for Transport document *Typical Costs of Cycling Interventions* gives a range of costs per km for resurfaced cycle routes. The closest example given is for the Leeds-Liverpool canal towpath between Kirkstall and Shipley. “Associated works included signage, repairs to the wall of the canal itself, and upgrade of barriers to improve access for pedestrians and cyclists whilst excluding vehicles and motorbikes.” The cost of this was estimated at £140,000 per km. This seems comparable to the work which would be needed to create a high quality bike lane here, although we wouldn’t need to make any equivalent repairs to canal walls – so we estimate £100,000 per km would be more accurate.

The distance along the course of the old railway between the two towns is 7.5km. This would give a total estimated cost of £750,000 for the route.

⁹ Metro Dynamics’ analysis of Cambridgeshire Constabulary data

2) A cycle lane connecting Chatteris to Sutton – which would link to the continuing cycle lane to Ely

Working on the same assumptions, the Chatteris to Sutton cycle route is also approximately 7.5km. Therefore, the estimated cost would again be £750,000. However, we want to work to understand if this cost can be brought down any further.

Management Case

The work would be led by Fenland District Council, working in partnership with the Combined Authority, to ensure the new routes are reflected in the new Local Transport Plan, and with Chatteris Town Council on the location of the new cycle parking facilities and promotion of the new routes. Liaison with Huntingdonshire District Council would also be necessary in relation to any future development of the Somersham route.

8. Provide better car and bike parking management

Strategic Case

One of the challenges facing our high street is facing is that it is often overly cluttered with cars. This makes the streets difficult for pedestrians to navigate, and creates a sense of “clutter”. It also causes problems for high street retailers when potential shoppers decide not to use the high street due to concerns about finding a place to park.

We also want to encourage people to, where possible, move away from their cars, and instead use more sustainable approaches to transport. Those who work in or around the town may be choosing not to cycle in due to concerns about the theft of bikes.

To tackle this problem we need to work with Fenland District Council to implement a stricter regime of parking monitoring (at the moment, parking is unregulated). An approach based on free usage for a set period of time followed by charging would encourage people to still use the town centre, but not to abandon their cars there, while heading off for hours on end. It would also mean using tickets where double yellow lines were being parked upon.

Financial Case

According to jobs website indeed.co.uk, the average salary of a parking enforcement officer is £10.98. The most cost effective way to run this would be to share resource between the four towns, with the officer adopting a varied pattern to ensure that people didn't learn, and work around the routine. On this basis, plus additional costs for travel between the towns, this would give an estimated cost of £25,000 a year. Between the towns, this would work out at £6,250 per town per year.

Management Case

This would be managed by Cambridgeshire County Council, as the statutory highways authority.

9. Create a community project funding pot

Strategic Case

One area that the Town Team identified as being a concern was the condition of some ornate street furniture, street lamps and the lack of some basic facilities for the public benefit, such as the availability of secure cycle racks. Many potential initiatives were identified as part of Chatteris Town Council's engagement with its residents and the creation of the Chatteris Community Plan – January 2018.

To ensure that many modest, but highly visible community projects can be delivered, it is recommended that a community project funding pot is created and used to either wholly fund or leverage in match-funded contributions towards projects that benefit the community of Chatteris.

Financial Case

It is recommended that a pot of £50,000 is created that can be administered by Chatteris Town Council against worthy projects that improve the appearance and visual amenity of the Town Centre area.

Management Case

This fund would be managed and administered by Chatteris Town Council.

Next steps

We have set out a vision for Chatteris to be **an aspirational community**, by showing which interventions can make a real difference to our town.

We now look forward to working constructively with the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA), and its Mayor, James Palmer, to implementing these ideas. This will require both direct support from the Combined Authority, and the resources needed to take these ideas to key government funds such as the Stronger Towns Fund as and when they come forward.

This work will be overseen by Fenland District Council, working in conjunction with the town team that was put together for this work.