

Good morning, I am Wendy Blythe Chair of the Federation of Cambridge Residents Associations. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share concerns from residents about this scheme.

The Federation of Cambridge Residents Associations (FeCRA) is a citywide grassroots civic organisation with close links to Cambridge villages and Cambridge interest groups. We recently hosted a well attended event at Great St Mary's at which the chair of the Cambridge Growth Company Peter Freeman spoke about his plans for making Cambridge a Happy City.

Many residents strongly object to the off-road section between Madingley Mulch and West Cambridge. While they agree that improving public transport should be a priority they say that they do not think that this proposal is the best use of taxpayers' money. They say:

This route does not make journey times to Cambridge much faster and it terminates in Grange Road. There is no clarity on how people would be able to get from there to major employment destinations or Cambridge's sixth form colleges, but it would inevitably involve further journeys through congested streets in the city centre, adding to congestion in the city centre.

It does not take into account current road usage data or evolving working and commuting patterns, especially the changes since Covid.

The off-highway route will destroy Coton Orchard, a county wildlife site, East Anglia's largest remaining ancient orchard, the eighth largest in the UK.

It will carve up the Cambridge greenbelt with restrictive covenants in favour of the National Trust and some of the UK's best farmland at a time when there is growing anxiety about the UK's food security.

It will ruin some of the best views and the setting of one of the UK's premier heritage cities. The city's beautiful green belt setting of farmland, water meadows and medieval villages is known and loved all over the world.

The scheme's heritage statement considers only the West Cambridge conservation area and individual local listed buildings. It does not consider Cambridge's strategic heritage significance even though this formed a key element of the basis of a High Court judgement in 2008 which refused consent for the development of the Coton green corridor because of the importance of the landscape for the setting of Cambridge.ⁱ

This scheme will spoil the city's West Cambridge heritage setting as well as urbanise the attractive rural and historic village of Coton.

There has been no quantitative assessment of the heritage impact of this scheme. Yet the Thames Landscape Strategy for the 'Arcadian' Thames, Weybridge, Hampton, Kew, a planning document established in 1994, written by the landscape architect Kim Wilkie, a member of Cambridge Ahead's high level strategic Cambridge landscape group, makes it clear that the heritage relationship between people and their landscape is significant.

A very recent heritage ecosystems impact assessment study by the University of York and University of Cambridge titled '*A Pilot study of East West Rail's preferred alignment Route E (Cambourne to Cambridge), South Cambridgeshire*' published in July 2025, suggests that integrating "heritage ecosystem perspectives" into planning decisions is crucial to address the transport project's negative impacts on local relationships with the environment.

The research funded by Cambridge University, sets out the importance of understanding and evaluating development impacts, drawing on the insights of local communities. The researchers argue that although environmental impact assessments are part of the planning process for large infrastructure projects they do not account for the cultural dimensions of affected landscapes. The Heritage Ecosystem Impact Assessment study argues that like transport, heritage and ecosystem perspectives need to be quantified and integrated into planning decisions to preserve local well-being and connectivity. There are choices to be made about well-being and heritage and cultural identity and wildlife and farming and food security.

Dr Dacia Viejo Rose, Director of the Cambridge Heritage Research Centre one of the two Principal Investigators (the other is Dr Tanja Hoffmann of York

University) said “the heritage of places is made up of an ecosystem of relationships built over time through practices, shared memories and familiar sights. These relationships are central to our feeling of belonging, of being at home. In the name of creating new connections this project will be severing many existing ones”. ⁱⁱ

The Researchers, who interviewed 80 Cambridgeshire residents, found that a community's lived experience of a landscape is just as significant as the technical aspects of assessing the impact of large infrastructure projects, and if this relationship is damaged or broken, it can have lasting consequences.

Their research tells a story about how people shape places, but how places and the species that live within them also shape people. But this is also a report about how rarely these critical relationships are given any attention or quantified in the context of development planning.

Compare this with the Thames Landscape Strategy a planning document which draws on those long standing heritage relationships to address flooding. ⁱⁱⁱ

Many residents say that the busway proposal has very little to do with improving public transport. It actually makes no sense in either financial or transport terms and the real reason they conclude for this destructive offhighway busway scheme is “land value uplift”. In other words to break up some of the UK’s best farmland and the heritage green belt setting of Cambridge, for development that only benefits the powerful owners of the green belt land in this area.

This was highlighted in the letter of complaint sent by NE Cambs MP Steve Barclay to the Auditor General in 2017 which FeCRA reproduced in full on our website in "Update May 2017" ^{iv}

Mr Barclay wrote: ‘The relationship between prominent local developers, and City Deal is opaque and open to abuse’ he added ‘developers, or their clients, own green belt land around Cambridge which has low value without planning permission. The developers have then lobbied the LEP and City Deal to fund transport improvements which increase the value of these sites. They have also lobbied the LEP to recommend their sites be designated as Enterprise Zones or Science Parks, as this then allows grants in excess of state aid rules as exemptions apply to both Enterprise Zones and to Innovation. Both the transport improvements, and loans or grants for new facilities, increase the viability and value of the housing on their site. This housing also benefits from

high prices in the nearby Cambridge market. Large scale housing meets a key Government objective, and benefits local councils through new homes bonus funding, satisfying key stakeholders.'

Mr Barclay said: 'There is nothing wrong with this approach if the investment decisions on transport links and approving schemes on green belt land are taken independently using clear criteria'. He added: 'Developers also influence the LEP and City Deal [now called the GCP] through organisations like Cambridge Ahead where the relationship is also close.'

Last week Mr Cameron from Landmark Chambers for the applicant referred to the valuable research done by Cambridge Ahead. However, the business group, whose former policy chair was Anglian Water's Regulations Director Alex Plant, has not modelled the impact of employment led housing growth on Cambridge, the UK's most water short city. Nor has it modelled the cost of dealing with all the sewage in the Cam chalk streams. Building 150,000 homes in Greater Cambridge AND doubling economic output is going to take a LOT more water and it will require doing something about the sewage in the Cam. But there is no plan for that currently. Government releases point to the proposed Fen Reservoir as a key solution to Cambridge's water scarcity. However, this is expected to meet only half of future demand, it will not provide enough water to 'supercharge' Cambridge.

At some point we have to decide what we are actually sacrificing for economic growth. Are we disenfranchising future communities over a possibility that potential investors might be put off investing in Cambridge if this busway doesn't get approved?

ⁱ <https://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWCA/Civ/2008/1151.html>

ⁱⁱ https://www.hgc.hosted.york.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/HEIA_FinalReport_Online.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.thames-landscape-strategy.org.uk/our-work-1/thames-landscape-strategy-document/>

^{iv} <https://www.fecra.org.uk/update-may-2017/>