

NEWS RELEASE

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Local Plan inspectors deliver preliminary conclusions for Cambridge and South Cambs

Government inspectors examining plans to deliver thousands of new jobs and homes in Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire have said that further work is needed to make sure they are sound.

Councillors have said that although it is unfortunate more work is needed on both Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire District Councils' Local Plans, they have welcomed being informed at this stage during the independent examination so that the work needed to be done can be carried out now and communities can be involved in making sure the best plans possible are delivered.

In a letter from Government inspectors, Laura Graham and Alan Wood, they have questioned whether the way the councils have assessed the number of new homes needed has taken account of market signals such as house prices and affordability, a requirement of new national planning guidance published after both councils had already worked with communities for over two years to prepare plans and were ready to submit them to Government.

Since the Local Plans were submitted last year, further changes to the Government's national planning policy have also been made for issues including affordable homes on smaller sites, housing standards and car parking and the inspectors have asked the councils to identify any changes that are now needed to both councils' plans.

The councils have also been asked by the inspectors to carry out more work on the testing of alternatives to the development strategy. This will include ensuring that alternative options of building extra homes on the edge of Cambridge have been considered in the same way as proposed allocations for additional homes at new towns and new villages – a strategy more people preferred during early public consultation.

In a letter to the two councils the inspectors have made it clear that their concerns do not mean that more green belt on the edge of Cambridge would need to be built on for the plans to be considered sound, but they have asked for clearer evidence to help them make an independent judgement.

Council planners have said that the implications of the news will now be assessed over the coming weeks so the specific work needed can be established and undertaken. Councillors are reassuring residents and businesses that they will continue to work with them on the plans and if extra consultation is needed to make sure the councils deliver the best plans for the Greater Cambridge area it will be carried out.

Cllr Robert Turner, South Cambridgeshire District Council's cabinet member for planning, said:

"Although it is unfortunate that further work is needed, we are very pleased that the inspectors have given this information at this stage in the examination. We've spent almost three years working with communities on how we should develop the area up until 2031 and by having the inspectors' letter now we can make sure we fully consider the best course of action and involve parishes, groups, business and local residents in the process. Some of the reassurances the inspectors have asked for relate to new planning policy that has come in since our Local Plans were being worked up and it is not unexpected that the inspectors have asked us to check our plans to make sure they take account of these. We have only just received the letter from the inspectors so it would be wrong to jump the gun and speculate the time it will take for us to work up the next steps. What is important is that we make sure we consider the next steps fully, get it right and deliver Local Plans that continue to build on our economic success story and the high quality of life local people enjoy here."

Cllr Kevin Blencowe, Cambridge City Council's Executive Councillor for Planning Policy and Transport, said: "We welcome the inspectors' preliminary views at this stage in the examination process, which provide a clear steer to help ensure sound Local Plans for the Greater Cambridge area are delivered. There are huge challenges in preparing Local Plans for growth in such a dynamic area and lots of other examinations carried out across the country have also been asked to carry out further work before they could be adopted. We are aware in some cases that Local Plans have been rejected at this stage in the process. We will continue to work constructively with key organisations, local groups and residents, as well as the inspectors, as part of moving the Local Plans forward towards adoption."

The submitted Local Plan for Cambridge included provision for 21,100 more jobs and 14,000 new homes. In South Cambridgeshire's submitted plan 22,000 new jobs and 19,000 new homes up until 2031 were being planned for.

ENDS

The letter sent to the Councils by the planning inspectors can be viewed by visiting www.scambs.gov.uk/local-plan-examination and <https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/local-plan-review-about-the-examination>

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