

Comment

Eastern promises – but what will be delivered?

September 2017

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority

Within his first few days in office, James Palmer, the elected mayor of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority published an ambitious '100 day plan' listing his immediate priorities and commitments. This included the commissioning of a new 'non-statutory' spatial plan as well as a commitment to launch a strategy to accelerate delivery of 100,000 new homes across the area.

As we come to the end of the Mayor's first five months in office, the Combined Authority has approved proposals for the preparation of the 'non-statutory' spatial plan and Turley considers how the work might influence strategic planning (in particular housing delivery) across the constituent authorities.



James Palmer (Image credit: The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority)



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The formal planning powers held by mayors and combined authorities across the country vary considerably. For Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, the devolution deal grants the Combined Authority powers over strategic planning and gives them the responsibility to prepare a non-statutory spatial plan to “act as a framework for planning across the Combined Authority area, and for future development of Local Plans”. However it also requires that “all planning authorities in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough commit to have adopted or published Local Plans by 2017 that reflect overall assessments of housing need”.

The table below lists the status of each of the constituent authorities’ Local Plans and their Objective Assessments of Need (OAN). With the exception of Fenland District Council, all constituent authorities have a relatively up-to-date OAN and are currently preparing Local Plans based on these, albeit for different plan periods.



Godmanchester and Huntingdon

Authority	Adopted Local Plan	Current status	Objective Assessment of Housing Need	Plan period for OAN
Cambridge City Council	Cambridge Local Plan 2006	Inspector’s report awaited	14,000	2011 - 2031
South Cambridgeshire	Core Strategy 2007	Inspector’s report awaited	19,500	2011 - 2031
East Cambridgeshire	East Cambridgeshire Local Plan 2015	Proposed draft Local Plan due October 2017	12,900	2014 - 2036
Fenland	Local Plan 2014	No review being undertaken	12,000	2011 - 2031
Huntingdonshire	Core Strategy 2009	New Local Plan being prepared	20,100	2011 - 2036
Peterborough	Core Strategy 2011	New Local Plan being prepared	24,525	2011 - 2036
Total:			103,025	

This therefore begs the question – if the devolution deal confirms that the non-statutory spatial plan “must not delay the production of Local Plans”, what influence can the plan have on spatial planning, and in particular housing delivery, across the area?

Wellcome Trust Conference Centre, Hinxton Hall, Cambridge





Cambridge Biomedical Campus, Phase 2

A report to the Combined Authority Board on 26 July 2017 provided further clarity on what role the non-statutory plan will play, confirming that it will be implemented in two phases. Phase 1 will set out the existing development strategy based on adopted and emerging Local Plans (to 2031/36) and will focus on ensuring delivery. Phase 2 will address growth beyond the current plan periods and will include the preparation of evidence base documents. It will also potentially identify strategic development locations and supporting infrastructure.

A high-level programme for the delivery of these two phases has been established which confirms the intention for the preparation of the Phase 1 document by February 2018, with the main work on Phase 2 taking place from February to December 2018. Considering the timescales which have been proposed, it would appear that the Phase 1 document will act as more of an 'interim' non-statutory plan whilst the more detailed work is undertaken in relation to Phase 2.

The exact format and status of each of the two phases of work is still relatively unclear. In order to ensure an effective Phase 1 document, we are therefore suggesting that three key issues be addressed during the preparation of the plan.



Christ's Lane, Cambridge

Firstly, the most important step in the early stages of preparing the plan will be to confirm what weight the non-statutory plan carries, how it will influence the planning process, and how the planning powers of the Combined Authority will be exerted.

Secondly, whilst Phase 1 will not be supported by its own evidence base, the plan should be based on a clear understanding of the housing market areas and housing delivery requirements for each authority. The preparation of a memorandum of understanding between the authorities would assist in providing clarity and ensuring all councils are in agreement over the total OAN for the area over a set plan period.

Finally, the Mayor has committed to establishing a Land Commission. Mechanisms should be established to ensure that the findings and recommendations of the Land Commission are implemented where appropriate.

We eagerly await the preparation of the non-statutory plan and hope that the purpose and status of the Phase 1 plan becomes clearer in due course. We look forward to engaging with this process from our newly-established Cambridge office.

