

Report on All Stakeholder Inception Meeting for the Growing Fenland project

Introduction

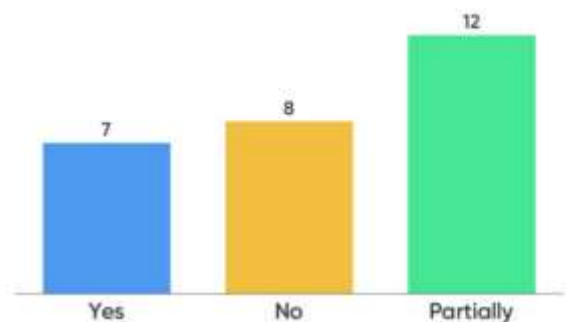
'Growing Fenland' is the overarching name for the project to create four market town 'masterplans' for the market towns of the Fenland District: Chatteris, March, Whittlesey, and Wisbech. This work will be carried out over the next six months, aiming to finalise a set of reports at the end of March. These will be put together as a prospectus, and used to bid for funding from the Combined Authority. On the 9th October stakeholders from each of the Market Towns gathered in Fenland Hall, March, to discuss the work, and think about what their key questions are for this work to answer. The day was facilitated by Metro Dynamics, who are advising the work, and working with stakeholders to produce the reports. Throughout the day, Mentimeter, an online survey platform, was used to gather delegates' views on the subject matter.

Key Context – The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Independent Economic Review (CPIER)

The CPIER was published in September 2018. The Commission was chaired by Dame Kate Barker, a leading economist, and set out fourteen key recommendations, and thirteen subsidiary recommendations. The final report can be found at www.cpier.org.uk/final-report/. At the start of the day, there were varied levels of awareness about the CPIER, with many saying they were 'partially' aware of its findings.

Survey Response about the CPIER at the start of the day

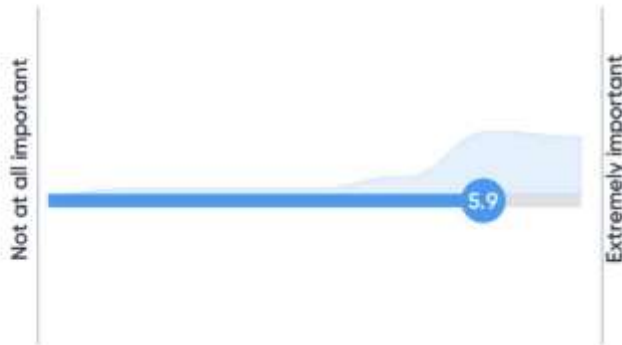
Are you aware of what the CPIER's recommendations are saying?



Mike Emmerich (Metro Dynamics) went on to outline some of what these key findings were, noting the parallels the review draws between Cambridgeshire and Peterborough and the UK as a whole. There are recommendations about housing, the need for infrastructure upgrades (whilst conscious

Survey Response about the CPIER (7-point scale)

Do you feel the CPIER is important for these market towns?



that Cambridge is likely to be the Combined Authority’s focus) and the need for growth which includes local people. There is also a significant focus on many of the key issues which hold Fenland District back such as on educational outcomes and health – indeed the CPIER recommends that an Opportunity Area for health (including mental health) is created for the North of the county. At the end of the day, most people felt they could see the relevance of the CPIER for the area.

Stakeholder perceptions of opportunities and challenges

In the opening session there was an opportunity to express what the key opportunities and challenges were for these towns, using the survey tool to generate ‘word clouds’. These were very revealing:

Responses to the question: “What are the biggest **opportunities** for these towns?”. Bigger words were chosen more frequently by respondents.



Housing is clearly seen as a big area of opportunity, and it will need to be explored what exactly these opportunities are. Growth is a big opportunity, and as noted by the CPIER, this has been higher in the district recently. Capitalising on this growth, and ensuring it is sustainable and inclusive, will be one of the key topics for these masterplans. Tourism is noted as an opportunity, and one where much more

- The potential for political instability beyond the district arising from Brexit
- The changing nature of the UK's relationship with the EU
- Overcoming apathy and creating the space for real debate in an era of post truth politics
- The need to have a real debate about priorities within the market towns. While money needs to target problems, a degree of balance is needed across the towns too
- Divisions are a problematic issue in the towns: rich and poor, educated and less educated, healthy and less healthy.
- The role of parochialism in holding the place back – focussing on small issues rather than important ones.
- The difficulty in communicating political and economic messages.
- The lack of synchronisation between (short term) political cycles and (long term) economic cycles.
- There may be a need to rebuild consensus in the community post Brexit
- There is a perception, widely felt, that there is the need to reduce bureaucracy and increase the pace of change/delivery.

Key Questions

- Is there really fairness in the distribution of resources between the market towns?
- Can the area start to argue for a reversal of funding cuts to enable services to be improved?
- Can integration between different communities be encouraged and delivered?
- Some communities don't have good enough English. Can this be changed?
- Could businesses play a bigger role in changing the nature of the debate about immigration and the role migrants play?
- Could ways be found to enable migrants to play a greater role in the day-to-day life of the towns where they live?
- Can town traditions be made more open to migrant communities?
- Lots of people don't want change. Can mindsets be changed in the market towns with people expecting and contributing more?
- Can debate be unblocked and passivity challenged?
- Do we really know what people want and why people do what they do? Are we prepared to challenge our assumptions?
- Can we find ways of not being limited by the views of people who are prepared to talk – how can we get to the voiceless? Could stores: Jack's, Wetherspoons, Aldi and B&M play a role?
- Can the Fens and the market towns within them really find their voices and shout more loudly?
- Can a culture of leadership: political, business and community be created and if so how?
- Is there really a viable vision for the Fenland market towns? Is/are there real and resonant identities that people can really get behind?
- Can mediocrity be banished?
- Can the commercial acumen be put in place to help the towns accelerate their delivery?
- Can more be done to help young people to engage more with civic life including politics? Is there a role for formal education too – such as teaching A level politics?
- Can we tackle the poor levels of literacy in the area?

Economic

Key issues

- Slowdown in productivity and currently stagnant wages
- A need for inclusive growth and increasing awareness of the number of people 'left behind'
- Change in the nature of work – more informal, part-time work and 'portfolio' careers
- Many unskilled jobs and lack of high skilled high paid work
- Automation continuing to replace low-skilled work
- Brexit, especially the anticipated shortage of European labour (for agriculture and related low-skilled sectors)
- Industrial mobility – both companies and employees can relocate more easily than before

Key Questions

- How to attract and keep young workers? Particularly skilled workers.
- Also, how can we support low/unskilled workers? These jobs are still essential, and with Brexit labour shortages are a serious concern.
- How can we improve the education system to improve skills outcomes and connect people to jobs? How can we connect employers to young people in schools, e.g. through apprenticeships?
- How can we create a career ladder for people who work here, and help them develop more flexible skillsets that allow for more movement/progression in the labour market? How can we link skills provision to local job opportunities and skills gaps? What would a local level careers service look like?
- How can we stimulate entrepreneurship among residents and make this an attractive option/career path?
- How can we attract higher value businesses with good employment practices? What sort of land provision (offices etc.) would this require? Equally, how can we improve perceptions of low value/unskilled jobs that remain essential to our economy (especially agriculture)?
- How can we take advantage of the qualifications of Eastern European residents, which are generally high?
- How can we capitalise on the growth (and overheating) of Cambridge and Peterborough? How can we overcome the perceived divide between Fenland and more successful parts of the county? How can we use transport investment to do this? How could we improve public transport provision? E.g. to Peterborough and the new university.
- How can we use our heritage to stimulate tourism and the local economy?
- How can we draw more people into the area who have money to spend?

Social

Key issues

- Demographic changes – ageing population, later retirement ages, rise of Generation Z
- Rising bills for health and social care and the need to find solutions
- Declining home ownership, and increase in rental, and trends away from 'ownership' towards 'experience'

- Poor housing conditions, especially in private rented sector, affecting people's wellbeing
- Eastern European communities are here to stay – lack of integration
- Lack of aspiration and poor attitudes to work
- Transport and connectivity

Key Questions

- How do we create a sufficiently attractive cultural offer to make young educated people want to live in Fenland?
- How can we raise overall aspirations to improve (social as well as economic) outcomes for our residents?
- How can we encourage parents to raise children's aspirations?
- How can we create role models in schools to raise children's aspirations?
- How can we foster welcoming attitudes towards immigrants among British residents and promote integration among recent arrivals from Europe?
- How can we stimulate community creation to engender greater self-reliance given our ageing population? How can we build social connections to reduce the strain on care costs?
- How can we use the resources of the older population (i.e. time/expertise in community projects)?
- What sort of housing is suitable for older residents, and how can we develop more of it?
- How can we improve affordability of housing (reduce ratio between house prices and earnings)? How can we improve housing conditions and ensure we have the correct tenure mix? How can we best use low land values to achieve these aims?
- How can we capitalise on our heritage? I.e. stimulating pride in our area.
- How can we improve health outcomes overall?

Technological

Key issues

- Fast and increasing pace of technological change, beyond the control of local actors
- Though broadband is improving, it's still inconsistent and at times unreliable – the same could be said for mobile signal
- Impact of online shopping on local retail
- Social media is ever more widespread, but causes tensions
- Artificial intelligence will transform the jobs market

Key Questions

- How can we maximise the upsides of technology and minimise the downsides?
- How can we help those who are less able to engage with technology, either for reasons of being unable to afford necessary hardware, or lack of skills (a particularly acute issue for the elderly)?
- How do we help the high streets move from a place people *need* to go to (which they no longer do) to one they *want* to go to?
- How can we create a 'positive digital community'?

- How do we reskill people to work in new industries and sectors, such as additive manufacturing and modular housing?
- How can we seize the opportunity to attract small companies who carry out all their business online, and only require good mobile signal and broadband to operate?
- How can we use technology to better monitor people's health?
- How can we engage with research carried out in and around Cambridge to transform our industries?

Legal (and Regulatory)

Key issues

- The impact of Britain's changing relationship with the European Union
- The multi-layered governance of the area, with four layers of local government
- Devolution. The possibility of more power being devolved to the locality
- Business regulation: there seems to be a growing consensus that business needs to play a different role.
- Housing standards, regulation and the need to ensure a decent standard of all parts of the community
- Planning powers and the need for local decision-making
- Bus regulation and the opportunity to improve local services.

Key Questions

- Do the farmers understand what the withdrawal from CAP means? Does anyone?
- Could the idea of a health entitlement play a role in improving standards?
- Would devolution of health and social care enable the area to manage these issues more effectively?
- Could there be bolder programmes of both health education and public service reforms to really bring together the resources spent on people to make them work more effectively?
- Could a change in regulations be made to allow businesses investing at a high level in training to pay less Business Rates in return?
- Could there be a review of the role of charity shops and whether they are forcing other businesses out as a result of their business rate subsidies?
- Can the Mayor accelerate the plans for bus franchising?
- The problem for buses may be regulatory but it is also financial – can more resource be found for public transport? And can more cost effective mechanisms such as community transport be investigated?
- Can we improve the image of buses if all of this happens? Most people have simply given up!
- Could a bus entitlement be considered?
- Can more social housing be built as there is a shortage?
- Is more regulation of housing, particularly HMOs, needed or is it just a matter of enforcing existing regulations better?
- How can planning be simplified so that appropriate development can happen more quickly?

- Can we have more devolution of powers and resources and could new delivery vehicles such as a Fenland Development Corporation be put in place?
- If the existing system can't deliver quickly, is there a case for removing a layer of local government?

Environmental

Key issues

- Flood risk, and the way that classifications of flood risk hinder development
- Climate change will have a large impact on industries, especially agriculture
- Despite the proximity of the countryside, many residents do not engage with it
- New types of housing and office space, growth of 'co-working' and 'co-living'
- Focus on localism and 'provenance' over mass production
- Energy revolution, smart grids, and increasing competitiveness of renewable energy


Key Questions

- How can we develop more sophisticated approaches to managing flood risk which do not preclude development?
- How do we help farmers to have the technology they need and to produce the right products which will ensure sustainability of the sector in an uncertain climate future?
- How can we better brand our food to build more value into agriculture?
- How can we help people engage with the countryside? What role might there be for country parks, and new paths and bike lanes?
- How can we use the public realm to improve cohesion in our communities?
- How can we develop our sustainability image, building on strengths in renewable energy production?
- How can we develop better energy storage to increase the proportion of our energy coming from renewables?
- How can we develop the facilities required to treat waste (and generate energy from it) when this is often unpopular with local residents?

Next Steps

Metro Dynamics will now work intensively with each market town, to replicate this analysis in their places (but with greater specificity) and discuss possible interventions. In each town there will be a period of stakeholder consultation with residents and other key stakeholders. Part way through the work in each town we will publish an interim report, showing the 'where we are now' and 'where we want to get to' positions, but not yet what actions should be taken. Then at the end of the work the towns we will publish a final report with the key strategic actions, and business cases for investment from the Combined Authority. The outline programme for this work is shown below:

GROWING FENLAND

 = key milestone

