



Cambridge Draft Local Plan 2014

Views of the Friends of Cherry Hinton Brook (FCHB) Committee on *Policy 15: South of Coldham's Lane Area of Major Change*

September 2013

Introduction

Friends of Cherry Hinton Brook (FCHB) is a group of mainly local residents who banded together in June 2009, initially triggered by the need to clear the rubbish from the Brook and its environs, particularly between Cherry Hinton Hall and Sainsbury's. FCHB members are daily users of the route and have become its "eyes and ears", reporting potential pollution, fly tipping, wildlife in distress and unusual wildlife sightings. We work closely with other groups interested in the Brook and surrounding open spaces, including the Wildlife Trust, Friends of Cherry Hinton Hall and Cambridge City Council.

Our aims are to:

- Maintain the appearance of the Brook, for example, by removing litter
- Raise public awareness about the importance of the brook for wildlife
- Improve the Brook as a home for wildlife
- Observe and monitor the wildlife of the Brook and surrounding area
- Work with other organisations with similar interests

We also campaign for the protection of the Green Corridor which runs from the Gog Magog Hills to the Cam, the backbone of which is the Brook. The lakes and surrounding open spaces, which are the focus of interest for *Policy 15: South of Coldham's Lane Area of Major Change*, are a vital component of this blue-green Corridor and this document lays out our views on this area. It builds on a broader statement we prepared in response to the Issues and Options Report and which can be found on our website:

<http://www.friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk>

Summary of FCHB views

- We are strongly in favour of the proposal that any changes should be subject to the production of a master plan for the area, and that the objectives of this should be put out for public consultation prior to preparing the plan, and that the subsequent proposed plan is then also put out for consultation
- We support the proposal for establishment of an urban country park, provided that this respects wildlife and that access and security issues are fully addressed in the master and management plans

- Given that well over 50% of this area is made up of sites of local nature conservation interest (City Wildlife Sites¹), as identified on the policies map (CambridgeDraftSubmissionPoliciesMap-July 2013), Policy 69 should be strictly adhered to. This would mean that the Wildlife Trust and City Council Wildlife Officer should be consulted at the beginning of any planning for the area, to ensure that any development proposed and undertaken “will not have an adverse impact on, or lead to the loss of, part or all of” the identified sites of local nature conservation interest, as specified in the Policy 69.
- As implied in the draft local plan, housing development is inappropriate on any of the open spaces in this area. FCHB considers that any commercial development should be confined to the northern part of the area of major change, north of the railway line.

This document covers FCHB’s views on the following issues in more detail:

- Boundaries of the area of the urban country park
- Objectives and master plan for the Area of Major Change
- Key Issues for consideration:
 1. Wildlife and the natural environment
 2. Public access
 3. Recreational use
 4. Long-term maintenance and management.
- Natural England’s Country Park Accreditation Scheme (Annex 1)

¹ City Wildlife Sites: 11 Cherry Hinton Brook; 17 Coldham’s Lane Old Landfill Site; 18 CU Officer Training Corps Pit; 40 Norman Cement Pits; and part of 48 The Spinney and Hayster Open Space.

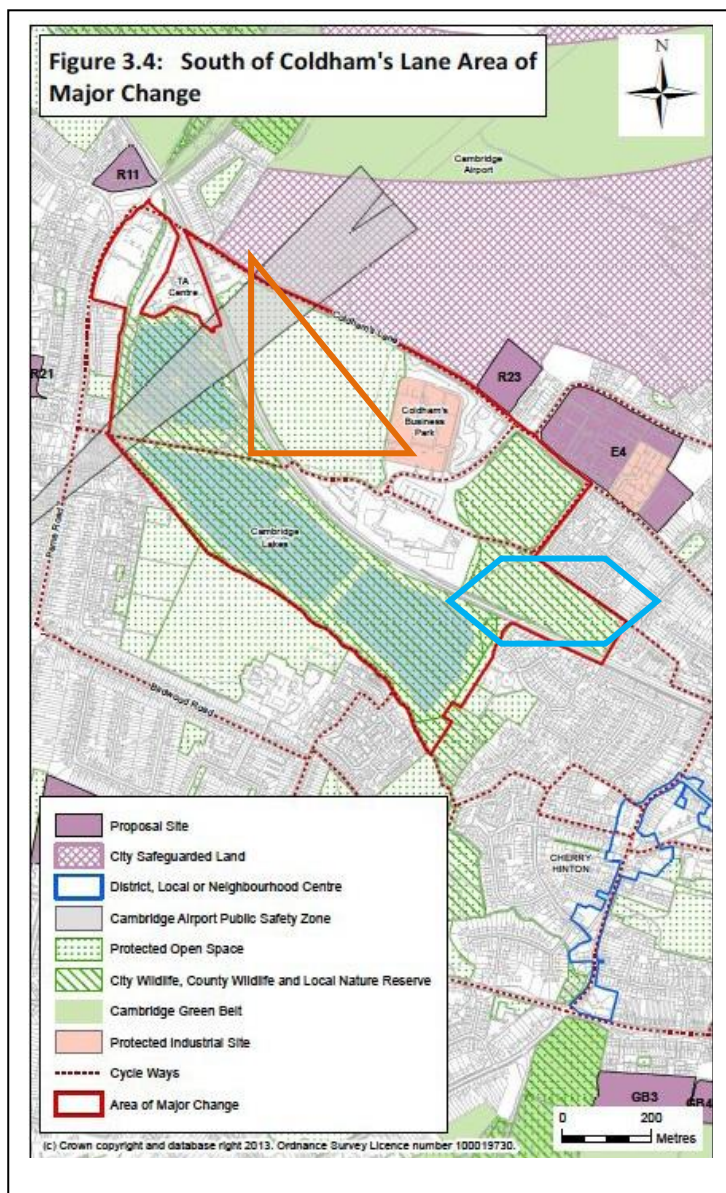
Boundaries of the area for an urban country park

The Area of Major Change that is south of Coldham's Lane and which is the subject of Policy 15 is delineated in red in the map below (taken from the consultation document). The consultation document defines two main parts to the area:

- Area to the north of the railway line which will allow for appropriate commercial uses on the land fill sites and some outdoor recreational use;
- Area to the south of the railway line, including the lakes which will provide for primarily passive outdoor recreation opportunities in the form of the new urban country park.

We agree with the proposal for the second area (b). We also support the proposal that the northern part of the site (i.e. to the north of the railway line) could also contribute to the creation of the new urban country park. The FCHB committee thinks that within the

northern part of the site:



- The area south of the Tins cycle path and east of the David Lloyd Gym should be considered for inclusion in the new country park, particularly as this area (highlighted in turquoise) is identified as both protected open space and a future Local Nature Reserve (see Policies map). In line with Policy 69, this area should be managed to restore natural habitats but could also be developed to allow for vehicle access and parking, as well as any infrastructure that might be needed for the urban country park.
- The area of protected open space to the west of Coldham's Business Park (indicated on the map by the brown triangle) should also be considered for inclusion in order to preserve it as an open space (see Policies map). This area might nevertheless be appropriate for the less passive recreational activities, such as BMX bikes.

We consider that the northern part of the site if developed, even as such in the plan for activities such as storage (in order to free up other parts of the City for housing), should nevertheless be maintained as far as possible as open space in order that it can continue to contribute to the green corridor. It should be noted that the northern part of the site includes a City Wildlife Site (no 17, Coldham's Lane Old Landfill Site, and currently seriously damaged) and that such areas of local nature conservation importance are addressed through Policy 69 of the draft local plan.

Objectives and Master plan for the Area of Major Change

We agree that the master plan for the area should set out the principal uses of the area, and address the following as specified in the consultation document:

- "The quantum of development and extent of developable land;
- Approach to the built form, circulation and movement, public access and landscape improvements;
- Future management and funding arrangements".

We also agree that the master plan and an assessment of transport issues must be developed **before** any planning application is submitted.

FCHB would like to make the following additional recommendations in relation to the master plan:

- The objectives of the master plan should be put out for consultation before the plan itself is developed.
- The concept of an "urban country park" should be more clearly defined; there is no formal definition for such a concept, although "Country Parks" are defined entities having been established as a result of the 1968 Countryside Act. It is assumed at present that the thinking is to see the development of a "country park".
- The "essential" and "desirable" criteria for a country park, that have been identified by Natural England and that are requirements for sites to be accredited as country parks by Natural England (see Annex 1), should be considered in the development of the master plan.
- A study of Milton County Park (<http://www.miltoncountypark.org/>) should be undertaken to determine what can be learnt from this initiative that could be applied to the Policy 15 Area of Major Change.
- The land south of the railway and of the Tins path is unsuitable for either residential or commercial development due to its status as contaminated closed landfill and its categorisation as a city wildlife site, and any development should be subject to the measures laid out in Policy 69 of the Cambridge Draft Local Plan.

Key Issues for consideration

In considering the development of an urban country park, the FCHB Committee believes that four issues must be addressed:

1. wildlife and the natural environment;
2. public access;
3. recreational use; and
4. long-term maintenance and management.

1. Wildlife and the natural environment

The lakes were included in the 2006 Cambridge City Council Nature Conservation Strategy as one of a number of potential new Local Nature Reserves to be designated by 2016, indicating the acknowledged importance of these bodies and the adjacent brook and open spaces. Policy 70 of the current consultation document makes reference to the need to protect priority species and habitat and Policy 69 proposes the approach to be taken if development is to be considered within areas of local nature conservation importance.

We strongly agree with condition (g) on Policy 15 which stresses the need to ensure local nature conservation but we would go further in stressing that prevention of damage to existing habitats is greatly to be preferred to mitigation after the fact (e.g., by providing "substitute" areas or replanting after clearance).

The three lakes provide a prime habitat for waterfowl. This large body of water is visible from a distance making it ideal for birds to use it as a stopover: tufted ducks over-winter there; terns, great crested grebes and other birds use it year round; migrant song birds and warblers use or nest in the surrounding vegetation. Sparrow hawks nest in the taller trees along Burnside and the cuckoo generally passes through in early summer. The land around the lakes and in the landfill area has small patches of chalk grassland with distinctive plants and flowers. Bats are seen over the lake.

The lakes and brook are tightly linked, with some wildlife dependent on both habitats, such as kingfishers which feed in one and nest in the other. Chalk streams (a priority habitat under the European Habitats Directive and in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan), of which Cherry Hinton Brook is one, are a globally threatened and rare habitat, with only about 200 left in the world, of which 50-60 are in England. The brook supports a good range of stream and streamside fauna and flora: kingfishers, rails, coots, moorhens, water voles (a UK Biodiversity Action Plan priority species), chubb, sticklebacks and other fish. It also provides a critical breeding habitat for a large population of toads, frogs and newts that make use of it each year, now helped by the low "toad kerbs" that have been installed along Burnside with the support of FCHB. The Wildlife Trust is working with FCHB to raise funds to restore the brook and its wildlife diversity by improving flow, removing silt and creating better fish habitat, and by creating open spaces along the banks to let more light in.

The FCHB Committee considers that, in the development of the urban country park:

- Existing policies on wildlife must be maintained and reinforced where necessary.
- Recreation must be compatible with the wildlife of the area, and care must be taken as some locations are very sensitive; there may be some areas with species and habitats that may need protection.
- Wildlife experts, particularly the City Wildlife officer and Wildlife Trust, must play a key role in the development of the urban country park and in the meantime should

always be consulted when any proposals are put forward for activities that might affect wildlife e.g. through noise, damage to vegetation, alteration to habitat, or other disturbance. We are concerned that this was not done prior to the recent clearing of land north and south of the railway.

- Owners of existing facilities in that area should be encouraged to enhance the landscaping under their control to be more wildlife-friendly, such as by the planting of wildlife gardens or wildflower meadows.

2. Public access

An urban country park would greatly increase car, cycle and pedestrian traffic to this whole area and the question of access will need to be a key aspect of the master plan, as identified in Policy 15. Access routes to the south are extremely limited (Burnside is a very narrow street and also a cul-de-sac with extremely limited parking; Snakey Path is a very narrow pedestrian and cycle path) and unlikely to cope with increased traffic.

Any increase in access must take into account the interests of local residents, and must be done in such a way as to preserve the function of the area as a wildlife corridor. We strongly believe that parts of the lake shore should be relatively hard to access, in order to preserve refuges of undisturbed wildlife habitat. The urban country park should not be promoted as a large-scale "destination" but primarily as resource for Romsey Town and the adjacent parts of the City which have the lowest amount of public green space available. We therefore support the statement in Policy 15 which proposes that the urban country park would be aimed at serving "the east of the city".

Furthermore, the FCHB Committee proposes that:

Car access to the urban country park:

- This should be **only** from Coldhams Lane on the north side of the railway line. Routes to consider would be: a) the road into the Business Park which leads into a public car park adjacent to David Lloyd Gym and Holiday Inn and b) Catherine Elliot Way (cul de sac running south from Coldham's Lane).
- There should be no motor vehicle access from Brookside and Burnside, given the narrow road and parking limitations, other than for emergency vehicles and for Cherry Hinton Angling Club members, both of which could use the gate at the far end of Burnside.

Cycle and pedestrian access to the urban country park

- Pedestrian and cyclist safety at the junction of Brookfields and Perne Road should continue to be improved, to make the entrance to this open space more attractive and in keeping with the concept of the blue-green corridor.
- A pedestrian and cycle path could be created from the Sainsbury's end of Coldhams Lane across the land fill area to the north of the railway line, to the Business Park/end of Tins Path. This would reduce traffic on Snakey Path and provide a much safer alternative for cyclists to using Coldhams Lane. The existing railway bridge will

need improvement as the blind corners on both sides of the bridge are dangerous for both cyclists and pedestrians.

- Cycle racks should be installed at appropriate entry points.
- Cycle paths providing access to the urban country park should be made safe in terms of surfacing, light and adequate width.

General access issues

- There should be no access to the urban country park from The Spinney School, Daws Lane and Blacklands Allotments, given the need to maintain a quiet, secure environment around the school, and the past history of anti-social behaviour in this area.
- Access points to the lakes themselves should be limited and the locations discussed with all those with interests the area.
- Sainsbury's should be involved in discussions on access to the urban country park and asked to help to improve and maintain the part of the footpath that runs through their car park and alongside the store.
- Consideration may need to be given to a new bridge over the railway to provide access to the southern lake from the northern part of the urban country park.

3. Recreational use

Since it is essential that recreation activities are sympathetic to wildlife needs in the area, the Council's Conservation Officer and Wildlife Trusts should be closely involved in planning of such activities.

Passive recreational activities

FCHB considers that the following passive recreational activities would be acceptable in the urban country park, including in the lakes and immediately surrounding land, provided they are appropriately managed:

- Walking – wheel chair access to be provided (e.g. some gravel or board walk paths in appropriate areas).
- Bird watching (RSPB) and other quiet enjoyment of the natural history of the area.
- Education: nature trails that local schools could use, industrial history trail with information panels etc. This area has a rich past in coprolite and chalk quarrying and was the industrial fringe of Cambridge in days gone by.
- Dog walking; consideration should be given to providing areas where dogs can be safely allowed off the leash; dog bins and notices to be installed.
- Swimming, providing this is restricted to the concept of “wild” swimming (i.e. swimming for pleasure in natural waters such as rivers and lakes) rather than sport or organised leisure swimming, in keeping with the natural surroundings and wildlife focus of the area, and that it is restricted to defined zone(s). The south-east lake has been used for swimming for many years but this has been controversial and has entailed trespass and safety issues. “Wild” swimming in part of the lakes might well be compatible with the other activities planned. Safety equipment would be needed, and modest wooden platforms only to enter the water could be considered

(ladders from the cliffs would not be safe or environmentally sound). Only a few areas of the lakes are suitable for swimming (in terms of access from the bank, depth of the lakes and safety in general), notably the south east bank of the lake at the Cherry Hinton end. The northernmost lake, currently used by the TA would be most suitable for swimming as it already has a jetty and facilities for keeping a safety boat there. Experiences in the development of swimming arrangements at Histon (Chivers Lake) and at Milton Country Park should be studied when the master plan is being developed. Whichever areas are considered ultimately to be most suitable for swimming should be zoned as such and this activity should not be allowed to expand to other areas.

- Angling: the Cherry Hinton and District Angling Club should be able to continue its activities, as the club's current activities and management of the area help to preserve the wildlife and peaceful nature of the area. Most anglers use the main central lake, although a smaller number use the southern lake. Angling should be allowed to continue in those parts of the lake that are currently used for this activity. Anglers should also be able to keep their current shed and facilities by the Burnside gate. In developing the master plan, consultation should be held about which are the most suitable areas for fishing, and which activities can be run in parallel with angling (walking, bird watching etc are considered compatible with angling in many locations).
- Picnic spots, sitting areas and a refreshment area, if appropriately sited and with litter bins etc, could be a compatible use of part of the area, particularly in the areas north of the lakes; in the immediate environs, careful consideration would be needed and probable restriction to the south-east lake.

Active recreational use

FCHB's view is that any recreational activities requiring facilities or generating significant noise or disturbance should be confined to the northern part of the area, partly because of the limited land area south of the railway, and partly to ensure that the nature conservation value of the lakes and land south of the railway is maintained. Organised sporting activity could be encouraged, but should be restricted to the quarry land fill area to the north of the railway, with access from Coldham's Lane and the Business Park, to minimise disturbance to wildlife and residential areas.

The land east of Norman Way Business Park is a City Wildlife Site and contributes to the green corridor. Consideration should therefore be given to retaining part or all of this as open space with public access, and integrating it into the proposed urban country park. It could however be developed in such way as to maintain the wildlife interest of the area, but also to provide facilities for the urban country park and various recreational activities. This would fit well with, and provide added value to, two of the operations in the Business Park: the gym and the hotel.

In terms of specific activities:

- BMX bikes are a popular activity but their use should be limited to an appropriate area to the north of the railway and this should not spill into other parts more

sensitive locations. Five-a-side football and possibly tennis courts would be appropriate, again to the north of the railway.

- Motorised boats of any form (other than to address emergencies), and motorised sports of any kind, are inappropriate for a country park and should not be considered, from the point of view of the wildlife, local residents and other recreational activities currently underway or planned in the area.
- Permanently stationed boats are probably not appropriate, with the possible exception of the TA lake, although a boat would need to be available for emergency situations and for maintenance.
- The use of non-motorised forms of boating would need to be considered very carefully; this activity might be compatible, but it would need a thorough investigation before being considered permissible.
- Seaside themed attractions, such as a beach and donkey rides, are not considered appropriate as these would potentially destroy the peace and tranquillity of the site, where nature and wildlife, and the enjoyment of local people are considered priorities.
- The creation of an artificial beach, with the implication of imported sand, is not considered to be appropriate to a lakeside bathing place and would have implications for the habitats of lakeside fauna and flora.
- Cambridge diving clubs (e.g. BSAC) may be interested in using the lakes, but the health and safety issues associated with diving means that a detailed feasibility study would need to be undertaken. If diving were to be considered appropriate, it should be managed to ensure that the wildlife both around and within the lakes is not disturbed.
- Limited moored floating structures within the lakes could be considered but their purpose (for swimmers; bird roosting areas etc), location and construction will need careful assessment.
- Recreational activities should be restricted to day light hours only (with the exception of the current occasional night fishing by anglers); no artificial lighting to be installed within the lakes area as this would cause severe disturbance to wildlife.
- Kiosks, ice cream vans, and commercial outlets should be based on the north side of the lakes only.

4. Long term maintenance and management

Ownership

The mixed ownership of the lakes and surrounding land will make the urban country park potentially difficult to plan and manage. We therefore encourage the council to support any moves towards unified ownership, particularly public local ownership and management, perhaps in conjunction with some kind of trust-based arrangement which would guarantee appropriate use of the area in the long term.

Management

It is essential that there is local involvement in management planning and decision making, including all those stakeholders with an interest in the area. Options for long-term management of the urban country park will need to be carefully considered and will vary according to ownership, use and physical characteristics. Models that could be studied and

that might provide indications of the way forward include: Milton Country Park; Grantchester Meadows and other public spaces along the upper Cam which are used for swimming; and Histon lake which has swimming access for triathlon training.

Issues that will need to be considered are:

- Safety – the depth of the lakes (and possible contamination from rubbish) means that safety will be a major consideration.
- Reduction and prevention of anti-social behaviour – the area is and has been subject to a variety of anti-social behaviours. Appropriate long-term measures will need to be put in place to mitigate against unsocial behaviour and to prevent access to those intending to use the lakes and surrounding areas for activities that would disrupt the enjoyment of others or damage the environment.
- Litter – many parts of the area are subject to both littering and dumping. FCHB carries out two clean-ups each year which removes large quantities of debris from the brook. Individual members remove litter on a regular basis between the clean-ups and report dumping of large items to the City Council for removal. Increased public access will help to draw attention to the problem of littering and dumping but also may potentially result in an increase. Appropriate bins and signage would need to be provided. An important issue to address will be the role of Sainsbury's in preventing rubbish from reaching the brook and public areas, given that the public footpath through Sainsbury's will be one important access to the Opportunity area.
- Noise – sound carries easily over water and is magnified. It will therefore be important that measures are in place to ensure that noise levels associated with increased use of the area do not become a problem for residents, hotel users, business people etc.
- High likelihood of reduction in safety and trespass issues – public access would provide more "eyes on the ground" (from dog walkers, recreational walkers, bird and wildlife watchers and cyclists) and this would make the lakes safer and easier to police.

We believe that problems of litter and noise associated with trespassing will be reduced when the lakes are publicly accessible. Any car parking area (which should be confined to the north of the lakes) should be locked at night. At Milton Country Park this appears to have been sufficient to avoid problems there.

Annex 1. Information about Country Parks extracted from <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/enjoying/places/countryparks/>

There are over 400 sites called Country Parks in England. All provide a wide range of opportunities for recreation, health and education and improve the quality of life for their local communities. Natural England recognises country parks as significant places that contribute to England's accessible natural green space. However, not all sites calling themselves country parks currently deliver all the core facilities and services expected of them both as originally set out in the 1968 Countryside Act (which originally established



country parks) and as necessary for the role they play today. Natural England has therefore updated the criteria for core facilities and services established in 1968 and in 2009 it set up the Country Parks Accreditation Scheme. This aims to identify and recognise those sites that actually do deliver the core facilities and services expected of Country Parks.

The Accreditation Scheme has 15 essential criteria and a number of desirable criteria as follows:

Essential criteria:

1. At least 10 hectares in size
2. Must have an identifiable boundary
3. Readily accessible to the population which it is intended to serve
4. Free entry
5. Site access plan must be in place and its development was preceded by an access audit, and that it addresses the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act to ensure facilities provided are inclusive and accessible
6. Must predominantly consist of natural or semi-natural landscape
7. Less than 5% total area of buildings
8. Easily followed paths and cycleways (e.g. marked and or with a leaflet)
9. Toilets on site or within 2 mins walking distance
10. Opportunities for the local community to have an influence over the management and development of the site
11. Daily staff presence
12. Up to date Management plan
13. Available for public and educational events
14. Clear entrance signage
15. Information about where visitors can go and what they can do

Examples of Desirable criteria:

1. Green transport plan or policy for the site
2. Additional facilities for less able visitors (e.g. easy going trails, accessible seats etc)
3. Evidence of progress towards the next level of equality standards or equivalent level of delivery
4. Management and promotion of the site's biodiversity, geodiversity and historical environment
5. Outdoor recreation facilities

6. Promoted self-guided health promoting facilities
7. Visitor centre
8. Play facilities
9. Catering provision
10. Cycle trails
11. Art or sculpture
12. Outreach programme to engage and involve local people
13. Active promotion to less represented sectors of the community
14. Outreach programme to involve local schools
15. Links from the site to the rights of way network
16. Programme of events
17. More detailed information and interpretation materials about the site
18. Brown or white directional visitors signage
19. Shown on OS map