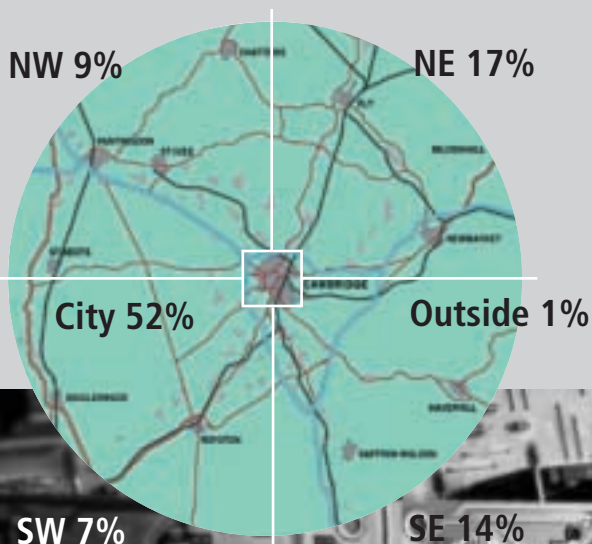


# Cambridge Futures:

Partnership in planning in the economic landscape



## Stephen Platt

explores Cambridge's inclusive approach to sustainable long-term economic city and regional planning.

**Cambridge is the centre of the greatest concentration of high technology firms in Europe.**

Economic activity in the area within a 25-mile radius of the city has expanded steadily over the last 50 years and there is intense and increasing pressure for further growth. Since the continued economic prosperity of the region depends on growth, it is essential that it should be sustainable and not only maintain but enhance the quality of life enjoyed by the local population.

In order to ensure an inclusive approach to the current wave of planning, a far-reaching research project was established, with the intention not of making any specific recommendations but rather of demonstrating the possibilities open to the local community, and in so doing, generating informed debate and aiding the formal planning process. Steered by members of local government, the business community and both universities, Cambridge Futures has focused on evolving and evaluating alternative forms for the development of the Cambridge region.

The Cambridge Futures research team has been supported by local sponsors, who have given over £150,000 in cash and kind to fund the project. It is being followed with great interest not only by those who live and work in the city area, but also by the numerous property developers who are already creating new business parks and residential sites, as well as the local authorities, whose planners have to tread the difficult line between over-constraint and rampant growth.

### Strategy modelling

Cambridge Futures has used the new Mentor land-use computer model developed by Marcial Echenique & Partners Ltd, together with the expanded Saturn transportation model used by the Cambridgeshire County Council, to analyse the long-term effects of seven different strategic planning options.

1. **Minimum Growth** would preserve the City of Cambridge and surrounding South Cambridgeshire with the minimum change. All new dwellings and business floorspace would be allocated to East Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire.
2. **Densification** would put the maximum development in the City of Cambridge where demand is highest. Dwellings and business floorspace would be allocated predominantly to the city, so higher buildings in a more compact form would be allowed to replace existing low density development.
3. **Necklace** would be the continuation of the policy which has existed for the last fifty years; it would produce only minimum growth in the city and green belt, with more growth in existing and new villages and in the main market towns.
4. **Green Swap** would allow development in selected areas of the green belt which are of less scenic value and/or are not available for public use. In return for such permission, developers would provide equivalent or enhanced amenities for the public farther out of town.



Option 1: Minimum Growth. View of Cambridge Centre (detailed view of three-dimensional computer model)

5. **Transport Links** envisages all further development as happening within easy access of a public transport corridor. It would include more intensive use of the existing lines and reinstatement of the St Ives–Huntingdon line.
6. **Virtual Highway** proposes a high-capacity electronic communications system that would provide instant business and personal communication for work, education, retail and other services. It is based on a concept of a multimedia supercorridor where audio, computer and visual communications are interconnected.
7. **New Town** would concentrate most of the development in a single location, large enough to make the new town an alternative to the City of Cambridge. It would necessitate investment in new transport links to the city.

Analysis of data projections on where households and businesses locate when costs and traffic congestion are taken into account has enabled a report to be prepared on the projected outcome of each of the options, in terms of economic prosperity of the region, social equity and environmental effects.

After a launch to several hundred business and opinion leaders at Cambridge University's Senate House, the Cambridge Futures Report was exhibited at the city's Grafton Centre, and other venues in the region. The report was also translated into an interactive computer survey for the exhibition. Members of the public could, at the exhibition or on the website, browse the programme which graphically shows the changes each growth option would bring to the urban landscape, and register their preferences. The public's opinion of the different ideas was then tabulated. The outcome of the Cambridge Futures survey and a summary of local

reactions to the report were discussed at a seminar at Churchill College.

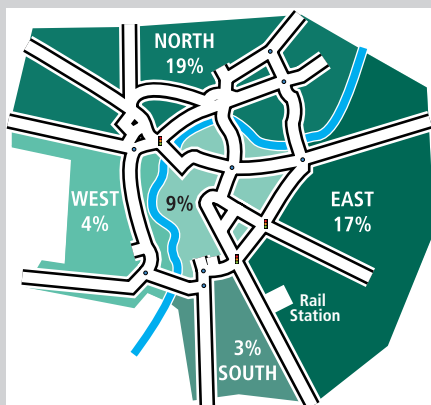
Supplementary to the report, a 3-D computer model of the area has been created and the development options have been dynamically modelled in an innovative video fly-over of the area.

### Public consultation

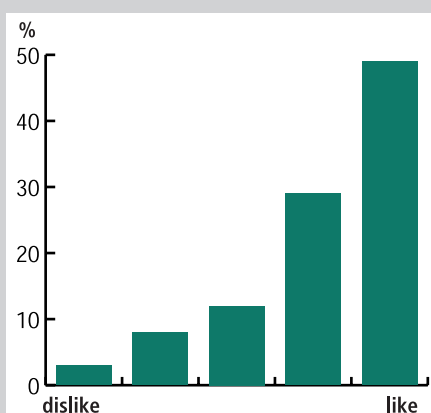
Cambridge Architectural Research Limited was responsible for devising and administering a survey to test public reaction to the report. The survey comprised two main sections, which sought public response in two ways.

The first of these, 'Options', registered the public's like or dislike of each of the seven development options being proposed. The second section, 'Statements', put forward eight views, in the form of quotes, about the future direction of Cambridge with regard to issues such as transport, traffic and preservation of the green belt. Those surveyed had to state the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with the statements.

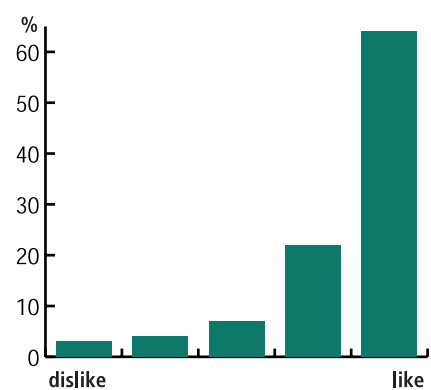
*The planning option called 'Transport Links' won far more support than any of the others, with a demand for greater investment in railways and other public transport rather than in roads.*



Residents of the south side of the city were over-represented, probably reflecting their patronage of the Grafton Centre, where most respondents completed the survey



Transport Links: this was clearly the preferred option, favoured by 78% of residents



Public transport: 86% of people agreed with the statement that 'More money should be invested in public transport than in roads'

The survey was conceived as a component part of the exhibition which was launched at Senate House and then presented at the Grafton Centre and other regional venues. Using panels, a video and a brochure sheet, the exhibition explained the purpose of Cambridge Futures and described the seven development options in detail.

People were offered the opportunity to comment on the proposals through a tear-off slip on the brochure or a computer-based interactive questionnaire devised by Cambridge Architectural Research Limited. Cambridge Futures also created a website, on which a survey devised by Cambridge Media Lab was published.

A total of 650 people completed the survey. Half of the responses were from the computer version of the survey, just over a third from the paper version and the remaining 9% from the web. About 457 people voted on the 'Options' section and 419 answered the 'Statements'. Over 500 gave their age and address.

Although the survey's respondents were self-selected, indications are that they reflected the average shopper in the Grafton Centre rather than any sectional interest or pressure group. It was concluded that a sufficiently good sample had been gained to have confidence that the survey accurately reflected general public opinion in and around the city.

**Community reaction**

Some strong messages emerged from the round of public consultations. The options which won least support were those closest to present policies: 'Minimum Growth' for the city of Cambridge, and 'Necklace' development. The consequences of minimising growth were unpopular, due to concern that it would have the result that only wealthy people would be able to afford to live in Cambridge. The planning option called 'Transport Links' won far more support than any of the others, with a demand for greater investment in railways and other public transport rather than in roads. The problem of greatest concern to those surveyed was traffic congestion. Options which would reduce congestion were preferred over those that would have less impact on congestion.

Not too surprisingly, city residents gave more support to development of the green belt, whereas people outside the city were keener on densification in Cambridge. The new town option was significantly less popular in the north-west of the region, where such a development would in fact be located. Prosperity and economic growth ranked high on everyone's agenda, though

not as high as tackling congestion, while planning options which would harm competitiveness were not supported. There was strong backing for the view that the region's high-tech businesses should be allowed to grow. Overall, the respondents to the survey expressed their desire for a balance of development in Cambridge and in the region. The survey suggested that a planning strategy which aimed for some growth in Cambridge through densification and expansion, together with growth outside Cambridge based on public transport links, would be most likely to satisfy the preferences expressed by the people who live and work in the region.

**Solid foundations**

With the launch of the report and the exhibition, the Cambridge Futures project came to the end of its first phase. There are pressures from business, local government and the public for the work to continue and it is hoped that this will happen in three ways: the findings of the report are being used in the development of the City Structure Plan to be published in 2001, with four options to be studied in depth; application will be made to the European Union, under the Fifth framework 'Cities of Tomorrow' programme, to use Cambridge Futures as a model for other European cities; Cambridge Futures will also continue to monitor the development of the city and the region. By taking a long-term view and engaging the local community fully in developing a strategy for sustainable economic development, Cambridge is demonstrating that partnership in planning need not restrict itself to one section of the community. The cross-sector approach employed has already paid dividends, in the form of an atmosphere of cooperation between the local policy and development authorities, the investment community and the regional workforce. With this strong foundation in place, future financing issues and policy development stand a much better chance.

**Stephen Platt** works for Cambridge Architectural Research Ltd. Copies of the Cambridge Futures report and video are available from Cambridge Futures, The Martin Centre, 6 Chaucer Road, Cambridge CB2 2EB. The report is £30 and the video £13, inc. postage. Cheques should be made payable to The University of Cambridge (Cambridge Futures). This article is published by kind permission of Cambridge Architecture.