

### **Follow-up questions from FeCRA talk – 15<sup>th</sup> May 2025**

1. The local health care sector faces major issues of capacity shortfalls and arrears of maintenance. This is the inevitable consequence of health care infrastructure investment lagging behind housing growth over the past two decades. In this context, it is concerning that housebuilders and development promoters, including the University of Cambridge, have objected to the proposed introduction of a formula-based approach to planning obligations, with the money raised hypothecated for investment in GP premises. Such an approach would go some way towards supplementing the inadequacy of central government funding for healthcare infrastructure. The developers' argument is that central government should provide. The reality is that government will not provide on the scale required. How is the Cambridge Growth Company engaging with this issue?

#### **CGC Response:**

**Thank you for your question about the Cambridge Growth Company's approach to funding healthcare infrastructure.**

**The Cambridge Growth Company recognises its role in aligning growth ambitions with infrastructure delivery. We are therefore committed to ensuring that new development is infrastructure-led and meets the needs of both existing and future residents. In addition to our evidence base work, we are actively exploring a range of funding mechanisms to support infrastructure delivery and will continue to develop this further.**

2. Over the last twenty years our infrastructure has fallen well behind Cambridge's growth in jobs and population. This includes health services, housing that people on average incomes can afford, sustainable water supply, and reliable, affordable public transport. How do you propose to make up the infrastructure ground that has already been lost as well as providing more to meet the needs of the greater growth you and the Government are proposing? Who will provide it and how will it be paid for given the Government's self-imposed "fiscal rules"?

How do you propose we should assess whether or not an even more rapidly growing Cambridge is happy? What key measures should we use?

**CGC Response:**

**Thank you for your questions regarding infrastructure provision and how we will measure community wellbeing in the context of future growth.**

**The Cambridge Growth Company recognises the importance of ensuring that new development is supported by the necessary infrastructure to meet the needs of both existing and future residents. We are therefore committed to making sure that growth is infrastructure-led and that the right facilities and services are in place to support this.**

**Regarding funding, the Cambridge Growth Company is adopting an integrated approach to infrastructure planning and delivery. By combining a robust case for public investment with innovative funding and delivery models, we will seek to unlock the resources necessary to address current gaps and meet the demands of future growth.**

**We also recognise the role of measuring community wellbeing as growth progresses. While we are currently gathering evidence to inform our long-term growth strategy, we have not yet defined specific wellbeing metrics. However, we are committed to developing meaningful indicators as part of our ongoing work to ensure that growth supports the health and quality of life of all residents.**

3. We support a visionary and transformational approach to Cambridge transport, moving away from the current silo approach, and embracing an integrated, strategic and holistic network. Will Peter Freeman review the concept of accident-prone busways and reappraise their proposed routes, so that the right strategic transport corridors are identified, avoiding the unnecessary loss of green spaces and special countryside amenity. With particular reference to CSET, will he instead follow the established transport corridors and avoid concreting over the rolling countryside along the Magog Down and preserve the recently designated Magog Countryside Park.

**CGC Response:**

**Thank you for your question. We strongly share your commitment to a visionary, integrated, and strategic approach to transport planning in and around Cambridge.**

**Our foremost priority is to establish the right future strategic transport corridors to support sustainable and inclusive growth across Greater**

**Cambridge. Creating an integrated, high-quality transport network that connects homes, jobs, and key institutions is essential to the region's future.**

**To support this work, we will be appointing a dedicated transport advisor to help guide our approach and ensure that any proposals are informed by robust evidence.**

**We are committed to thoroughly reviewing all available evidence and carefully considering feedback from stakeholders and the community to identify the right future strategic transport solutions for the area.**

**Our goal is to ensure that any transport solution is carefully considered and capable of meeting the future needs of Cambridge's growing population and economy.**

4. In response to my question you disapproved of the OxCam Arc and its million houses and likely low density sprawl. I agree. But the only concrete aspect so far is EWR, and that has not changed with the new government. There are always three things: jobs, transport and houses that go together. How does making the OxCam Arc/Corridors led by DSIT make any difference at all? It really looks like the same thing dressed up differently. It still has huge potential for creating sprawling housing and the economic case for the railway remains dreadful - £8billion for 2000 Cambridge commuters means £4million each - and that is with new housing for 200,000 people. EWRCo. figures. Mayor Bristow's light rail for the C2C busway would take further passengers away from EWR.

**CGC Response:**

**Thank you for your question regarding the Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor.**

**In January, the Chancellor announced the government's commitment to unlock growth in the Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor and the high potential sectors within it, as part of the government's Plan for Change to kickstart economic growth. The government believes additional action can maximise the benefits of East West Rail and enhance the economic performance of the wider Oxford-Cambridge region.**

**The government is taking a much more targeted approach than the previous government's Oxford-Cambridge Arc programme, focused on high-impact interventions across the Growth Corridor. The work of Lord Vallance will**

**coordinate key government activity, in a hybrid, agile way, to boost growth across the region and for the UK as a whole.**

**With the right support the Oxford-Cambridge Growth Corridor can leverage its existing expertise in life sciences, artificial intelligence, manufacturing and technology to become a world leading science and growth hub; the home of British innovation. Lord Vallance is committed to unlocking blockers to growth and finding creative solutions with local partners to ensure the Oxford-Cambridge Corridor has the right infrastructure for growth, and the right partnerships to sustain it.**

**There are already signs of success. In February, the government announced the designation of an AI Growth Zone in Culham and in April, a multi-billion pound investment in a new Universal theme park and resort in Bedfordshire which will create around 28,000 jobs.**

5. I am the Chairman of Hobson's Conduit Trust. For 250 years from 1614 Hobson's Conduit, fed from the chalk springs at Nine Wells provided Cambridge's principal source of clean drinking water. One could say that as a model this was only too successful, as 99% of Cambridge's water still comes from the chalk.

For a hundred years the Hobson's Trustees have been alert to and concerned about the impact of abstraction by Cambridge Water Company on the flows in Cambridge's chalk streams, and the deleterious impact on watercourses.

In 1952 Cambridge Water was taking 17 million litres a day out of the chalk for the public water supply. Following a government mandated increase in their supply area from 60 to the current 453 square miles in 1963 the water abstracted had doubled to 36 million litres a day.

With growth during the 1970s, by 1981 the total abstracted had doubled again to 65 million litres a day, and at that point we were clearly in trouble. Nine Wells dried up in 1975 for the first time since the ice age and lost its SSSI status.

Now we are in a permanent groundwater crisis with at least 100 million litres a day coming out of the chalk- six times more than in 1952, and we know that the flow in Hobson's Brook and Conduit is a fraction – only one fifth- of what it was in 1953 when it was carefully measured by the Borough Engineer.

Current projections for housing completions indicate another 35,000 residential units in the Cambridge Water supply area being completed by 2032, consistent with the figures used by Cambridge Water in their 2024 Medium Term Plan.

On projected average occupancy, and even assuming that a limit of 110 litres per person per day – some 20% less than the current average - can be achieved, the increase in residential demand by 2032 creates at the very least a further 10% in regular demand on the aquifer. This is an appalling prospect.

In 2032, we will start to get 26 million litres a day from Grafham Water - assuming that Affinity Water first get their replacement supply from a Birmingham sewage works down the Grand Union Canal,

It is only in 2035 or 2036 that we can expect the new Fens Reservoir at Chatteris to ease the groundwater crisis, but Cambridge Water will still be taking more from the chalk than they were in 1963.

The Environment Agency have stated that a permanent reduction in abstraction of 60 to 70 percent is required to bring our rivers and streams back to what could be called normal flows.

It is pretty hopeless if that relief and environmental restoration expected from 2035/6 through Cambridge starting to receive water from the Fens Reservoir is immediately undone by further growth in demand for water from more housing.

Rome was not built in a day, but the Romans, and the Greeks, clearly understood the vital importance of water to the creation of successful cities, a point forgotten or ignored for decades in this supposed seat of learning.

So, Peter against that bleak outlook, what hope can you give us now that the relief to the badly abused aquifer which is so urgently needed can be delivered faster than seven and ten years hence, and what hope is there that there will be more relief to come?

#### **CGC Response:**

**Thank you for your detailed and important overview of the longstanding challenges facing Cambridge's chalk aquifer and its associated watercourses. The government is committed to ensuring there is adequate water supply for growth. Working with local partners, including through the expert advisory Water Scarcity Group, our approach will support the growth**

**of Greater Cambridge in a way that is sustainable and protects the natural environment – including the aquifer, which feeds rare chalk streams in the area.**

**To that end, we continue to collaborate with a wide range of stakeholders—including water companies and the Environment Agency—to implement the interventions outlined in the policy paper published at the Spring Budget 2024. These include short-term measures to reduce and offset water demand, such as delivering a water efficiency programme and developing a water credits scheme, to ensure there is sufficient water available for new development coming forward between now and 2032. We are also assessing further demand management measures and supply options we could take forward to create additional headroom for growth.**

**As you are aware, in the long-term, new water resource infrastructure will need to be delivered to support sustainable growth, protect the surrounding environment - including the aquifer - and ensure water supply for future generations. Water companies are responsible for planning and delivering this infrastructure, including the Grafham Pipeline Transfer and the Fens Reservoir, and we are working closely with the Water Scarcity Group to ensure that happens.**

6. Dear Peter Freeman,

Thank You for coming to GSM last week as the Cambridge Growth Company takes its baby steps with you at the helm - very noble of you, very brave, very much appreciated as the attendance showed.

My earth-shattering realisation and hence URGENT question :

How will anything you outlined - plans, budgets, time-lines, getting to know this Cambridge 'Patch' and how it operates - do anything to bring back 'gin-clear' water from our ultra-fragile Chalk Streams to the 'runnels' in front of the Fitzwilliam Museum, and then most visibly to a Public Fountain on the Market Square as donated (engineeringly proudly & socially humbly of necessity as in a time of plague) by Thomas Hobson in 1610 ?

Even if you could reconnect the pipes cut in 1971 by Petty Cury Clearance for Consumer Development, no monies can bring back the Groundswell and Flow, the very life-blood for equity and 're-booting' of all gasping sentient beings on the banks of our River-systems, clogged by Anglian Water's upstream sewage

neglect and already suffocated by developers' concrete in 'Monopoly' real-estate units, already redundant car-parks, ghostly inhuman labs, plunder of food-security land, in a Floodplain expecting sea surges, hence un-insureable. With your miraculous 'Midas Touch' serving the Cambridge Growth Company, (undemocratically imposed from scientifically-ignorant Westminster) will we and future generations not be wading through water, water everywhere but not a drop to drink? !

### **CGC Response**

**Thank you for your thoughtful and important question regarding the restoration of Cambridge's chalk streams and water systems.**

**We recognise that this is not a new issue for Cambridge – with abstraction placing pressure on the aquifer over the years, leading to concerns about water supply, which also contributed to the Council's decision to switch off the public fountain in 1971.**

**The Cambridge Growth Company is committed to taking this issue seriously and will work with a range of stakeholders through the expert advisory Water Scarcity Group, to ensure the city can grow in a sustainable way. We are working with the Environment Agency, DEFRA and MHCLG to design and deliver a package of water interventions, including a water efficiency programme, and innovative nature-based solutions and agricultural trials, to generate water savings and offset development in the short term. We are also working to set high building standards for new homes and commercial space to support improvement to the natural environment, including nationally important chalk streams.**

**Through their Water Resource Management Plans (WRMP), water companies are responsible for planning and delivering a secure supply of water and a protected and enhanced environment. Cambridge Water's WRMP sets out their plans for reducing abstraction from the chalk aquifer over time, to support the sustainable restoration of Cambridge's vulnerable chalk streams. We are working with MHCLG and the Water Scarcity Group, which includes representation from the Environment Agency, to ensure the water company delivery of their WRMP commitments.**

**You also rightly point out the ongoing wastewater capacity risks Cambridge is facing. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of wastewater services providers to plan for and deliver sufficient levels of infrastructure capacity. The government is taking action on this, with the Environment Agency delivering 10,000 inspections on rivers this year and with the Water (Special Measures)**

**Act providing the most significant increase in enforcement powers to the regulators in a decade, giving them the teeth they need to take tougher action against water companies in the next investment period, which began in April this year. We are working with water companies through the Water Scarcity Group to ensure that they address immediate capacity issues at existing treatment plants to tackle the sewage issues you highlight and deliver the right levels of infrastructure to support long-term sustainable growth.**