



Ramblers Association Cambridge Group

Email: info@cambridgeramblers.org.uk

Response to Draft Greater Cambridge Planning Obligations Supplementary Planning Document

Introduction

On behalf of the Ramblers Association Cambridge Group this is a response to the consultation on the draft Greater Cambridge Planning Obligations Supplementary Planning Document. As Ramblers our primary area of interest is in the maintenance and enhancement of Public Rights of Way (PROW). The guidance in Section 21 seems to underestimate the importance of PROWs and has a modest ambition of simply creating connections from the development to existing PROWs.

The importance of the network of Public Rights of Way cannot be underestimated. Walking for leisure is one of the most accessible forms of physical exercise for people of all abilities. The benefits to mental health and emotional wellbeing of being out in the countryside and in contact with nature has been proven.

Participation in recreational walking

The participation in walking for recreational purposes through formal organised groups in Cambridgeshire is enormous. Organised walks typically attract between 8 and 30 people with some organisations offering different levels of walks:

Organisation	Walk Frequency
Cambridge Rambling Club <i>Membership circa 480</i>	Wednesdays – 4 groups Sundays – 3 groups Thursdays - summertime
U3A Cambridge Group	9 groups
U3A Sawston Group	2 groups
U3A Royston Group	2 groups
U3A Huntingdon Group	2 groups
U3A Ely Group	8 groups
U3A Wisbech Group	2 groups
U3A March Group	2 groups
U3A St Neots Group	2 groups
Cambridge Hiking Club <i>Membership circa 1460</i>	Weekends
Cambridge University Rambling Club	Weekends
Cambridge University Hillwalking Club	Weekends
Ramblers Association has the following local eight groups	
Cambridge Group <i>Membership circa 480</i>	Saturdays Mondays fortnightly
Walk Cambridge	Weekends
Huntingdon Group	Saturdays

	Sundays
Fenland Group	Sundays
Peterborough Group	Thursdays Sundays
Walk Peterborough	Weekends
Newmarket and District (includes some of East Cambs)	Wednesdays Sundays
Royston Group	Tuesdays Thursdays
Lots of village walking groups. For example the Comberton Ramblers, Stilton Stumblers, Wandlebury Walks etc	

In addition to the above Wellbeing Walks are run by the Ramblers Association, each District Council and by Everyone Health. These walks are led by trained specialists and are tailored for people with specific health needs and are a follow on to maintain the gain from rehabilitation programmes as well as for prevention and maintenance of long term health conditions. And the National Trust leads weekly walks from Wimpole Hall, Anglesey Abbey and Wicken Fen.

Apart from organised walks, many individuals and families walk for pleasure. There is also the increasing number of dog owners who walk on a daily basis. 36% of households now own a dog in the UK.

Recreational vs Active Travel

In an Active Lives Survey completed by Sport England in 2024 and published on the GOV.UK website shows that 69% of adults walk at least once a week, 55% for leisure purposes and 38% for travel purposes. Currently there is an emphasis on promoting active travel for commuting to school, college or work and developing a network of cycleways and wheeled walking surfaces. This is part of a climate strategy to reduce our reliance on cars generating carbon emissions. However the statistics show the importance of having Public Rights of Way accessible for walkers for leisure purposes. The strategy for Cambridge and South Cambs on PROWs should not only aim to maintain the current network of footpaths but enhance the connectivity between footpaths.

Development pressure

There is enormous pressure on Public Rights of Way from developments in particular from the growth of housing and travel. Developments such as the new A428/421, East West Rail, the busways between Cambourne and Cambridge and Addenbrookes and Babraham are major and complex and often threaten our footpaths and bridleways and break connections for making circular routes. The planning guidance needs to address the opportunity for maintenance and creation of new footpaths in conjunction to these major pieces of transport infrastructure.

Access to Countryside

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 allowed the freedom to walk over mountain, moor, heath and downland in open landscapes without the fear of trespass. The Ramblers Association has an 'Outdoors Unlocked' Campaign to expand the freedom to roam in woodland, beside water and over more grassland. The Ramblers Association supports the Access to Nature Bill. Access should be only 20 minutes from anyone's front door. People living in

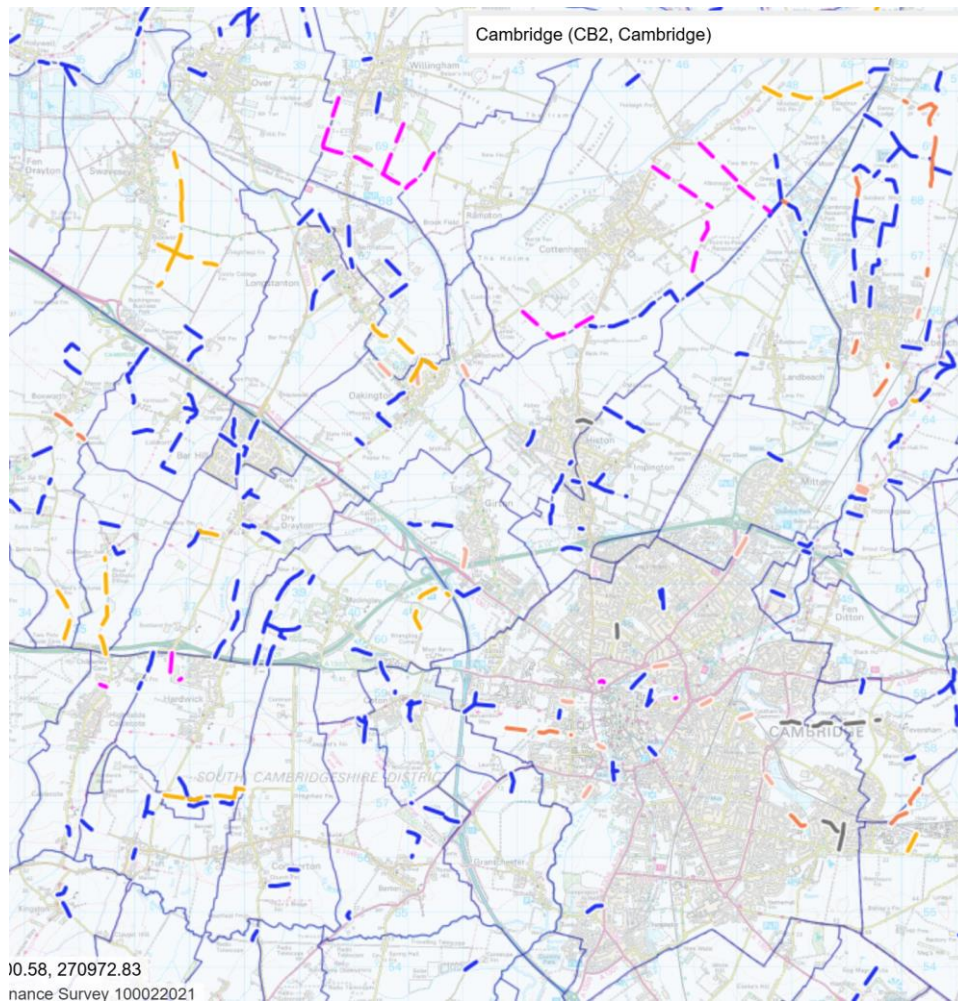
deprived areas have to travel 48% further to enjoy the freedom to roam. Improving access to the footpath network should prioritise accessibility for the most urban deprived areas.

In Cambridgeshire there are some 200 parks and open spaces and there are several long distance walking routes: Fen Rivers Way, Ouse Valley Way, Harcamlow Way, Pathfinder Long Distance Walk, Nene Way, Hereward Way, Rothschild Way, and Fen Edge Way. The footpath network should not only aim to connect urban areas with green spaces but to make connection corridors between green spaces. Wildlife needs these connection corridors to try to reduce depleting populations and loss of biodiversity. Footpaths should be designed to be more than the minimum specification for ease of travel but to have space on either side for planting and for havens for wildlife to provide that sense of connection to nature for walkers and to be able to journey to wider countryside. The planning guidance should encourage meeting more than the minimum technical specification but add to the aesthetic experience of walking.

The benefit of Greater Cambridge Planning Services working across the two council areas is the potential to create interconnecting and circular routes. The two great examples of circular Green routes are the Green Link Walk around London and the Greater Manchester Ringway. Whilst Cambridge is not of that scale of London or Manchester the principle of having a circular route is that it connects all the radiating routes thus a greater benefit to the whole.

Lost Public Rights of Way

The planning guidance also needs to recognise that not all regularly used pathways are recorded on the Definitive Map of the area. The Ramblers Association's campaign on 'Don't Lose Your Way' has identified potentially unrecorded paths and members are producing the evidence to try to save these lost paths. The map below shows apart of Cambridge and South Cambs and the number of potentially lost paths that developers should be asked to respect and add into their planning application proposals.



Summary

Developers need to fully understand the importance of Public Rights of Way and the level of current usage, not just for commuting, but for recreational purposes. The quality of PROWs and their interconnectivity should be planned to optimise accessibility to nature and green spaces and support circular routes of various lengths for all abilities.

Jane Crawford-White

Chair, Ramblers Association Cambridge Group. 20/1/2025