

Research Proposal – “Is the Planning system in Cambridge delivering on inequality?”

Overview: Cambridge is experiencing significant economic growth through continued inward investment largely built on its reputation for academic excellence and innovation. The most prominent examples of this are probably the tech and pharmaceutical investment in the city which are delivering a significant number of well paid-jobs for the city. While this growth is welcome there is concern that its benefits are not being felt proportionately by the people of the city and in some cases may be increasing the gap between mid to high income citizens in the city and those who earn a low to mid income for example by driving up the cost of housing.

The city’s planning frameworks (and associated county and regional planning frameworks) are important tools in managing the development of the city and should be proactively anticipating the future needs of the city and making provision for all of its citizens as the city’s economy grows and evolves. This should cover issues such as provision of adequate education, healthcare, housing and employment as well as identifying constraints such as the infrastructure (physical and social) and environmental capacity of the city.

The proposed research aims to

- a) summarise the complex patchwork of plans which are in place
- b) understand the extent to which inequality issues have been identified and addressed in these plans and
- c) identify the extent to which measures in those plans (with respect to inequality) are being implemented.

Alignment to The Cambridge Commons Objectives:

The Cambridge Commons stated vision is: *Cambridge can do better: A radical vision for change*. It also draws upon the Equalities Trust Manifesto identifying that we want to build a city that has fair pay, policies, work, housing, chances, and environment. The planning framework addresses many of these areas and is a key tool in local democratic processes to ensure that the city’s future is one that we strive towards rather than live with once we are there. Understanding this area will provide The Cambridge Commons with evidence to lobby and shape policy and plans for the city’s future.

Proposed Approach

Scoping – Undertake a mapping exercise identifying the key planning policy documents and identifying how they broadly fit together¹. Consideration will be given to the 6 key themes in the Equalities Trust Manifesto to determine if all of them are sensibly addressed or if it is preferable to focus in on themes with a spatial component (e.g. housing and employment provision over issues such as living wage). Documents that address (or should address) the selected themes will be brought forward into the policy review. (1-2 weeks)

Policy Review – More thorough review of the identified documents identifying the extent to which the respective plans address the selected themes and identifying any areas of perceived weakness or explicit gaps. A summary of “anticipated actions” and “policy gaps” will be developed. Two tables will be produced. The table for planned actions will list both the actions that have been identified, which plan it sits in and any measurable outputs that were expected (either defined in planning

¹ There is a useful question to be asked about whether South Cambs planning documents should be considered as core part of the review (much of the eastern fringe development in what we would recognise as the “city”, falls under their jurisdiction rather than Cambridge City Council)

policy documents or by the author). The table for “policy gaps” will identify the gaps and will be circulated amongst the Cambridge Commons group (and possibly wider stakeholders) for suggestions as to measures which we may lobby for to fill those gaps. (4 weeks)

Analysis of Implementation: This stage will seek to test the level of implementation that has occurred for the measures that had been identified. The approach to characterising this is likely to be specific to the measure however the following methods are likely to be employed:

- Existing monitoring and evaluation reports from the city where available
- Freedom of Information requests where published results are not available but the council (or other public body has committed to measuring)
- Published planning application outcomes
- Discussions with stakeholders where possible

(6-8 weeks factoring in 20 working day response times for FoI requests)

Anticipated Outputs/Outcomes

Technical report identifying areas of good practice and gaps to support or campaign to fill (using the evidence base we gather). This could then be used to develop materials such as:

- Letters to political leaders (the Major, MP, Councillors) highlighting the challenges we identify
- Material to support future consultation responses (e.g. supplementary planning documents, future local plans, individual planning applications – particularly for “areas of major change” such as the proposed redevelopment of east road or the airport site, neighbourhood plans etc)
- “press releases” highlighting individual conclusions which could be fed to the local press/social media over a period of time
- Source material for blogs or position papers

Support Requested

Money: None requested at this stage.

People: Additional support from others would be useful in both the literature review and the analysis phases. Someone with PR experience/skills would be really useful to help disseminate results.

Potential Partners

It is possible that we might be able to engage with RTP1’s “planning aid” to get some professional town planning support or the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) to give a stakeholder view. I would welcome suggestions for other parties that might have an interest?

Developed by:

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