



Combined Authority Board Meeting

13 November 2024

Title: Public Questions

Public Report: Yes

Question 1 – from Annabel Sykes, local resident

To: Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority Board

Question

The CPCA approved a State of the Region Report at its 16 October board meeting. This report says “Agriculture plays a crucial role, occupying 79% of the total land area, which is higher than the UK average of 63%. Notably, C&P contains 34% of the UK’s Grade 1 (excellent quality) agricultural land, making it a vital regional asset”. The region’s best and most versatile agricultural land is surely a vital national asset too; as the Labour Party Manifesto correctly identifies “food security is national security”. I understand that the region and the fens together supply 25 to 30% of the UK’s food, including 50% of its wheat (which is produced within 20 miles of Cambridge).

CPCA is preparing a Local Growth Plan. The Infrastructure Delivery Framework (“IDF”) prepared for CPCA by Stantec highlights agritech as a potential growth story. It also considers blue-green infrastructure noting that it “has a key role to play in place making, tackling the biodiversity crisis, and creating places and spaces in which people want to live and work.” and “as one of the most nature depleted areas in the country, a focus on the delivery and enhancement of blue/green infrastructure is essential across the CPCA geography.” The IDF concludes that lack of adequate and appropriate blue-green infrastructure will in future become a barrier to growth.

What is the CPCA doing to value and safeguard the region’s agricultural land (especially its best and most versatile land) and to monitor and assess the impact on it of (for example) growth and infrastructure proposals, water scarcity and climate change-related flood risk?

Please read value in the broadest sense - as well as food security and emissions absorption, land is important for ecosystem and biodiversity preservation and enhancement (think the region’s rare and fragile chalk streams and its wetlands). A small agricultural area in the Green Belt on the southern edge of Cambridge is a haven for red-listed farmland birds. As Emeritus Professor of Economics Partha Dasgupta warned at a recent climate crisis seminar, we can’t continue overdrawing our account with nature.