



# 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.*

**Response:**

The Combined Authority recognises the value of our natural assets. This is at the forefront of our Shared Ambition Statement. Alongside our rich history and communities, our natural assets (including land used for farming) are key elements that ensure Cambridgeshire and Peterborough continues to be globally recognised for our groundbreaking achievements.

Agri-businesses are important both to our economy and, through their management of land, our environment. Earlier this year, we received a report into the strengths of our AgriTech and cleantech sectors, and how to encourage that potential. We have supported innovation in agri-businesses.

Agricultural land does face challenges. Much of our highest value agricultural land already benefit from the extensive systems to provide flood management and resilience. We also have natural habitats that are sensitive to the use of farmland. The impact of a changing climate is putting more pressure on these. The government is undertaking major investigations into the long-term investment needs to maintain

flood resilience. The Authority will continue to press for the right level of investment in our area. As Mayor, I have raised the issue of funding for Internal Drainage Boards with the Secretary of State.

The Authority has also provided capacity funding to organisations such as Fenland Soil and Natural Cambridgeshire to help them in their work on developing locally-led solutions. We have also provided a Nature Fund as a demonstrator to encourage more investment in biodiversity schemes. We are also working with Water Resources East in nature based solutions for water management for agriculture.

The Authority is currently developing its Local Nature Recovery Strategy that is identifying vulnerable species and habitats. Representatives of the farming community, including the NFU, are helping us to understand the potential issues on farmland. We will be seeking views on the emerging priorities and proposed actions in that Draft Strategy next year. Work on the Strategy will also help us monitor the effects on our rich wildlife areas more effectively.

In our emerging Local Growth Plan we have workstreams on infrastructure and sustainability and must continue to put this at the heart of our vision for the next 10 years.