



# FENLAND



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# OVERVIEW

Each district of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough is different; hence we have developed distinct approaches for the distinct geographical areas of Peterborough, Greater Cambridge, Huntingdonshire, East Cambridgeshire, and Fenland. These are set out in this chapter, and each reflects local transport constraints, opportunities, and patterns of growth.

Each approach outlines the major schemes expected to be delivered within each area to deliver our objectives, both directly by ourselves and in partnership with other local and national stakeholders. Some aspects of the strategies are, by necessity, still under development and hence all schemes will need to demonstrate value-for-money and affordability, together with alignment with our strategic priorities before they are able to proceed.

This section includes:

- Summary of recent and planned growth, and local transport constraints;
- Progress and projects delivered to date; and
- Transport schemes to help deliver each strategy.

# BACKGROUND

Fenland covers approximately two hundred square miles of Cambridgeshire. It is a rural, sparsely populated district with many diverse communities, each with different needs. Approximately 80% of the district's residents live within the four market towns of Wisbech, March, Whittlesey and Chatteris, with the remainder living in a number of

small villages and hamlets. It is located in the North of Cambridgeshire and borders Norfolk and Lincolnshire.

Although Wisbech is the largest town in the district, March is also of notable size. Both are set to grow in forthcoming years. Wisbech and March both offer significant local employment opportunities and access to a number of key services, including education, retail, and leisure facilities. Travel patterns in Fenland are heavily influenced by the main sub-regional centres of Cambridge, Peterborough, and Kings Lynn. Growth in employment in the district has not matched workforce expansion and has resulted in significant out-commuting. Forty-five percent of residents in work commute outside the district, primarily to Kings Lynn and to Peterborough. Fenland's economy is more reliant on agriculture and food production than the rest of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough region. There are also areas with higher levels of deprivation, particularly in Wisbech.

# RECENT DEVELOPMENT

Although the district remains relatively sparsely populated, Fenland has experienced considerable housing and population growth in recent years, growing by 8.7% in the decade up to 2017. Whittlesey, Chatteris and March have accommodated significant new house building, as have a number of villages including Doddington, Wimblington, and Manea. This growth is expected to continue into the coming years. Fenland District Council (FDC) adopted its Local Plan in 2014. This sets out the district's proposals for growth, including 11,000 additional homes from 2011 to 2031. This includes:



- 3,500 in Wisbech, plus 550 on the eastern edge of the town within the Kings Lynn and West Norfolk council area;
- 4,200 in March;
- 1,600 in Chatteris;
- 1,000 in Whittlesey; and
- 1,200 elsewhere, predominately in smaller villages

The Fenland Local Plan is currently under review with public consultation on a draft version held in late 2022. Based on government's 'standard method' to calculate local housing need, in Fenland there is currently (as of March 2021) a need for 517 dwellings per year. Therefore, the overall housing need for the emerging Local Plan is expected to be in excess of 9,800 dwellings between April 2021 and March 2040.

# TRANSPORT CHALLENGES

As the region's most rural and economically deprived district, there is limited accessibility to services, employment, and education opportunities. A lack of integration between modes of transport constrains the local economy, hinders development, increases health inequalities, and has an adverse impact on the area's environment. The historic development of the district along the route of the River Nene means that outside the four towns, the population of the district is sparsely dispersed across a very rural area, characterised by small villages and hamlets. This rurality has led to a high dependency on the private car, which can result in transport poverty for some families. Poor availability of public transport and limited active travel infrastructure across the local area can mean that there are no genuine, realistic alternatives to the private car and therefore those without access to one are isolated.

## CROSS BORDER TRAVEL

As set out in the background section above, access to a range of places, especially for employment is essential. Connectivity to Cambridge, Peterborough and Kings Lynn is essential. There are also strong employment links to wider parts of Norfolk and into South Lincolnshire. Many children and young people access education in Lincolnshire and Norfolk travelling from Fenland. Access to transport for cross border journeys needs to be improved.

## ACCESSIBILITY TO ESSENTIAL SERVICES

Twenty percent of residents have no access to a car and yet the proportion of journeys undertaken in the towns on foot or by bike is relatively low. This is due in part to the absence of high-quality walking and cycling infrastructure and high levels of accidents. This serves to exacerbate poor health outcomes that already exist within Fenland. Key indicators around life expectancy, obesity and physical activity are considerably worse for some parts of the district's population when compared to the rest of the region and the national average. In addition, access to employment, education, and key services for those who do not have access to a car is often limited, thereby having a detrimental effect on their mental health through a sense of social isolation and exclusion.

## THE ROLE OF THE CAR

The distinct lack of viable alternatives to the private car has led to high dependency on the private car. Consequently, this has ultimately led to fewer viable alternatives for even short journeys, resulting in a vicious circle whereby public transport provision has become less viable as demand decreases and active travel modes are less attractive due to the high levels of traffic, high accident rates and associated air pollution. Furthermore, increasing the dependency on the private car has led and will continue to lead to increases carbon emissions, the effects of which globally are likely to have a disproportionate effect on the district given its low-lying geography.



## RAILWAYS

The Ely-Peterborough railway line passes through the district, with the stations at Manea, March, and Whittlesea offering Fenland residents' access to the wider region and beyond. March has an hourly service between Stansted Airport, Cambridge, and Peterborough (continuing to Birmingham), two hourly services to Ipswich and a small number of direct services on route to Norwich and services north towards Liverpool. These services offer good opportunities for commuters but, services in the early morning and evenings are less frequent, making it difficult to rely on for some journeys including travel to and from the airport and to access the evening economy. Whittlesea and Manea railway stations have approximately two hourly services. A previous audit of all Fenland railway stations identified deficiencies in the provision of facilities at each station in terms of general station information, access to the station and customer facilities at the station.

## BUS SERVICES

Bus services have declined significantly due to a reduction in financial support. Where they do exist, they are largely limited to the key corridors between towns and have a limited frequency that do not provide a genuine alternative to the private car in terms of convenience. Weekend and evening services are significantly reduced and make it difficult for those without access to a car to travel. Continual amendments and changes to timetables make it difficult for those who rely on bus services to continue their employment or for young people to access education and training of their choice.

## COMMUNITY TRANSPORT

FACT Community Transport (FACT), operate dial-a-ride services five days a week linking to areas not served or poorly served by the bus network. This transport offers a vital lifeline, especially for people living in villages and for large population of elderly people within Fenland. However, at present there is limited integration between these services and the wider public transport network, such as the conventional bus and rail services. This therefore acts as a barrier for those residents who are wishing to make longer journeys beyond the district boundaries (such as to Peterborough).

## PUBLIC TRANSPORT INTEGRATION

The lack of integration between different public transport options and services, coupled with inadequate or non-existent provision of high-quality walking and cycling infrastructure for the first/last mile links, limits the ability to provide a genuine alternative to the private car. This in turn makes it difficult for residents without access to a car to travel to key employment, leisure, educational and healthcare services, such as Peterborough City Hospital.

Fenland links to the wider national highway network by dual carriageway are very limited. There is a small stretch of dual carriageway on A47 in the northwest corner of Fenland. The district's road network primarily consists of rural, single-carriageway A-roads. In addition, several key junctions act as 'pinch points' on the network, especially in and around the towns. These suffer from severe peak time traffic congestion impacting on all road users. Many of the routes within the Fenland have ongoing issues with regards quality. This reflects the low-lying Fenland environment, with some routes suffering from regular flooding, such as North Bank near Whittlesey, and others requiring specific maintenance regimes due to being constructed on peat soils.

## PROGRESS TO DATE

Progress in recent years has been made regarding a number of Fenland transport issues, which are as follows:

### RAILWAYS AND THE HEReward COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIP

Since the previous adoption of the *Cambridgeshire and Peterborough LTP* in 2020, progress has been made on several key projects. We have already committed £9.5



million of investment into March, Manea, and Whittlesea railway stations to aid their regeneration. In addition to the number of smaller projects that have been delivered, such as new waiting shelters on platforms, additional cycle parking and new ticket machines, major improvement work has been undertaken at March railway station. This project has delivered an open-plan ticket hall and waiting area, accessible modern toilets, and retail facilities as well as an upgraded and extended car park. In addition, Manea Station will have a car park for the first time including more cycle parking and bus turning facilities.

## Case Study: Transport Planning Guide for Local Communities

HCRP and FDC in partnership with Cambridgeshire ACRE and CrossCountry trains have produced a Transport Planning Guide for Local Communities. The guide is for local Councils and community members aimed at those people who may have an interest in transport or transport issues in the community that they need to address. Getting around to work, shop, and carry out our everyday lives can sometimes be a challenge, particularly in more rural communities. Good transport planning can have a positive impact on our daily lives, helping to improve our health, our local areas, and our overall quality of life. Transport planning can be complex, so it is important that the issues involved are understood by town and parish councils and communities. It is essential that local communities can give input to and influence the transport systems provided at a local level. This publication gives guidance, advice, and case studies to enable local communities to input into transport planning projects.

## FENLAND WALKING, CYCLING AND MOBILITY AID STRATEGY

FDC adopted the second version of its *Walking, Cycling and Mobility Aid Strategy* in October 2022. Delivery of this strategy will see fundamental change in the ability to be

able to use active travel modes in and around the towns, villages and hamlets across Fenland and increase accessibility between towns. This approach will enable significantly higher levels of active travel whilst providing for successful integration with our public transport network.

## ACCESSIBILITY AND THE FENLAND TRANSPORT STRATEGY

It is well recognised that accessibility is a major transport challenge in the district and that this should be the focus of the *Fenland Transport Strategy* (child document to the LTCP). The first step of identifying exactly where these challenges exist and what they are, has been undertaken through an accessibility *Evidence Study and Report* (2020). This forms the basis of the approach to address these accessibility issues in Fenland. The *Fenland Transport Strategy* was adopted by Cambridgeshire County Council in March 2023.

## MARCH AREA TRANSPORT STUDY

The *Fenland Retail Study* (2009) and *Growing Fenland Strategy* (2019) identified March as one of Fenland's two major town centres, providing a range of facilities and services for an extensive rural catchment area. Currently March town centre does not function in a way that promotes resilience, diversification, and sustainable growth. This is due in part to significant severance and dislocation issues. Property values are well below regional and national levels, and development appraisals prepared by independent specialists show a consistent viability gap for residential, retail, and other uses.

Further public consultation on the March Area Transport Study (MATS) was undertaken in 2020, ahead of the Outline Business Case work completed in 2021 and detailed design in 2022. Several schemes will now be taken forward to construction between 2023 and 2026. A package of active travel schemes is also being progressed through feasibility stages in early 2023.



## WHITTLESEY KINGS DYKE LEVEL CROSSING

Infrastructure improvements are being delivered to better connect Fenland to Peterborough, the nearest major urban centre. The removal of the level crossing at Kings' Dyke that has long been the cause of delays between Peterborough and Whittlesey, with a new road bridge replacement is now complete. All the major structures have now been completed and the new road is connected to the existing network. The Ralph Butcher Causeway opened to the public in 2022.

## STUDY WORK AND FUNDING FOR OTHER FENLAND TRANSPORT PROJECTS

Since 2014, several significant improvements, including allocating £10.5 million for a package of improvements to the road network in and around Wisbech to help stimulate sustainable housing and economic growth. In addition, £1.5 million has been approved to fund a study into a potential future rail link between Wisbech and March. The investment to improve March, Manea, and Whittlesea railway stations included funds to allow for 70 new solar powered 'cats eyes' providing an illuminated walkway to Whittlesea railway station.

# OUR APPROACH

## VISION

Our vision is:

Improving accessibility to and within Fenland by all modes and for all people. Infrastructure improvements and the ability to travel on an integrated network are central themes to achieving the overarching Fenland strategy.

The vision will also be supported and delivered by a range of other transport strategies for Fenland including *Fenland Transport Strategy*, *Cambridgeshire Active Travel Strategy*, *Fenland Rail Development Strategy* and *Fenland Walking, Cycling and Mobility Aid Strategy*. All of which include ambitious schemes to address the transport challenges in Fenland.

Key opportunities and themes which form part of our approach are as follows:

## CONNECTIVITY INCLUDING CROSS BORDER TRAVEL

Better links to key service centres such as Peterborough, Greater Cambridge, Kings Lynn, and the rest of the country will make Fenland a more attractive place to live and work. This should include an hourly train service (minimum) serving the Fenland rail stations as this will also create new opportunities for residents to travel to employment, retail, leisure, education, or training elsewhere. We will look to support the investment in infrastructure with a simultaneous push to making transport and travel choices more accessible for residents in Fenland, many of whom either cannot travel easily or need



help and encouragement in using these travel choices. Connectivity to the transport network, both physically and in terms of accessibility for all users is a primary area in need of development in Fenland.

Greater consideration will be given to the cross-border journeys into Norfolk and South Lincolnshire, particularly where those journeys are for employment and education. The role of social and leisure journeys beyond Cambridgeshire is also noted given the proximity of these areas to Fenland. Closer working and co-ordination with the local authorities and other key stakeholders in these areas will form part of the approach to improve cross border transport issues.

## A LINK FOR WISBECH

Reopening the link by rail or autonomous vehicles to Wisbech from March, will transform accessibility to and from the town. This will ensure residents and businesses in Wisbech are able to reach Cambridge in approximately 45 minutes through seamless integration with other public transport services allowing access to the opportunities across Greater Cambridge. In addition, we will continue to progress our ambition for Wisbech Garden Town and this link forms a fundamental component of this scheme's delivery.

## A47

A package of improvements to the A47 between Peterborough, Wisbech and Kings' Lynn, including much-needed upgrades to junctions and interchanges are necessary to increase accessibility across the region.

In the longer-term, we will continue to explore the case to address capacity and provide improvements on the A47, further reducing journey times and reliability as well as address safety for all road users including commuters and freight. Local junction improvements within Wisbech as part of the *Wisbech Access Strategy* will help to relieve congestion, provide additional highway capacity for the benefit of all

users. These will be delivered along with bus, walking, and cycling improvements to support the town's sustainable growth.

## BUS SERVICES

Key to the successful delivery of the strategy is a more integrated, seamless public transport network that provides a genuine alternative to the private car and allows access to employment, education, retail, and social opportunities. In line with the recommendations of the Bus Reform Review and the *Bus Service Improvement Plan*, the plan for the bus network includes the continued support for our key interurban routes between Wisbech and Whittlesey, March, Chatteris, Peterborough and King Lynn. We will work in partnership with operators to review levels of service at evenings and weekends to increase the levels of accessibility across the district.

The challenge of providing regular and financially viable bus services in rural areas is well recognised. Solutions to this matter must be found in Fenland to achieve the integrated and seamless network that reduces reliance on the car. Opportunities to link with other transport, such as community transport and demand responsive services, need consideration along with a good understanding of where the public want and need to travel.

## COMMUNITY TRANSPORT AND DEMAND RESPONSIVE SERVICES

Support for community transport within Fenland will continue and the potential for Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) to seamlessly connect with core inter urban bus services will be explored and implemented where appropriate. We support and will seek to improve the integration with a future DRT scheme, the FACT Community Transport network, and Fenland Car Schemes to effectively provide the vital links with rural hamlets and villages that are not directly served by the bus network.

We will work to ensure that it is easier for passengers to make journeys involving a combination of bus, DRT, rail, community transport, and active travel modes through





seamless integration between modes. New rural Mobility (Travel) Hubs will offer improved interchange between transport modes, acting as a gateway to our public transport network, combined with better integrated ticketing and timetabled connections. This will help ensure that residents can travel easily to destinations without having to rely on a car and will simultaneously reduce pressure on our highway network.

## ACTIVE TRAVEL - WALKING, CYCLING AND MOBILITY AIDS

New, high-quality active travel infrastructure will be developed across Fenland and along upgraded highway corridors and linked to new developments. This network will help to make walking and cycling a safer, more attractive option for local journeys. Moreover, we will seek opportunities to improve interchange between public transport and active modes, particularly for first/last mile trips and short distance journeys within and between Fenland market towns and villages. Our approach will realise the benefits of the emerging *Fenland Transport Strategy*, *Active Travel Strategy* and *Fenland Walking, Cycling and Mobility Aid Strategy*.

It is recognised that active travel modes are more difficult in the rural areas of Fenland; however, by supporting and providing the high-quality infrastructure for these modes it is hoped that more journeys will be undertaken on foot and by bike. These improvements will be implemented on new and existing corridors, focusing particularly in addressing the missing links within the rural network. These will help to alleviate traffic congestion that is found in the towns, whilst also helping to improve air quality. In addition, these improvements will allow those without access to a car – such as teenage children – more independence and opportunity to travel to key destinations. The implementation of the *East Anglian Alternative Fuels Strategy*, in partnership with local districts and central government, will help to reduce carbon emissions towards net zero and improve local air quality.

## SOCIAL INCLUSION AND SUPPORTING OUR COMMUNITIES

New opportunities to travel will need to be supported by supplementary measures aimed at encouraging and supporting use, such as the Travel Buddy and Travel Champions schemes. We will continue to pursue the Travel Champion and Travel Buddy schemes, along with other ‘softer measures’ such as travel planning that are aimed at helping to encourage and support users who may feel less confident about using public and community transport options. This will help to reduce connectivity and accessibility issues within the district, but also maximise the investment in the new transport infrastructure.

## STRATEGIC PROJECTS

### EAST / WEST CORRIDOR

The A47 is both a sub nationally and internationally strategic link. It formed part of the TEN-T Trans European Network Route, making it a part of the European Union’s strategic transport network. Nationally, it is a key route into East Anglia, connecting Norwich and Norfolk with the East Midlands and the A1, and therefore carries a significant number of heavy commercial vehicles.

At a local level, the A47 allows for local movements and direct access between Peterborough, Wisbech and Kings Lynn. Therefore, the A47 acts as a key commuter route for people travelling to and from these key destinations.



The long-distance regional trips (and particularly heavy commercial vehicles) generate a consistent flow of traffic along the route, and when this is mixed with localised commuter traffic the network comes under substantial strain and congestion is common. This is particularly common on the approaches to key junctions such as the A47 / A1101 Elm High Road Roundabout. The high proportion of heavy commercial vehicles travelling along the single carriageway section between Thorney and Wisbech creates an unsafe environment for all road users as some vehicles cannot overtake safely which in turn can lead to increased driver frustration and risk taking.

To address these issues, we continue to work with National Highways to assess the viability of the A47 improvements between the A16 Peterborough and Walton Highway, whilst continuing to assess the viable alternative routeings for active travel modes along and across the corridor.

## WISBECH RAIL

Construction of a new link to Wisbech will transform accessibility of the town. Options for rail, ultra-light rail, and other high order transit such as autonomous pods, tram/Light Rail Transit and Bus Rapid Transit are being considered. Residents and businesses in Wisbech would benefit from being able to reach Cambridge directly, connecting them to the opportunities within Greater Cambridge, including well-paid, skilled roles in the knowledge economy, retail, leisure, education and training opportunities at the University of Cambridge, Anglia Ruskin University and Cambridge Regional College. It will also play a key role in supporting the ambition for Wisbech Garden Town, helping to secure the viability and delivery of additional development.

# LOCAL PROJECTS

## FENLAND STATION REGENERATION

Significant elements of the package of planned enhancements to railway stations within Fenland at Manea, March, and Whittlesea will be completed. Further work is required at all the stations. For example, short platform lengths currently prevent longer, higher

capacity trains from calling at the stations, as well as reducing the frequency of trains able to stop. The potential for interchange with buses is required at all three stations and does not exist at present. In addition to platform lengthening, we will fund station enhancements to improve the quality of station and waiting facilities, as well as improving access to, from and at the stations, following continued engagement with the Hereward Community Rail Partnership. A pedestrian bridge for Whittlesea Station will enable people to catch trains and link to the industrial area from the town when the level crossing is closed.

## WISBECH ACCESS STUDY

The Wisbech Area Transport Study (WAS) is a three phased package of multi modal transport schemes aimed at delivering growth in and around the town. The schemes aim to address congestion, safety concerns, active travel provision and resolve challenges of a transport network that interfaces with a river at key junctions, and with limited crossing opportunities.

- Three initial schemes contained within the WAS are the A47/A1101 roundabout improvements, the A47 Broad End Road junction improvements and the A1101/Weasenham Lane junction; and
- We support the development and implementation of two A47 schemes located in Norfolk as these have significant importance to Wisbech and Cambridgeshire along with the A47 corridor due to the east-west nature of the route.
- The medium-term phase of WAS focuses specifically on Wisbech and unlocking its potential across a range of modes.
- Freedom Bridge roundabout and the adjacent bus station will see improvements for walkers, cyclists, bus services and road users. There is potential for wider economic growth and regeneration proposals in these locations; and
- Improvement schemes along Cromwell Road will open significant opportunities for Wisbech whilst generating a modern and improved gateway into the town from the west.
- The third phase of WAS focuses on strategic traffic and unlocking the potential for Wisbech by removing traffic from its centre allowing for greater use of active travel modes. This will include:



- The provision of re-routeing opportunities (especially for business access);
- Quicker journeys for longer distance traffic that currently must use the centre of the town;
- The western industrial link road is a key component of delivering the sustainable growth strategy for Wisbech; and
- For the medium- and longer-term phases, further feasibility and development work will be needed before firm opportunities for delivery funding are known.

## MARCH AREA TRANSPORT STUDY (MATS)

MATS identifies a number of locations in and around the town where transport interventions were needed to address existing congestion problems, missing active travel links and to provide capacity for future sustainable housing and employment growth.

An online public consultation on proposals was held in May 2020 with subsequent approval for further funding being made by the CPCA to move to Outline Business Case/preliminary design. Detailed design work was completed in 2022 and schemes are expected to go into construction between 2023 and 2026.

The MATS study contains five schemes:

- A141/Peas Hill roundabout capacity improvement, in conjunction with a developer funded and delivered roundabout at the junction of A141/Hostmoor Avenue;
- A141/Twenty Foot Road junction, introduction of traffic signals;
- Broad Street/Dartford Road/Station Road junction, replacement of traffic signals with a mini roundabout and converting Broad Street to a single lane in each direction;
- Development of a Northern Link Road between Hundred Road/Melbourne Road in the south and Longhill Road to the north; and
- High Street/St Peters Road upgrade to existing traffic signals.

MATS has also delivered nine minor schemes specifically focused on improving the safety for March residents. In addition, a *Pedestrian and Cycling Strategy* has been developed and adopted for the town. In excess of ninety possible interventions have been identified to improve the environment for pedestrians and cyclists. A number of these schemes are being implemented or progressed as feasibility study projects in 2023.

## COMMUNITY RAIL PARTNERSHIP AND LOCAL RAIL IMPROVEMENTS

The Hereward Community Rail Partnership (CRP) provides a local voice for the community to have their say on issues relating to railway. The CRP works to ensure that there is strong awareness of railway services locally and more widely through promotion and events.

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, the Fenland railway stations had seen significant growth in usage with over 100,000 additional railway journeys each year. The CRP lobbies for railway service improvements and has played a key role in the delivery of the two hourly service from Manea, the additional CrossCountry services that stop at Manea and the extra Norwich–Liverpool services which stop at March.

## WHITTLESEY RELIEF ROAD

In order to facilitate economic growth in Whittlesey, Fenland, and the wider region, we will consider the need for the Whittlesey Relief Road with the aim to reduce congestion and remove Heavy Goods Vehicles from the A605 having a detrimental impact on the people and environment in and around Whittlesey. The aim of the relief road would be to divert through-traffic away from Whittlesey and to improve journey reliability.

