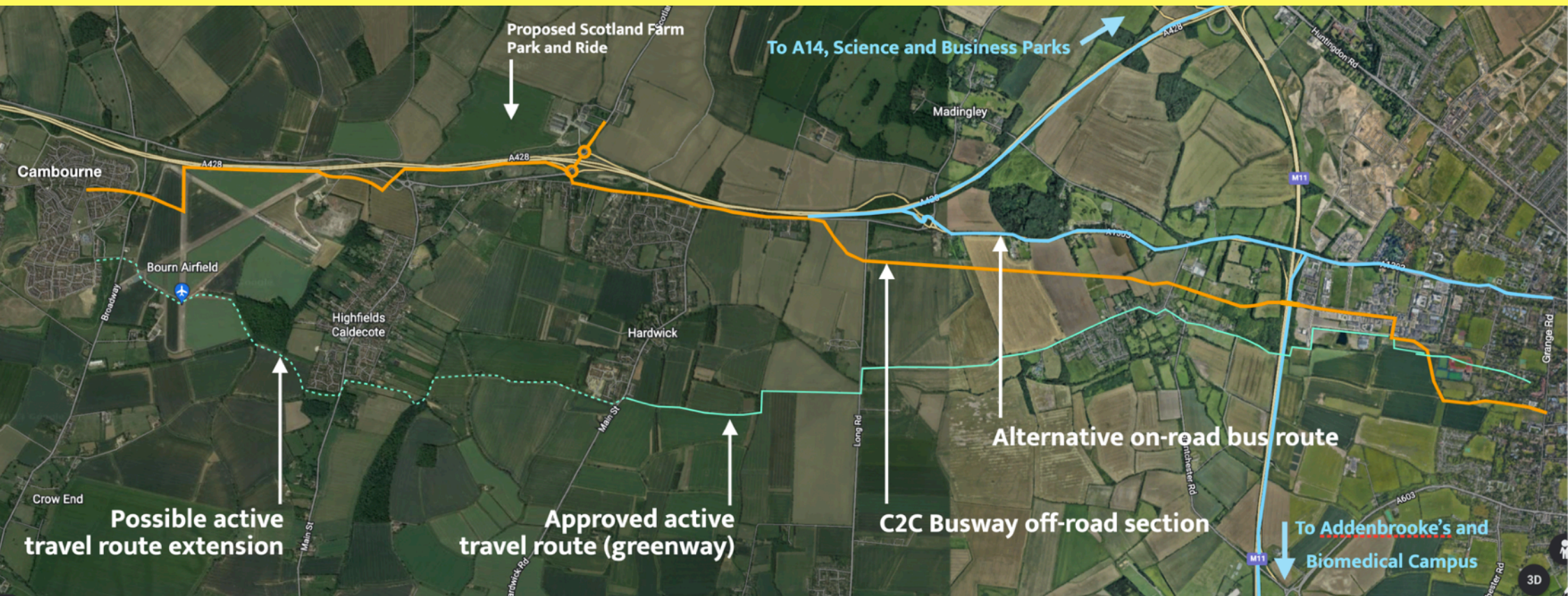


The Cambourne to Cambridge (C2C) Better Public Transport Project

Briefing document for Cambridgeshire County Councillors

Cambridge Past Present & Future

Coton Parish Council • Coton Busway Action Group • Coton Orchard



The Greater Cambridge Partnership (GCP) scheme runs on road in Cambourne, then off road from Bourn to Scotland Road, parallel to the A428.

It rejoins the road, diverts to a new Park & Ride at Scotland Farm, then runs on the A1303 through Hardwick village.

The route leaves the A1303 before the 'Madingley Mulch' roundabout, and cuts through fields, hedges and the Coton Orchard.

It then goes over a new motorway bridge and through a wildlife site to run on road through the West Cambridge University Site.

The final section then goes off-road through another wildlife site, across the West Fields Site, and along a narrow access road to reach Grange Road, where it joins the city's road network.

THE ORIGINAL PLAN

The C2C proposal was formulated by the City Deal in 2014 in response to the [South Cambridgeshire District Council draft Local Plan](#). This included a significant development along the A428 corridor, west of Cambridge. The plan (adopted 2018) stated that there should be improvements to public transport, to include:

'provision of high quality bus priority measures or busway on or parallel to the A1303' (p.74)

An off-road busway is not a requirement of the Local Plan

HOWEVER

- An off-road busway is not a requirement for the Local Plan, and less than half of the GCP's scheme is off- road.
- The GCP's scheme does not provide good routes to key destinations.
- The off-road section down Madingley Hill and through Coton was opposed by the public in all consultations.
- The road and its construction will be extremely ecologically destructive.
- The scheme is disproportionately expensive and carries significant financial risk
- The County Council will be responsible for the financial and environmental risks.
- There is an in-highway alternative scheme that can provide comparable benefits and satisfy the Local Plan at a fraction of the cost, and with less harm to the environment.

There is a feasible, cost-effective alternative that is better for the environment.

THE CURRENT CONTEXT

Since the original proposal there have been significant changes to the conditions and context of the GCP's scheme:

- National government support for the East West Rail scheme, which would provide much faster journeys from a Cambourne Station to the Biomedical Campus, Cambridge Station and Cambridge Science and Business Parks
- Post-Covid work and travel data showing reduction in journeys to work, and future patterns remaining unpredictable
- Start of work on Comberton Greenway, which provides a more attractive and practical cycle route between city and villages
- National Highways are reconsidering an all-ways junction at A428/M11 (Girton Interchange), which would reduce congestion on the A1303 by 30%
- A proposed Congestion Charge which, if it goes ahead, will increase the speed and reliability of bus journeys from Cambourne to the city centre
- A deepening environmental crisis, which means that unnecessary development of green spaces is now unconscionable.

TRANSPORT WEAKNESSES OF THE GCP SCHEME

- **Buses join the city network at Grange Road, which means they cannot return the same way because of the one-way system – resulting in a lengthy circuitous route and journey times that are no faster than buses using Madingley Road.**
- **No guarantee that the off-road section will carry buses at the proposed 10-min interval – no bus companies have indicated that they will want or be able to run such services.**
- **A cycle route on a steep hill, which is potentially dangerous and discriminatory, as well as duplicating the much better Comberton Greenway route, now under construction.**

THE FINANCIAL RISK

Off-road estimated cost in 2018	£157M¹
Current estimate (for 2024 start)	£220M²
In-highway alternative (for 2024) (or less)	£20m (or less)

Even on the 2018 estimate, the remaining City Deal funds barely cover the cost of this single project. The maintenance cost per year is an estimated £1M, which would fall to the County Council.

C2C is disproportionately expensive relative to other schemes – even more so when measured by the Cost–Benefit Ratio, which is only 0.43³. Schemes rated < 2.00 do not normally proceed. This would be even worse if East West Rail goes ahead, because the number of passengers using the GCP busway would be significantly lower.

1. The Outline Business Case estimate is £160.5m, based on Jan 2020 prices and 10% inflation to opening in 2024. (Although construction inflation is now nearly 20% p.a.)
2. The 2018 figure multiplied by the ONS annual rate of inflation. This does not allow for, e.g. extra steel price rises, so, again, probably conservative.
3. Calculated value of the benefits amount to less than half the total cost. Even with less-certain benefits included, the adjusted CBR is only 0.48.

This is just one of four corridor schemes. Building this off-road busway will prevent investment in these and other major infrastructure projects, including Greenways.

LOSS OF GREEN BELT AND SIGNIFICANT LANDSCAPE



Many walkers enjoy unspoiled views on Red Meadow Hill



View towards St Peter's Church, Coton



View from the American Cemetery Entrance

The Busway will cut across all these landscapes

- The off-road route would run through Green Belt to the west of Cambridge and
- across fields bought in the 1930s by local charity, Cambridge Past, Present & Future
- to protect this countryside from development. It now has legal covenants held by
- The National Trust, who are objecting the the GCP scheme and have stated that the
- area is:

• **‘a valued landscape which has intrinsic visual, historic and cultural**

• **significance’** ([Letter, pp.2, 3](#))

• This Green Belt land and ‘the Coton Conservation Area’ is identified in the LDA

• Cambridge Greenbelt Study (see [GCP Planning Appraisal](#)) as a ‘heritage asset’

• which is:

• **“critical to preserving the the setting and historic character of the city” and**

• **as requiring “very special circumstances” to permit its removal.”**

• **(Planning Appraisal 3.2.2, 1.7)**

• In order to comply with Green Belt planning policy, the GCP will have to

• demonstrate that there are no alternative locations which would avoid the damage

• to the Green Belt. We have shown that there is an alternative scheme which would

• result in far less harm to the Green Belt.

• THE AMERICAN CEMETERY

• The American Cemetery is a world-renowned monument and a Grade 1 listed

• landscape. The site was chosen for its peaceful setting, and on the understanding

• that it would be protected from encroaching development. The Cemetery’s

• Superintendent has expressed concern that an off-road busway running across the

• fields nearby will compromise the setting, and subsequently open up the land

• between the busway and the Madingley Road for development.

THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

The UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world and Cambridgeshire is one of the most nature-depleted counties in the country. In response, Cambridgeshire County Council has committed to doubling nature by 2050. Initiatives such as the Cambridge Nature Network are trying to ensure that green corridors – crucial for the survival and recovery of wildlife – are protected and restored.

And yet the off-road busway cuts right across the green corridors on the west side of Cambridge.

This stands in direct conflict with the UK Government's National Planning Policy Framework (2021), adopted by Greater Cambridge, which states that planning decisions should be 'establishing coherent ecological networks' and that plans should 'safeguard wildlife corridors and stepping stones that connect them' (p.50–51).

The off-road busway also bisects:

- two city wildlife sites
- the largest traditional orchard in the county
- a key hedgerow containing rare species.



- Area of Coton Orchard removed for construction
- Other areas cleared for construction (eventually new 'grassland' planting)
- Other areas cleared for construction (For new woodland planting)
- Bus stop, cycle park
- Cycle park

The construction of the GCPs scheme, including a bridge over the M11 and a new Park & Ride, will produce significant greenhouse gases.

Park & Ride encourages car journeys and so also results in increased emissions.

Trees and vegetation which absorb carbon will be cut down.

If East West Rail goes ahead, this damage will have been for nothing.

COTON ORCHARD

This 60-acre Traditional Orchard is the largest in the county and the eighth largest in England. Traditional Orchards improve the condition of the land and are hotspots for biodiversity. The UK has lost 90% of its Traditional Orchards since 1950s – which is why they are designated Priority Habitats.

Undisturbed by ploughing or pesticides for more than a century, and with a mix of traditional planting, hedgerows and scrub, the value of this orchard is more than the sum of its parts.

It is home to at least 8 species of bat and many other Red List species (recognised as under threat). Already a vital refuge for wildlife, this vestige of the county's orchard heritage is undergoing a programme of restoration and management to maintain and enhance its value both as a productive orchard and a rich, exciting habitat.

Running the busway off-road will destroy so much of the orchard as to effectively result in its complete demise.



IMPOSSIBLE TO MITIGATE DAMAGE

The GCP is aiming for 20% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG). This sounds great, but it is not possible to replace the habitats found in traditional orchards like Coton. This is because it takes well over 50 years for the habitat conditions to be replicated, and because of the need for traditional orchard practices over such a sustained period.

The Mitigation Hierarchy (on which BNG rests) demands that all schemes **avoid impacts first, then mitigate, and only compensate as a last resort**.

This means that habitats should be retained in situ unless all other options have been exhausted. And there is an alternative that the GCP has not properly considered.

There is an alternative that the GCP has not properly considered.

AN ALTERNATIVE SCHEME USING THE A1303

An alternative, in-highway scheme comprises a range of measures that include some sections of bus lane and some new bus-priority traffic signals. Together, these measures would enable buses and other traffic to run freely along the A428 and A1303, and then into Cambridge, as well as south on the M11 to the Biomedical Campus.

ADVANTAGES TO THE SCHEME

- Similar journey times for a fraction of the cost
- Far less damage to the environment
- Lower carbon emissions
- More direct journeys to Biomedical Campus, and the same journey time to other key destinations
- A safer, pleasanter, more direct cycle route
- Does not depend on Congestion Charge for funding
- Maintenance costs likely to be significantly lower
- No risk of being expensive 'white elephant' for the County Council
- Frees up GCP budget to deliver other vital projects

The GCP have never explained why this scheme could not be considered, comparing their selected scheme only with on-road schemes that were not viable.

Contrary to what the GCP are claiming, an in-highway scheme is entirely feasible. This is borne out by detailed analysis in the GCP's own [C2C Outline Business Case Options Assessment Report, Section 8](#) and this [2021 Report](#), and was deemed to have merit by an Independent Inspector.

Other transport schemes, such as East West Railway and the Congestion Charge, would have a major impact on travel in the area if they go ahead. These would result in the GCP off-road busway being under-used and a financial failure. This is a significant risk. An in-highway scheme, on the other hand, makes better use of existing infrastructure and therefore does not carry this risk. Its success does not depend on other schemes.

Provision for cycling and other active travel will all be made by the GCP's Comberton-to-Cambridge Greenway, already under construction. This route is more direct, safer and does not include a very steep hill.

Additional recommendations under the alternative scheme include:

- The westward extension of the Comberton Greenway as far as Cambourne
- Dropping the Park and Ride at Scotland Farm in favour of high-quality bus services from Cambourne
- A proper bus station in Cambourne with appropriate facilities.

The estimated cost of the in-highway measure is no more than £20M.



OFF-ROAD VS ON-ROAD

The GCP's C2C off-road route

- Likely cost >£230M
- Potential opening in 2026
- Was opposed by the majority of the public in all GCP consultations
- Does not provide straightforward journeys to most key destinations (with the exception of the West Cambridge Site)
- Bus journey time on slowest days (1 in 20) = 31 mins (reduces the average 30+minute C2C journey time by less than 3 mins)
- Time saving for general traffic on slowest days (1 in 20) = 0 mins
- Business case at risk from East West Rail

Alternative in-highway scheme

- Likely cost <£20M
- Potential opening in 2025
- Was the preferred majority option in all public consultations
- Similar journey times to key destinations in most cases (except the West Cambridge site, but this is still not significantly different.)
- Bus journey time on slowest days (1 in 20) = 31 mins
- Time saving for general traffic on slowest days (1 in 20) = 2 mins
- Business case not at risk from East West Rail

THE BOTTOM LINE

- The GCP have not published revised cost estimates for C2C.

The scheme is likely to cost far more than £200M.

- The GCP must demonstrate that the off-road busway warrants the consequent harm to Green belt.

There is an alternative scheme that avoids harm.

- The GCP have dismissed the public's preference for an in-highway busway, have only ever compared their scheme with in-highway options that are not viable, and have never given satisfactory reasons or evidence for their decision.

An on-road solution using the A1303 is feasible, far less damaging to the environment, costs a fraction of the off-road scheme, and poses less risk.

- The GCP claims it will mitigate the loss of Coton Orchard and achieve 20% Biodiversity Net Gain.

The damage will be fatal to the whole orchard, all of which will be lost. Planting fruit trees elsewhere will not be able to compensate for over 50 years.

A VOTE FOR THE SCHEME RISKS FINANCIAL AND REPUTATIONAL EXPOSURE, AND IT WILL NOT PROVIDE A GOOD SOLUTION.

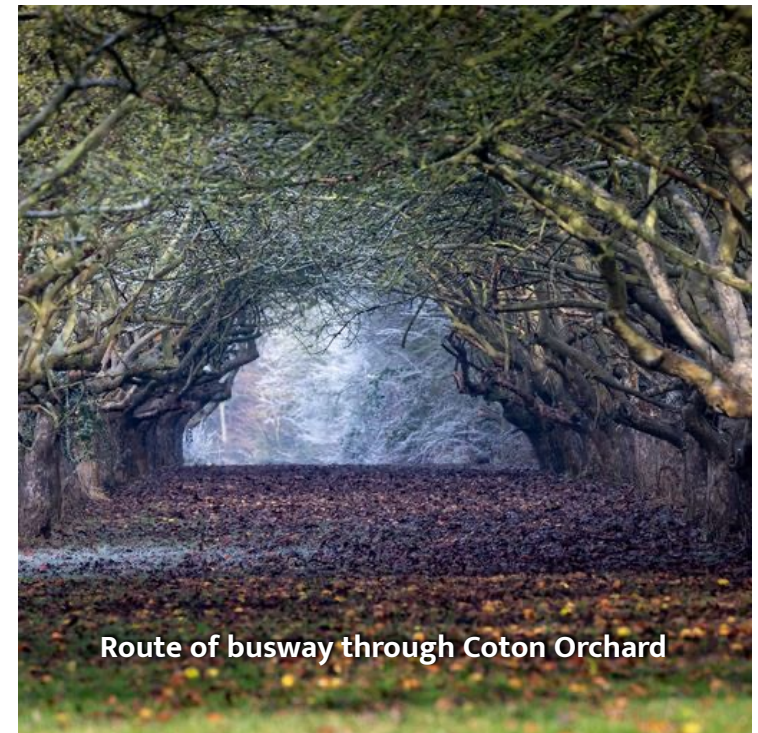
WHAT WE ASK OF YOU

The GCP would like us all to believe that this is a done deal and that there is no alternative. But that is simply not true.

We believe it will be worth pressing the pause button now. And we believe it is possible to get badly needed bus services without sacrificing valuable countryside and incurring enormous financial risk.

That is why we would like to make these two requests:

- **That you ensure you are acquainted with the facts of the case and understand the risk**
- **That you ask the GCP to carry out a properly objective comparison of the current proposal and the alternative in-highway scheme.**



Route of busway through Coton Orchard



View of Coton Orchard and countryside beyond that would be destroyed by the GCPs scheme

