

Press Release to Cambridge Independent on behalf of Better Ways than Busway group
Date: 25/4/22

How do you know whether any local party can and will influence transport planning?

There is one key issue in South Cambs which should differentiate the candidates in the forthcoming council elections and that is transport planning and the numerous disconnected proposals that are being imposed on local communities.

CSET is such an issue and our campaign group, Better Ways than Busway, has been trying to establish the views of local candidates on Greater Cambridge Partnership's plan to build 14m wide tarmac roads ("busways") through greenbelt and special countryside.

Quoting from Cambridge Independent (20/4/22) we learn that:

The **Conservatives** "...do not support the proposed CSET busway. The current route of the Cambourne to Cambridge Busway is not acceptable."

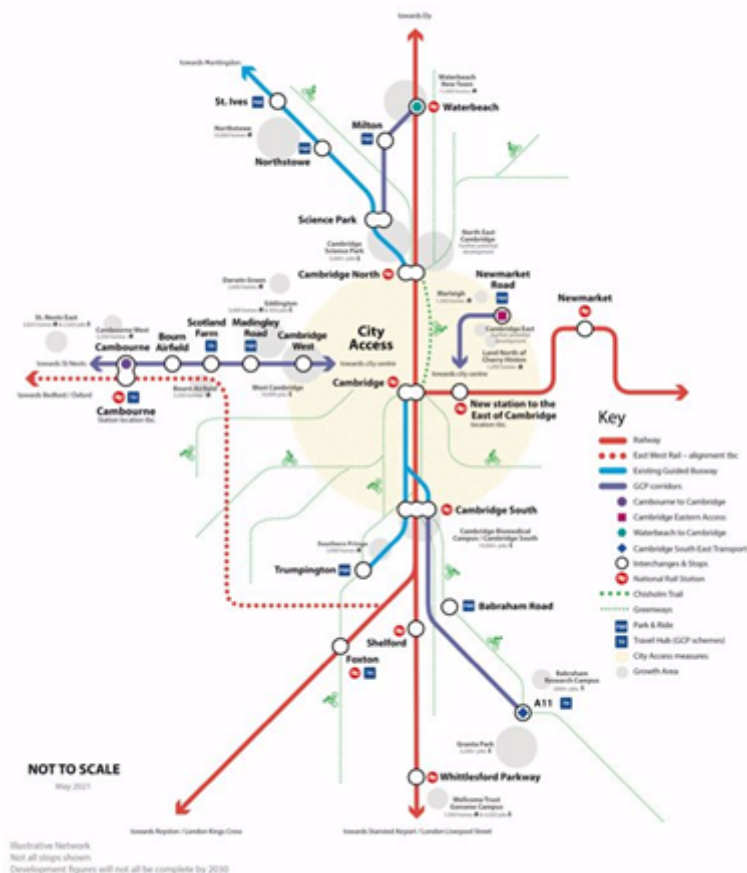
Labour say "Busways are one transport option. There must be consultations and environmental assessments of any proposed scheme. Community voice is important."

Lib Dems state "There's an urgent need to tackle congestion and the worsening pollution from cars. Many key workers and students are facing terribly long commutes that affect the quality of life... We believe in sustainability and public transport... The CSET and C2C projects are part of a plan for a network of public transport... This is about equality of opportunity for all while solving environmental problems."

The Green party advocates "Good transport alternatives like busways – but only if they did not destroy important natural habitats..."

What can the public possibly draw from this? How do these comments sit with the parties' action to date and statements previously made? And how do *local* candidates' opinions sit within their own wider party?

The GCP flagship projects comprise four expensive, environmentally damaging busways. Do any of the candidates really believe these solve today's transport and housing problems, when they are still years from completion? Or will serve the long-term transport needs of everyone in Greater Cambridge, when they don't actually create an integrated public transport network? Or are an adequate response to the climate crisis?



We would ask the Cambridge Independent to help voters by following up the comments made, exploring discrepancies and publishing a detailed explanation of each party's position on the viability of CSET (our particular focus) and indeed other transport plans, including East West Rail, Cambridge South and East stations. Local people would undoubtedly like to understand the position of each political candidates on these transport plans.

Notes for Editors

Better Ways than Busway is a non-political campaign group made up of people and organisations in S Cambs and supports improvement in public transport. It campaigns for an alternative to the CSET route and supports the limited expansion of the A1307 corridor for buses, with a rail connection to Haverhill in the longer term. This avoids the environmental damage of the current proposals and serves the public and economic need more effectively.

Ahead of the local elections to be held on 5 May we wrote to all candidates standing in the electoral wards of the Shelfords & Stapleford, Sawston, Whittlesford and Duxford & Barbraham.

Below is the letter we wrote and the three replies we received in the order we received them.

BWTB Letter to Candidates

I am writing to you in my capacity as coordinator of the Better Ways Than Busway Group (BWTB), a non-political community organisation formed to campaign for a better route for the South East

Cambridge busway than the route being pursued by the Greater Cambridge Partnership, which would be constructed through open green belt countryside causing significant harm.

BWTB believes that a better route can be built within the A1307 corridor which will achieve similar transport and economic benefits, at less costs, quicker, and with much less damage to open countryside. Over the past 6 months there have been several significant changes in regard to this scheme:

- Planning permission for a new retirement village in Haverhill Road, which means that the busway's route will have a bigger impact on the landscape of the Gog Magog Hills and will go right through a newly designated country park.
- The opportunity to connect with the Cambridge Biomedical Campus expansion earmarked in the draft Local Plan to be alongside the A1307.
- The cancellation of the Cambridge Metro, meaning that the busway no longer has to be segregated from traffic along its entire length.
- Progress on the Cambridge South Station project, which will likely cause delay to the delivery of the GCP project because it will require use of the same land for construction compounds.
- Reduced travel patterns arising from the pandemic.
- Anthony Browne MP's survey results, which generated a bigger response than any of the GCP's consultations – 81% of respondents said that they would 'definitely not' or 'probably not' support the present route and 69% supported the idea of reopening the Haverhill to Cambridge railway line as a longer-term alternative to the GCP's busway.

In light of these changes, BWTB is asking for the Greater Cambridge Partnership to assess a route in the A1307 corridor against a route through open countryside, before ploughing ahead with an expensive public inquiry. You can find out more at <https://www.cambridgeppf.org/south-east-cambridge-busway>

We are writing to you, and all candidates for the Duxford and Babraham Ward to ask where you and your group stand on this important issue. We will then circulate your responses to enable voters to make an informed choice in the May 5th local election.

Please respond to me with your views on the GCP's proposal. The key issue for our members is, if elected, would you oppose the construction of a busway through open countryside and what action you would take to stop it happening.

Responses of 300 words or less will be circulated in full. We reserve the right to edit longer submissions. Please respond by email, in Word format, by 5.00 p.m. Monday 18th April at the latest so that we can circulate our supporters before the despatch of postal voting papers on Wednesday 20th April.

Yours sincerely



Howard Kettel*

Response from Peter Fane, Liberal Democrat

Thank you for your email on behalf of BWTB group. You ask about my position on the CSET busway proposals, and what I would do about this if elected to the District Council.

As you know, I have always opposed the GCP proposals for cross-country busways to be constructed through the finest countryside in the Cambridge green belt, in particular the proposed CSET busway through the edge of the Magog Chalk Hills LCA.

I think that building new roads (in this case for buses) rather than improving existing travel corridors should always be avoided where possible, including because of the climate change, environmental and landscape impact. The concrete bridges proposed across the river Cam would be particularly damaging and are completely unnecessary because a viable alternative route is available, in particular busway(s) beside the A1307 where some of the necessary works were undertaken by the County Council prior to the formation of the GCP. Any new works should focus on the section between Hinton Way roundabout and Addenbrookes roundabout, where the vast majority of congestion actually occurs, and a new spur may be needed around the Addenbrookes site to Cambridge South.

The main congestion which makes buses to Cambridge station and the centre of the city relatively slow (and reduces modal shift) is actually North of Addenbrookes roundabout. We will need to wait to see what the Mayor, now responsible for strategic transport, proposes for this section following the abandonment of the CAM project. Those proposals, in particular the substantially revised LTCP, will be put out to consultation this summer and it will then be for the GCP and others to implement them for the CSET section, once finalised by the "combined authority", rather than their own long-standing commitment to cross-country busways and large car parks which are now increasingly irrelevant to resolving the actual problems of congestion.

In the longer term, I remain supportive of the proposal by RailFuture and others to re-open the Cambridge to Haverhill railway. Further studies are needed before this long-term option can be fully assessed, and consideration should be given to light rail options here and elsewhere. Rail in all its forms is likely to be a more sustainable long term option than buses, in part because of the much reduced rolling resistance.

If elected I will continue to press the GCP Assembly and Board to reconsider their proposals, to adopt the more sustainable and cost-effective alternatives available, and to focus their efforts on long-delayed greenways rather than busways except where specific improvements are needed to existing routes. I shall also press the C&P Mayor to assert his position, and his expressed willingness to consider alternatives, more strongly including in his role as a member (currently non-voting) on the GCP board.

Many thanks,
Peter

Response from Ben Shelton, Conservative

Myself and my group stand firm that we do not support the route proposed through open countryside which would have a massive impact on the Gogs. I agree that a better route can be built within the A1307 corridor.

The track history of the GCP is poor, I don't think they are fit for purpose as in my view they have achieved NOTHING to improve the lives of residents.

I have no faith in the GCP and are not listening to residents' views or are even bothering to make sure they are listening to residents' views. Anthony Browne's response was far greater than any of the half cut GCP consultations.

Thank goodness for an organisation like BWTB who will stand up against this and I fully support the work it does but worry about the financial burden this could place on Parish Councils.

It is also disappointing that the Lib Dem administration is not wanting this to be stopped and seem to be supporting the GCP in its bureaucratic undemocratic existence which shows that the Lib Dems do not and will not make tough decisions and will not protect the residents from this outrageous proposal.

If this proposal goes ahead in its current form then the whole immediate area will be ripe for development, no Inspector would refuse development with new access routes close by.

I would speak up at every opportunity to expose, question and prove that there is a better way than busway.

Ben Shelton

Response from Gregory Price, Green

Thank you for your email. Please note that my response is as the Green Party candidate for the district council elections to the Stapleford & Shelfords ward, rather than as a Great Shelford Parish Council member.

I am happy to publicly reiterate my opposition to the current Greater Cambridge Partnership (GCP) proposals for the South East Cambridge busway. The proposed busway plans are unnecessary, grossly damaging ecologically, open the 'green Belt' to the very real threat of wider development and fail to acknowledge the changes to work/commuting patterns brought about by the pandemic. Furthermore the current plans offer no benefits to the villages that will be adversely impacted.

I believe that there are better options, primary of which is on road bus lanes along the A1307. It appears that these alternatives have been overlooked in favour of a 'grand vision' rather than through a genuine desire to address the very real transport and infrastructure issues we face.

If elected as a district councillor I will continue to voice my opposition to the current GCP proposals and to push for a less destructive and more appropriate alternative.

I hope that this addresses your concerns.

Kind regards
Greg

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*On behalf of BWTB. The Group includes:

Gt Shelford Parish Council
Stapleford Parish Council
Babraham Parish Council
Cambridge Past Present & Future
Mogog Trust
Hobsons Conduit Trust
Smarter Cambridge Transport
Cambridge Connect