

There are many bewildering aspects of the project to think about: the environmental destruction; the carbon cost; the impact on communities; the HGVs, the dust, odour, and noise; the size of the new plant - bigger than Wembley; the poor design; a whole new road junction; the outfall; the transfer tunnel; the flood risk; the chalk aquifer; the setting of historic buildings permanently affected; the fragility of the pointless organic screening; the fact that Anglian Water readily admits there is no operational need for the move; the horrendous cost to the taxpayer. It is easy to forget that there is actually only one element that needs to be in place for this to go ahead: 'very special circumstances'. Even Anglian water admits that nothing else matters: (8.3; 2.23c) 'it is unlikely that the other benefits described would be sufficient to clearly outweigh Green Belt harm and any other harm in this instance to constitute very special circumstances' .

'Very special circumstances' is a vague term, so it is crucial that the decision is based on solid, compelling evidence. And solid compelling evidence is precisely what is lacking. Will Hartree, the new development planned for the core site, ever come about? Will there be enough water for this development, given water scarcity and over abstraction of chalk streams in Cambridge? Only today it was announced that the Environment Agency has blocked yet another development - this time, a new Cancer hospital in Cambridge, because of lack of water. Will it be possible to decontaminate the land? Will the relocation deliver enough houses to match the commercial area, or will Hartree, as announced to the surprise of Cambridge City Councillors on 12 February 2024, actually be a commercially-led development, with a slow housing build-out rate, which will exacerbate the housing shortage and increase house prices? What will be the final shape of the Hartree masterplan and will it be given the go-ahead? At the moment the Hartree website, displays and consultations with the public, and presentations to councillors, all say completely different things.

The document that sets out to prove why this site at Cowley Road is one of national significance, better than the rest; and has to be cleared for development, is the 'Strategic Carbon Assessment'. It was prepared by, amongst others, the Council's climate consultants, Bioregional, who, in another report for the Council in 2020, favoured low-rise village homes which 'gain a small carbon benefit because they can fit more rooftop solar panels per dwelling.' Which report is reliable when they now claim the opposite? At least one thing is clear, the whole life carbon cost of the Proposed Development is much higher than that of leaving the existing plant in situ. And if carbon offsetting is a priority then why not apply it to the existing sewage plant?

The use of the word 'sustainable' to justify everything is very confusing. Cambridge City Council, in their 2022 Information Pack about NECAAP, says that transport is the only thing they have considered when defining the word 'sustainable'. If that is the case, then the new plant will most definitely be in the least sustainable location, because sewage will now have to be pumped 24/7 through a 2.4km pipeline, 20 metres deep, running under the river Cam. At the hearing on 9 April the applicant argued that sustainability was actually about so much more than that, including protecting and enhancing the historic environment. This seems a strange aspect to highlight, when you are planning on putting a sewage plant on Green Belt, designed as South Cambridgeshire District Council says to 'protect the special historic setting of Cambridge.' And will there even be enough money to pay for the relocation, given the ever-escalating costs and gaps in funding? With so many unknowns and no compelling evidence for developing this site above all others, the relocation should not go ahead.