



# Wisbech 2020 Vision

Fenland District Council, Cambridgeshire County Council, Wisbech Town Council, Greater Cambridge & Greater Peterborough Enterprise Partnership (LEP), Thomas Clarkson Academy, Anglian Water, the MP for North East Cambridgeshire and the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority.







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# 1. Wisbech Charter for working better together





## 1 Wisbech Charter for working *better together*

Only by working together more closely to capitalise on opportunities and overcome challenges will we be able to deliver the social, economic and environmental regeneration of Wisbech. We are committed to providing resource and working in partnership to achieve this.

### **Wisbech Town Council**

*Council Leader:*

*Town Clerk:*

### **Fenland District Council**

*Council Leader:*

*Chief Executive:*

### **MP For North East Cambridgeshire**

### **Cambridgeshire County Council**

*Council Leader:*

*Chief Executive:*

### **Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough Enterprise Partnership (LEP)**

*Chairman:*

*Executive Director:*

### **Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority**

*Mayor:*

*Chief Executive:*

### **Anglian Water**

*Chief Executive:*

## 2. Evolution of the Vision



## 2 Evolution of the Wisbech 2020 Vision

### Where did the Vision come from?

The idea of the Wisbech 2020 Vision emerged in 2012. It was borne out of discussions between the two political leaders of Fenland District and Cambridgeshire County Council and the MP for North East Cambridgeshire. All three figures agreed that the challenges faced by Wisbech and its hinterland were greater than those elsewhere in their constituencies, and in response, public bodies and private sector partners needed to think differently about what to do.

The idea of local organisations working harder in and around Wisbech coincided with the onset of public sector austerity and shrinking local government budgets that continue to this day. Therefore, simply throwing resource at the problem was not, and is not, an option for the future.

The approach taken was therefore to bring together a group of public, private and third sector representatives and create a shared framework that allowed everyone to contribute and work smarter. As a result, the first Wisbech 2020 Vision strategy was launched in 2013.

As time passed the first strategy was updated. The original three themes of *live, work* and *visit* were replaced with *infrastructure and growth, town centre, skills and education, health and wellbeing and communication* (2015). These changes reflected the evolution of circumstances in Wisbech and the recognition that greater emphasis was needed on social issues.

Many of the actions contained in the first two versions of the strategy have been delivered, some are ongoing and others have fallen away as the situation has changed around them.

As time has passed, other major initiatives have emerged which are progressing in parallel to the Wisbech 2020 Vision, linking up where appropriate; this includes the possibility of Wisbech receiving Garden Town status and securing an allocation for over 12,000 new homes and associated infrastructure (see below); and, local government devolution which could radically re-shape how public services are funded and delivered.

As part of a healthy ongoing process of review and in order to keep pace with change, at the start of 2016, Fenland District Council and Cambridgeshire County Council along with Wisbech Town Council, the Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough Local Enterprise Partnership (GCGP LEP) and Anglian Water who were now at the table, resolved again that more focus was needed to take the Wisbech 2020 Vision strategy to the next level. As a result, over the course of 2016 unprecedented levels of dedicated research, consultation and analysis were carried out to review and rebuild this iteration of the Wisbech 2020 Vision strategy.

## What has it achieved so far?

A lot has already been achieved. The Wisbech 2020 Vision has led and supported numerous projects since it was set up. Just a few of the major successes are illustrated on the timeline below.



## What's next?

The 2017 Wisbech 2020 Vision is designed around four inter-related themes that provide a framework for a comprehensive series of actions that can support the regeneration and growth of Wisbech and its surroundings:

1. Education and skills
2. Health, wellbeing and cohesion
3. Infrastructure and the built environment
4. Local economy



All of the themes are underwritten by the Charter at section 1 whereby the partners agree to work *better together* to deliver the various actions. This pledge has been adopted by each of the respective bodies.

Within each theme, the Wisbech 2020 Vision contains transformational actions based on evidence of demand and need and fresh thinking such as the Beyond 2020 report. These actions are deliberately bold but eminently deliverable. It is these actions that the partners involved in the Wisbech 2020 Vision will strive to achieve.

The Wisbech 2020 Vision will continue to be overseen by the Core Vision Group which comprises the Leaders of Wisbech Town Council, Fenland District Council and Cambridgeshire County Council and the MP for North East Cambridgeshire.

On a day-to-day level, the actions contained in the Wisbech 2020 Vision will be managed by a Steering Group that has been up and running since the start of 2016. The Steering Group provides joined-up senior level leadership from across local agencies and co-ordinates action to ensure delivery of the Wisbech 2020 Vision. It represents an unprecedented level of collective action and corporate focus from the member agencies and is a landmark initiative for the town.

The role of the Steering Group is set out in a separate Terms of Reference document which includes a commitment to regular engagement with the local community and stakeholders and coordinating input from relevant professionals across the public and private sector to galvanise action.

#### **How does this link to the Garden Town proposal?**

The Wisbech Garden Town proposal is a bold and ambitious response to central Government's drive to deliver new homes and support economic growth. It is a big idea, potentially even a 'game changer' for the town that has attracted support from Ministers, Local Government, major companies and the University of Cambridge.





The Wisbech Garden Town idea recognises that the world around us is changing; the impacts of climate change, population growth and economic uncertainty all place a great amount of strain on communities and businesses across the country. The Garden Town will ensure that Wisbech is ready to face these challenges through the delivery of an exemplar new community of over 12,000 new homes that will support the existing town.

It is important to recognise that the Wisbech Garden Town idea isn't just about building homes; it has economic development at its heart. It seeks to bring new jobs and wage growth to the local community, bringing earnings in Wisbech in-line with the rest of the County and it seeks to support local businesses to survive and thrive whilst reinvigorating the town centre.

The emerging spatial plan for the Garden Town includes:

- The delivery of up to 12,000 new homes
- A new country park and more formal recreation spaces
- New primary schools
- A new secondary school
- Space for new shops and facilities
- 13 hectares of land for new office based employment and nearly 80 hectares of land for new industrial employment
- The retention of historic landscapes and habitats such as woodland and orchards.

A Working Group has been set up to develop plans for the Garden Town and progress towards delivery. It is made up of a wide range of specialists and stakeholders many of whom are represented on the Wisbech 2020 Vision Steering Group reflecting the areas of cross-over and ensuring that we are joined-up.

To give the project a real boost, the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority recently approved £6.5m to take forward the feasibility work over the next two years. This work will not only involve the traditional development and technical appraisals, but will also look at social impact and a branding strategy for the town which aligns well with the Wisbech 2020 Vision programme.

In addition, key infrastructure such as the A47 upgrade and the rail link from Wisbech to Cambridge will be assessed via the Garden Town and other approved feasibility work.

The Wisbech 2020 Vision deals with the here and now and must stand regardless of progress with the Garden Town which is all about the long-term future. The bodies of work are therefore progressing in tandem but are not reliant upon one another.



### 3. What we know about Wisbech





### 3 What we know about Wisbech

An unprecedented programme of engagement, research and consultation was undertaken during 2016. This work sought to identify objective and empirical data that highlighted trends in Wisbech, some negative, but some also very positive.

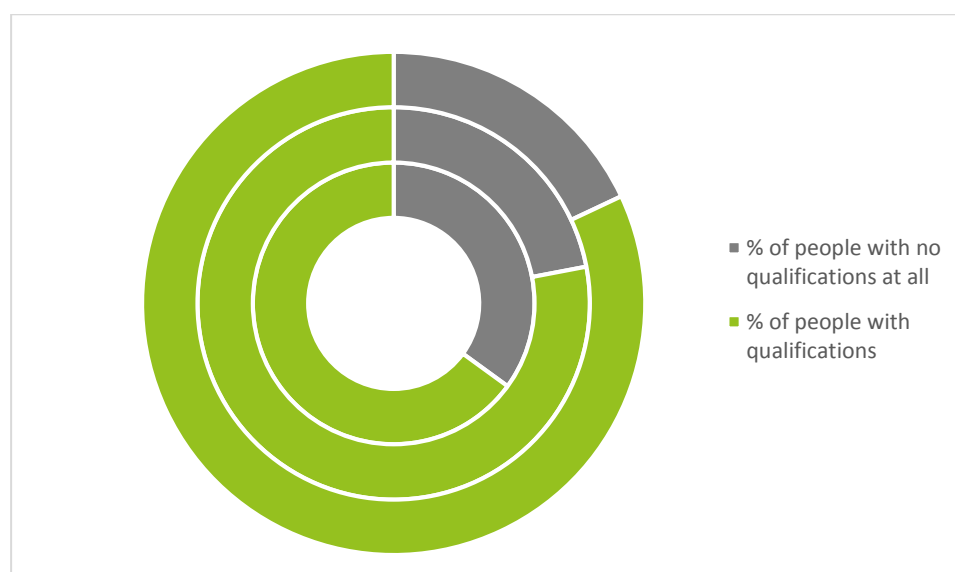
The research confirmed a lot of what we know from working in Wisbech every day and paints a challenging picture. However, it also offers some fantastically positive stories and opportunities that can be built upon. A comprehensive gazetteer of the data is provided in an accompanying report but a few snapshots are provided below to give the reader a sense of Wisbech in 2017.

**Wisbech has one of the highest concentrations of Listed buildings and structures in the East of England. The North Brink is described by one of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century's great authorities on historic buildings as "one of the finest brick streets in England".**

**Listed buildings in Fenland towns:**



**35% of people in Wisbech (inner ring) have no qualifications at all. The equivalent picture across England is 22% (middle ring) and Cambridgeshire is 18% (outer ring).**



A typical new three-bedroom house in Cambridge today might sell for over £700,000. Similar properties in Wisbech, where they are being built, are being sold for around £170,000. This makes property in Wisbech hugely affordable compared to a city only 40 miles away but is also highlights a weak property market, which is a symptom of many of the issues noted in this strategy.

Typical price of a new 3-bedroom home:

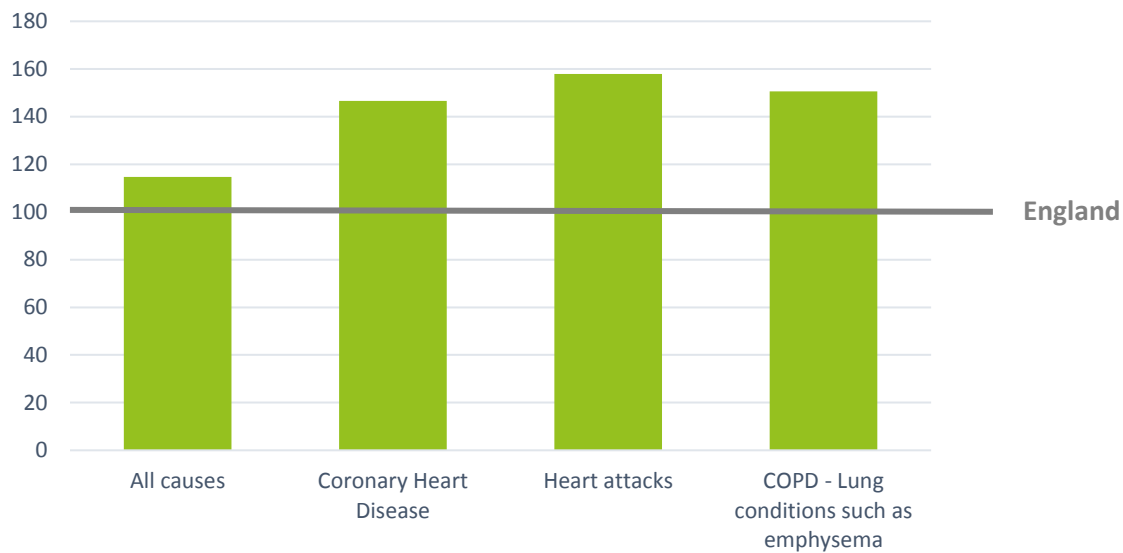


Wisbech has a very high concentration of economic activity engaged in the ‘agri-food’ sector. The range of activities taking place and the importance of this grouping means that it operates as a cluster, just as hi-tech does in Cambridge. This doesn’t just mean Wisbech has lots of growers, it means that it has all of the related services that allow this cluster to thrive.





**Rates of emergency hospital admissions related to lifestyle factors such as smoking are significantly higher in Wisbech than across England. This shines a light on the lifestyles of residents in the town and suggests low levels of utilisation of preventive care.**





## 4. The refreshed strategy





## 4 The refreshed Wisbech 2020 Vision strategy

As research and consultation progressed over 2016 a refreshed strategy started to emerge from the previous documents and new thinking. Discussions with partner agencies, Councillors and the community helped to shape emerging ideas and have helped to prioritise particular issues.

Reflecting on previous versions of the Wisbech 2020 Vision it was clear that actions in this document need to be sharper, more ambitious and more active than in the past. But ultimately they must also be deliverable; actions are therefore designed deliberately to form the basis of funding applications, Council resolutions, lobbying efforts and real projects. Some actions will take many years to fully deliver, others can be achieved within months, but what is important is that they are based on evidence of demand and need and can make a difference.

A summary of the refreshed strategy is provided below.

		<b>Partners at the centre of the Wisbech 2020 Vision will:</b>
<b>Cross-cutting theme: Working better together</b>	<b>Theme 1: Education and skills</b>	a) Equip schools in Wisbech to attract the very best teaching talent
		b) Place schools and libraries at the centre of community life
		c) Build better links between schools and regional businesses
	<b>Theme 2: Health, wellbeing and cohesion</b>	a) Deliver new initiatives and pilot new ideas to improve health & wellbeing
		b) Shape new and improved health facilities in Wisbech
		c) Support the community to grow together and address areas where there is a lack of cohesion
	<b>Theme 3: Infrastructure and the built environment</b>	a) Reduce journey times between Wisbech - Cambridge and Wisbech - Peterborough and reduce the perceived distance
		b) Redouble efforts to secure improved national road connectivity
		c) Accelerate development at existing allocations and undeveloped sites
		d) Secure further investment in Wisbech's outstanding built heritage and leave a positive legacy for future generations
	<b>Theme 4: Local economy</b>	a) Position the agri-food cluster at the centre of the Wisbech economy and help it to thrive
		b) Increase engagement with businesses to help them flourish and help grow the economy
		c) Restore the image of Wisbech as the proud economic and social Capital of the Fens.

## Theme 1: Education and skills

Issues relating to education and skills are truly multi-faceted and at the very core of what is holding Wisbech back from realising its full potential.

Low-levels of achievement, for example, mean that many residents are employed in low-skilled and low-wage jobs with limited disposable income to reinvest in the economy and limited ability to set up a new business. The international nature of the community often means that language barriers challenge the effectiveness of education services on parents and children, leaving them with a narrower spectrum of choices for work. Negative OFSTED reviews of our schools drive aspirational parents to enrol their children elsewhere which can leave Wisbech schools with the children of those families without the means go elsewhere; this drives falling attainment and impacts OFSTED reports which (alongside broader perception issues) deters aspiring young families from moving to Wisbech which has a stifling effect on demand for new housing and inward investment. And so the cycle continues.

But Wisbech does have the infrastructure and inspiring people to turn this around. The Thomas Clarkson Academy was entirely redeveloped a few years ago and has some of the best teaching facilities in the region; The College of West Anglia provides a diverse range of technical courses from brand new facilities and has links to campuses elsewhere; our primary schools provide safe environments that nurture young children; we have an independent school known as Wisbech Grammar School and the teaching staff and public bodies care passionately about making a difference. Most recently, alongside East Cambridgeshire, Fenland was awarded Opportunities Area Funding by the Department for Education to improve teaching and leadership capacity and provide the best start in life for young people entering education.

The challenge for the Wisbech 2020 Vision is to take stock of this landscape and identify targeted modifications that make the system work better. The partners at the centre of the Wisbech 2020 Vision will therefore:

### **a) Equip schools in Wisbech to attract the very best teaching talent**

This action will ensure that Wisbech schools can provide the very best learning environment in the area. It will mean our schools become an asset for the town, inspiring and educating our young people.

### **b) Place schools and libraries at the centre of community life**

This action will break down barriers and build positive, trusting relationships between schools, libraries and their communities. It will ensure that parents, as well as children, are comfortable and confident visiting these sites and ensure that they play a more active role in the life of all of their community.

### **c) Build better links between schools and regional businesses**

The action will help to raise the aspirations of young people by giving them tangible examples of career paths and employment opportunities. It will also create a dialogue between supply and demand to ensure that students are given the right skills and training to easily enter the labour market when their studies have been completed.



## Theme 2: Health, wellbeing and cohesion

The community of Wisbech experiences higher rates of poor health and income deprivation than communities elsewhere across the County and England. This is driven by a complex mixture of social and economic factors such as low levels of education achievement, lifestyle trends and cultural habits.

By and large, the town has all the facilities it needs to look after its community and this could be greatly enhanced by proposals to develop an entirely new North Cambridgeshire Hospital. The challenge is to help people make different choices about their lifestyle and ensure that they make the most of services on offer.

The community of Wisbech has changed over the past few years with new people from European countries coming to settle in the area rather than just visiting for seasonal work. Certainly, there are issues when the composition of a community changes in a relatively short space of time but this is the case wherever new arrivals spring up and settle into local life.

That the community of Wisbech has changed is now a given; classes of school children are made up of students from half a dozen European countries but they find delight and humour in their differences and work together as a group. The challenge is to take this openness of spirit and engender it across the community as a whole.

To address these challenges, the partners at the centre of the Wisbech 2020 Vision will:

### **a) Deliver new initiatives and pilot new ideas to improve health and wellbeing**

This action will seek to make use of existing measures and powers available to the Wisbech 2020 Vision partners that can directly and indirectly benefit the overall health and wellbeing of the local community, including giving children the best start in life and making sure they are ready to start school.

### **b) Shape new and improved health facilities in Wisbech**

This action will seek to make the best for the community of the facilities that Wisbech already has and any new facilities that might be delivered. It will ensure that the community know about, engage with, and access health services rather than relying upon emergency admissions.

### **c) Support the Wisbech community to grow together and address areas where there is a lack of cohesion**

This action will seek to provide a range of measures that help to ease the integration of recent in-movers with the existing community.

## Theme 3: Infrastructure and the built environment

Wisbech suffers from an infrastructure deficit; road and rail links to the regional and national network are poor and the town and its community suffer in a multitude of ways as a result.

However, the fundamentals of Wisbech's location in the East of England are a huge opportunity. For example, it has Cambridge on its doorstep, one of the engines of the UK economy and a global centre for the hi-tech bio-tech industries as well as home to one of the worlds' leading universities. And, Wisbech is at the centre of a cross roads between the major regional towns and cities of Kings Lynn - Cambridge (north – south) and Norwich – Peterborough (east – west).

The property market in Wisbech is fragile. In many cases, the cost of building new homes or business premises is greater than the end value of those buildings, resulting in stalled developments and derelict brownfield sites.

Yet, Wisbech has some of the most beautiful historic buildings, streets and spaces in the south of England. Other than Cambridge, nowhere else in the region can compete with the sheer concentration and quality of Listed buildings that are located Wisbech. The North Brink and The Crescent are iconic and rate alongside views of Ely Cathedral and Kings Parade.

To address the challenges related to infrastructure and the built environment in Wisbech, the partners at the centre of the Wisbech 2020 Vision will:

**a) Reduce journey times between Wisbech - Cambridge and Wisbech – Peterborough and reduce the perceived distance**

This action will promote securing a rail link to March and through a range of other measures enable Wisbech to benefit from the success of its near neighbours and relieve some of the pressures that have resulted from Cambridge's boom.

**b) Redouble efforts to secure improved national road connectivity**

This action will enable Wisbech and places to the east, such as Norwich, to benefit from improved access to the A1 and the national motorway network.

**c) Accelerate development at existing allocations and undeveloped sites**

This action will kick-start stalled development projects at a number sites around Wisbech and unlock the development of new homes and business premises.

**d) Secure further investment in Wisbech's outstanding built heritage and leave a positive legacy for future generations**

This action will build on the success we have already had with conserving our unique heritage buildings. It will ensure that Wisbech's wealth of important historic architecture is protected, conserved and enhanced.



## Theme 4: Local economy

The economic success of Wisbech is held-back by issues cutting across all four themes; the infrastructure deficit mentioned above turns-off inward investors, the weak property market rules out speculative development, skill levels remain low due to a business base that is not moving up the value-chain and aspirations are undermined by the creation of an unfair image of the town as a troubled place.

Despite this, we know that the town contains the ingredients that others would look upon with envy. For example, unemployment in Wisbech remains relatively low and the dynamic nature of the community means that it is full of young, energetic people with a drive to succeed and contribute. Looking further back in time, one of the legacies of Wisbech's strong history in international agriculture and trade is that it is the home to a handful of large global employers such as Nestle Purina, Princes Foods and Del Monte.

The fundamental competitive advantages that drove the early success of Wisbech's economy have not changed; it is surrounded by some of the highest quality agricultural land in the Country which attracts growers and manufacturers and it is located at the centre of an axis of major regional towns and cities (King's Lynn, Norwich, Cambridge and Peterborough). Today, to this list can be added its proximity to Cambridge as a global centre for research and development and Norwich as a powerhouse in environmental science.

The challenge for Wisbech is finding ways to capitalise on its original competitive advantages and forge links with places that are at the forefront of the global economy to help the local community see the opportunities and go on to thrive. To address these challenges, the partners at the centre of the Wisbech 2020 Vision will:

### **a) Position the agri-food cluster at the centre of the Wisbech economy and help it to thrive**

This action will take economic development in Wisbech back to basics focussing on the fundamentals of its historic prominence. But, our approach will be to grow added value and create higher value, higher skilled opportunities for our community.

### **b) Increase engagement with businesses to help them flourish and help grow the economy**

This action will ensure that we build our economy from the bottom up, working with the impressive cast of businesses already located in the town. These businesses are in Wisbech for a sound commercial reason and are committed to its future. They must represent opportunities for increasing growth and therefore prosperity.

### **c) Restore the image of Wisbech as the proud economic and social Capital of the Fens**

This action will ensure that the image of Wisbech speaks for itself. It will turn-around the image of Wisbech so that people and businesses have a positive image of the place and treat it as a serious option as a place to set up home or locate a business.

If you would like to receive a copy of the report in an alternative format or for further information please contact us via [w2020vision@fenland.gov.uk](mailto:w2020vision@fenland.gov.uk)

