



View over the Green Belt to the City of Cambridge from the Coton Countryside Reserve (managed by CambridgePPF)

COTON RESERVE APPLAUDED IN UK GREEN BELT REPORT

Natural England survey puts village countryside reserve on the map

A new report from Natural England – the government’s independent advisor on the natural environment – has named Coton Countryside Reserve in Cambridge as an example of how Green Belt land in and around busy urban centres should be protected and used.

Managed by local charity Cambridge Past, Present & Future (CambridgePPF), Coton Countryside Reserve is one of fourteen sites in the country identified in *Green Belts: a Greener Future* – the first major survey to evaluate the environmental state of Green Belt Land in the UK.

Produced jointly by Natural England and the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE), the report highlights the need for Green Belt land to be managed positively to enhance the natural environment and the lives of people in and around major conurbations. It recommends that Green Belt areas in the UK, like Coton Countryside Reserve should be:

Recognised and protected: Rather than being regarded as a planning designation, Green Belt land should be actively managed to deliver attractive landscapes, wildlife rich habitats, places for recreation, healthy soils, fresh water, woodland and improved air quality.

Invested in and improved: Green Belt land should be protected as an open rural area but also actively used as a recreational resource and a production source for local food, fuel and fibre.

Better connected and networked: Pockets of Green Belt should be linked to other urban green spaces and the wider countryside to form ecological and green recreation networks that can help tackle the challenges of climate change and population health.

Shaun Thomas, Natural England’s Regional Director East of England, said: “By containing urban sprawl, the Green Belt has been a great success story of post-war planning. It is an essential environmental resource that, managed effectively, can help tackle climate change, support wildlife and provide health and leisure opportunities for millions to enjoy. Projects like Coton Countryside Reserve show just how this can be achieved. We congratulate Cambridge Past Present & Future on their work and encourage other organisations with a say in the future of Green Belt land to follow their lead.”

Commenting, Carolin Göhler, Chief Executive of CambridgePPF said: “We are delighted that Natural England has selected Coton Countryside Reserve as an example of Green Belt best practice. CambridgePPF was instrumental in the creation of the Green Belt in the 1960s, which was one of the most important planning steps ever taken locally and its influence – particularly on the urban fringes – continues to this day.

“Cambridge faces extreme challenges with up to 50% growth forecast by 2031. Recognising the need for expansion, we believe the city should evolve in a sustainable way that retains and makes most sympathetic use of the green spaces available. We campaign vigorously on this and do not believe it is necessary in the foreseeable future to release more Green Belt land to accommodate housing growth. Instead, we must continue to find exciting ways of better managing the local landscape so local communities can enjoy it for years to come. We have been doing this successfully at Wandlebury since the 1950s and are in the first phase of improving the landscape at Coton along similar lines. We are delighted that Coton is being highlighted as a good practice example in the joint report from Natural England and CPRE. Hopefully it will highlight to a wider audience the vital importance of Coton and the Green Belt to the future of Cambridge and the need for ongoing support and funding. In the meantime, we will continue to champion the tremendous value and benefits of the Green Belt to local people.”

From 28th January 2010, copies of *Green Belts: a Greener Future* will be available to download from http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/about_us/news/2010/280110.aspx and www.CPRE.org.uk

About Coton Countryside Reserve

Since 2000 CambridgePPF has managed over 120ha of land around Coton – a village to the immediate west of Cambridge. Although still farmed, the land is being proactively managed to benefit both wildlife and local residents. Supported by a wide range of grants, donations and enthusiastic volunteers, Coton Countryside Reserve is undergoing a programme of improvements, including planting of small woodlands, hedges and orchard areas and creation of new meadows. Public access routes are also being developed without compromising sustainability.

At present the Reserve has basic facilities for public access and recreation, with plans for further enhancement over the next decade. Highlights include open sky, large fields, tall hedges and a viewpoint hill with panoramic views of the countryside, Coton village and historic Cambridge skyline. Each year an increasing number of visitors enjoy the site. More improvements are planned with involvement from the local community and a Phase 2 Master Plan will be drawn up in 2010. This will include plans for an improved visitor centre, better signage, rustic seating, an informal fitness trail, improved connections with the city and neighbouring villages, increased wildlife habitats and improvements to farmland management. CambridgePPF also hopes to employ a farm ranger to help with environmental management and educational activities on site.

About Cambridge Past, Present & Future (Cambridge PPF)

Cambridge Past, Present & Future aims to be a vocal and vigorous champion for sustainable development of the city and its surroundings. Founded in 1928 by a group of local business people, town councillors, aldermen academics and city officials the then Cambridge Preservation Society's objective was to work with local authorities to keep a vigilant eye on development - an ethos that holds just as true today. For more information about Coton Countryside Reserve and the work of Cambridge PPF go to: www.cambridgeppf.org

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