

A City Farm for Cambridge?



A site feasibility report for Cambridge City Council

By Phil Back Associates Ltd
April 2011

Phil Back Associates Ltd
Boston House
212-214 High Street
Boston Spa
WETHERBY
LS23 6AD

1 Introduction

The proposal to develop a City Farm for Cambridge first came to formal consideration by the City Council in the course of considering the Masterplan for Cherry Hinton Hall, which was taken to Community Services Scrutiny Committee in October 2010. The Council had been made aware of this proposal, and of the apparent desirability of locating the farm at Cherry Hinton Hall, whilst it was preparing a city-wide consultation on the Masterplan earlier in the year, and opportunity was taken to add an additional question to the Masterplan consultation to sound out public opinion on a City Farm at this location.

Residents (and other interested parties) gave the overall Masterplan, and its constituent elements, strong support in the public consultation in 2010. The Masterplan also attracted the committed support of the Friends of Cherry Hinton Hall, a group of local people established to ensure that the park's ethos and qualities are protected and enhanced. As to the City Farm idea, the response showed that the proposal had significant support, but also that there was substantial opposition to a Cherry Hinton Hall location.

The consultation was reported back to members at the October 2010 meeting, where an officer's report noted¹ that

“the City Farm concept...has substantial support and cannot be ignored because it did not form part of the initial scoping discussions nor feature in the Masterplan. There is, though, limited detail on how this may impact on the site, and on other Masterplan content, and therefore a feasibility study should be undertaken, to determine whether a City Farm is feasible within a reasonable footprint in Cherry Hinton Hall, or indeed whether a different location might be preferable.”

Members also heard representations from the proposers of the City Farm, in support of the proposal, and from the Friends of Cherry Hinton Hall, who oppose the idea. After considering the officers' report, and the results of the consultation, Members...

“...Supported the principle of a City Farm and instructed officers to work with the City Farm project to prepare a feasibility study to identify the most appropriate location for a City Farm within the city;

“Agreed to liaise with the Folk Festival project team to integrate the Masterplan with operational requirements of the Folk Festival.”²

The Masterplan and its origins are reviewed in detail elsewhere³, but the map below shows the geography of the plan, and denotes in outline the area which a City Farm would occupy

¹ Report to Community Services Scrutiny Committee minutes, meeting on 14th October 2010, para 1.6

² Community Services Scrutiny Committee minutes, meeting on 14th October 2010

– in essence the former propagation site, which was closed by the City Council in 2007, with the structures that existed at that time removed or demolished, and which has remained unused ever since. In the Masterplan this area is designated as a performance area with a mix of grass, planted beds, and informal tree planting, and a new structure that would provide toilet and cafe facilities.

The location in question is behind the existing hall building (which is now used by an independent school) and adjacent to a structure known as the Atcost building, which is leased out Cambridge Regional College (as is a cottage next to the hall) and used as a training and educational facility focussed on the needs of vulnerable and alienated young people. A small area adjacent to the site is used at present as a storage area by the City Council; a small Council depot formerly occupied this part of the site.



³ Initially in Understanding Needs, Usage and Improvements at Cherry Hinton Hall (Phil Back Associates, Jan 2009), and subsequently in The Future of Cherry Hinton Hall (Phil Back Associates, Sept 2010) in which the consultation on the detail of the Masterplan is reported.

The Cambridge Folk Festival is a major national music festival, run by the City Council, which has been running for more than forty years, and which has grown into a very popular and well-attended event attracting artistes of international standing, as well as extensive national and regional media coverage. It runs over a long weekend at the start of the summer, and during this period (and the time needed to set up and take down the festival infrastructure) it occupies the whole of the park, which is closed to the public for the duration.

2 Objectives and scope of this study

This study has therefore been commissioned to answer these questions:

- Is a City Farm feasible in the space available at Cherry Hinton? This question in turn gives rise to questions around space itself, but also the impact on the Masterplan, the proposed location in relation to other activities in the park, and the impact on neighbouring uses, with particular reference to the Folk Festival.
- What issues arise in considering the development of a City Farm, and (following on from that) what are the criteria that should be used in assessing the suitability of sites for a City Farm in Cambridge? What other sites might be available if Cherry Hinton Hall were deemed unsuitable?
- Given that the consultation reveals differing, and opposing, views on this proposal, how well founded are these different views, and how far should they influence the Council's decision on this proposal?

To provide answers to these questions, we have

- Examined the ways in which different City Farms operate and visited some sites to see the issues at close quarters;
- Researched the background to City Farms in the UK, the benefits that derive from City Farms, and the issues that have arisen in relation to City Farms in this country;
- Explored the principles involved in siting a City Farm with a representative of the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens;
- Met with different interest groups and community representatives with a strategic interest in the proposal, including
 - The Cambridge City Farm Project
 - Friends of Cherry Hinton Hall
 - Cambridge Past, Present and Future
 - The Cambridge Folk Festival
 - Cambridge Regional College
 - Cambridge International School
 - Local City Council Ward Councillors
- Reviewed the results of the Masterplan consultation in the light of the additional information gathered through this study.

It is important to note that we have not been asked to comment on the viability or otherwise of the City Farm proposal. Whilst we have been given access to the City Farm proposers' business plan, it is not part of our remit to appraise the proposal as such. Our role is rather to explore the criteria which would govern the selection of any given site for an enterprise along the lines proposed (some of which emerge from the proposers' work to date), and not to evaluate the detail of the proposed Farm itself.

3 What is a City Farm?

City Farms and Community Gardens are defined as “community-managed projects working with people, animals and plants”.⁴ The definition emphasises three key characteristics of these sites: that they are **community managed** projects, typically run under voluntary systems of governance; that they work with either **animals, or plants, or both**; and that **people are part of the focus** alongside the animals or plants being cared for or cultivated. The Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens, a national body providing advice, guidance and support to ventures of this type, has around 60 City Farms (and a similar number of School Farms) and over 1000 Community Gardens in membership; no doubt there are others that are not associated with the Federation. These are scattered widely across the country.

They also vary widely in size and scale, and in the nature and focus of their operations. Community Gardens are essentially horticultural in nature, but include projects cultivating produce in the way a smallholding does, and also garden environments that are essentially recreational spaces. City Farms are generally to do with animal husbandry, but encompass a wide range of possibilities, from small, very contained operations occupying small spaces up to full-scale farming across a much larger site, and from essentially “petting zoo” type operations up to larger scale farming and breeding operations.

City Farms and Community Gardens do nevertheless have common ground in terms of their objectives, and the benefits they seek to achieve for their target audiences. They will typically seek to re-establish a link between people and the sources of their food, especially for young people who may have limited contact with the countryside and with the source of the products they purchase in supermarkets; included in this it is common to find opportunities for hands-on care or cultivation as part of the offer. They will also typically promote sustainable farming or horticultural practices, including organic approaches to farming and agriculture, and the use of renewable and sustainable energy sources.

Their audiences will often include disadvantaged children and young people, as well as adults and children with learning disabilities or mental health problems, where contact with plants and animals has been shown to be potentially therapeutic; they may also work with alienated and disaffected young people, using animals and plants as a means of developing responsibility and creating routes towards skills acquisition and future employment. The Federation’s view is that there is a correlation between success as a City Farm, and engagement in and with the local community; and that this is best achieved within the community where the farm is located.

They also have common ground in being voluntary in nature and governance, with most run as voluntary bodies of one type or another, and dependent on a range of funding sources that include the revenues from trading activities such as cafes or produce sales through farm

⁴ Helen Quayle, The True Value of Community farms and gardens, (University of Northumbria, 2007)

shops; educational fees charged to schools, visitor donations (many are free to enter but welcome donations), and public sector support through grant funding, contracts to provide specific services, as well as the revenues to be gained from commercial operations. Alongside funding and revenue, City Farms typically rely on a significant commitment from volunteers as part of their workforce, and thus provide significant volunteering opportunities.

Research into City Farms' sources of funding⁵ indicates a high level of reliance on charitable trusts, which account for over a third of the income of the farms surveyed. Produce and sales revenue is also important, and local authority support represented over 10% of income and was the third most important source of finance. The Federation believes that viability cannot depend solely on sales and admissions revenue, but many of the projects examined in the research were working hard to move from a dependency model of funding to becoming more self-sufficient.

Guidance to would-be City Farms from the Federation is largely the same guidance as would be given to anyone wishing to set up a voluntary body, augmented with specific advice and guidance on animal husbandry or horticulture that will usually be tailored to the specific operation envisaged – issues such as the design of the site, whether animals can withdraw from contact, sourcing of stock and the age at which animals are removed are all variable to the operation. The Federation also provides guidance on legal issues common to City Farms such as the legalities of selling food, registration requirements, licences, veterinary care and animal welfare policies, including RSPCA standards of care. According to the Federation, City Farms are not high-risk operations, but are high-profile, and this means that risk is magnified.

The range of City Farms is best illustrated by brief reference to some examples:

Wythenshawe City Farm in Manchester is a small farm occupying a site of about 1ha, and located in the centre of a public park in a significantly disadvantaged area of South Manchester. The farm is a working farm that relies on its educational role with local schools, and a local FE college (it provides hands-on opportunities for agricultural students), and some public funding, but which also operates commercially, breeding and selling livestock and farm produce from a stock of chickens, pigs, goats and some cattle (grazed at a separate site). It relies heavily on a voluntary workforce that is augmented by students, and managed by a small full-time staff.

Heaton Park Community Farm occupies a similar size of site, about 1Ha and again located in a public park in Manchester, but is vastly different in character. Its operation is much less farm-like and much more akin to a small zoo; animals are kept in open pens; stock includes horses, donkeys, an alpaca and some small mammals such as rabbits, as well as chickens and fowl. The approach is much more exhibitive in nature and includes information displays and petting opportunities.

⁵ Quayle, p 70-71

These two projects thus occupy similar sites in similar locations, but have a very different character. Other examples are

Gorgie City Farm occupies a modest site on the edge of a cemetery⁶ in urban Edinburgh, and houses a range of farm animals, including cows, sheep, goats and pigs, and various poultry; the farm also has a collection of pets, a pony (which can be ridden), and cats. Alongside the working farm there are equipped play space, catering and picnic facilities, and managed “handling sessions” for the small animals.

Heeley City Farm in Sheffield also occupies a site in an urban setting. It advertises itself as a “farm and environmental visitor centre”, and runs a café/restaurant, garden centre, recycling facility and gift shop alongside a farm that houses sheep and pigs but is primarily focused on organic crop cultivation and associated promotion, education, demonstration and volunteering. The farm also runs two separate “walled garden” sites as cultivation areas elsewhere in the city, and an allotment is also operated as a SureStart project for families, growing fruit and vegetables.

Meanwood Valley Urban Farm started as a small site with two caravans, but now occupies a large site of about 7 ha in the north of Leeds, where it houses cows, sheep, poultry, goats, pigs and rabbits (and more besides), and also acts as a demonstrator for sustainable construction and energy supply. It runs as a working farm but also offers educational and therapeutic opportunities, handling and feeding opportunities, and ancillary activities such as play space, an education centre, and activities typical of a country park such as bug hunts, summer playschemes and ranger-led activities.

The research report produced by the Federation looks particularly closely at the benefits conferred by City Farms and Community gardens.⁷ It concentrates on volunteers and “clients” – those whose involvement is part of a contract or similar arrangement – rather than the wider community of casual visitors. Identified benefits to volunteers and clients include:

- **Social interactions and inclusion** – the development of friendship and support, building social skills, reducing marginalisation of different groups and increasing social integration, and the development of social skills and team building. These benefits are especially strong for marginalised and vulnerable groups of people.
- **Health** – the health benefits of City Farms are both physical (exercise, manual work, outdoor work) and mental (stress relief, socialising with others), and can also include healthy eating.

⁶ This is by no means unique; Rice Lane City Farm in Liverpool also occupies part of a cemetery.

⁷ Helen Quayle, *The True Value of Community farms and gardens*, (University of Northumbria, 2007), published by Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens, accessed at www.farmgarden.org.uk/publications

- **Therapy** – the opportunities for developing new relationships with society and individuals through shared engagement and responsibility for animals; opportunities for creativity and expression; the development of confidence and a sense of ownership; growth of independence and responsibility.
- **Skills** – learning new skills, hands-on experience, providing an environment in which education can be successful, and providing a stepping stone towards employment or more formal training.
- **Environmental awareness** – awareness of biodiversity, of environmental good practice, connecting with the natural world.
- **Economic** – development of sustainability, stimulation of the local economy

These benefits vary, of course, according to the nature of the operation and its volunteer and client workforce. In the context of this study, though, it is especially important to note the considerable benefits to local communities that are claimed for activities of this type, and the wide range of different activities and complexities that are embraced by the term “City Farm”.

This in turn affects people’s perceptions of what exactly is contemplated in the current proposal for Cambridge. The question “What is a City Farm?” has many answers in practice.

City Farms are subject to the same operating constraints as any other voluntary organisation. Their funding is uncertain, to the extent that any grant or contractual funding is subject to review and vulnerable to the wider economic climate in which their funders operate; their reliance on volunteers creates management challenges that are less prominent when staff are in formal employment. At least one City Farm faces closure following Local Authority funding cuts.⁸

These issues become more complicated, though, when vulnerable people (on the one hand) and animals (on the other) are involved. Animals require care every day of the year, without exception, and this normally demands a certain level of paid employment to ensure attendance each and every day, to cover for absence and sickness, and to attend for out-of-hours emergencies. These challenges have no bearing on the siting of a City Farm, but do relate to its long-term sustainability.

City Farms have other vulnerabilities that are unique to their operation:

⁸ Bucknall Park City Farm, Stoke on Trent, has been threatened with withdrawal of funding by Stoke-on-Trent City Council (www.friendsofcityfarm.org , “Why is the City Farm worth saving?”, accessed 3rd Feb 2011). Rice Lane Farm, Liverpool, plans to scale down its operations in the face of cuts in local authority support (http://www.catalystmedia.org.uk/issues/nerve5/rice_lane_farm.htm, accessed 5th April 2011)

- **Security** is a concern not only to ensure that intruders are kept out of the farm when it is closed, but also to protect the animals from disturbance, and to exclude predators such as foxes that inhabit the urban environment. Security is also necessary to ensure that animals do not escape.
- **Disease** is a risk that City Farms have to guard against. Strict regimes of hand washing for visitors are now established good practice at most sites, as is guidance on personal hygiene before and after touching animals, but even so disease outbreaks do occur. City Farms and similar enterprises have been closed for prolonged periods following outbreaks (or suspected outbreaks) of Foot and Mouth disease⁹, and of e. Coli.^{10 11} These not only impair the reputation of the farm, and threaten the health of the animals and workforce; they also mean that visitors and volunteers must be excluded from the site during the closure period, with consequences for contractual arrangements and for revenue streams.

⁹ For example, Lawrence Weston Community Farm in Bristol had to cull its entire stock of animals in 2001 as a result of Foot and Mouth requirements. (<http://www.lwfarm.org.uk/history.html>, accessed 5th April 2011).

¹⁰ "Animal petting banned at Feltham Farm over e. Coli fears", report in Hounslow Chronicle, Feb 2nd 2011, accessed 3rd Feb 2011.

¹¹ Report on the outbreak of e. Coli at Godstone Open Farm (not a City Farm, but welcoming visitors), at http://www.griffininvestigation.org.uk/report/full_report.pdf, accessed 5th April 2011

4 What is proposed for Cambridge?

It is clearly important (given the wide variety of City Farms in existence) to set out what exactly is being proposed here, as this has a significant bearing on the suitability or otherwise of any site, and thus on the criteria by which suitability can be assessed. It is also clear that many people's responses to the proposal (for instance in the Cherry Hinton Hall Masterplan consultation) are based on a preconception of what is proposed, rather than on accurate information, and this means that their responses may not actually be particularly well-informed (this applies both to supporters and to opponents of the idea). A number of people we spoke to clearly had a very limited understanding of the actual proposal, and this tended to increase both concern and enthusiasm.

The City Farm proposal has been prepared and developed by a group of local people linked to local churches, and also to Transition Cambridge, a local organisation that promotes sustainable ways of living that are more resilient to threats such as climate change. They have prepared a business plan and other projections to demonstrate the viability of their idea, and have developed a considerable network of local support and enthusiasm, much of which was mobilised in support of the proposal during the Masterplan consultation last year.

The proposers describe a project that aims to be

- **Attractive** and welcoming, drawing in both people who visit specifically to see the Farm and also others who visit the park, for whom this would be an added attraction. The market for this activity includes not just park visitors, but also school groups, after school activities, groups and individuals with specific needs, Community Service Teams, and the young people already on the site through the College.
- **Educational**, both as to food production and as to the wider environment; the project would seek to inform visitors about the origins and processes whereby food is produced, and would promote and explain sustainable methods of farming and food production. It would do this both for casual visitors but especially for school groups using the Farm as a place to take their pupils.
- **Promoting community involvement**, in that schools and local people would be encouraged to become more involved and more regularly involved, as volunteers and as participants in special activities; there would be an emphasis on engaging with the community living in the vicinity of the Farm. People would be encouraged to become involved in the project by giving their time, their money, or committing in other ways. The proposal notes the importance of rooting this project in its local community.
- **Promoting social inclusion**, with specific reference to ensuring the Farm appeals to people of all ages and socio-economic groups, and does not exclude people with disabilities or those who are socially or economically marginalised. Entrance to the Farm would be free of charge, and although charges would be made for some

activities, the underlying inclusion principle would be predominant. There is also a strong recognition of the potential therapeutic value of the project in meeting the needs of vulnerable people such as those with learning disabilities, with mental health problems, or those who are socially alienated.

- **Environmentally sensitive**, in that the project's underlying principles and ethos are sound and sustainable. Accessibility without the need for a car would be in keeping with these principles, as would the need to engage local people, and the sale of locally sourced, seasonal produce in a healthy cafe/farm shop as a revenue stream helping to make visible and tangible connections between food and food production.

A phased approach is envisaged, in which the first year or two would see the development of horticultural activity, perhaps including school plots, a sensory area and so on. This would be paralleled with fundraising so as to bring in animals at a later stage, once the project is established. Growth and development would be managed carefully, and growth would be progressive and organic, even if resources become available to do more, or to do things more quickly than originally envisaged.

Animals would potentially include chickens, goats, and small animals such as rabbits and guinea pigs, but would not include larger farm animals such as pigs, sheep or cattle; this is not to be a working farm so much as an educational and therapeutic resource providing wider community benefit. Animals would act as a draw for visitors, and would also provide therapeutic opportunities for working with young and vulnerable people.

The group promoting this project includes experience in setting up and running a City Farm, as well as wider charity trustee responsibilities. These skills would be combined with the involvement of local people to form a Board of Trustees who would manage the project as a Company Limited by Guarantee and a Registered Charity, supported by a wider advisory body; this type of arrangement is not at all uncommon in the Third Sector. They are taking advice from the National Federation of City Farms, and also visiting several other City Farms to see what can be achieved in small spaces, to get ideas, to generate enthusiasm and possibilities, and to build a support network.

The group claims considerable support for its proposition. It says that schools in the area are very enthusiastic to see this happen, and keen to be involved. Schools see the project as an alternative to expensive Pupil Referral Units; locating the project at Cherry Hinton would place it within easy walking distance of several schools. The University Faculty of Education has also given its support to the venture. The group describes its backers as serious about getting involved in this project.

The group is very focussed on the Cherry Hinton site and is keen to locate there for several reasons. These include the proximity of several schools; the availability of car-free routes to the site; the interest of the local community, providing a local network of potential volunteers; and the location within a well-utilised park that already has an established audience of its

own. They suggest that the City Farm would add to the range of attractions offered at Cherry Hinton Hall, and that the park is not just for those who use it at present but for the whole community, including those who support this idea. They also argue that the Farm would complement the existing educational value of the park, and would integrate well with the Masterplan; it would provide fruit trees and wild flowers, a cafe, and buildings and structures that could be multi-functional.

Nevertheless, other sites are also on their radar, and Cherry Hinton is not an “all or nothing” option. Other sites are less good because they do not provide all that Cherry Hinton Hall offers, but this does not necessarily make them totally unsuited for a venture like this.

Asked about expansion, the proposers do not accept that this is inevitable even if the project is successful. They do not equate “bigger” with “better”, and accept that the Cherry Hinton site would be constrained. They do nevertheless see possibilities should the adjoining buildings such as the Atcost structure become available.

5 Reactions and comments

5.1 The Folk Festival

The Council's decision to investigate the feasibility of a City Farm at Cherry Hinton Hall included a proviso that the operational requirements of the Folk Festival must be integrated into the Masterplan (and by implication, into any modification to the Masterplan produced to incorporate a City Farm). The Council is committed to retaining the Folk Festival at Cherry Hinton Hall, and this decision means that any City Farm proposal has to be made to work within this constraint. This makes it imperative that we examine the possible impact on the Festival of siting a City Farm in the location proposed.

The Folk Festival is an annual event that is widely recognised as an important part of the City's cultural offer, has been operating for over forty years, and generates national and international interest, with performers and audience drawn from a very wide geography indeed. The Festival is also acknowledged as a significant boost to the local economy, and coverage in national media also raises the city's profile and reputation as a cultural centre, stimulating visitor interest.

The Folk Festival takes over the entire Cherry Hinton Hall site for several days at the start of each summer, including a set-up and break-down period on either side of the Festival itself. Its occupancy of the site is very carefully orchestrated and the management of the Festival are insistent that they have little or no flexibility over the way in which they utilise the site, because landscape constraints and the location of fixed services and utilities require that certain features of the festival are sited in certain places. As regards the former propagation site, this is used to provide space for siting performers' accommodation, broadcast vehicles, generators and other equipment. Festival managers are adamant that there is nowhere else in the park suitable for this, and that the allocation of this space to a City Farm would be incompatible with the Folk Festival.

There was a time, of course, when the presence of a Propagation Centre meant that this space was not available for the Folk Festival. At that time, the facilities now placed on the Propagation Centre site were located near the pond and beside the roadway leading to the school; however, this caused damage to the ground surfaces, and increased disturbance to park neighbours. The new location has reduced the impact of the festival on the park surface, and has also created space for enhanced safety separation; it has also allowed space to be allocated to concessions, increasing festival revenue, and to charitable and voluntary groups.

The Folk Festival has grown over the years to the point where it now occupies all available space within the park during its operation. However, its managers are committed to remaining within Cherry Hinton Hall and have no plans, nor desire, to relocate to a bigger site. Their policy is to manage the festival so that it can be contained within Cherry Hinton

Hall (though this does nevertheless involve the use of external sites for parking). The Council is similarly committed to Cherry Hinton Hall as the Folk Festival venue.

The Folk Festival would be incompatible with the presence of animals; it generates noise and hubbub which would disturb and distress the animals, and the advice received¹² is that animals would have to be moved offsite during the Folk Festival; the City Farm proposers accept this and are willing to do this. This in fact happens when events compromise other spaces used by animals, such as Midsummer Common.

Managers of the Folk Festival also claim it would be incompatible with the presence of planted beds or structures such as polytunnels, fencing or animal pens; these would effectively prevent use of the space for locating vehicles and equipment, because of the damage this would cause, and because of the physical barriers that would be created. Festival managers are adamant that the locations of different elements of the festival have evolved over time to the point where they cannot be modified without causing damage to the surfaces, increased disturbance to nearby residents, or compromises to health and safety. The non-availability of the existing concrete roadway would increase operating costs by requiring temporary surfacing to be hired (this would apply equally, though, to the proposed Masterplan use of this space).

It should be noted that the managers of the Folk Festival are equally concerned about the Masterplan idea for a performance area in this space. They would require modification to the Masterplan to remove the trees and other planting intended for this space, or the Folk Festival cannot operate.

The Festival managers believe that the City Farm is a good idea and would support it (to the extent of providing promotional space as a community organisation at the festival, and even organising visits for festival-goers). They believe it would meet a need not satisfactorily addressed by the existing animals in the city (which are not approachable) or by sites such as Wimpole (too distant, too costly to visit); they also support the idea of promoting education on food production and sustainable growing practices, which are in keeping with their own sustainability commitments and ethos. They are not however able to accommodate this project within their own demands on Cherry Hinton Hall.

The photo below illustrates the intensive demands made on this space by the Folk Festival.

¹² Friends of Cherry Hinton Hall have consulted a local animal welfare charity on this point.



5.2 Friends of Cherry Hinton Hall

The Friends of Cherry Hinton Hall (FCCH) was formed in 2009 and has a membership of 250, mainly Cambridge residents but including interest from outside the city; its meetings typically attract an attendance of around 40 or so. The group aims to protect and enhance the present ethos and character of the park by working with the Council on proposed improvements and by volunteer effort to provide additional care for the site.

FCCH is strongly committed to the Masterplan and this attracted unanimous support when presented to a meeting. One welcome feature of the Masterplan was the opening up of the former propagation site and its return to the open area of the park, with removal of fences and hedges that at present form boundaries. This would be lost if the City Farm proposal were to proceed. FCCH are disappointed that the Masterplan is not proceeding and feel let down by the willingness of the Council to entertain this idea after approving the Masterplan.

FCCH acknowledge that the Farm might not in practice make a huge difference to the way the park works for its existing users – other than perhaps in terms of traffic, asb, and visitor numbers if it succeeds. They nevertheless think the Masterplan offers a much better solution, which they fear they may now lose.

FCCH are also strongly in favour of keeping the Folk Festival at Cherry Hinton Hall. Though there are FCCH members who dislike the festival, the overall view is that this is an activity of value to the local community and the city, which they wish to accommodate. They indicate that they are willing to compromise on the Masterplan if necessary to allow the festival to operate as it does at present.

FCCH discussed the City Farm proposal at a meeting in November 2010 and reported¹³ a mixed response with a majority opposed to the siting of a City Farm on the Hall. The concerns raised by FCCH are largely echoed below in the wider feedback, but they are also

¹³ Minutes of a meeting to discuss the brief for this study, 17 November 2010

disturbed that the present lack of detail may mean that plans being proposed now, might change before they come to pass, and that allocating this space now may be a precursor to a requirement for more space later, which would be harder to resist.

The City Farm group are aware of the position taken by FCCH, but say that they have misunderstood the nature of what is planned. They would like a positive partnership with FCCH, and hope to win people over to their plan by showing how it complements the Masterplan and delivers against some of FCCH's own objectives, such as by reducing anti-social activity in the park through community engagement.

5.3 Park users and other interests

Park users, those who represent them, and other stakeholders in the site raise several possible issues for consideration, both positive and negative; many of these views overlap with those of others. These are presented at face value, and evaluated as to their applicability to the proposal; it may be noted that the proposers have addressed some of these issues in their plans already. Those that are evidently based on misunderstanding of the nature and scale of the project have been discounted unless they have relevance to the selection of a suitable site. For clarity, the comments have been grouped into broad thematic areas.

5.31 Structures and infrastructure

Covenant – attention has been drawn to the existence of a Covenant which (it is claimed) restricts use of the property at Cherry Hinton, and bans its use for animals. We have obtained a partial copy of the document;¹⁴ it makes no reference to animals, but it does require that no structures be erected on the site other than for the purposes of maintaining the park as a public open space; it also specifically allows horticultural buildings, toilets, bandstands, refreshment facilities and “buildings of a similar character”. If the document can be interpreted as precluding construction of a City Farm, it also in our view could call into question the use of newly constructed buildings for education and for depot storage.

Utilities – the farm needs a water supply, electricity, and sewerage and drainage facilities. The park offers these and they are available at the site, having been provided for the propagation centre. Whilst opponents are concerned that providing utility supplies may cause temporary digging up of the park to lay pipes and cables, this concern does not seem to be well-founded.

¹⁴ For reasons that are unclear, only the second page has been made available, but this seems to be the relevant section. The date of this document is unknown (presumably it is on the page we have not seen!)

Partnership – can the City Farm usefully partner with others, for instance local nurseries/farming ventures, or with an anaerobic digester for the processing of food waste (which could have its own educational dimension). Partnership possibilities may exist, but Cherry Hinton does not offer space for a larger venture; other sites may allow for more creative synergies to be exploited.

5.32 Operational issues

Catering – a City Farm would, it is claimed, increase the viability of a catering outlet, especially a volunteer-run outlet, and would generate additional customers which would allow it to remain open all day, or at least for longer hours, and over more of the year. This would improve the service to visitors and enable longer stays in the park. On the other hand, there is a view that the concession for catering at Cherry Hinton Hall is a potentially lucrative one that would generate revenue for the Council and which ought not to be given away without careful thought. There is also the possibility that another voluntary group might be invited to staff a catering facility to raise funds for park improvement work.

Traffic – it is claimed that the Farm would increase traffic within the park, through deliveries, collections, and the transfer of people with disabilities into and out of the site. Whilst there would be some additional traffic, it seems unlikely that this would be significant inside the park, given what is proposed here. Traffic would potentially be generated on Cherry Hinton Road, though, by those people who are unable or unwilling to use other forms of transport.

Parking – however much sustainable travel options are available, it seems inevitable to us that a successful project will generate visitor traffic in the form of cars; parking space at the hall is limited, and there are already overflows at certain times of day (school drop-off/pick up, for instance). The farm would thus also put pressure on parking space, even if sustainable transport is available and promoted. People travelling with children often find cars easier than public transport; and children are a key target audience here. It is also suggested that provision would also need to be made for disability access over and above existing provision at the hall.

Noise – it is suggested that a farm might generate noise; this however seems unlikely given the nature of what is proposed.

Smell – it is suggested that a City Farm might generate odours, particularly linked to animal waste. This again seems unlikely given what is actually being proposed.

Maintenance – there is concern that a site run by volunteers will be kept tidy and clean to the standard of the rest of the park. Whilst this might be an issue at times, Council monitoring would tend to control and remedy any persistent problem in this respect and we do not therefore see this as a significant issue.

5.33 Audience-related issues

Food education – supporters of the City Farm welcome the opportunity it represents for people to learn more about animal husbandry, food production, agriculture and horticulture, and ethical growing practices. Its proximity to people would mean that children could become more involved and engaged in such practices, rather than having just the immediate one-off impact of a trip to somewhere like Wimpole. There are those who disagree with this, claiming that this will not be a “real” farming environment and will not be able to present farming as fully as others think.

Complementary education – there is a view that this would be a valuable additional resource for working with the vulnerable communities that the project aims to target. The presence on the site of part of that target audience as part of the College’s work would enable that relationship to be more easily established. The informal learning environment would also be very appropriate to this audience group. Community cohesion will be enhanced through this aspect of audience development. However, the College’s lease has only a limited time to run, and the College is tending at present to try and contain costs through centralising on to its northern campus, so the benefits of this partnership may be reduced by distance.

Need – many see a City Farm as a potentially valuable addition to the city’s portfolio of activities and attractions. Others, though, challenge the need, given the proximity of other “similar” attractions such as Wimpole, Linton Zoo, and Shepreth Wildlife Park, which also offer animal insights and might be more exciting as outings for families and for school groups. The Coton Countryside Reserve may also augment its educational plans with animals, and Wandlebury is also a nearby alternative for educational visiting. In practice, the Farm is offering something that is qualitatively different from these other opportunities, but faces competition for at least some of its planned audience (and revenue).

On the other hand, those who foresee a site based largely on horticulture (which this would be, at least its early phase) are concerned that valuable recreational space would be sacrificed for the sake of something akin to a smallholding which, they suggest, will not be as attractive as the proposers predict.

Comment is also made about the existence within the city of farm-type animals already, which give people an opportunity to see animals regularly even if they rarely visit the countryside. Comments mention the cattle on Midsummer Common, the geese at Coe Fen, and the animals at Coldhams Common, and also the Darwin Nursery on Newmarket Road which seems to be pursuing broadly similar objectives to the City Farm idea. These alternatives may weaken the audience for a City Farm; while the City Farm may be unwelcome competition for their existing audiences.

With the possible exception of the last named of these, the sites mentioned may give visible exposure to animals but provide little educational or volunteering value, and would not seem to us to be compelling arguments against the need for a City Farm.

Content and interest – the question is raised in several quarters about the level of interest likely to be generated by the proposal. Whilst the proposers are confident about their plans being of interest, others suggest they may be being over-optimistic, especially given the limited scope of their plans; and that an alternative site may allow more exciting, and thus more successful, options.

Audience development and location – some respondents suggest that Cherry Hinton, as a relatively affluent area of Cambridge where many people have gardens (and where it is not difficult to keep your own rabbit or guinea pig) is a less ideal location than other areas of Cambridge where higher density housing means that people have less space of their own, and less opportunity to encounter animals and food production. The growth areas in the north of the city will house substantial populations in homes with limited garden space who, it is argued, may present a greater need for open space and for opportunities such as those a City Farm may present. Schools in Cherry Hinton and its vicinity have apparently welcomed the project and see it as a project of significant possibilities for their children; this suggests that schools in the north would almost certainly be interested in developing relationships of the type envisaged at Cherry Hinton and might benefit more.

Cost and convenience – a local City Farm would be cheaper and easier for schools to visit, and could attract more spontaneous visits, than attractions such as Wimpole, where travel has to be more carefully organised and managed, and which require charges that may exclude some potential participants. However, it is also argued – we think with some justification - that local schools will want more than the proposers are offering here.

5.34 Safety matters

Security – there are concerns that animals would become a target, and recent experience at the park of anti-social behaviour problems would support this contention. The cafe, with its possible cash on site, might also be a security risk (but this would apply equally to any other trading operation, not just the Farm). There have been several incidents at the school of minor, but persistent, damage, and it seems unlikely that a Farm next door would be immune from this. In our view, the proposers have considered and addressed this issue within their own thinking.

Disease – disease outbreaks have closed City Farms elsewhere in the country, either for public protection or as a precaution. The question is raised as to whether this might actually close the park completely, or just the farm area; a disease outbreak requiring even a precautionary closure which coincided with the Folk Festival, for example, would be calamitous.

Vermin – there is a concern that a Farm might attract vermin. There are already rats visible within the park and a Farm project with animal feed and other detritus might exacerbate this problem.

Anti-social behaviour – there is a persistent anti-social behaviour problem at Cherry Hinton Hall. Opponents of the Farm argue that this would be exacerbated if the project went ahead; the Farm group argue that, by involving local young people in the farm as volunteers, this problem would be reduced through an increased stake in the park's quality. There are also those who believe that a City Farm, with staff and volunteers on site for much of the day, would inhibit some of the asb that now occurs.

Fencing – there is a view that separation of the animals from other park users, and from predators, may only be achievable through new, higher and more close-lapped fencing. This will damage visual amenity within the park and intrude on lines of sight across the park vista. People voicing this concern would actually like the fences and hedges in the park removed to open up the space more fully.

5.35 Impact and consequential matters

Spatial constraint – there is a suspicion that at some point the farm will want to grow, and that its presence, and its success, will make it difficult to prevent that expansion – notwithstanding the assurances of those in charge at the moment, this may become an issue in the future, and the views that prevail within the City Farm group at the moment may not prevail in the longer term. Expansion within Cherry Hinton Hall could only be achieved at further cost to other uses of the space, and to the detriment of the Masterplan; expansion would be viewed very negatively in some quarters.

Impact on Masterplan – what would need to be sacrificed to make room for this? For several people, this is critical. The Masterplan overall, and its plans for this area specifically, attracted significant support in the 2010 consultation. However, amendment of some sort would also be necessary to meet the requirement to accommodate the Folk Festival, so some compromise on the Masterplan is inevitable. The school is known to want an additional portion of land which is currently part of the derelict site where a Farm project would go.

It is also the case that some people feel that the Masterplan offers only a limited gain to younger visitors; a City Farm would redress this balance.

Park attractions – there are comments to the effect that a City Farm would complement existing provision at Cherry Hinton Hall and make the site a more attractive, and more diverse, place to visit. This confidence does not seem to extend, though, to a community garden, which is seen as too limited to achieve this kind of outcome. We suspect that some people have misunderstood the nature of the proposal here and this has influenced their views.

Landscape character – it is suggested that the Cherry Hinton Hall site is actually a Victorian planned landscape with its own unique character. A City Farm, it is argued, would be contrary to this character and would damage the ethos of the park. Equally, it has to be noted that this argument was not effective in preventing the erection of the other buildings behind the hall, the propagation centre itself, or the tennis courts. Nevertheless, the view is widely held that further compromises to the character of the park are unwelcome, and damaging to its historic and heritage value (for example, the setting of the hall buildings) as well as its landscape.

Biodiversity – attention is drawn to the increasing success of biodiversity activity within the park, and there are worries that this will be threatened by a Farm with associated noise and smell which might alienate wild creatures. The park is not only an urban green space, but also a landscape of semi-natural character which is greatly valued. There would also need to be care taken over the impact on watercourses in the park. The scale and nature of what is being proposed, however, would not seem to us to pose a threat to this character to any significant extent.

Goodwill – the Friends of Cherry Hinton Hall rely a great deal on goodwill to support their own voluntary efforts to keep the Hall in good condition and to staff activities such as clean-ups. The Council in turn values the work done by the Friends and would not wish to damage this evolving and important relationship. There are fears that this goodwill might be eroded or put at risk. No doubt there would be disappointment in some quarters if this project were to proceed as planned; communities do of course have a history of bouncing back from disappointment, whilst a City Farm would be likely to generate its own goodwill through development of its audiences. Equally, we believe it is important for a project of this type to have community support and backing, as important components of success.

Viability – the City Farm's viability may be seen as a matter for its trustees. However, the City Council as landlord would inherit the Cherry Hinton site (and, possibly, its contents) should the enterprise fail, either in the short or longer term. There is therefore a risk attached to this venture in the form of a potential liability falling on the Council to cover for failure of the Farm, or to reallocate the land again following failure, when the funding opportunity presented by the Masterplan has passed.

6 Criteria

The list of criteria presented here is developed from an appraisal of the different points made by those who have commented on the proposal. Not all criteria suggested have been included; some have been discounted as unhelpful or irrelevant, or as having little or no bearing on the suitability or otherwise of a site. In addition, we have developed criteria of our own from analysis of the comments made to us and from our own analysis of the requirement; we have also had access to a document from a City Farm in the East Midlands¹⁵ concerning its own siting.

Population – is the site within easy access of a significant local population? An isolated site may find it difficult to attract prolonged commitment and interest, or to attract sufficient revenue generation.

Audience development – is the site close to, or within easy reach of, potential institutional audiences such as schools, and easily accessed by other potential audiences such as young people or vulnerable people without independent transport?

Growth and expansion – does the site allow for expansion should the project grow, or if visitor numbers are above expectation? Has due account been taken of the impact of new populations for the city?

Community welcome – does the surrounding community want the facility locally? Is there the necessary commitment from the local community to enable it to build strong community links and attract a volunteer base? Are there likely to be objections, and would these be damaging to the potential success of the project?

Community benefit – how significant is the benefit in the context of the local community? All other things being equal, an economically disadvantaged community, a high-density housing area with small or no gardens, or a community with limited open space might be expected to benefit more from a project of this type.

Access and accessibility – is the site accessible by sustainable means of transport, and also by car? Is there adequate provision for parking, for people with disabilities, and for those arriving with buggies?

Sustainability – is the site available on a sufficiently long lease to allow the project to invest with confidence in a sufficiently long-term future? Would buildings on the site be likely to secure appropriate permissions?

¹⁵ Stonebridge City Farm in Nottingham produced a set a criteria for siting a farm; this was provided to us by FCCH but we have been unable to secure an independent copy.

Viability - if the project were unable to maintain its existence, what liability would fall on the Council to either maintain the site or to clear it? Does the risk of failure carry with it a risk of loss of amenity or of other use, or damage to neighbours' amenity?

Impact on usage – is the land currently underused, or will existing uses be adversely affected by the proposal?

Impact on landscape - does the proposal have a positive or negative effect on the landscape character, or the environmental and biodiversity character of the site?

Utilities – is the site serviced for power, water and waste products?

Security – can the site be appropriately secured? Would (for instance) fencing have a detrimental effect on other users of the site or its neighbours?

Added value – does the site provide additional value in terms of amenity, green space to relieve built-up areas, or links to other green spaces (“green corridors”)?

7 Alternative sites

Among the alternative sites suggested are these (some are quite vague as to location):

- **A field adjacent to Coldhams Common.** This is thought to be owned by St Andrew's Church, who are reported (by FCCH) to be very interested in hosting a City Farm on this site.¹⁶ Part of this site may be required for an extension of the guided busway should the airport development go ahead (but this in turn would provide a transport link that is lacking at present). Parking might be possible nearby as the Horizon Centre is closed. The site is close to an existing green corridor, and to the new Abbey Meadows Primary School; it is the one most frequently mentioned as an alternative. The City Farm proposers are aware of this site and agree that it is bigger, but say that it offers less easy access for walk-in visitors or for school groups.
- **Darwin Nursery** in Newmarket Road is a small plant nursery with some animals, which provides (among other things) paid work for people with learning disabilities. It has been suggested that they might be open to the possibility of working together with the proposed City Farm.
- Land on **Fulbourne Road behind Cambridge Water** is also suggested as a possibility; the land is owned by a Mr Lacey.
- **Orchard Park** has a site near the hotel at the A14 junction; a site here could serve the northern fringe and potentially also Milton. The land is owned by South Cambridgeshire DC.
- **Fulbourn Hospital** – behind Tesco on Yarrow Way, this site is owned by the NHS. It is in the Cherry Hinton area but is more peripheral to the community.
- **St Bede's Playing Fields** are nearby, but are in use. The site is owned by Cambridgeshire County Council.
- Land may be available through the developments **at NIAB 1 and NIAB 2**, at Kings Hedges as part of the open space requirement imposed on developers in the Design Guidelines. NIAB 1 is a site already under development, however; NIAB 2 is in South Cambridgeshire.
- A waste site on **Coldhams Lane** may be suitable, as may a site in the vicinity of the pits off Norman Way, behind or adjacent to the David Lloyd Centre/Holiday Inn complex. Ownership of these sites is unknown.

¹⁶ An offer to meet the Vicar and church authorities to discuss this possibility has been received, but is outside the scope of this brief.

- **Milton Country Park**, a South Cambridgeshire site managed by a community trust, is suggested as a possible venue, where the farm would be an additional attraction but more in keeping with its surroundings, and could also take on management of the wildfowl on the site's ponds.
- On **Madingley Road**, near to the Park and Ride site, there is an old farm owned by the University which could be a suitable site; but land values are high in this area and release of potential development land for a charitable purpose may be difficult to secure.

The “most appropriate location” requested by members at Community Services Scrutiny Committee may be one of these sites; the final selection of a site may benefit from the application of the criteria in section 6 of this report to each of the available sites on this list, or to others of which we are not at present aware. As will be noted, however, many of these sites are owned by others. Whilst the City Council can consider the appropriateness of sites in its own ownership using these criteria, investigation of the privately owned sites would require making approaches to the landowners, and we think it is inappropriate to effectively open negotiation with private landowners on behalf of a third party.

8 Conclusions

The questions originally posed by the study, and the conclusions we have reached, are set out below:

Is a City Farm feasible in the space available at Cherry Hinton? This question in turn gives rise to questions around space itself, but also the impact on the Masterplan, the proposed location in relation to other activities in the park, and the impact on neighbouring uses, with particular reference to the Folk Festival.

8.1 We do not believe a City Farm is feasible at Cherry Hinton Hall.

Our reasons for reaching this conclusion are these:

1. A City Farm is incompatible with the continuation of the Folk Festival. We accept the submission made by the Festival that it would be unable to provide the festival at Cherry Hinton Hall if the space it uses at the moment were given over to a City Farm. The Community Services Committee minutes require integration of the Folk Festival's operational requirements with the Masterplan, and this means that, given the impossibility of accommodating both the festival and the farm, the festival must take precedence and the farm must look elsewhere.
2. The support for the Masterplan was strong and convincing, and should not be dismissed. We think there are dangers for the Council in overturning the conclusions drawn from the 2010 consultation on the Masterplan, notwithstanding the support expressed there for a City Farm. Support for the package proposed in the Masterplan was strong, and objections tended on the whole to be muted and to do with detail. We concur with the view that the former propagation site is best restored to the wider open space.
3. A City Farm would, in all probability, be beneficial to Cambridge. A City Farm on the scale envisaged to allow accommodation at Cherry Hinton is, however, not sufficiently ambitious to allow for a good prospect of success, in our view. We find the arguments in favour of establishing a City Farm irrefutable and respect the enthusiasm and commitment being shown by those backing the project. We are also convinced by the benefits a City Farm would confer on the city, and on specific target groups; but we do not believe these can be maximised in the space available at Cherry Hinton Hall. We also believe that it is necessary to allow for the possibility of expansion in the future, as whatever assurances the present trustees provide would not necessarily bind their successors.
4. In the event of failure, there is also a greater risk to the Council in a site at Cherry Hinton Hall than might be the case at an alternative location. If the farm fails (and the

present economic climate raises the stakes in this respect), the Council will inherit the liability to maintain, or to close, the farm, and the need to deal with its contents. Should this situation arise, the site will be likely to return to dereliction but the opportunity presented by the Masterplan will have been lost.

5. We are also concerned that the project may prove to be divisive. In the 2010 consultation, there is a much more marked divergence of opinion over this idea than over any other element of the Masterplan. Moreover, the Friends Group, whose support for the park is a valuable contributor to its continued success, and which includes several people of local standing, are opposed to the idea. This seems to us to weaken the likelihood of gaining the community support needed for success.
6. Finally, we warm to the idea that this project could be more usefully located elsewhere, in an area of greater need, and higher potential benefit, and we urge the authority to work with developers and partners to identify, or to reserve, a site in the growth areas, which meets as many of the criteria as possible, closer to the College which could prove to be an important partner, and which would enable the deployment of section 106 contributions to facilitate the creation of this project.

What issues arise in considering the development of a City Farm, and (following on from that) what are the criteria that should be used in assessing the suitability of sites for a City Farm in Cambridge? What other sites might be available if Cherry Hinton Hall were deemed unsuitable?

8.2 These are detailed in section 6 (criteria) and section 7 (possible sites) of this report, but are summarised below.

7. An ideal site would satisfy these criteria:
 - A substantial local population
 - Within easy reach of potential institutional audiences, and of people without independent transport
 - Space for further expansion or development of the project
 - Welcomed by the local community
 - Meeting identified need within the local community, such as need deriving from economic disadvantage or lack of private gardens
 - Accessible by sustainable transport and by private car
 - Available on a tenure that would allow confident investment, and likely to secure appropriate permissions
 - Creating as little future liability for the Council as possible
 - Not impacting adversely on existing uses or neighbours
 - Creating a positive impact on landscape character
 - Capable of being secured appropriately from intrusion and escape

- Adding value by providing additional open space or linkages between open spaces
8. Other sites suggested as alternatives to Cherry Hinton Hall are detailed in section 7 of the report. Many of these are in private ownership or are owned by other public bodies, and it is not appropriate to seek access or information as to whether or not they meet the criteria; this for the applicants to pursue if they wish.

Given that the consultation reveals differing, and opposing, views on this proposal, how well founded are these different views, and how far should they influence the Council's decision on this proposal?

9. Some of the views are well-founded; others are not. Our assessment of feasibility addresses this (Section 5 of the report sets these out in detail) and the soundness of the various observations made has been appraised in the process of selecting criteria for inclusion in section 6 of the report. It will be noted that we have not accepted all the opposing arguments, nor all those in favour; our intention throughout has been to give each position a fair hearing, and then to weigh it up so as to answer the Council's requirement to assess the appropriateness of this location and of others.

**Phil Back
Wetherby
April 2011**