

Big Issues for the Cambridge Area

Notes from the discussion session of the U3AC meeting of 8 Nov 2017 Session led by Rob Howard

Notes by Harry Gelsthorpe and Rob Howard

Design of buildings and localities

Peter presented a number of points: the need to compete on a global scale, more affordable housing outside the Green Belt, science park buildings could go from 2 – 4 storeys, median house prices are 13 x average salaries, UK dwellings have a smaller floor area than in many other countries, towns around Cambridge should be developed further and there is much bad design of buildings in the city.

1. Rob Howard, although an architect, had mostly worked on IT developments in building. He suggested we should not discuss aesthetics since everyone's taste is different, and concentrate on meeting needs for housing, research, industry and leisure as far towards our goal of 2050 as possible
2. **Where should we build?** The last 15 year plan mainly allowed growth on the edge of Cambridge eating into the Green Belt. The next 15 year plan proposes that development is mainly in areas such as Waterbeach, Cambourne and Bourn airfield. It seems we are still waiting for acceptance of this since there are new thoughts about the Cambridge-Oxford corridor. It is therefore difficult to look beyond 2030. Cambridge growth is out of balance with the less well paid not able to live in the city due to costs and income not keeping pace. What is needed is to allow the city centre to remain attractive but where will traffic go? Should there be tunnels under the city or should all private traffic be banned?
3. **Developments in modelling buildings.** Following the improvement to communications on building sites from the mobile phone, there are now computer models of the design available on computers to which all those involved, including clients and users, can get access. This should allow better understanding of designs, and the way they fit into their context, as well as reduction in errors through pre-testing.
4. **Green developments in building.** Eddington shows the use of centralised power and heating plant, recycling of water and better waste disposal without wheelie bins. In future it may be possible to generate power and heating in small developments, or even individual housing with battery storage, to enable surplus energy to be fed back into the grid.
5. **Heights of buildings.** Do we need to build higher? Research has shown that high density can be achieved without having to build towers. The general policy on height adopted recently was for 7 storeys in suitably prominent places but the Marquee is about 9 storeys.
6. **Quality of design.** Cambridge has some of the best and the worst buildings. Can planners ensure the quality of all new buildings? Their ability to turn down developers' proposals is limited by the cost of having to pay compensation if a refusal is overturned on appeal. The

relationship between architects and builders has changed on many speculative projects with the architect effectively working for the builder on a design and build contract. Fortunately the most prominent building projects are led by architects but they have to compete on fees and the best one may not win.

- 7. Expansion of market towns.** Can we encourage closer links between the city and market towns such as: Saffron Walden, Royston, St Neot's, Huntingdon, St Ives, Ely and Newmarket? How far will people travel to work? 90 minutes has been quoted for those travelling to London. Better communication links are essential and were the subject of a previous discussion. Development along improved routes fanning out from Cambridge would help those travelling into the city and would allow green spaces to remain between.
- 8. Working from home.** The growing number of self-employed people, and even those working in large organisations can often work part time from home. This lacks the social benefits of travelling to work, however there are examples of clusters of workspaces sharing facilities and providing the social contact necessary.