

# Lessons from the Development of Cambourne

(A new community near Cambridge)

Conclusions  
of  
Conference and Workshop  
held on

14<sup>th</sup> June 2007

Material assembled by

Peter Landshoff.

and

John Patman

who organised the meeting.

Acknowledgements to Mark Deas of Inspire East, Simon McIntosh of South Cambs District Council, and Anna Clarke, Heather Cruickshank, Tony Hargreaves and Peter Tyler of Cambridge University.

The meeting was attended by some 45 people from all over the East of England and from central government, CABE, the LGA, URBED and a number of companies. What follows is a summary of their discussions, which were preceded by brief talks:

- Gary Young (Higgs Young Architects): the original vision for Cambourne
- Steve Platt (Cambridge Architectural Research): evaluation of Cambourne
- Andrew Goodchild (Mid Beds District Council): the Wixams project
- Brian Human (Cambridge City Council): relationship between government, local authorities and the developer
- Suan Goh (Cambridgeshire Primary Care Trust): mental health
- Nicholas Falk (URBED): integration of social housing
- Sarah Monk (Cambridge University): maintaining a sustainable community
- Peter Studdert (Cambridgeshire Horizons): the Northstowe project

Their slides may be found on <http://www.inspire-east.org.uk/lessonsfromcambourne.aspx>

## Final summary talk (Simon McIntosh)

### New Framework and Guidance

Five key conclusions stand out:

- There is a need for **Social Impact Statements**, similar to those for environmental or health impact, to be drawn up as part of the planning process, setting out a fully thought-through consideration of the challenges of creating a new community given the age and social profile of the expected residents, and the actions to address these.
- The development of a **Quality Charter** may be an important step in establishing agreement between the stakeholders on the objectives of the new developments (beyond the delivery of x number of homes, and y level of return for the developers) and the process to achieve places where people want to live, providing a focus on quality,.
- There is a need for a body to provide the **Leadership** for a new development, and to have a continuing role in ensuring its successful management, including running the community development process. This role can be fulfilled by a **Development Trust**, which could also work for the interests of the new community, going above and beyond those of any of the stakeholder agencies.
- The critical role of the **Masterplan** which needs statutory support not only to be produced to acceptable standards but also to be followed through with ongoing master planning, working flexibly with stakeholders to develop and agree changes during the development process.
- The criteria for a successful development need to be agreed before it starts, perhaps as part of the Planning process, with strengthening of the **Monitoring and Enforcement Processes** to ensure delivery against these criteria, including achievement of the masterplan and successful community development.

This has been a good day – real buzz from the participants who are drawn from a wider range of bodies than for some previous workshops about similar issues. The following themes were drawn out of the day.

## **Key Themes**

### **1. Growing a community**

A community takes a long time to grow, and we don't have a blueprint for how to do it. It's an organic process. Sir Frederick Gibberd described how a new town should be: "an organism which would go on changing and being rebuilt as the needs of the people altered".

Social processes are as important, or even more important, than the physical environment in the wellbeing of a growing community. The involvement of residents is vital, and to assist this you need Community Development workers who can help people grow into the roles needed to build the social network.

### **2. Cambourne**

Built in a physically 'hostile' empty place, and over the last few years it has often been portrayed in a negative way. But now it has much which is successful, as highlighted by Steve Platt in his report: for example, it's a safe place for children, who are often allowed to play outside; most children walk to school; the landscape is attractive, and the maximum use has been made of the existing woodland.

But we've heard how it suits some but not all – there is a high level of mental distress in some of the population, experiencing similar 'new town blues' to others such as residents of Milton Keynes 30 years ago. There is a lack of shared space where people can just drop in and meet others; facilities to allow this are essential – though they are not sufficient on their own.

### **3. Economics**

Need financial realism on the funding for the infrastructure, which is needed 'up front'. There is great, perhaps too great, reliance on the Section 106 funding from developers, recognising that they need to achieve a level of return to fund the whole development process.

The size of settlements has been highlighted as a key issue, ensuring that they are of an economic scale. There may be policy implications on planning arising from this.

One suggestion was that charges on residents should be levied in order to help fund the necessary infrastructure; the shared payment of such charges would be an incentive for residents to maintain a good local environment. However, this needs to be balanced against the total charges on residents, including the Town Council 'precept', likely to be high based on Cambourne's experience, for running facilities; high charges would undermine the achievement of an inclusive community.

### **4. Age Structure**

The importance of the age structure of new communities has been an underlying issue in a number of points made, mentioned by both Suan Goh and Nicolas Falk. It has been noted that the high child population of Cambourne was not predicted, so much so that an extra primary school has had to be added to the plans, unbalancing the school provision serving the three villages. For other settlements, such as Northstowe, the predicted demographics show very few older people, which is the very group which studies show provides a great deal of the social capital in communities. What is needed is a more even balance of ages in a new settlement.

Is there an opportunity to sell Northstowe as a high-quality, well-serviced place with well-maintained public spaces which is ideal for older people? This should fit with the high densities which have to be achieved, which will require many flats and properties with small if any gardens. Would it be possible to persuade people of this?

## **5. Connectivity**

The way the new community should be connected to surrounding communities is important in terms of both the physical and the social environment. Physically Cambourne was designed to be quite separate from nearby villages, without a connecting road to Bourn and only one to the bypass for Caxton, reinforcing the differences between the newcomers and existing residents, 'them and us'. The lack of public transport also misses the opportunity to link in to local communities. Cambourne itself is designed to appear as three villages, when in reality it is an urban environment.

Socially, the importance of developing a sense of belonging was pointed out, with a strong need for shared activities and 'neutral' spaces, such as a community café, where people can meet casually. Such opportunities would have helped in the building of the community and allowed established residents to help meet and welcome those who arrived after them.

## **6. Schools**

The key role that schools play was highlighted. They are one of the venues within a settlement, which allows the population to mix and interact, bridging between those in different social or interest groups who may otherwise not come into contact. In the Wixams and Fairfield they are seen as important central facilities for the village communities.

To play their role as community hubs they need to be open to all, accessible by right in the evenings by groups from all parts of the community. And they need to be designed flexibly to accommodate a wide range of uses.

## **7. Social Rented Housing/Housing Tenures**

The effects of the different tenures of housing could be significant; it was suggested that about 4% of tenants in social rented housing have problems that may affect their tenancy or neighbours, a small but potentially significant number. The large private rented sector, with younger people unlikely to stay and put down roots in the community, was also significant and something which had not been predicted. The need for more 'co-housing' on a continental model had also been put forward, as well as the need for key worker housing to be accessible by people unable to afford Cambridge area prices.

The initial presentations had highlighted that the tenures should be intermixed, avoiding large areas with a single tenancy; in Cambourne there are often areas of 25-30 social rented homes together, which was a little too large, but one or two much larger blocks which was a big problem. The ideal arrangement would be 'pepperpotting' of individual homes, but this may not be practical.

The timing of arrivals from different tenures was also important. There was a tendency for a large number of social rented homes to be made available and let at the same time, unlike the steadier flow of private homes, leading to problems such as a large number of children, some with high needs, arriving at schools together. The impact of 'choice-based lettings', allowing prospective tenants to register interest in available homes, was not yet clear.

The Registered Social Landlords (i.e. Housing Associations) had a significant potential role in the management of wider areas of housing and the new settlements. Many have experience of this neighbourhood management role, which could be useful for new settlements.

## **8. Management and Governance**

Good management of new settlements is a crucial issue. The discussion groups had highlighted the possible role of a Development Trust in undertaking this role, or the establishment of some form of joint venture body. Whatever structure is established it needs to be able to adapt to developing needs and the changing dynamics of a growing population.

Appropriate governance structures are also needed, something which took too long to set up in Cambourne. Parish Councils have an important role to play, and balancing the use of existing PCs with the establishment of new structures.

## **9. Resident involvement/community development**

Many of the speakers referred to the need for residents to be actively involved in creating the community, and for assistance to help them do this. At an early stage this could involve finding ways to overcome the barriers to those in surrounding communities and include new residents. An audit of the skills of the existing and incoming communities could be very helpful, to match up with needs. Support for volunteers, for example for a community café, could help the community to grow. The role of the church could be crucial to help develop an inclusive community.

There also need to be ways for people to input their views on ongoing design issues, to allow local input and hopefully ensure good design to meet community needs. New residential areas should include some workshop spaces attached to homes, to facilitate homeworking. The establishment of a small fund for assisting people to develop their skills as entrepreneurs was suggested as a useful way to help a local economy to grow.

Another idea put forward was for ‘incentivised social behaviour’, finding ways to highlight the benefits of social rules so people are more willing to ‘sign up’.

## **10. Long-term Interest**

Speakers identified the need to tie landowners in to longer-term interest in the well-being of developments. However, the current interests of landowners in the development are generally very short-term, with a need to turn around their capital as soon as possible and move on. The first garden cities, and previous generations of developments such as Milton Keynes, benefited from altruistic landowners or longer term development corporations with control of the land.

There needs to be a premium on quality, with the developers and other stakeholders sharing in the benefits. How can this be achieved? One way is to bring in stakeholders with their own long-term interests, such as the Wildlife Trust who manage green spaces in Cambourne, or Registered Social Landlords who have long-term interests in housing and neighbourhoods. Is there another way to ‘engineer’ value, in the creative mould of carbon trading (providing a new set of values through new markets for trading emissions)? That is, some way to tie developers in to the long-term wellbeing of communities, through providing some form of financial payment based on the quality of life for residents after 5, 10, and 20 years.

## **11. Leadership**

One view, which received much support, was that of the Council’s role in relationship with the developers, which was to provide strong leadership on the nature of the development

required, and provide a local delivery team. Most groups and speakers pointed out the pitfalls of the current process, with a complex process, too many players and often a lack of continuity. This leadership needs to extend over both the provision of the built infrastructure and homes, and the appropriate service provision to the new residents.

While most speakers implicitly accepted the need for this firm leadership, not everyone agreed this would be within the Council's remit. An alternative proposal was for an overarching Project Board, including local and central government, the developers' master planners, residents and the local delivery vehicle (ie Horizons in this area). If such a multi-agency body could be effective, it could champion the development coordinate and oversee delivery.

## **12. Developing Measures of Success**

At the moment there are no agreed measures of the success of new developments. The only criteria would seem to be whether they match the build rate in the plans, and perhaps the number of architectural or other awards achieved! We need clear measures and targets if we are to work towards the achievement of successful communities.

Suggestions for these measures arising from today are:

- Measurement of the levels of 'bridging' social capital developed
- The numbers or % of people participating in local activities or networks
- Measures of the mental health of the population
- % of children who walk to school, with a target of over 95 %?
- Comparisons with Cambourne – how have we built on the positives, and how well have we managed to avoid the negative aspects?

There are more which could be developed, using the expertise of a conference such as today's.

## **Discussion group feedbacks**

Groups were asked to identify issues that need particular attention in future developments and processes to ensure that they are properly addressed. The following summarises issues raised in 6 discussion groups. All groups were asked to address the issue of "Who is Responsible". One of the other 5 issues was allocated to each of the groups.

### **Who is Responsible?**

#### *Key questions*

- How do you ensure that the vision in the master plan does not get diluted?*
- How do you get the developer to do the right thing while making a reasonable profit?*
- How do you resolve the conflict with short-term banking needs?*
- How do you ensure good quality attractive buildings?*
- How do you achieve good-quality landscaping and green spaces?*
- How do you overcome problems with regulations?*
- How do you overcome boundaries between different jurisdictions?*
- Who should be responsible for ensuring that these issues are properly addressed?*

There was discussion about the changing needs of the master plan and the need for it to be able to grow organically, responding to changing needs. This means different groups will be involved at different stages. It was also felt that the original master-plan for Cambourne was in some ways misconceived – sustainability was high on the agenda, but a village can never be sustainability in today’s world – its residents are likely to be highly car-reliant and travel outside the village for lots of things. Starting out with a village idea and then extending it to make it more sustainable, making it more like a town, caused confusion as to what it was. Part of this confusion relates to whether we are trying to build for the future or recreate something from the past

### **Issue raised**

- Maintaining continuity of the master plan was seen as critical -- consideration given to giving it a statutory footing
- The need for strong local government was seen as a key issue
- The District Council has overall responsibility for new developments like Cambourne and is responsible for ensuring that issues are properly addressed.
- However, for these new ‘exurbs’ to evolve and respond to change whilst still ensuring the vision of the master plan they may require a new type of steering organisation that has the benefits of the local involvement of a parish council but the wider expertise and strategic understanding of a project group.
- In terms of governmental responsibility for the overall plans it was felt that the lead should come first from regional government, and then the LAs. Overall vision for the growth areas needs to come from central government.
- The group felt that RSLs should be much more involved in the whole process. They often have community management skills which can be utilised. They are also going to be responsible for 40-50% of the housing in future schemes if current quotas go ahead.
- Provision of schools was seen to be essential in community building, and those responsible for them need to be more closely involved in the wider process.
- Key ingredient is to ensure long term leadership-to get the master planners to stay involved
- A structure for long-term management of the public realm was felt to be crucial.
- Development bodies with long-term financial stake in the public realm can be very successful eg. Letchworth Garden City and Thames Gateway where developer retains freehold so retains long-term interest.
- It is the responsibility of the District Council to ensure that the vision of the master plan is not diluted.
- Getting the right developer was seen as a priority and crucial to the delivery of a long term strategy.

- Developers are likely to exert pressure to build more houses than in the original master plan, to boost their profitability.
- Central government should support the efforts of District Councils to maintain the vision of master plans and not apply pressure to cram in more houses to meet regional targets.
- The main developer could be encouraged to do the right thing by restricting how the land is sold on to house builders after the developer has obtained planning permission.
- If this sell-off were only to be allowed in stages, the quality of the delivery of each stage could be monitored and planning conditions used to bar unsatisfactory sub-developers from bidding for subsequent parcels.
- Keep the original developer involved throughout the whole development process with an incentive to achieve the original aspirations of the master plan.
- Section 106 is not an adequate means of providing this funding because developer contributions rely on profits that arise later in the project.
- A helpful alternative would be if loans were more easily available for the upfront investment in infrastructure and services.
- The scale of development planned for Cambridge requires substantial public sector investment in infrastructure and services to cater for the wider impacts of this growth.
- In the UK, central government controls public sector policy and funding. This can make it difficult for local authorities to provide the policies and investment that is needed for local circumstances.
- Other European countries, such as Germany, find it easier than the UK to deliver developments to high level of quality and sustainability, probably because local government on mainland Europe generally has more autonomy over policy and local revenue
- Regulations and standard need to be consistent
- Design codes can help to achieve quality but if not used appropriately they could lead to a lack of character and variety
- The flexibility of the development to evolve over time was considered important
- Over the longer term, residents should be able to extend their houses and provide suitable housing for an aging population.
- If residents have a sense of 'ownership' of their neighbourhood this could encourage a sense of community
- Some shared local ownership of land may help to achieve a sense of pride and responsibility if this allows local communities to build some of their own facilities such as a community centre, library, nature reserve, etc



- The new developments need to have opportunities, facilities and activities for all socio-economic groups.
- It is important to have a cross section of skills, interests and age groups
- Ensure that all of a major new development will be within the jurisdiction of a single district council, if necessary by realigning the district boundaries.

## **Transport and integration with surroundings**

### *Key Questions*

*How do you overcome car dependence and achieve adequate transport?*

*How do you transport to and from school?*

*How do you remove the problems that occur at boundaries between different jurisdictions?*

*How much parking should be provided and how should it be laid out?*

*Where are the cycle routes and how many?*

*How do you improve and encourage footpaths and pedestrian rights of way?*

*How do you cater fully for the disabled access?*

*What will be the relationship with other nearby towns and village?*

*How do you make people safe and feel safe?*

*Who should be responsible for ensuring that these issues are properly addressed?*

### **Issues Raised**

- Good public transport services are important to help reduce the amount of car use and provide good accessibility for people without access to a car.
- For the fast and frequent operation of a bus service it is helpful if the settlement has a spine road with bus route that is with easy walking distance for all residents.
- Bus priorities are also important so that the bus service can compete with the car on journey times
- Real time information about the public transport services is also likely to increase patronage.
- Major upfront investment is needed in transport infrastructure within Cambridge to provide fast and reliable public transport services through the city centre, especially as the city grows and traffic levels increase.
- Section 106 agreements will not be able to provide the amount of investment that is needed for the planned level of growth. More investment is needed from central government.
- Community transport is very important for the accessibility of people who may have difficulty getting around on their own. It can also help to build a sense of community.

- Parked cars can be a problem. However, reducing the amount of parking is not recommended. Households may have more than one car but this does not mean that they drive more miles than a household with only one car.
- In Germany car ownership is higher than the UK but they drive fewer miles, and in some residential areas they park in communal garages often a few minutes' walk from their house. This may help to reduce the use of the car for short trips.
- Connectivity of bus, cycling and walking links should be improved between new settlements and the surrounding communities.
- The local authorities should push through sustainable transport links where barriers have been erected between the new settlements and adjacent existing communities.

## **Integration of Social Housing**

### *Key questions*

*How do you integrate – pepper-potting or in large pockets?*

*Do you integrate in phases or introduce on block?*

*What are the viable numbers?*

*What is the best range of accommodation?*

*How do you address the needs of the smaller household?*

*What are the alternative economics to give incentive the developer?*

*Who should be responsible for ensuring that these issues are properly addressed?*

### **Issues raised**

- Big publicity drive required to improve image of social housing
- No one saw shared ownership as an issue. Key workers in particular are seen as an asset. Social tenants are believed to be mostly on benefits so a problem rather than an asset. Depends on how you look at it:
- social tenants are likely to be less car dependant so more of an asset in environmental terms
- General feeling that social housing was not the cause of all social problems
- 4% quoted as estimate of social tenants quoted as problem families
- If excluded from new community they would require additional support at a cost
- Private rented sector seen as important. Intermediate housing to bridge gap between owners and social renters
- High rise blocks cause their own problems due to high service charges for lifts, facilities etc. An extra burden for social tenants
- Successful pepper-potting of flats within blocks achieved but where RSL had been leading the process

- Conflict of standards was seen as an issue where Housing Corporations impose higher standards on affordable housing. Creates difficulty with pepper-potting
- Good practice achieved with RSL's involved in the whole process
- Mass clustering of social housing not seen as been good practice
- Integration was seen as both possible and desirable to avoid "Ghetto Culture"
- More innovation is required: Denmark was referred to in respect of their Co-Housing which makes up 15% of Denmark's housing
- Timing for the introduction of social housing into a development was seen as critically important.
- Social housing requires phasing into the progressive development of the site/community
- Good management of the public realm were felt to improve integration ie play area for kids, rubbish collection etc
- Sound insulation between homes was seen as a necessity to harmonious living

## **Employment**

### *Key questions*

*How do you attract employers?*

*What are the economic issues for the Developer?*

*How do you address the conflict between the short-term banking interests and community need?*

*What is the extent to which the community needs to be self-contained in terms of jobs?*

*How do you attract brands that create local businesses?*

*Does the business park need to be integrated in the development or placed elsewhere?*

*Who is responsible for ensuring these issues are properly addressed?*

## **Issues raised**

- More likely to have influence at the micro level than at the macro level
- Need to address the skill set of the community
- Service industries (including farming) can be important
- Opportunities for entrepreneurial progression-home working / workshop spaces
- Quality facilities to assist work and live community integration
- Pioneers need help to get established

## **Making a community**

### *Key questions*

- What is needed to make a community?*
- How do you avoid loneliness?*
- How do you provide facilities from the start?*
- What is the strategy for the involvement of community workers?*
- What are the roles and importance of the Church and other religious facilities?*
- How do we create innovative use of green spaces, parks, allotments etc?*
- What is the role of section 106?*
- What are the innovative alternatives in funding mechanisms?*
- Who is responsible for driving these and ensuring they are properly addressed.*

### **Issues raised**

- Up to now change has been incremental across the sub region -- but no longer seen as sustainable so having to create large scale development all at once
- Need a community development officer to create vision
- Need things for people to be involved in that they value -- not just sport
- Include existing communities -- to create a positive impact reach out with key attractors make the new people feel wanted
- Establish a managed “Change Agenda”: create a long term programme with involvement of both new and old community
- A need to stick to plans in terms of size of community -- measure expansion potential; constant review and feedback
- Design for 40 year window — making facilities such as schools flexible in use
- Consider balance of community – mix of older people/ young set. How do you attract mix?

## **Provision of services**

### *Key questions*

- How do we bring innovation to the funding mechanisms?*
- What are others doing to be more creative?*
- How do we get a balanced range of shops to serve the community?*
- Should the school be the focus of the community? What are the alternatives?*
- What does the community need as essential services?*

*How do we provide these services from the outset?  
What is the right size for the development/services?  
How do we ensure smaller developments have same benefits/priorities?*

## **Issues raised**

- It was generally felt that Cambourne was too small and that the right size of a development cluster to support innovative services was around 30,000, which meant looking at the regional strategy
- Getting a better range of shops relates to sustainable size and catchment area.
- Critical mass is essential to obtaining an effective range of shops and facilities.
- Building in flexibility was seen as good practice to enable you to do informal things and experiment
- The school is one of a number of focal points. Positioning was seen as crucial.
- The school will always be provided but can't be sure other services will be present
- Schools provide a good focus but there are others centres that should be considered. Multi-user centres were discussed.
- The focus should be on "the community" as a whole rather than on a particular service.
- It was generally felt that good services need to be provided from the start and early stage findings are required for this purpose. Current emphasis is on section 106.
- Integrate the services of surrounding communities with those of new ones.
- Transport solutions need proper attention to reflect the needs of the community.
- Tends to be a cherry picking approach in many cases, which leads to inadequate servicing.
- Churches were seen as important as they provided a common community space. Can be innovative in a multi user community. Can provide cohesion between age differences i.e. crèche and toddler groups mixed with coffee mornings and group activities etc.
- Funding mechanisms was seen as an area for further innovative thinking. Section 106 was heavily criticised and not seen as helpful toward this process
- Funding mechanisms considered involved LSPs and Local Area Agreements, and the relationship with private corporate infrastructure, which was seen as a potential growth area.