



# TOWARDS A QUALITY CHARTER FOR GROWTH IN CAMBRIDGESHIRE DUTCH STUDY TOUR REPORT

## Produced by

### URBED

26 Gray's Inn Road  
LONDON WC1X 8HP  
t. 020 7831 9986  
f. 020 7831 2466

e-mail. [f.king@urbed.com](mailto:f.king@urbed.com)  
website. [www.urbed.co.uk](http://www.urbed.co.uk)

Special thanks to all at the  
Vathorst Information Centre and  
Han Lorzing, Sector Head at the  
Netherlands Institute for Spatial  
Research

July 2007

## Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Day One</b>	<b>2</b>
Presentation	2
Amersfoort	2
Kattenbroek	3
The VINEX housing programme	4
Nieuwland	5
Vathorst	7
<b>Day Two</b>	<b>10</b>
Haverleij	10
Houten	11
<b>Participant Feedback</b>	<b>12</b>
Introduction	12
Section one	12
Section two	16



# Dutch Study Tour 12-13<sup>th</sup> July 2007

## Introduction

This description of the Dutch Study Tour incorporates URBED's, participants and experts observations and input from the presentations given. A separate follow on feedback report accompanies this report.

Representatives from three Local Authorities – Members and Officers, Developers and other key agencies took part in a two-day study tour organised by URBED as part of the continuing programme Towards a Quality Charter for Cambridgeshire. It followed a successful overseas visit to Freiburg last year that focussed on environmental sustainability in the Freiburg developments of Vauban and Rieselfeld.

The particular focus for this visit was on identity and private-public partnerships, as well as on environmental considerations, and the suburbs visited were recommended by Han Lorzing, a Spatial Planner, Landscape Architect and Sector Head of The Netherlands Institute for Spatial

Research. Han had presented to a visiting group from Harlow to Amsterdam (suburbs and expanded town centre of Almere) earlier this year.

\* An asterisk has been used to denote ideas/actions that might have relevance to development in Cambridgeshire, and be incorporated within the Charter Document



## Day One

### Presentation

Our visit started at the Vathorst Information Centre (a dedicated facility which welcomes visitors and facilitates and arranges tours\*), with a presentation given by an Alderman (political leader) from Amersfoort who has been involved since the start of the expansion programme.

### Amersfoort

Three new districts of Amersfoort, a city located 15 miles to the north of Utrecht, were visited: Kattenbroek, Nieuwland and Vathorst. These were facilitated by the Vathorst Information Centre. Amersfoort is a historic city with a major railway junction, where the station has been redeveloped with offices alongside and railway facilities over the tracks.

In 1981 Amersfoort, with its medieval town centre, was designated a Growth City by the national government, with the aim of increasing its population of 130,000 to 160,000 by 2016. The designation led to significant increase in the hospitality, trade sectors, and a number of businesses areas being developed. First reactions to the designation was a 'no' with the expression of a wish to stay small, beautiful and modest but 20 years later new growth has been embraced and there is pride in the achievements.

The growth area designation led to landowners (farmers) selling their land to private developers for the highest price instead of selling to the City, which had traditionally been the case. Prior to the new development all planning decisions were made

by and at 'Town Hall' level. Private developers bought land, with an expectation of obtaining permission to build, and the city was 'furious'. However rather than go to court and seek a legal solution, the municipality made an agreement with the developers to work together to achieve a consensus of the outcomes to be achieved.

The concept adopted was that of an experiment in social housing. No areas were to be split into rich and poor – all is mixed. Private developers predicted that it would be impossible to sell houses in mixed areas, but in reality found no difficulty. They wanted to build large houses with green space/gardens – but also wanted to have greater density.

The City has now learnt how to grow sustainably and has greater local autonomy in what they want to do. Amersfoort is now designated one of the '*greenest cities in Europe*'.

Three different areas for growth were identified, Kattenbroek, Nieuwland and Vathorst.





## Kattenbroek

Planning for Kattenbroek started in 1986 with the first houses being built in 1990. A total of 4,547 houses have been built. There is an enormous diversity in colours, forms and materials used. There is a mix of social and private housing though there are differences in quality between the two. Prime lakeside space has been used not just for private housing (as developers wanted) but also for the benefit of social housing.

The Aldermen made the decision on behalf of the municipality that Kattenbroek should be different. They chose to appoint an architect from outside Holland to get a different perspective, and selected Ashok Balotra, an Indian born architect to produce the masterplan. Balotra produced a sketch plan featuring an inner circle the size of Amersfoort old city, representing the theme of 'being at home'. The sketch plan became known as the Kandinsky plan because of its similarity to the artists work. In total 40 architects were involved in the development.

Two masterplanners, one representing the Municipality and one the developer, were appointed and made to work together.\* It was decided that the developments had to be different from the past; they had to provide a different atmosphere and make use of canals and the fields (using water, woods and history to form identities). The masterplanners also used different approaches e.g. one used architects in the top ten, and the other did not\*. There is a

**Theme** The vision for Kattenbroek was to retain as much as possible of the original landscape, structure and sense of security of the old medieval town centre of Amersfoort. Two themes have been carried through the development; 'travelling and staying at home' and 'the four seasons'. The Court Lane (Laan der Hoven) and the Hidden Zone (Verborgten Zone) represent journeys of discovery to unknown and hidden destinations. The Avenue of Gardens symbolizes summer and the Hidden Zone symbolizes the spring. Forming a circle, the Ring represents being at home, which is the collective identity of Kattenbroek. The old centre of Amersfoort would fit exactly into the circumference of the Ring.



long list of acceptable architects. So there were different architects working in the fields of both private and social housing, and all working with the City planners.\*

Kattenbroek was effectively the first Public Private Partnership in the Netherlands. The City had to find a way of working with private developers to achieve their planned growth and regain control. The municipality went on to make an agreement with the developers to work together on

the outcomes to be achieved. The emphasis has been on team working – all must agree, and a consensus reached. Working closely with the main architect the City developed a new way of working with private partners to mutual benefit.\*

## The VINEX housing programme

In 1990/1 the Dutch government issued its "VINEX" report on spatial planning (VINEX stands for 4th Planning Report Extra). This document proposed the building of 455,000 new houses over the period 1996 to 2005. Of these 285,000 houses were to be built around cities in suburbs. In the end 90 new suburbs were built and 50 are in the Randstad area that lies within Utrecht, Amsterdam, The Hague and Rotterdam.

The national government required VINEX suburbs to be compact in order to preserve the countryside, as close to the existing cities as possible to keep car travel to a minimum, and to be developed around existing or new public transport to encourage its use. The national government provided incentives to local and regional authorities including assistance to ease procedures. It allocated 3.2 billion euros for transport and traffic measures and provided money for soil sanitation and other local impediments. This was only a fraction of the total cost but provided an incentive (perhaps like the Growth Area Fund in the UK).

Part of the success of the VINEX suburbs can be attributed to the variety of homes available, which was due to many factors:

- City planners and officials want their VINEX suburb to stand out
- Builders and developers believe 'variety sells'
- Prospective homebuyers want more choice

- Many of the suburbs have been built around a theme with water, woods and local history being the most popular.

Possible lessons from VINEX for the UK:

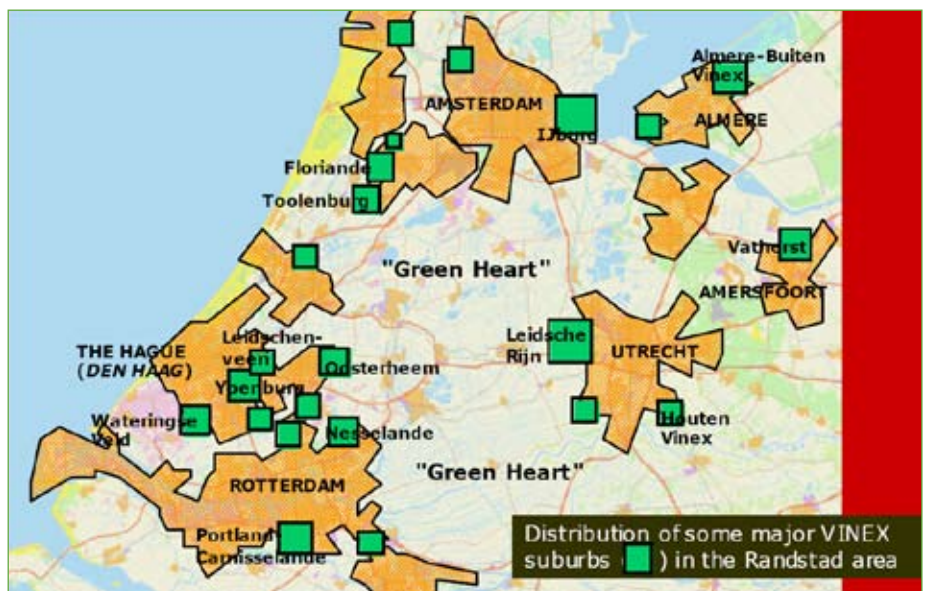
- Good coordination between different levels of government helps facilitate a smooth start
- Use of existing landscape features was a powerful tool in giving each new suburb a unique character
- Building for variety (and theming) helps sell houses, promotes community pride, and helps strengthen existing cities.



Vathorst



Vathorst



## Nieuwland

Planning started in 1993 with building work starting in 1995. Nieuwland was Amersfoort's first VINEX suburb (Vathorst is also a VINEX suburb). In total 5,420 houses have been built.

This district grew in its use of private public partnerships, with a combination of private build and management of the new area. County Hall was involved in planning, and working with other delivery agencies through a Steering Committee. The emphasis has always been on team working.

Sustainable development is the major priority for Nieuwland, with an emphasis on the issue of *'how do you ensure that the private company (developer) is doing this?'*. In Nieuwland they employed a supervisor (a Professor, expert in materials) working on behalf of the local authority to oversee and monitor the materials used and to set the environmental goals.

At the time of the new development there was very little knowledge of environmental standards and how to achieve a sustainable environment in developing new buildings and areas. So they brought together all the material they could find on the subject along with outside experts, and together they *'learnt a lot'*. \* Part of the approach was to ensure the efficient use of space, including one incinerator to heat the whole district,

and clustering amenities. High quality architecture was also sought.

The next question asked was *'how far do we go?'* Changes in law resulted in higher standards having to be incorporated. Their energy performance rate of 1,4 EPN (Energy Performance Standard) not only met but exceeded the Governments required standards. *'We make a point of trying to improve at the local level on the standards set by the Government.'*\* This demonstrates a very different way of thinking (and might appeal to the competitive element within people!).\*



Solar power in Nieuwland

	Capacity kwh	Surface m <sup>2</sup>
50 rental homes (housing association)	110	1,107
19 private houses	55	576
370 houses each 1m <sup>2</sup> PV	37	370
2 primary schools	20	170
24 houses with solar panels	9	108
2 zero energy houses	18	118
MW PV project	1,351	12,299
56 sound barrier houses	18	224
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,618</b>	<b>14,972</b>



### Observations following the coach trip to Kattenbroek and Nieuwland

- Idea of 'winter gardens' – enclosed glazed areas between houses providing places to be outside during inclement weather character
- Small blocks of housing with different design provides variety character
- Future proofing, with potential to add additional stories to houses (flat roofs) climate / character
- Use of ground level for conservatories and garages – flood defence? climate / character
- Water permeation climate
- Independent cycling networks with priority climate
- Nieuwland – solar panels climate
- Social and private housing on different sides of the road – clear difference in quality – not tenure blind community / character
- Simple, often small play areas – but quite a number of them community
- Housing for disabled young people and elderly (clustered, but in the central area, not marginalised to the periphery) community
- Farmer re-housed on his land – 100 years old – with a sheep etc. 'sold his soil' community





## Vathorst

Vathorst was explored on bicycle and by coach in the afternoon. At first Vathorst was not considered for expansion because of the constraints posed by its generally poor connections (located on the northern perimeter of Amersfoort but separated from the centre by the A1 motorway) and considerable amount of contamination. The issue was *'how can you build here to a good standard?'*

Vathorst is a joint 50:50 venture, between the local authority and private partner. Vathorst is also a VINEX suburb.

The first commitment to build Vathorst was made in 1995 with the first building going up in 2002. Between 2002 and 2014, some 11,000 new houses are being built. (approximately 3,434 homes have been built so far) on an area of about 550 hectares, with all the necessary amenities, including shopping facilities (17.500m<sup>2</sup>), a business area covering 45 hectares of retail and offices and a railway station. Development is on a relatively small scale with some 70/80 houses being designed by one architect.

Density agreements have been reached as the 'results of discussion' with private developers (35ph) who wanted it to be lower. There have been tensions between the municipality and house builders/developers. The ratio of 25% apartments to 75% houses has been built. Higher densities close to the station at Vathorst have enabled the development of the new railway station. One

**Theme** The challenge of ensuring diversity and pleasant living conditions in this large scale development was translated into a major theme for the city plan. The underlying theme is 'a world of difference' as they hope to attract different demographic groups to Vathorst and have built a wide range of homes to do this. As a result every section of the development has its own atmosphere reflected in architecture, density, scenery and structure making use of the original landscape e.g. ditches, old lanes and farm tracks. For example in the section called 'Velden 1', houses have traditional forms. Many wooded banks have been preserved within this section. In the section called 'De Laak', most houses have flat roofs and a contemporary look inspired by canalside housing in Amsterdam. The landscape (former grassland) here has been transformed and redesigned with many canals.



of the initial conditions of ProRail (the organisation responsible for the railway station) was that there should be some 500 houses within a radius of one mile. To the north east there are 100.000m<sup>2</sup> of office-space. The density of housing surrounding the railway station is as follows: to the northern side the density is 100 houses per hectare; in the shopping centre to the west there are some 300 apartments (some 75 units per hectare); on the east there is an existing village plus a new area of about 35 houses per hectare.



The developers have a dedicated marketing and information building, which is entered through a 'gateway' with traditional and modern eco housing with green roofs on either side. The building is used locally for meetings, and has a model of the development, presentation facilities and a café.

Vathorst is being developed sustainable, making use of durable materials and energy resources (e.g. solar energy systems, district heating by means of an incinerator), efficient use of space (clustering of amenities) and high-quality architecture.

An exceptional feature of Vathorst is that its amenities will keep in step with the building process, for example crèches, schools, health care centre and shops are available from the start of people moving in by using temporary buildings.

At the start of the development of Vathorst the EPN (Energy Performance Standard) rate set by government was 1,0. The municipality achieved 0,9. Today the rate is 0,8 and the municipality are aiming to achieve a rate of 7,2 (always 10% ahead).

There has been a general move to more home ownership in Holland. Mortgage borrowing is usually at a rate of five times annual income. This appeared to encourage a greater supply of new, cheaper housing (however as in the UK supply shortages mean that this is not happening). The old city of Amersfoort is very expensive. Some older social housing in the city is being replaced.

#### Presentation of the Vathorst model

- Amenities in place when new district is developed including e.g. a cultural centre and schools community
- Use of different coloured flags on the ground to signify age group usage of play space (e.g. under fives, teenagers etc. – some areas designated for all ages) community
- Important to provide places to meet: churches used, but considered too large and Information Centre is now a place for neighbourhood meetings \* community
- Use of waterway connections; lake and waterfront areas used for leisure, with boat building popular community
- Ditch drainage – water channelled to other areas if there is too much – but as far as possible is kept within the area climate
- Water management authorities – national and local – an elected body – separate authority: *'Make water your friend and not your enemy'* \* climate
- Small scale development of neighbourhood – 70/80 houses, designed by one architect character
- First thing decided by the development was to go for higher density – in some places e.g. around the railway station and shopping centre much higher character
- Marketing focussed on living by the waterfront (urban area) or in a green area. Two distinct areas character
- Mainly use car to get to work, but station beginning to be used more (cycle to station) – it is now a year old connectivity



### Vathorst by bicycle and coach

- An 'Amsterdam style of housing' where 25% of the brickwork colour is picked up in the next house to provide both individuality and a sense of continuity and flow character
- Both period and modern style housing character
- Some typical Dutch housing with high pitch roofs character
- Feature lighting – acorns character
- Small bridges between houses over drainage character
- Amsterdam canals 44 ph – feel for the new housing to come character
- Balconies of a good size provide private outdoor space character / community
- Low grade roads during development – many not tarmac climate
- Gabion walls to provide opportunities for seeding and greening and creates sound barrier to shield from noise of the A1 character
- Live-work housing community / character
- Has an Agricultural School community
- Restaurant (like an old farm house) community
- Temporary amenities – bank and some shops \* community
- 5/6 primary schools (including religious based, catholic, protestant, Islamic; 2 secondary, 1 agricultural, 10 football courts, 10 tennis courts, 1 skateboard park, 1 swimming pool community
- Recent Dutch legislation has made it mandatory to provide pre and post use of schools to give an 8 – 6 day (pre and post not provided by teachers) community
- Many secondary schools in Holland are vast with up to 4,000 students, but different buildings provide different facilities and students are streamed in order to give an education appropriate to their interests and skills/competence capabilities community
- Large shopping area planned community
- Dedicated area for skateboarding and rollerblading are signposted in a 'fun' way community
- *'Riding a bicycle around Vathorst was a joy – cars were respectful and the whole experience felt safe'* climate and connectivity
- Parking is identified by the use of very discreet, small 'P' signs on either buildings or the roads connectivity
- Access to parking also indicated by the use of different kerb levels connectivity
- Centre easier to access by bicycle – peripheral roads connectivity
- New station \* connectivity





## Day Two

### Haverleij

The trip to Haverleij was unguided, but was useful in providing a contrast to the other developments. Haverleij is unusual in having a number of high density developments around a golf course and inspired by medieval castles. The golf club house is being used as an information/marketing centre, and has a café. Our visit began at the centre, with small groups then walking together around the development.

#### Observations

- Essentially a golf course based development with residences (local attraction – people arriving from further afield? – economic base?) *character*
- Six of the nine medieval castles completed
- Urban living (of some density) in a rural setting (overall density is 4 ph) *character*
- Provoked nearly all negative comments and reactions – ‘*we have arrived in Disneyland*’, ‘*pleased to see that the Dutch get some things so wrong*’ *character*
- Also likened to collegiate development *character*
- Will in due course have business quarter development *character*
- No amenities – apart from 1 shop and golf restaurant open to all *community*
- Some conflict over whether the building was of a high quality or not
- Appearance of a gated community (unusual and a first for the Netherlands?) – vehicle barriers into courtyards (to stop parking?) *community / character*
- Much public space to walk around (not including the golf course), with private space as well – balconies and small gardens at ground level *character*
- Ground level parking bays with buildings above *character*
- Central recycling centres – some caged, greened and disguised *climate*
- Resident reaction (woman with pushchair and small children on bicycles ahead of her) – been there for 5 years and very positive – ‘*soon as we leave the house we are in a green area and the children like it very much*’ *community*

The Haverleij project is being constructed on a bend in the River Maas, on the outskirts of the city of 's-Hertogenbosch. It is considered one of the city's jewels. Haverleij is a high-profile urban expansion project that blends natural, residential and recreational elements. In this innovative concept, residences are divided across nine different castles that evoke days of yore, but in fact offer all modern conveniences. Each castle includes 50 to 90 residences. The project is situated in an extensive and richly varied countryside (around 210 hectares in all) that also has space for a golf course, a wooded area, gardens and a reed area. The River Maas and Engelermeer are within walking distance, and within view of the site. The castles are dotted around the landscape, and are being designed by a variety of nationally and internationally renowned architects. The landscape is being designed while the castles are being built, and is therefore part of the integrated development.



## Houten

This final part of the study tour was introduced and accompanied by city planner Andre de Wilde, who works for Derks Stedebouw b.v., a private planning practice brought in to advise the municipality. Houten is close to Utrecht with its town population of 6-8,000 and regional population of 100,000. An early decision was that Houten should not 'join up' with Utrecht.

Andre delivered an interesting presentation describing the intellectual conceptualisation that had gone into the development of the area, including:

- The integration of both emotional and rational aspects (represented by circles and straight lines)
- Historic links, and the integration of old and new Houten
- A ratio of 60% built environment to 40% open space – grid distribution to achieve best results for residents
- Inspired by the Corbusier and also medieval influences
- A bicycle based environment (unlike the car driven suburbs of America)
- Peripheral or central car traffic system – Houten peripheral 1985 built ring road; cycle routes in the centre and a central green belt.

The development of Houten VINEX is based on a number of 'layers'

- Historic elements and lines in the landscape
- The ring road (no cars inside grid) ensures no conflict between cars and cycles (children go to school on their own)
- Housing density varied – up to

70ph and as low as 25/30ph

- Striking and recognisable centre the Castellum (historical) Islands in the east
- Mounds provide interest in an otherwise flat landscape and have been used as a basis for play area and view points
- Main structure, using green areas and water – large lake, providing leisure facilities, with an emphasis on making contact with water and using it (saw boy fishing and told that boating is popular)
- Rainwater managed with use of surface drainage
- A sound barrier embankment 1.5 metres high (trees – joins all together)
- Neighbourhoods have own identity
- English / Dutch town planning in one part with crescents, circus etc
- French / Dutch area (Hausmann influenced – straight lines)
- Shops and station are planned for the next two years



### Sustainable urban design

Houten is world-famous for its urban design. Distinctive qualities include the excellent accessibility of the railway station, green and water zones throughout the whole city, numerous football and basketball fields, high standard of accommodation for different groups and the child friendly bicycle paths. It is one of the safest cities in the Netherlands. Bike-riders and cars are able to avoid each other: an extensive network of bicycle tracks connects the different districts of the town, while cars have to go to the city ring road before they can go to another part of the city. Some 7,000 new houses are being built in Houten-Zuid up to 2008, following the same urban design principles as the existing Houten-Noord, but with some differences. The body of water in the east is large in comparison with water bodies in the old parts of Houten. The pentagonal green zone in Houten-Zuid embracing the centre is different from the greenzone in Houten-Noord, which runs through the whole city in a linear structure, with parks at the ends. Another difference is in some places cars share the road with bicycle paths.

# Participant Feedback

## Introduction

Feedback was received from 11 people (mainly the core group), using the form, e-mail, or on the coach. While there was much consensus on what was seen, what might be learnt and what would be applicable to the Cambridgeshire situation there was also some differences of opinion, especially regarding the Haverleij development. A further point was that Kattenbroek and Nieuwland were seen only from the coach (due to a later than desired start) and it was therefore a little difficult to separate out the two some time later.

The feedback is summarised below following a similar structure to that of the feedback form where possible [some additions have been made in square brackets by URBED to clarify or add some minor points of information].

**Section One** looks at each of the suburbs visited and **Section Two** looks at:

- Which place provided most inspiration and which is most applicable to Cambridgeshire?
- General points, covering what needs to be avoided and any further observations picked up from the guides

Feedback from the question regarding the Charter have been fed back into the draft Charter as appropriate.

## Section One

### Kattenbroek

The features that were emphasised were firstly the positive use of water, the varied house design and the extensive green space. Transport related observations were that the cycle lanes offered the potential for sustainability; the streets were fairly

narrow and appeared to be on a grid pattern; and car parking was at the back of buildings.

### Nieuwland

The emphasis here was on the extensive use of solar panels, for which the development is known. While having main, wide boulevards which gives an open feeling, the roads become narrower within the housing areas. This encouraged cycling which has its own dedicated provision, and discouraged large vehicle access.

### Vathorst

Feedback on Vathorst was far more extensive as we both reviewed its features through a model and also cycled or drove around the suburb. Described by one person as *the most impressive development we saw* comments can be put within the 'c's' framework (as in the draft charter):

#### Character:

- **Form and streetscape:** it was noted that the old lanes and farm tracks have been integrated into the new development. Also there was a *modern interpretation of a traditional street scene with terrace houses*

## Participants

Julie Ayre, South Cambridgeshire DC  
Kerry Babington, Cambridge City Council  
David Bard, South Cambridgeshire DC  
Sue Beecroft, Cambridgeshire Horizons  
Kevin Blencowe, Cambridge City Council  
Elizabeth Bisset, Cambridge City Council  
Paul van de Bulk, Cambridgeshire Horizons  
Peter Carter, Cambridge City Council  
Lindsay Dane, University of Cambridge  
Daniel Durrant, Inspire East  
Nichola Harrison, Cambridgeshire County Council  
Dinah Higgins, Cambridge City Council  
Nigel Howlett, Cambridge Housing Society  
John Jenkins, Cambridgeshire County Council  
Melanie Jones, Cambridge City Council  
Francesca King, URBED  
John Preston, Cambridge City Council  
John Oldham, Countryside Properties  
Diana Oviatt-Ham, Cambridge City Council  
Sian Reid, Cambridge City Council  
Glen Richardson, Cambridge City Council  
Stephen Sillery, Marshalls  
Catherine Smart, Cambridge City Council  
Peter Studdert, Cambridgeshire Horizons  
Timothy Ward, Cambridge City Council  
Joseph Whelan, Cambridgeshire County Council  
Timothy Wotherspoon, South Cambridgeshire DC  
Anne Wyatt, URBED



*fronting straight onto the pavement.* 'See through' fences gave a sense of open (but private) space and helped to provide a green aspect in spite of density.

- **Architecture:** the most noticeable feature was immediately evident on arrival at the information centre/marketing suite, with the housing on either side demonstrating a *curious mix of traditional pastiche and bold innovation*. Architectural quality was exemplified through the simplicity of design and use of brick where *each frontage used 25% of its bricks the same as the adjoining houses*. This gave a distinctive appearance for each house but which was in keeping with the terrace. There were good examples of well-designed waterside houses and one whole neighbourhood designed as a canal side quarter with excellent contemporary houses alongside modern interpretations of more traditional canal side housing (*the best houses we saw on the whole trip*).

- **Landscape and public realm:** the use of water and canals contribute to the sense of place. Although the design of the public realm was simple, care had been taken to minimise street clutter by putting street lights on buildings.

#### **Connectivity:**

Both the actual and psychological connections to the town seemed strong. Town centre facilities are, as in Cambourne, to be phased in quite late, although temporary local centres have been introduced (as shown on the masterplan). A town centre serving a population of 11,000 will tend

to be car dependent, as distances will be too great for walking or cycling with shopping. There was an impression that the suburb is not particularly well served by buses, especially given the width of some of the roads. Certainly the road layouts and priority system is designed to make cycling much safer than in the UK. The boundary treatments (gabions and green sound banks) were useful in separating Vathorst and the adjoining motorways.

A key factor was the construction of a new station linking to Amersfoort and Utrecht with a frequent service. Only a year old it has yet to reach its full potential, [which will be greater when housing around the station is built to a far higher density].

#### **Climate:**

Interesting features included a group of contemporary 'eco-houses' with green roofs and areas of landscape allowed to grow wild to encourage biodiversity. There appeared to be difficulties in maintaining regular flows through the urban drainage system (cf Houten). It can become a liability if allowed to dry up and stagnate (a similar use of water is proposed in draft masterplan for Cambridge East).

#### **Community:**

There was a well designed and equipped Information Centre, with a café, large model and exhibition area [had also served as a community resource in early stages]. It was also noted that there was clustering of high and low value housing.



Kattenbroek



Vathorst



Vathorst

## Haverleij

Haverleij was the least liked suburb and indeed provoked the strongest (and most emotional) reactions. Although there was agreement that this was definitely not for Cambridgeshire there were some positive reactions, and also some opposing views on some aspects e.g. quality of architecture/build

*Quality of the architecture was surprisingly poor – typical of post-modernism of the 1990s – much of it poorly detailed and likely to weather badly.*

*Haverleij was a good example of how not to plan new communities, and it also gave some interesting lessons on the difficulties of achieving architectural distinctiveness – it is possible to try too hard!*

For a number of people there was ambivalence, and the first reaction on coming in to sight was that of *oh, look Disney.*

*The best 'castle' was the pastiche medieval castle designed by Sjoerd Soeter because it didn't mess about and went for pure Disneyland. The other castles tried to take a more serious approach but ended up being either over-scaled, bizarre or just plain gloomy*

*A curious places, completely unsustainable but with a few interesting design details*

### Negatives:

On balance the development was considered as 'not working', and was certainly unsustainable. At present there is a lack of facilities (just one shop, one school and the golf club), together with a rather rudimentary



Haverleij



bus service which is infrequent and finishes at 5.00 pm. It is therefore car centred.

The atmosphere created was considered rather bleak and forbidding. It was attributed as being inward looking, owner occupied communities in a landscaped setting with a golf course and country club.

*It was the architecture of paranoia – for older people afraid of crime and young families fearful for the safety of their young children.*

*The 'Bastide' was attempting a type of high density urbanism, but in fact looked austere and unwelcoming with the Primary School looking incongruous on the main square*

### Positives:

A number of positive comparisons were made with other uses, e.g. holiday resort, retirement village, institutional context such as a university.

*Fine as a holiday resort, but not a permanent home*

*Atmosphere and concept more suited to a series of retirement villages, but significant number of young families*

*Some of courtyard layouts would*

*work well in high density urban developments or in an institutional context e.g. university (might work well, with modification, on site such as Cambridge NW)*

A dense urban form has been created [although within a vast landscaped and green area, giving very low densities].

*Refreshing to see some imagination in a completely unconventional approach to this large site*

Parking uses the natural slope of the land to enable it to be under the development although not underground. Also there has been an attempt to provide attractive cycleways with priority over the car at junctions. There were a large number of different designs to house bins and recycling points.

A final positive comment on the site as a whole:

*I actually really liked the design of most of the internal streets and houses, and therefore didn't concentrate on the outside package, which in itself is an interesting concept. I am a big supporter of small squares within urban environment, they act as social meeting places, especially if they are nice places to go, and they don't need to be that big!*



Houten

## Houten

The development of Houten has been based on a quality, coherent and thoughtful masterplan, with much consideration given to varied design, and taking into account historical land patterns, and incorporating green areas. The thorough 'options' exercise carried out to evaluate different ways of enlarging the town was impressive.

*It reminded me of the Cambridge Futures project we did with the University in the late 1990s. The chosen option had therefore been arrived at by a rational process of evaluation.*

As with Vathorst the strategy relied on a compact development, but it also had a clear landscape strategy which was very impressive, and included a pentagonal 'mound' which echoed the size of the historic centre.

### Character:

- **Architecture:** the house design was *considered ok*, but not as *appealing as Vathorst*. As with Haverleij there was an attempt at architectural branding, but this was more successful and within a context of English and French neighbourhood layouts in two distinct areas.
- **Landscape and public realm:**

the integration of the lake and green spaces into the development was viewed positively, although there was a caveat that gaps may create a rather bleak windswept impression in winter. There was imaginative use of water [for leisure activity as well] and the waterfront terrace worked particularly well.

### Connectivity:

Having a central cycle path and segregating bikes and cars as much as possible was a good idea

### Climate:

The flows and rainwater handling seemed to be better thought through than at Vathorst, with runoff channels for surface drainage as alternative to gutters. Neighbourhood recycling facilities were neat and well located, with underground storage chambers. There was also a green corridor. Green Corridors have a dual purpose; to provide areas of habitat – an ecological network – through an area of intensive land use (urban or agricultural), and to provide access routes for people.

### Community:

The Primary School was of a simple modern design and looked very

welcoming with a low fence instead of the 2 metre security fence now required in Cambridgeshire. In part it was two storeys high, with a first floor play area (*would not be allowed in Cambridgeshire*) as well as a playground surrounding the school. Most children seemed to either walk or cycle to school.

The incorporation of live/work units gave flexibility for domestic/small scale commercial use (cf Newhall, Harlow).



## Section Two

There were four responses to the specific question regarding which places provided the most inspiration and were most applicable to Cambridgeshire, as summarised in the table below. Without doubt Haverleij was the least inspirational and least applicable, and Vathorst and Houten the most. From a climate point of view Nieuwland was popular and lessons could be applied in Cambridgeshire. A further number of general points were made (some very specifically in relation to the Cambridgeshire situation).

### Density

The densities were significantly lower than will be needed at Northstowe and Cambridge urban extension, and will not be able to incorporate as much green space.

*Some areas were higher density, but overall I am not sure they were comparable.*

*I am worried that we are too mean about releasing land in the UK and so have to look for high density even in suburban family housing areas.*

The English section of the Houten development would seem most appropriate (not necessarily same architectural styles) in achieving the densities need in Cambridgeshire

There did not seem to be an obsession with density, and there were sensible bands that allowed for urban extensions with 2 storey family housing, good gardens, adequate parking, landscaping and public open space

	Most inspiration: Please rank (most 1 – 5 least)	← and why? →	Most applicable Please rank (most 1 – 5 least)
Kattenbroek	3 4 3 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Older design town – 15 years, pleasant not cutting edge though</li> </ul>	4 3 3 3
Nieuwland	4 2 4 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use of solar power</li> <li>Older design, solar panels inspirational but not really affordable on large scale</li> </ul>	3 1 5 4
Vathorst	1 3 4 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Quality and simplicity of some houses</li> <li>Effective use of natural light achieved through the fenestration</li> <li>Great variety of house design</li> <li>New Town - Northstowe</li> </ul>	1 2 4 1
Haverleij	5 5 5 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Castles – ghastly but some design features could be used in an urban area</li> <li>Some good design concepts but very experimental and not really sustainable</li> </ul>	5 4 5 5
Houten	2 1 4 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Quality and use of water – large open spaces</li> <li>New town joining older town – similar to East Cambridge situation</li> </ul>	2 5 5 2

### Public realm

The public realm was well maintained, with extensive use of hedges rather than fences and often beech hedges to provide leaf cover during winter.

Features such as dykes and water are used to provide form and structure to otherwise featureless landscape, as well as leisure provision e.g. boating, swimming, play areas

Good street furniture and attractive street lights (often on house walls) were to be seen through the whole neighbourhood.

There was little clutter from signage and posts giving a clear open feel

Excellent approach to public art around the streets and alongside the canals

### Risk taking

There are different attitudes to risks associated with water use which is encouraged and managed rather than prohibited with authorities protecting themselves

### Parking

Varied on-plot parking e.g. rear curtilage parking was laid out as part of garden design.

### Balconies

There was extensive use of balconies, which were large and provided useful living space, with nearly all flats having one

### Public transport

Access to public transport looked good but needs to be planned ahead.

### Future proofing

The flexibility to adapt buildings seemed important in order to allow movement upwards and outwards without obviously, in most cases, harming the whole.

### To be avoided or noted

- Housing that is remote from facilities and car-dependent
- 'Drab, grim out of town shopping developments (not linked to cycle networks)
- Dutch style barn roofs in town - best left in the countryside!

### Final quotes

*There was a willingness to experiment with architectural form on relatively small developments within a coherent overall pattern and I found it delightful to go round a corner, or look down a new street, and see something fresh and different, but always with the same comfortable atmosphere, people-friendly streets and wildlife friendly green spaces. The pattern, the sense of place, was everywhere created by an obvious love of and respect for green spaces, including water areas, and wildlife, and an extraordinary level of care by individuals for their own homes and gardens and for the public spaces around them. This looks like a society at ease with itself. I was also very impressed by the sheer quality of construction and maintenance, both of the houses and of the public realm.*

*We packed in a huge amount over the two days, and we managed to see a good variety of approaches. I*

*think that Holland is possibly more relevant to the UK context than Germany or Scandinavia, and it would be good to establish ongoing links between Cambridge and Amersfoort in particular because of their similar size and historic context.*

*The Dutch trip was particularly valuable as people felt very comfortable with what we say. We came away from the Netherlands thinking that we can see this happening in Cambridge. They had left the history of the landscape in the development.*

*The big issue is how developers are involved. The Netherlands is generally considered one of the best governed countries with a high level of community involvement. The local authorities join everything up, and help to integrate the new and the old communities.*

*The houses differ in scale and type but without the stark social contrasts you get in the UK. This is because everything is so well maintained.*

While we did not ask any specific questions on the process our overall impression was that everyone had found the trip a valuable experience, and it was good to involve a wider group. The challenge is to push the boundaries of working together in applying the principles of looking and learning together to ensure that future developments in Cambridgeshire meet the highest possible sustainability and quality standards.