



QUALITY CHARTER FOR GROWTH IN THE CAMBRIDGE AREA

EAST OF ENGLAND STUDY TOUR REPORT

Produced by

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EAST OF ENGLAND STUDY TOUR INITIAL CONCLUSIONS

PROGRAMME STRUCTURE

The first study tour run under the Quality Charter programme proved a real success. It used a small bus with tables round which groups could meet. The 20+ participants were a cross section of senior local authority councillors and officers, plus property owners and developers, both commercial and social, including many who are on Cambridgeshire Horizons Board.

The tour provided an opportunity for networking, for seeing whether high density development can produce quality places, for learning about how different forms of trust work, and for discussing difficult issues in a convivial way. Participants met up with a range of experts, and were able to pursue their own particular interests. Participants would have welcomed a digest of information before the visit, as well as the brochure of case studies on the day, and a better chance to share conclusions at the end of the day. There is also a case for identifying other places which people can visit on their own.

The day long tour involved visits to five places:

1. The Span development at **Highsett** which features neighbourhood management of common spaces in a pioneering 60s development



2. The Countryside Properties development of former government offices at **Brooklands Avenue**, near the station, and which features first-class modern design at relatively high densities

3. The development of a former mental hospital as **Highfield** by Wimpey and other house builders, which features a 60 acre park run by a trust, and the innovative conversion of a chapel into a theatre space and cafe, as well as a community sports centre

4. The development of the former **Shenley** mental hospital as a new village by a number of house builders, which features a 45 acre rural park, including a cafe, cricket ground, and walled garden, run by a trust with a property endowment

5. **Letchworth Garden City**, and the refurbishment and conversion of the Spirella Building into an enterprise hub and conference centre by the Letchworth Heritage Foundation, which owns a property portfolio worth 140 million.

As well as presentations and brief tours of each of the schemes, the bus ride was used to introduce the aims of the Charter, and to discuss David Birkbeck's research into factors that affect whether higher density housing can be successful.



KEY ISSUES

Key issues raised by participants included:

- **good design**, and how to secure it in the face of Nimbyism, nostalgia, a highly complex planning system, and developers who are concerned about short-term profits
- the **management of open space**, and how to deal with conflicts over parking, places for young people to meet, and the pressures to build at much higher densities than people are used to
- **community engagement**, not just in planning but in longer-term management in the face of political apathy and reluctance to share responsibility
- **funding social infrastructure**, in a system which focuses on physical investment, and where local authorities lack financial and managerial capacity
- **environmental sustainability** and securing real innovation in reducing energy consumption (and hence operating costs), and also in saving water.



ing communities where people get on, and help each other. Once the physical foundations have been laid, social capital is vital. People relate to streets and neighbourhoods, but have limited time to put into tackling common problems. The example of facilities like the café and theatre group at Highfield or the role of the trust in supporting mothers with young children at Shenley offered possible answers.

2. What success looks like

Sustainable communities not only are popular from the start, but look well-cared for years after, and are able to deal with crises as they occur (like the decline of Letchworth town centre). As circumstances are continually changing, for example young children turning into teenagers, major firms closing down, car parking needs expanding (and possibly then contracting), what matters is being able to manage the process of change in ways that secure broad support.

3. How you get there

Planning can only do so much, as you cannot predict everything. As developers

FINDINGS

While everyone had slightly different interests, the event helped in building a common vision of where development should be going, both through seeing different models and being able to discuss issues openly with other colleagues. From responses and the results of the questionnaire, a number of findings emerge:

1. Key challenges

The problem for development is not just the physical one of turning under-used land into places where people want to live, but also the social one of creat-

are naturally interested in what is easiest and most profitable to do, it is crucial also to have:

- a proactive local authority who can reject inadequate designs, and secure first class architecture (as in Brooklands Avenue)
- responsible neighbourhood associations prepared to take on the management and maintenance of common parts, like the Highsett Span estate
- an active trust or foundation with a long-term interest in the wellbeing of the community, and the independence and power to act that comes from having a property endowment, like Letchworth or Shenley
- well-designed new housing that has good enough insulation to stop noise travelling, and with arrangements for parking that minimise conflicts between neighbours, as in Highsett
- the management and financial capacity not only to deal with development over a long period, during which circumstances will change, but also the ability to respond to new challenges and opportunities long after development has ceased, as with the Letchworth Heritage Foundation.

LESSONS FOR CAMBRIDGE

The implications are that Cambridge needs to go beyond depending on masterplans and Section 106 agreements, which tend to be negative. The experience in Hertfordshire suggests that mechanisms are needed to tap land value uplift or to



save on the infrastructure costs in order to act in the long-term interests of the wider community, and ensure that new developments live up to their promise.

There is no one perfect model. Good places need to accommodate a range of people, in different styles of building. The unanswered questions, which may influence the agenda for the visit to Freiburg, include:

1. How do you secure real community involvement in the process, and sufficient accountability without ruling out innovation?
2. How do you secure environmental innovation on a scale that will make a difference?
3. How do you create landscapes or neighbourhoods that will attract people to live in new settlements out of choice not necessity?
4. How do you tackle the problem of making housing affordable without putting private investors off, or creating social ghettos with too many young children?

SUMMARY OF QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES

The following ten participants out of 19 have filled in the feedback questionnaire for the East of England Study tour:

David Bard
Jonathan D Barker
Michael Bingham
Dan Durrant
Richard Harrington
Nigel Howlett
Andy Lawson
Valerie Leake
Sian Reid
Peter Studdert

SCDC
Marshall
Go-East
Inspire East
English Partnerships
Cambridge Housing
Gallagher Estates
ECDC
Cambridge City Council
Cambridgeshire Horizons

OVERVIEW AND CONCLUSIONS

The feedback was extremely positive about the organisation of the study tour and its usefulness and relevance to Northstowe. The quality of feedback comments was very high and helpful regarding the day's content and learning, and for the future aspects of the programme. All participants had enjoyed the conversations that they had during the day.

Desired outcomes from the tour

Participants were clear about what they wanted to learn from the day, and different aspects were emphasised relating to different perspectives and interests. These centred around:

- How to manage new developments?
- How social and market housing can 'live together', and is there an ideal proportion or balance to create a successful community?
- Can a diversity of people be formed into a community and how?
- How can architecture be used to produce quality developments for densities above 40 ph?
- What approaches to the design of

the public realm and parking have been applied?

- What processes, other than planning, are important in successful developments, and how can these be used in Cambridge?
- Is there any information on construction costs and sales values?

In particular participants wanted to understand the following about Local Management Organisations (LMOs):

- How they work: how do they reflect the 'ethos' or 'philosophy' of a development; how are they set up, who is involved (and whose views are represented), how are they constituted; and how are they financed?
- What makes for good governance?
- How can long term stability and viability be built in – what assets are needed to make this more likely?
- What successful models are there to learn from?

Relevance to the Quality Charter

What learning can contribute to the devel-

opment of the Quality Charter for Growth in the Cambridge area?

- Can LMOs be made to work in large scale developments? (Capacity)
- What elements have led to quality developments that need to be included in a charter e.g. design, materials, and learning regarding the delivery of higher density housing without compromising quality? (Character)
- What processes enable different people to work together to produce results? (Collaboration)

What issues/themes should a Charter address?

As well as the eight characteristics of a sustainable community, the Charter should set out its relationship to existing policy and planning guidance (including Local Development Frameworks) and what added value it brings. In addition the following areas were singled out as important:

- Design and construction standards
- Energy efficiency
- Water recycling
- Long term maintenance
- Effective management structures

Sustainability concerns and issues

What are the most important aspects of sustainability that apply to growth in the Cambridge Area? Responses centred around the environmental:

- Proofed against climate change
- Water and energy supplies
- A low carbon footprint

...the social

- A good social balance
- Accessible homes for all sections of the community

...and infrastructure

- Public transport, access and lowering

congestion

- Links to commercial and cultural centres e.g. Cambridge
- Health
- Education
- Leisure
- Employment

What, if anything, can be learned about engaging communities in the development of new communities? Responses referred to:

- Engaging new residents from the very start
- Encouraging existing communities to become involved and identify potential benefits that new developments can bring (once past the initial inevitable opposition)
- Agreeing what can and what cannot be done, and at what stages in the development's life cycle

Learning methods

Do you have any general views on study tours?

- Responses indicated that study tours are valued both in terms of 'seeing is believing' and as networking opportunities, and key factors that are valued include:
 - relate back to practical and present issues e.g. Northstowe and the Cambridge area
 - involve decision makers
 - have a good mix of participants
 - be well briefed in advance
 - have knowledgeable local guides
- The structure of the event should include time to debate, debrief, reflect on and to summarise and draw conclusions on what has been seen
- It was also noted that an 'open learning' type of study tour where a briefing pack of schemes/places is provided for people to visit as and when they get the chance



would be useful. These could cover a wider area and perhaps be linked to a website (Inspire East?) where comments, questions etc. could be recorded.

What is the best way of sharing experience and working towards innovative solutions in the East of England?

- One suggestion was to use the Inspire East website as a means of communicating
- Responses indicated that a number of learning methods were desirable: visits, workshops/seminars, publications
- Cross sector and tiers working with all agencies in developing a shared vision is essential.

Visit to Freiburg

What do you think needs to be explored on the Freiburg study tour (Vauban and Rieselfeld developments)? The main areas were:

- Understanding the political, financial, planning and social/cultural policies/institutions that have led to what can be seen, and the extent to which these may or may not be transferable to the UK

- Exploring environmental sustainability issues, architecture, management structures, and social balance/cohesion i.e. similar to the ones on the East of England study tour

PARTICIPANTS' FEEDBACK*

1. East of England Study Tour

- What particular aspects/questions would you like to explore today?
 - Long term management of developments
 - Local management issues
 - Management issues in new developments
 - Integration of social and market housing
 - How does low and high cost housing sit side by side?
 - What % of housing can be affordable and create a successful community
 - How can you build in community?
 - Can you develop community when there is a mix of age, income and interests?
 - Methods of achieving social balance in new developments
 - Density/quality issues

* Some paraphrasing has been used

- Architectural solutions for densities > 40
- Approaches to parking provision and design of the public realm
- How relevant/applicable the development/schemes are to new strategic sites around Cambridge
- How much/what aspects can be achieved through the planning process and what other processes should be acknowledged, understood and recognised as important
- What has been achieved already?
- Construction costs/sales values
- Life cost of development and how managed
- Looking at contrasting developments
- Hearing about the challenges
- What would you like to learn from today's visits relating to the development of local management organisations?
 - How are they initiated (when and by whom?)
 - Who should run such organisations?
 - To gain a greater understanding of the range of practical and workable options that exist for setting up an LMO
 - A LMO is critical: where should the boundaries be drawn between roles of a parish council and a local community trust (especially as housing associations might be managing 40%+ of housing e.g. Northstowe)
 - Critical that there is unified housing management of the affordable housing in each settlement/community, regardless of whether ownership is diverse ("one unified affordable housing manager at Northstowe would have one of the largest turnovers of any company based there)
 - How are they constituted?
 - Scope of organisations
 - How do you stipulate good governance at the inception of a community or local management organisation?
 - How are they financed?
- How do you ensure financial viability of community groups by transfer of sufficient assets?
- How effective are they?
- How stable are they?
- Their successes and failures
- Ethos of the development
- How 'management' interacts with 'governance'
- Relationship with local authorities
- What aspects of living need 'management'? (can we try too hard to influence the way people live?)
- Are they necessary for successful communities?
- Must be a trust/lmo which has a series of inclusive, community building objectives (Northstowe) – cannot all be left to a Parish Council – dangers of NIMBYism
- Affect on resale value of properties
- Should Directors be paid?
- Residents' views

2. Towards a Quality Charter

- What do you want to learn from the tour that will help the development of the quality charter?
 - Applicability of local management organisations to large-scale development – can they be made to work?
 - Different management models
 - How to create successful communities
 - I want to be able to understand the process and structures that enable other people to solve common problems
 - Different approaches to delivering quality that have been show to work (an enlightened view by developers)
 - Specification and cost of materials
 - Variations of design
 - How developments can be built to high density without compromising design
 - Evidence of good practice in design etc.
 - How developments stand the test of time

- What issues/themes should a charter address?
 - Building for longevity/long-term maintenance of quality
 - Stable management structures
 - Design and construction standards
 - Energy conservation, water recycling etc.
 - Energy efficiency
 - Private/public space
 - All aspects of the sustainable community agenda
 - All eight dimensions of a sustainable community as outlined in PPS1
 - Sustainability
 - How it relates to or improves upon or complements existing policy and planning guidance and LDFs
 - Quality of life for residents
 - Set out a vision for the new communities and headings on p6 of brief very relevant
 - Governance
 - Economic viability
 - Clarity on financial and other consequences of what goes into the Charter (to avoid waste of money as in Cambourne)
- What are the most important aspects of sustainability that apply to growth in the Cambridge Area?
 - Ensuring long-term resilience to climate change
 - Water
 - Access, materials, design
 - Reduction in congestion
 - Low carbon foot print
 - Transport infrastructure
 - Water and energy supply
 - Public transport, energy efficiency, health, education, leisure, local employment
 - Understanding costs of achieving 'sustainability'
 - Balancing hard and soft infrastructure
 - All aspects are important, but achieving

- a good social balance in new communities will probably be the most difficult to achieve
- Making homes accessible to all sections of the community
- Inclusivity - ensuring that poorer people are able to move into the new developments, not just those with cars and higher aspirations, as this will leave behind 'rumps' of social housing in other areas.
- Ensuring that priorities are agreed
- The creation of rural dormitories
- The link to commercial and cultural centres like Cambridge
- Need to plan in workspace e.g. car repair
- What, if anything, can be learned about engaging communities in the development of new communities?
 - Once the opportunity to oppose has passed, the vocal opposition needs to be included in shaping developments
 - We need to identify what good practice exists elsewhere, although this may be limited in scope
 - Cannot all be done at once at the start of (or before) a new scheme is built
 - Some decisions and planning need to come later
 - New residents (and existing neighbours) need to be involved from the start
 - Engagement should encourage existing communities to look beyond the narrow issue of reservation of the status quo
 - Lots: look at Millennium Community movement
 - Learn from successful and failing communities

3. Learning method

- Do you have any general views on study tours?
 - Valuable for seeing best practice on the ground
 - An opportunity to see things on the ground

- It is important to be able to connect good practice back to the reasons for the tour i.e. Northstowe
- They are very useful if they are well organised and briefed, and if there is good engagement from participants
- Need to involve decision makers
- Networking
- Very helpful
- The 14 March tour was good (better than I had thought). Was the aim to get together a disparate group of people to think about these issues within their own work, or to share common experiences in order to work together to tackle specific problems. Felt more like the former to me (useful) but does not really go far in terms of drawing up, let alone implementing, a Charter
- What is needed to get the most out of study tours?
 - A good mix of both case studies and participants
 - A balance of views and opinions on any issue or project
 - Focussed, succinct information before a tour
 - Fact sheet on developments visited
 - Knowledgeable guides to places visited
 - Accurate authoritative back up information
 - Enough time and people to answer questions
 - A good debrief and summary of information
 - A clear coherent structure that leads towards a conclusion(s)
 - How it can be applied to the Cambridge area

Do you have any comments on the following aspects, and can you add to this list?

- Briefing paper (s)

Need more prior details of places being visited
Useful but a bit general and idealistic.
Will Freiburg learning include how to get families to live in flats around court yards?

Charter (title of paper) only appeared at the end on p6

- Working with colleagues
Information on their background
- Pre visit thinking
Good contact with Anne
- Post visit discussions
An opportunity to discuss/reflect upon the visit more quickly following the event would have been useful, so that impressions and questions are not forgotten
No forum to have a discussion. This goes back to how the Charter will be developed. Big chunks of vision for new communities should be set out in existing local authority strategies – is this the case? Happy to input ideas.
- Other
All useful, particularly post-visit discussion and follow through

- What is the best way of sharing experience and working towards innovative solutions in the East of England?
 - No one answer: demands a range of visits, workshops and publications/ briefing documents tailored carefully to the needs of different stakeholders
 - Programme of seminars on relevant topics
 - Through the Inspire East website
 - Getting the vision right is key and can be innovative. Also critical to set out vision with outcomes that are tangible.
 - Working across sectors/tiers and involving all the relevant agencies and stakeholders in developing a shared

- vision for what we're trying to deliver
- Group working between Cambridge/ Horizons/Developers etc.
- Hopefully a programme like this

4. Next Steps

- What do you think needs to be explored on the Freiburg study tour (Vauban and Rieselfeld developments)?
 - Similar issues!
 - Architecture, management structures, green issues, social balance/cohesion
 - Standards of energy efficiency
 - The social and political background that has led to the solutions they have found to some of the environmental questions
 - Whether there are legislative, practical, policy or other reasons why something may or may not be capable of being achieved in Cambridge or the UK cf Freiburg/Germany
 - Infrastructure, sustainability, LA relationships, culture (transferability)
 - Planning policy constraints
 - Are there local/regional/national regulations which are not transferable
 - Need to identify and draw out less that are particularly relevant to Cambridge sub-regional context. Different financial or cultural context in Freiburg that we need to understand to avoid drawing wrong conclusions?
 - Most valuable will be the shared experience, and opportunity for informal discussion and team building
 - What has worked and what failed
 - What improvements are recommended for future developments

5. Reflections on today – please use the space below (and over) to provide any further thoughts, ideas or comments.

- At Accordia would have liked to look

around the affordable housing to contrast it with the private and see how, as an example, the two can sit side by side

- The general theme of the day – showing the value of community groups and tenant organisations – was good. It could have been developed more e.g. Trestle Arts (award winning social enterprise) – more information would have illustrated that organisations as signed community spaces do not have to be concerned with grounds maintenance but, potentially, have a much wider role in community development.
- ...the tour was well organised and content very useful. Good to have wide range of participants, particularly from the private sector. I had some very useful conversations in the coach and when walking around. Raised a number of issues relevant to LMO discussion for Northstowe to be followed up.
- Out of necessity sites & schemes (looked at) needed to be close to Cambridge. What about an 'open learning' type of study tour where a briefing pack of schemes/places is listed that can be visited by people as and when they get the chance? These might be further afield with perhaps a website where comments of those who have visited can be recorded.
- Very useful and informative
- Good discussions during the journey