

A QUALITY CHARTER FOR GROWTH IN CAMBRIDGESHIRE

Consultation Draft



FOREWORD

All of us who are involved in taking forward the ambitious growth plans here know that we have a rare opportunity to create new settlements which will offer future communities a convivial, visually pleasing and environmentally sensitive way of life.

We also know that to achieve this vision we need to work across a broad range of interests, spanning extremes of commercial and public values and aims. But the traditional planning process, with its contentious and legalistic character, is far from ideal as a means of creating trust, cooperation and communication.

We have therefore much welcomed our involvement in the Quality Charter process. Landowners, developers, housing associations, and local authorities have learnt so much together from the experience and research which we have seen in our study tours. We have been able to define our ambitions and to develop a common understanding of how we might achieve our goals.

We hope that this document conveys our common enthusiasm and our determination to achieve the best standards possible in the task ahead.

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We very much welcome your feedback on this consultation draft, and an indication of your willingness to sign up to the document. Would you kindly send any comments by Friday 26th October 2007 to **Sheryl French, Quality of Life Programme Manager, Cambridgeshire Horizons** at: sheryl.french@cambridgeshire.gov.uk or telephone 01223 714047.



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PREFACE

Faced with huge pressures to build new housing in Cambridgeshire and achieve much higher standards than in the past, Cambridgeshire Horizons has been working with URBED (Urban and Economic Development) and a range of partners on the draft of a charter for quality growth. The aim is to improve quality while simplifying the development process by establishing a short set of over-riding principles. The partners recognise that with the fastest rate of growth in the country, there needs to be a step change in both the types of housing and the processes for development if the new communities are to be successfully integrated with existing places, stand the test of time, avoid repeating past mistakes and apply good practice in every field.

This charter is the result of over a year's work by a top level group from the public, private and voluntary sectors on how to achieve higher standards in the new housing developments that are planned for Cambridgeshire. The key feature of the Quality Charter for Growth in Cambridgeshire and what makes it special has been '**looking and learning**'. It has involved visits both in the UK and overseas, and in all the charter draws on lessons from some 15 different places.

Visits were made to exemplary projects in the East of England like the Span estate in Cambridge, Letchworth Garden City and some of the new villages in Hertfordshire, and also study tours to Vauban and Rieselfeld in Freiburg in South West Germany, and to new Dutch suburbs around Utrecht. Successive drafts of the charter have been developed through symposia that brought key people together from the public, private and community sectors. In all over 90 people have contributed (see final page), and we are grateful for all the time, energy and experience that has been put in.

Findings from relevant research, including experience at Cambourne, and a variety of good practice guides have also been drawn on. The project

has been publicised, and working papers have been published on the Inspire East (www.inspire-east.org.uk), Cambridgeshire Horizons (www.cambridgeshirehorizons.co.uk), and URBED websites (www.urbed.co.uk). The draft charter has benefited from the hard work of a core group from Cambridge City Council, South Cambridgeshire District Council, and Cambridgeshire County Council, together with Cambridgeshire Horizons and Inspire East. It is now being launched for wider comment before it is finalised towards the end of the year.

Learning from elsewhere

The reports of the visits show what can be done to achieve much higher standards, and to build new communities that offer benefits over existing settlements and that are future proofed. While there are differences in the context and institutional framework, four of the most important lessons being applied to new settlements in Cambridgeshire are:



Above: The Accordia development in Cambridge has been awarded a gold standard for design quality in new housing by Building for Life

Centre: Shenley Park provides facilities that are used by both the new residents and the wider community and which is maintained by a trust through its property endowment

Below: New Dutch suburbs are built with distinctive neighbourhoods



'You can hear the birds sing and the children play in Rieselfeld it is so quiet'

- Locating new developments where they can benefit from high connectivity to jobs and services, and upgrading the infrastructure to match the pace of development
- Creating places of character with distinctive neighbourhoods and a public realm that encourages people to walk and cycle
- Tackling climate change through imaginative landscaping that treats 'water as a friend not an enemy', and through innovative approaches to energy and waste
- And most important of all, building a sense of community through providing a greater choice of housing along with the active participation of people in the way their neighbourhoods are run.

Making things happen

These tangible results reflect the way people have worked together for the common good, a process that Cambridgeshire Horizons and the Local Authorities are trying to apply in all their work. The process can be summarised in four key management principles:

1. Communicating a shared vision Local authorities exercise leadership in place-making, thus

ensuring that strategic growth plans enjoy community support, 'selling' the benefits of planned quality growth to overcome the problems associated with piecemeal development, and ensuring that the quality of life is improved for everyone, for example through the new Joint Committees that have been set up to handle major schemes.

2. Working together over many years The public sector and the utilities need to sign up to providing the necessary social and physical infrastructure in a phased way so that private investors have the confidence to invest in quality, and so that the process provides benefits for all the stakeholders. Also ways have to be found to encourage a spirit of collaboration, for example by developers continuing to employ the team that worked up the masterplan, and through the use of architecture centres to help communicate what is being proposed, and to monitor the results.

3. Encouraging smarter growth through innovative forms of finance A 'rolling fund' has been proposed by Cambridgeshire Horizons to help fund the early provision of infrastructure, with the investment to be recouped from developers later in the process for

reinvestment in future developments. Other models under consideration include the use of development trusts to act as stewards of environmental assets.

4. Building skills and capacity at all levels Ongoing support is being provided through Inspire East, the Regional Centre of Excellence, to enable councillors and officers to extend their knowledge, work more effectively together, and break down the barriers to innovation. This will not only help maintain the ethos of working together, but will also help spread the lessons to other parts of the region.

BACKGROUND

Why a charter?

Features The charter provides a simple prospectus for what major new housing developments in the Cambridgeshire area should aspire to provide. The idea of charters is very old, and many of our best loved towns and cities were set up on the basis of charters that prescribed rights and responsibilities. With an abundance of guidance, sometimes conflicting, partners felt that what is needed should be:

- Short so it can be read without having to wade through a mass of guidance or research
- Compatible with other plans e.g. Local Development Frameworks, Local Area Agreements and covering all the key aspects, not just design
- Drawn up with the active support of the different stakeholders
- And supported by local authorities, statutory agencies like the Housing Corporation, utilities, and hopefully major landowners and developers so that it will make a difference.

A charter essentially contains principles and parameters to guide growth with the aim of securing some common good. Relevant models are the Charter of the Congress for New Urbanism in the USA (www.cnu.org), the Charter of the Renaissance Towns in Yorkshire (www.yorkshire-forward.com), the New Zealand Urban Design Protocol (www.mfe.govt.nz/issues/urban/design-protocol/index.html), and work in Thames Gateway, which has led to the main stakeholders signing up to a Concordat to work together.

Scope The components of a Sustainable Community have already been defined through the Egan Review on skills, which was adopted as the Bristol Accord by Europe. They make up a 'wheel' with eight spokes, which are useful in thinking about the range of parameters. However they do not provide the inspiration that partners are looking for to drive up standards in the Cambridge area, which has very special issues (for example economic growth is a challenge rather than a problem). To stimulate fresh thinking 'out of the box' we have used four concepts all starting with the letter C (inspired by the New Zealand model). These are Community, Connectivity,

Climate, and Character. All of these are recognised as important ingredients of successful places, and the Cambridge Charter is one of the first documents to address climate change as a major priority for new housing development.

Methodology Having discovered there had been little time to look and

learn from other places, URBED secured support from Cambridgeshire Horizons, Inspire East, the Academy for Sustainable Communities and English Partnerships to test out the idea of working towards a charter, using an innovative 'action learning' process. The process has aimed to bring together different stakeholders around a shared vision, and develop



Inspire East's Excellence Framework Wheel

the capacity of local authorities to provide leadership in 'place shaping' (as they do in the Netherlands and Germany). The various briefing packs have sought to synthesise what is already known in plain English (and are available on the web). The principles have generally emerged from discussions by working groups who have relevant expertise. The principles have been limited to ten points, under four themes, and each starts with a simple explanation of what it involves and why it is important. The examples and illustrations are by and large drawn from places we visited as a group.

Uses When it is agreed and publicised the charter will provide a basis for:

- helping communications with existing communities, including those who may want to move into the new settlements
- equipping councillors, officers and developers with a common language, and enabling them to demonstrate their commitment to achieving quality growth
- securing investment commitments from government agencies and public utilities, and enabling them to align their spending plans with the growth of new settlements
- encouraging the private sector to develop better masterplans and development frameworks, and to build quality into their design and management.

Monitoring As well as agreeing a set of guidelines, it is also important to learn from the experience of new settlements, and to share the emerging lessons. While there are a range of possible indicators that can be used

to assess performance and set targets, including frameworks such as that used in the Buildings for Life checklist or Inspire East's Excellence Framework, there are many different criteria for success, and no single measure. Furthermore the weight given to different objectives will depend on both the time and the place. Hence, while quantitative data is important, it is even more valuable to look at a scheme from a number of different perspectives, as is for example happening with Cambourne, where the achievements are being judged against both the original objectives and current thinking.

The Charter will be a working document which can be used as a reference point to check that agreed principles are being adhered to during the lifetime of a development, as well as at the stage when bids to develop a site are being explored by developers and by local planning authorities.

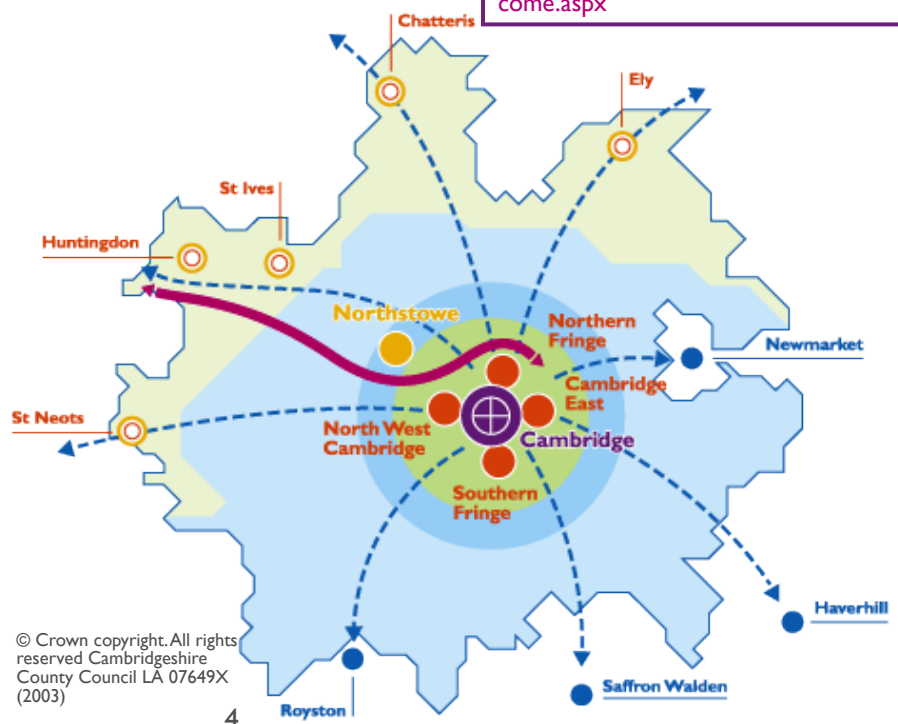
Inspire East's Excellence Framework

This framework is a web based tool developed by Inspire East and BRE (Building Research Establishment). It provides signposting to resources and information, standards and examples of best practice and it can be used to assess and evaluate projects. It is based on the eight components of a sustainable community as identified by DCLG.

1. Social and Cultural
2. Governance
3. Transport and Connectivity
4. Services
5. Environmental
6. Equity
7. Economy
8. Housing and the Built Environment

These components do not reflect a hierarchy: they interrelate to form a complete whole. This complements the work of the Quality Charter that identifies key components where there is a need for particular focus during the growth of new communities in the Cambridge area. However it makes clear the need for all the eight components to be addressed eventually for these new communities to become truly sustainable.

<http://www.inspire-east.org.uk/welcome.aspx>



CAMBRIDGE CHARTER PRINCIPLES



In Freiburg groups of householders take responsibility for developing and maintaining communal spaces between the blocks, and children play freely

A. Community: places where people live out of choice not necessity, creating healthy communities with a good quality of life



Many new housing schemes have suffered from high rates of turnover, aggravated by large numbers of homes being bought to let, which makes it harder for the new community to put down roots. As well as creating places that are active, inclusive and safe, and fair to everyone (as set out in the Bristol Accord), the Cambridge Charter aims to create a better balance with a mix of house types and tenures that reflects the needs, aspirations and profile of the wider area, and with a greater degree of vitality, for example anticipating the trend for more and more people to work from home. It also recognises that successful communities are made up of people from many different backgrounds but who benefit from the 'social capital' created through positive interaction. To achieve this, developments need to follow a number of principles:



Local project team offices in new Dutch suburbs such as Vathorst improve communications

1. Community involvement throughout the process is crucial, which means consulting with people who are going to move in, or are similar to the groups that are expected to move in, and getting their views as the settlement grows, as well as engaging positively and creatively with neighbouring communities.

2. The housing in all tenures should allow for changes in needs and lifestyles so that as people's circumstances and ages change they do not have to leave the neighbourhood, and new forms of intermediate tenure, such as co-housing should be actively promoted, with careful design to avoid areas becoming stigmatised.

3. People should be encouraged to take active roles in the development and continuing management of their communities and engage in local democratic processes. The establishment of appropriate forms of governance should be built into the planning of new communities from the early stages.

4. The 'social infrastructure', such as health, education, and leisure/play is just as important as the physical infrastructure of roads and utilities, and 'community hubs' should be provided in a phased, predictable and flexible way in line with population growth and demographic change. Leisure and play facilities should be affordable to residents.

5. Opportunities should be provided for people to set up their own services, including cooperative and affordable forms of housing to be commissioned by local groups, as well as some self-build, and also where people can live and work.

6. Initial and on-going community development support should be provided for pioneers to 'build your own community', including interim spaces to meet such as cafes, market stalls, as well as their 'e' equivalents.

7. Public spaces should encourage social interaction and support healthy lifestyles, with a clear allocation of responsibilities for managing communal spaces and the public realm.

8. Community (and other key) buildings should be designed to be flexible, and make use of the latest technology e.g. wired up communities, and should support wider community use.

9. Space should be made available for local shops and services to set up, both to build a sense of community and to minimise car dependence. This may include providing interim facilities or giving short-term rent subsidies.

10. Developers should be asked in their planning submissions to provide a clear statement of how their development will build a thriving and sustainable community, including its relationship with other existing facilities, such as health and education, how different tenures will be phased, and how community facilities will be managed. An agreed version should be used in marketing the new neighbourhoods to avoid false expectations.

B. Connectivity: places that are well-connected and enable easy access for all to jobs and services using sustainable modes



In the past new settlements have often ended up car-dominated, while those without cars have suffered from the cost and inadequacies of public transport. As well as creating places that are well-connected, the Cambridge Charter aims to minimise unnecessary car use (and hence congestion, pollution and CO² emissions) by ensuring that other modes have primacy. Key principles include:

1. New development should be served by rapid transit systems such as railway stations or stops on the Guided Bus route, and incentives provided to reduce car use.
2. New developments should contribute to the wider environmental goals for the Cambridge area, such as providing opportunities to work close to (if not at) home for part of the time, with broadband and other network links and services.
3. Public transport should be part of an integrated system.
4. Bus stops should offer well designed waiting areas, providing information on services and local facilities, and should feel safe and overlooked.



Above and below: Underground or peripheral parking and extensive cycling means that cars are tamed and do not dominate

5. Easy mobility for all, including those using wheelchairs, pushchairs etc should be taken into account.

6. Potential linkages with existing employment and service centres should be strengthened and should follow natural desire lines.

7. The streets, footpaths and other links on major urban extensions should be designed as a user hierarchy so that it is clear and obvious who and what they are primarily for, which encourages and prioritises walking, cycling and community transport.

8. Parking management or charges and car sharing/car clubs should be used to discourage unnecessary car use.

9. Provision should be made for distribution ducts for water, power, communications, and waste to save resources and avoid having to dig up the streets again and again.

10. Developers should demonstrate full compliance with these objectives in their Transport Impact Assessment.



Mixed use development at Amersfoort railway station

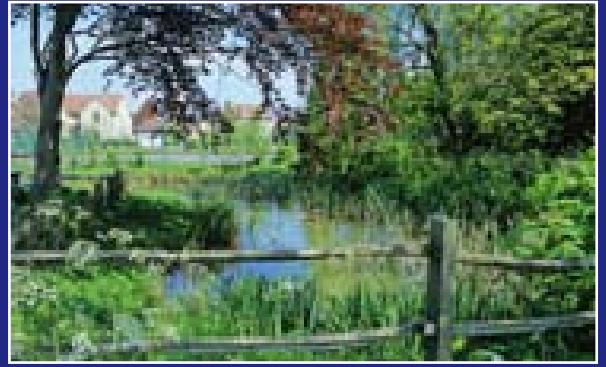


In Rieselveld a frequent tram service was provided from the start of development



Imaginative landscaping in Dutch settlements such as Houten makes them permeable and legible

C. Climate: places that anticipate climate change in ways that enhance the desirability of the development and minimise environmental impact



More and more attention is being paid to schemes being environmentally sensitive, yet new settlements in the UK still lag far behind their Continental equivalents in the Netherlands or Sweden, for example. The new building regulations will not have their intended benefits unless the principles are applied to the whole of the neighbourhood. Cambridgeshire is in a good position to demonstrate the feasibility of ideas like 'Eco-towns' and zero carbon housing, given its low rainfall and high levels of sun and wind for much of the time. So in addition to ensuring new schemes are environmentally sensitive, the charter will ensure that developments around Cambridge are exemplary, through the following principles:

1. Major new developments should encourage residents and workers to adopt lifestyles that minimise the use of energy and other resources, and promote a better quality of life for all.
2. Environmental targets should be challenging and where possible go beyond the minimum standards so that new schemes in the Cambridge area act as exemplars for the rest of the country.
3. Each development should feature an exemplar element or area that will apply European best practice, and that should demonstrate the marketability of new forms of technology or construction (especially those developed locally).
4. The utilities should be engaged in a collaborative design process to help promote energy and water conservation and the potential for as much local energy generation as feasible.



5. Sustainable energy partnerships or trusts should be encouraged, for example through education, marketing and schemes that make Combined Heat and Power economically viable, and that encourage people to be 'waste less'.

6. Public buildings, housing and neighbourhoods as a whole should be designed to anticipate climate change so they are capable of being upgraded and adapted easily and economically to minimise the resources used in both their construction and operation, and to cut down on air pollution.

7. Biodiversity and wildlife should be enhanced through a network of green spaces and Sustainable Urban Drainage systems.

8. Trees and planting should be used extensively to provide cooling in summer and to soak up rain, as well as to provide a landscape that encourages people to walk and cycle.

9. Arrangements for sustainable waste management should be built into new developments to make recycling easy and unobtrusive.

10. Developers should demonstrate compliance in their Environmental Impact Assessments and Sustainability Strategies.



Above left: Vauban in Freiburg is promoted as Europe's solar capital, and some 700 people work on solar research, and the manufacture and installation of solar panels

Below left: Sustainable Urban Drainage systems in Rieselfeld provide a great environment for children

Above middle: New Dutch suburbs provide underground storage for different kinds of waste

Below middle: Combined Heat and Power reduces energy waste

Above right: The Dutch have learned to treat water as their friend not their enemy

D. Character: places with distinctive neighbourhoods and a sense of place that reflect local building traditions



Despite a plethora of good design advice from the government and English Partnerships, most new developments are disappointing. In part this is due to house builders using unimaginative standard house types, but it has also been the result of highways engineers, who are often more concerned with safety and traffic movement than with the look of places. There is also often a difference of opinion over what will look right in different circumstances. Hence in applying good practice, it is going to be important not only to ensure that schemes are well-designed and use good quality materials but also to enable the residents to personalise where they live and create the clear identity for different neighbourhoods that people prize. It will also be important to create a high quality public realm and, for instance, apply the latest thinking on the design of shared surfaces, possibly with the use of competitions to encourage creative thinking and the involvement of smaller builders. The Cambridge Charter therefore stipulates:

1. The existing landform and features of the site, such as water and landscape and the relationship to existing settlements, should be used to create contrasting and memorable townscapes, including vistas, intimate local places, informal natural areas with windbreaks, and ponds and waterways.
2. An overriding masterplan should aim to provide the vision for the development, with neighbourhood design strategies and simple design codes establishing the qualities and characteristics that will make the new places distinctive, and providing guidance and inspiration to the architects who will design the new neighbourhoods.
3. Developers will be expected to employ masterplanners of the highest quality who should be retained for the duration of the development to ensure that the original vision is carried through to completion. Similarly house builders will be expected to use only design teams who have demonstrated a high level of skill in previous projects, and should retain them through to the detailed design stage and supervision on site.

4. The creation of good landscapes is as important as the creation of good townscapes. Different kinds of spaces should be provided to give character to the neighbourhoods and improve biodiversity, from linear parks, squares and crescents down to more intimate communal spaces looked after by adjoining properties or community trusts.

5. Simple designs using high quality materials and careful detailing are often the most successful approaches, particularly if the design allows space for the imaginative use of planting to enable residents to personalise their homes and enrich the biodiversity of their neighbourhoods.

6. All homes should have gardens or generous balconies or terraces to provide private space for outdoor living.

7. Densities and massing should vary, with higher densities around local shops and transport nodes, to provide the full range of house types that are needed.

8. All buildings - commercial, residential, and public - should be flexible and adaptable, which means providing large enough spaces or space for appropriate expansion and changing lifestyles.

9. Car parking and storage for recycling should be carefully integrated within the design of the new homes, and in higher density developments car parking should always be located underground or undercroft so that parked cars do not dominate the street.

10. Developers should demonstrate commitment and compliance to these principles in their Design and Access Statements.



Extensive use of streets and communal areas where children can play makes both Vauban and Rieselfeld feel safe and welcoming



New housing in Freiburg is simple to build, but looks distinctive because of the balconies, solar panels and greenery



A green roof connects the sports centre with the school and the shops in Rieselfeld

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Inspire East is the regional centre of excellence for sustainable communities in the East of England. Our aim is to deliver the knowledge, skills and advice that will inspire you to use and apply best practice.

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