**Fourth Annual Report on the work of the Cambridgeshire Quality Panel for the period October 2014 to September 2015**

**Summary**

The pace of development really picked up in the year 2013/14 and was matched by an increase in the number of Quality Panel sessions. This has continued at a more measured pace in 2014/15 when the Panel met on 10 occasions and considered 15 schemes; now there are plenty of schemes in the pipeline.

There have been two major structural changes to the Panel with John Worthington stepping down as Deputy Chair after five years of service and the Panel has grown with six additional members. As more of the schemes that the Quality Panel reviewed are now being built out, news of the quality of much of the new housing and communities in Cambridgeshire is spreading; this is leading to a number of visits, which we are keen to support. One outstanding issue is an examination by a third party of the value added (or not) through the work of the Quality Panel as seen by developers and residents.

**New Panel members**

John Worthington and I joined the Interview Panels to select new members to support George Hazel on Connectivity, Canda Smith on Character (Landscape) and Nick James on Climate Change. Having been slightly concerned about the increase in economic activity, we were delighted by the level of response; we interviewed nine excellent candidates, choosing six:

* **Connectivity – Phil Jones** from Birmingham; Phil has his own consultancy, with 25 years specialising in achieving synergy between highway and urban design, with the aim of creating places and spaces that meet aesthetic, social and functional aims. He advises a large number of private and public sector clients on transportation and infrastructure matters. He was a key player in the team that wrote the ‘gold standard’ ‘Manual for Streets’ (v1 and v2).
* **Connectivity – David Taylor** from London; David is a Civil Engineer with over 30 years’ experience in the design and construction of infrastructure for new and existing places. His career spans periods in construction, local authority and education and most recently as the partner responsible for movement and transportation at Alan Baxter LLP. He established The Urban Engineering Studio in 2012 to promote creative engineering thinking in master planning and urban design.
* **Character – Luke Engleback** from Tunbridge Wells: Luke founded Studio Engleback in 1996 and is an expert on climate change adaptation. Luke wanted to become a landscape architect from an early age and all his projects consider climate change as well as local character. He describes landscape architecture as the “green glue” that holds development schemes together.
* **Character – Jo Gibbons** from London: Johanna established J&L Gibbons LLP in 1986 and is a Design Advisor to the Mayor of London’s Design for London. She is a member of English Heritage’s London Advisory Committee (LAC) and English Heritage’s Historic Parks and Gardens Panel; she is a visiting critic in Edinburgh, RCA and MMU where she is an external examiner.
* **Climate - Ashley Bateson** from London: Ashley is Head of the Sustainability Group at Hoare Lea; he became interested in the building sector when he realised that the construction and operation of buildings were responsible for a significant proportion of our environmental impact. He wanted to make a difference to how we use energy and work with architects to reduce environmental impact. He is a member of the Design Commission for Wales’ Design Review Panel.

**Chair**

When neither John Worthington nor Robin Nicholson were able to chair a meeting, other members have risen to the challenge. On reflection with officers it is proposed that, rather than appoint a single deputy chair, Lynne Sullivan, Meredith Bowles and David Prichard be appointed as deputies to chair meetings. In due course a succession to Robin Nicholson as Chair will be able to be implemented. (**This was agreed)**

**Visits and meetings** (in date order)

Interest in the housing developments and new communities in Cambridgeshire is attracting considerable interest as is the Quality Panel itself. Among the events what we took part in:

* 28 Oct – Chief Executive of Design Commission for Wales, Carole-Anne Davies, attended the Panel meeting in Huntingdon as an observer and exchanged experiences.
* 21 Jan – Robin Nicholson and David Prichard accompanied Antony Proietti to make a presentation on the work of the QP to a meeting of Fenland District Council
* 27 Jan - RN took an active part in a round-table discussion convened by Urban Design London of all those engaged in or interested in Design Review in the London Boroughs. Following this discussion, three Design Review bodies made short pitches to the Boroughs – Design Council Cabe, Design South East and Frame Projects.
* 23 April – RN accompanied QP member David Birkbeck on his tour of Cambourne and Clay Farm as part of a briefing for the incipient Ebbsfleet Development Corporation team (HCA/DCLG). Steve Platt joined the tour to report on his studies of Cambourne.
* 21 May – RN attended an HCA conference at Wolfson College at which Glen Richardson explained the role of the Quality Panel in his presentation
* 15 Sept – RN joined Peter Studdert’s tour of the Southern Fringe and NW Cambridge for members and officers from Bristol City, Bath, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire; Clr Wotherspoon, Sharon Brown and Glen Richardson participated.
* 12 Oct – RN took part in a tour of Trumpington Meadows and Clay Farm and then spoke at Urbed’s 40th birthday workshop at Trumpington Meadows Primary School. The event was led by Urbed founder Nick Falk, who authored the Quality Charter; Clr Wotherspoon participated.
* 27 Oct – RN took part in Big Meet 4 at the British Academy and was badged as Quality Panel.

**Learning from Cambridgeshire**

In July 2014 Robin Nicholson joined the City and South Cambs officers’ tour for members of Trumpington Meadows and Clay Farm which he found was a useful opportunity to explain the workings of the Panel and to hear members’ views. However there was not repeated in 2015.

In April 2015, QP member Steve Platt, chair of Cambridge Architectural Research Ltd, wrote a report on Design Review for the Planning Advisory Service which usefully sets the QP process into a wider context. Notwithstanding, RN and John Worthington have long discussed at length the need for research and continued to seek funds, disappointingly without success; given the high quality of much of the new housing in Cambridgeshire and the national ‘crisis’ in housing this seems like a lost opportunity both for Cambridgeshire and for the Nation. However at the Urbed workshop there was interest expressed by Councillor Wotherspoon, Andrew Sharpe of Grosvenor and Dr Nicky Morrison from the Dept of Land Economy. **The officers will develop a brief**

At Big Meet 4 RN spoke with the Head of Policy at the British Academy and exchanged ideas about linking into their network of academics. **RN to follow up.**

Members of the Quality Panel bring their experiences in designing schemes and siting on other panels and we might want to consider how to capture some of this as did Urban Design London for the London Authorities.

RN had been particularly impressed by a Cabe review of the urban design framework for phase one of North West Bicester, the last remaining Ecotown for which PPS1 has been exclusively retained; the so-called exemplar neighbourhood is nearly completed with show houses. The developer, A2 Dominion, reported a range of targets including ‘true zero carbon’. This was the fourth review RN had chaired over 5 years.

**Schools for Tomorrow**

There has not been a follow up meeting with the County education team; however now that Trumpington Meadows Primary School and phase one of the NW Cambridge Primary School have been completed and are in use, a site visit and workshop with members and officer could be useful. It is worth noting that the developed Urban and Civic, of Alconbury is using the excellent design of the primary school to set a design standard for the housing.

It may be useful to study the findings of the recent paper ‘Clever Classrooms’ by Prof. Peter Barrett et al from the University of Salford on the relationship of design to educational attainment (Elsevier Feb 2015). **Members, officers and panel members are interested in a tour - tba**

**Issues – continuing and new**

The list of regular shortcomings is likely to remain constant including:

* Adequate provision for community facilities at the heart of the development at the start of the development and before any actual building commences – beware the effect of large, early stage car parking associated with retail
* Connections with neighbouring communities
* Managing bins and bikes
* Accommodation of the car in a changing world of SMART technologies and good designs for parking; this extends to understanding the impact of broadband and ‘the internet of things’
* The need for sections through the buildings and adjacent buildings/sites.
* The lack of ambition for reducing energy demand and meeting rising standards
* The serious likelihood of future over-heating, often without anticipating the need for adaptation as the temperature rises, requires differing designs according to the actual orientation
* Indoor air quality is a related and rapidly growing issue nationally
* The difficult question of local character eg ‘Ely-ness’; can one have too much beige brick?
* The temptation to cheapen the details and materials following planning permission
* Long-term stewardship by the masterplanning developer; we have been particularly hampered by the absence of a coherent masterpan for the whole of the Addenbrookes estate.
* The need for continuing support from the Local Authority for ambitious masterplans as they develop.

There are two other challenges that seem to be growing in importance:

* The need to consider the implication of ‘long life, loose fit, low energy’ design - for say 100 or 200 years
* A move towards local management and sometimes municipal ownership of energy, water and waste systems.

**A changing context**

It is clear that the Housing and Planning Bill 2015-16 will have a dramatic impact on the nature of housing and especially ‘affordable housing’ in England and the Panel will need to understand the consequences.

**In conclusion**

Given the political imperative of ‘The Housing Crisis in England’ the work of the Panel is likely to grow but needs constant reviewing and improving. Tasks for 2015/16 include:

* Developing a dialogue with the CC Education team and reviewing schools when built
* Reviewing the form and content of the ‘standard’ letters, use of record drawings and the potential of scoring of impact by members
* Considering the value of workshop sessions and/or mentoring earlier in the process
* Finding resources for monitoring research of both the process and the products
* Monitoring the workings of the district heating and the underground refuse collection system being installed at NW Cambridge
* Finding a way of sharing experience with the housebuilders with a view to improving the overall quality and considering climate change
* Exchanging experience with other Panels and championing the work of the Cambridgeshire Quality Panel

**Robin Nicholson amended post Steering Group meeting 10th Dec 2015**