

Seventh Annual Report on the work of the Cambridgeshire Quality Panel for the period October 2017 to October 2018 for the Steering Group, the Quality Panel and Planning Officers

Summary

This past year the Quality Panel has seen more schemes (19 up from 15) and has played its part in the increasing Government debate about design review methodologies along with the first researches into the Panel’s impact. The issues raised by the research are discussed in the Appendix to this report.

Some project highlights

This year there have been a number of significant events:

- The highly innovative research carried out at the Wellcome Genome Campus at Hinxton has encouraged them to propose a mixed use 150,000 m2 research development with 1,500 homes for their research community. The QP saw this key scheme for UK plc twice and is broadly supportive providing that the A1301 can be calmed to allow cyclists, pedestrians and children to cross it with ease.
- We were delighted to see how the Wing design code had continued the improving design although considered that the primary school proposals fall short of expectations
- The Panel was critical of the ‘lack of architectural input to coordinate with the excellent landscape intentions’ in the draft Cambourne West Code. This provoked a strong reaction from the applicants but their initial reaction seems to have dissipated.
- The primary school proposed for Wintringham Park in St Neots continues the process whereby some school architects are very good like dRMM as at Wintringham Park but some not so. It would be interesting to discover whether this confirms the Department for Education’s researches into the impact of the value of good design (in BSF) on educational outcomes.
- Although we found the site selected for the school at Buxhall Farm, on a major commuter route through the edge of Histon, to be completely unacceptable, the Panel did suggest a solution to the otherwise unworkable access across that road.
- And Storey’s Field Centre in Eddington (NWC) was nominated and is said to have been only narrowly defeated by the £1bn Bloomberg Centre for the prestigious Stirling Prize

Schedule of schemes seen

Lead Local Authority	Schemes
Cambridge City	Land North of Cherry Hinton x 2 (at pre and outline planning application stage)
Cambridgeshire County Council	Northstowe School Campus (in South Cambs) Buxhall Farm Primary School (in South Cambs) Wintringham Park Primary School (in Hunts) Wing Primary School (in South Cambs)

	Fenland School Campus (in Fenland)
East Cambridgeshire	Kennett Garden Village
Fenland	See CCC (Fenland School Campus)
Huntingdonshire	See CCC (Wintringham Park)
South Cambridgeshire	Waterbeach Masterplan (RLW) Bourn Airfield Masterplan Northstowe Play Areas Wing Design Code Northstowe Phase 1 Parcel H7 Northstowe Phase 1 Parcel H5 Genome Campus Masterplan x 2 Waterbeach Barracks and Airfield Key Phase 1 Design Code Northstowe Phase 1 Parcel H10 Cambourne West Design Code

Reinforcements

We are delighted that, following competitive interviews, the Panel has been reinforced by:

- Lindsey Wilkinson, freelance landscape architect and Technical Director at RHDHV
- John Dales, transport engineer and founder of Urban Movement
- Amy Burbidge, design action manager at North Northants Joint Planning Unit

We are grateful for the contributions of Climate specialist Nick James who having moved to Bath has decided to stand down.

Promotion

Panel members continue to promote the approach of the QP through leading tours, lectures and articles:

- Chair Robin Nicholson was able to join the two members' and officers' visits to the Southern fringe and with vice-chair Lynne Sullivan to Eddington (NWC)
- Dr Mathew Carmona did not specifically refer to the Quality Panel in his paper 'Reviewing Design Review in London' published in July; however he asked the Chair to write a 1500 word reflective piece for Urban Design Quarterly which was published in October 2018.
- The Chair escorted a group of high-end, sustainable Chinese developers, Greentown Oriental, around the southern fringe one afternoon and Eddington the next morning. A

similar trip from 2017 was written up by the Director of the Chinese Design Centre Dr Ying Tian article in TCPA journal.

- Lynne Sullivan took part in the Design Quality Tools and Processes Round Table at MGCLG at CQP Vice-Chair and Chair of the Good Homes Alliance.
- SCDC are using the 4 Cs in their design and enabling panel sessions, which are seen to be particularly relevant where the schemes are medium to relatively large such as Highfields Road, Caldecote.

Some longstanding if slightly rephrased, issues include:

Process issues

- The need for Design Codes to be shorter, sharper and (more) useful to all parties
- Comparing the advice in the QP's Reports with the consented schemes and then as built
- The impact of the appalling Grenfell fire on procurement, standards and monitoring

Community

- Is there a role for the community in the Quality Panel process? Should we expect to see consultation documentation or will that undermine the need to see schemes early?
- Health and Well-being needs to be highlighted under community and connectivity. We look forward to learning from Northstowe 2 and 3 where this policy might lead.
- The provision for employment/workspace within housing developments

Connectivity

- The construction of bellmouths with associated services before the layout is agreed – see also first bullet in Character
- Allowing car parking access off major roads eg Highflyer Avenue in North Ely which arguably should never have been designed as a major road in the first place.
- The impact of emerging technologies, batteries and AVs etc and parking standards

Climate

- With “only 12 years to go”, raising the level of understanding (among all developers, designers and builders) about the real implications of climate change and the route towards carbon neutrality
- Platitudes are offered but where are the planning policies with teeth and the mechanisms to insist on preparations for future adaptation? Will Cambridge City and the surrounding Districts set higher standards as they are permitted to? Without setting higher standards all we can argue for is designs that recognise the impact of orientation!
- The Committee on Climate Change and the Environmental Audit Committee have both called for an urgent response to overheating in buildings and the planning/design review stage is critical to addressing this.

Character

- The development of streets and places rather than plots divided by roads
- A wider discussion about local identity (eg Ely-ness)
- Conflicts between tree planting, their maintenance costs and Highways' funding regime
- Landscape is often trivialised but this is critical for long term place-making; its role in modifying the local climate is seldom appreciated.

Masterplanning

- The recent half day in Fenland was interesting but missed the opportunity to comment on the emerging masterplan as the Panel had been convened to review the school, which should be playing a major role in the masterplan. Hopefully a whole day visit will be arranged to review the masterplan with a second review of the school.

Government interest continues to develop with a series of conferences and workshops. The second version of the NPPF, published July 2018 now includes further emphasis on the role tools such as Design Review Panels, Community Engagement, Design Workshops and Building for Life 12 play in the design evolution process as well as adding further emphasis on the need to manage "value engineering" and the erosion of design qualities at the delivery stage.

Local planning context - the structural changes in Cambridgeshire with the progressive merging of SCDC and the City Planning Departments and the appointment of a Joint Mayor for Peterborough and Cambridge, should now be bedding in. Is there any way the Panel can assist this process through workshops &/or presentations?

New opportunities – we are still keen to review appropriate City Deal projects but we understand that there has been some reconsideration of the programme. The Panel would also be keen to be engaged with the new settlements in the Oxford-Cambridge growth corridor.

From time to time we hear about possible changes to the scope and content of our reviews (see Appendix) and would welcome a great involvement in these discussions.

Support - the Panel is grateful for the support from the Steering Group, from the County officers who manage the Panel and the many other officers who attend our meetings. The Panel is more than willing to engage as a critical friend, as and where it can be usefully deployed. Members are welcome to attend Panel meetings as observers.

In conclusion

The Panel understands the pressure that Local Authorities, both Members and staff, are under but as we started discussing last year there are a number of proposals that the Panel would like to make to the Steering Group and see implemented:

- Holding a workshop with the County Highways Department to debate **road layouts, standards and trees** with Phil Jones and one or two other members of the QP as well as the discussion on shared surfaces.
- Reviewing the form and content of the 'standard' letters and the use of record drawings.
- Considering the use of **workshops/surgeries** with planning officers to get to discuss codes/ masterplans/ schemes earlier in the process and the possibility of a **Chair's/Vice-Chairs' review** for a revisit as is done elsewhere.
- Developing a dialogue with the CC Education team and **reviewing built schools** with them once a year as the school plays such an important part in community development in new settlements.
- Finding a way of sharing experience with the house builders with a view to improving the overall quality and a **proper consideration of climate change** by all parties. Could the

Cambridge Sustainable Housing Design Guide which is based on the 4Cs be more widely adopted.

- **Feedback about innovative strategies** such as the CHP infrastructure and the underground refuse collection system installed at NW Cambridge.
- Assembling a **dataset** of all schemes seen and reports written on a website/Dropbox file accessible to Members, officers and QP members. **Discuss**

Robin Nicholson with Lynne Sullivan, David Prichard, Meredith Bowles and Simon Carne Nov 2018

Appendix on Research:

For the first time there has been some research and feedback on the work of the Quality Panel on three fronts:

1. Work by Urbed deriving from their discussions with Cambridge Ahead, the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority and with the Leader of the City Council led to a flurry of activity around the question of a fifth 'C' - Cohesion. The chair has seen drafts of Dr Falk's comprehensive paper 'Creating Cohesive Communities' for C&PCA and a model 5th C for Cohesion. While this subject is important to the Panel, many of the aspects are covered under Community, others require policy to be set by the City and District Councils. A review of the 9 supporting topics for each 'C' would be useful in the light of Cohesion, Health and Well-being and other current concerns. **Discuss**

QP member Dr Steve Platt interviewed Planners, Applicants, Designers, QP members and others and wrote a supportive report on the workings of the Panel for the C&PCA. He made a number of proposals, which are discussed below. Among the Panel members interviewed David Birkbeck suggested the need for a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) to mandate issues such as minimum outdoor amenity space, minimum floor to ceiling heights and proof of a ventilation and energy strategy. **Discuss**

2. There were two dissertations by students of Dr Nicky Morrison in the Department of Land Economy following an introduction of the origins and workings of the Quality Panel by Peter Studdert and Robin Nicholson. One masters' student submitted a useful account of the Panel with some suggestions for improving its impact – see below.
3. Urbed have been developing a Survey Monkey survey of the Panel members and a draft paper on 'Assessing the Value of Quality' both of which are work in progress and on drafts of which the Chair has commented; the Chair was especially keen to see incorporated into any such review the increasing dominance of Building for Life 12 (BfL12) which it is understood will be embedded in all the work of Homes England from January 2019.

The Chair agrees with Dr Falk that, given the richness of the Cambridgeshire portfolio of new and extended communities and the importance of this for Government and the Oxford MK Cambridge Arc, there should be a workshop to explore how this experience can be deployed on a national basis. Before 2010, this would have been natural territory for CABE but the question now is under who's auspices and with who's funding? **Discuss**

Some changes proposed by the research

It is really good that some research has been carried out into the operation of the Quality Charter ten years after its launch (8 years after the establishment of the Quality Panel) but it is only two steps in the right direction as Post-Occupancy Evaluation is seldom practised in housing design. In October the Chair took part in a meeting of the UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence and proposed that the CQP offered them a unique opportunity; this is being pursued by Prof Flora Samuel of Reading University.

In the meantime it is worth quoting the Key Findings in Dr Stephen Platt's report "Achieving Quality in Cambridge" in full, *with comments by the authors of this report*:

1. There has been a lot of new housing in Cambridge and the overall quality is high but there are some glaring exceptions and it is still unaffordable to half the residents of Cambridge.
2. The main factor affecting the quality of new development in Cambridge is the attitude of the developer / landowner and the ability of the design team they employ. *(We strongly agree)*
3. The Cambridge Quality Charter (CQC) has been important in raising the bar on quality. People appreciate its simplicity and brevity. *(But more diagrams and less words by the Applicant might, however, be useful.)*
4. It is important that the same panel members review schemes coming back to the panel more than once. *(The Secretariat does try to do this but availability can frustrate this ambition)*
5. Planning committee members place great confidence in the panel's report. This must accurately reflect the open discussion at which the applicant was present. The report might usefully be in the form of numbered points, highlighting which are most important. *(It will take a bit longer but is this something that the Panel should look at. Some have suggested the use of a traffic light system, although others suggest that these tend towards Amber)*
6. Planning officers might be encouraged to contribute more to the open session. *(This does happen but assuming it is a good idea, how shall we encourage this?)*
7. Most people thought schemes should come to the panel earlier and more often. *(we agree but that is for the planning officers; first Genome discussion was well timed but Wing Primary School was too late)*
8. On large schemes there is a case for retaining a master planner and for appointing a panel member to champion the scheme. *(This is well worth considering but how would it work and be paid for?)*
9. Neither developers nor planners can create communities that guarantee cohesion and social inclusion, but well designed and built schemes can reduce social conflict, while poorly thought through schemes can foster social tension and aggravate conflict. *(agreed)*
10. There is a case for a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for Cambridgeshire that embodies clear rigorous guidance. *(to be discussed – what issues would be included?)*

11. The highways department can be particularly inflexible and the constraints they impose can prejudice the quality of schemes. *(we proposed such a workshop last year and following the Kennett Garden Village Review we would welcome this)*
12. Post occupancy evaluation is a missing piece in the process. How a place develops and performs over is crucial. *(this is critical but funding has been the stumbling block thus far; meanwhile Nicholas Falk is considering an appropriate methodology)*

Land Economy MPhil student Lidija Mirella Honegger's dissertation 'Can design-led planning help deliver sustainable development and communities' studied Phase 1 at Trumpington Meadows and two schemes at Great Kneighton, Abode and Aura. She makes three recommendations about the QP process:

1. The need for a supervisor for large developments to stay with the scheme from beginning to end to deal with the change of personnel on panels. *(desirable though this may sound, it may be operationally difficult when one considers that at Great Kneighton, the Skanska scheme was already built before the QP started in 2010 and there are still at least two more lots to be developed, eight years later – see 8 above)*
2. She discusses the issue of the public engagement of the Panel and despite concerns about it being counter-productive she argues that the Panel's views should be made available in a public participation process. *(would put developers off? Although it is done in other places, the QP is NOT public consultation, rather it is scrutiny by experts.)*
3. She also recommends that the Panel should clarify what it expects 'by introducing a specific set of requirements' while avoiding it becoming a tick-box exercise. *(this resonates with Platt's point no 10 about an SPD. However there are many guides out there such as Building for Life, Manual for streets and Cabe documents,; they have been widely used for over 10 years so we probably don't need another special Cambridge one?)*

Current members of the Panel:

Amy Burbidge, North Northants Joint Planning Unit
 Ashley Bateson, Hoare Lea
 David Birkbeck, Design for Homes
 David Prichard, Metropolitan Workshop
 David Taylor, Urban Engineering Studio
 John Dales, Urban Movement
 Kirk Archibald, Think Three
 Lesley Johnson, Phoenix Community Housing
 Lindsey Wilkinson, freelance landscape architect
 Luke Engleback, Studio Engleback
 Lynne Sullivan, LSA Studio
 Meredith Bowles, Mole architects
 Oliver Smith, 5th Studio
 Phil Jones, Phil Jones Associates
 Robin Nicholson, Cullinan Studio
 Simon Carne, architect planning and urban design
 Dr Steve Platt, Cambridge Architectural Research

Please note that many members of the Panel have a portfolio of occupations and jobs