

South Cambridgeshire Local Plan

Housebuilders, Registered Providers and Planning Agents Workshop

3 April 2012

Attendees

Nigel Agg	Taylor Wimpey
Janice Blake	The Papworth Trust
Peter Bovill	Montagu Evans LLP
Richard Brimblecombe	Richard Brimblecombe Architect
Stephen Brown	Artek Design House Ltd
Hamish Buttle	Bovis Homes (South East)
Andrew Campbell	Andrew S Campbell Associates Ltd
Colin Campbell	Savills
Tim Christy	Tim Christy Architect
Matthew Clarke	Boyer Planning Limited
David Coleby	Mark Liell & Son
Stephen Conrad	Cambridgeshire County Council
Peter Cutmore	Peter Cutmore Architects
David Digby	Hill Residential Partnerships Limited
Neil Griffiths	Cambridge & County Developments
Ian Harvey	Harvey Norman Architects
Daniel Hewett	Carter Jonas LLP
Rob Hopwood	Bidwells Property Consultants
Peter Jolly	Peter Jolly Chartered Architect and Town Planning Consultant
Andy Joyner	Gallagher Estates
Andy Lawson	Gallagher Estates
Paul McCann	Banner Homes
Tarry Moore	Alun Design Consultancy
John Oldham	Countryside Properties
Martin Page	DH Barford & Co Limited
Nicky Parsons	Pegasus Planning Group
Owen Pike	Cheffins
Tim Poulson	Poulson Architecture
Don Proctor	RPS Planning & Development
Chloe Renner	John Martin & Associates
Thomas Rumble	Wolf Bond Planning
Nigel Schofield	Papworth Hospital
Laraine Southwood	Terence O'Rourke
Christine Steele	Bedfordshire Pilgrims Housing Association
Tim Waller	JB Planning Associates Limited
Stephen Walsh	UNEX

Cllr Tim Wotherspoon	Northstowe & New Communities Portfolio Holder, SCDC
Jo Mills	Planning & New Communities Corporate Manager, SCDC
Keith Miles	Planning Policy Manager, SCDC
Caroline Hunt	LDF Team Leader, SCDC
Jonathan Dixon	Principal Planning Policy Officer, SCDC
David Roberts	Principal Planning Policy Officer, SCDC
Jenny Nuttycombe	Planning Policy Officer, SCDC

These notes are a record of points raised in open discussion sessions by those attending the workshop, where a wide variety of views and ideas were put forward. The notes capture the range of issues and views identified, sometimes by individual stakeholders, and do not necessarily reflect the view of the Council. They do not represent any specific decisions made.

Discussion 1: What is South Cambridgeshire like now?

Things to retain and protect

- Plenty of open space and good access to the countryside.
- Fantastic research and development parks of international importance – need to think sustainably about where people work and want to live.
- Top of the league for quality of life.
- Services and facilities in Cambridge are readily accessible.
- Successful exceptions sites policy but need to look at what other options and tools could be used as well.
- Economy that has withstood the recession.

Things to improve

- Some villages have grown into executive housing dormitories.
- Poor balance of development – concentration of development in north west of the district.
- Broaden employment base in those parts of the district that are a distance from Cambridge.
- Congestion.
- Settlement hierarchy is too rigid; there are sustainable locations in smaller villages.
- People living in South Cambridgeshire and commuting to London and the southeast are driving up house prices and making them out of reach for locals.
- Not enough “affordable” market housing.

- Requiring affordable housing provision on sites of 2 or more dwellings is restricting the supply of windfall market housing.
- How many extant planning permissions are there? This has an impact on supply and demand?
- Restricting size and type of employment uses outside of Cambridge is counter-productive.
- Need to look more imaginatively at provision of employment space and opportunities.

Discussion 2: What is the vision for South Cambridgeshire at 2031?

- Need to continue positive approach to planning for economic prosperity and growth.
- Make South Cambridgeshire more self-contained and reduce reliance on Cambridge.

Discussion 3: Options for the Development Strategy, Scale of Growth and Green Belt

- To achieve sustainability need to provide range of transport choices. Provide viable and safe alternatives to the car e.g. cycle paths making sustainable travel a real choice.
- Need to know the objectives of the plan to determine what sustainable development is.
- Don't forget the third element of sustainability – economic. Take account of the viability of the development (see paragraph 173 of the National Planning Policy Framework).
- Need to think of level of service provision, especially main roads, shops, services etc.
- Development should not all be focussed on Cambridge, need to encourage market towns to grow as well.
- Don't focus all new development into a new settlement (i.e. don't put all your eggs in one basket). Spread new development across a number of tiers of the hierarchy. Need a mixed approach. Need to free up the settlement hierarchy to deliver village sites.
- A dispersal strategy could have an impact on the character and attractiveness of a village, and could destroy the qualities that attract development and investment.
- Need strong policies to make South Cambridgeshire independent from Cambridge.
- How do you encourage employment opportunities into the village?
- Need to foster high tech research and development locally.
- Plan making process is too long, therefore always retrospective and will never meet the need.
- Growth needs to meet unmet needs – historic, current and future.
- Where is the potential for growth?
- Need to consider deliverability over the 20-year plan period.

- Need to take a positive approach to growth. Need to co-operate with Cambridge City.
- Allow as much growth as needed to support the Cambridge economy. The Cambridge economy has weathered the storm over recent years, so need to build on this.
- How do we listen to the views of Parish Councils?
- Development framework boundaries may need to be changed if a dispersal strategy is promoted to create space for development.
- Parishes should be able to take forward their own options for development through Neighbourhood Plans.
- Scale of growth is difficult to predict but should relate to the district.
- Need to consider the role of the smaller villages – allow small developments to round off villages.
- How do we sustain small communities? Some villages need development to increase their sustainability, but quantum of development needs to be sufficient to make the provision or retention of services and facilities viable.
- Need for high quality design dialogue between the planning authority and agents to promote incremental growth across all settlements.
- Combination of the current settlement hierarchy and low threshold for the provision of affordable housing is frustrating good quality sustainable development – there are lots of good sites that are not being brought forward.
- Focus development on villages with services (e.g. secondary schools) and use previously developed sites.
- Allow some development on the edge of Cambridge plus development in villages to support services and facilities.
- Deliver and reinforce current plan strategy – build on existing planned development where infrastructure is being provided.
- Promote home working or local working through provision of employment starter units and flexible dwellings.
- The imbalance between jobs and housing is only going to be exacerbated if we don't provide more housing.
- Need to maintain support for Cambridge and consider sub-regional needs. Need to look at the city region as a whole.
- Scale of growth should be guided by the Cambridge phenomenon rather than national trends.
- Housing should be located to support existing employment uses and to support the use of sustainable transport.
- Need to keep business in the district and provide homes for their workers.

- New strategy should be balanced in terms of where development occurs.
- Diversify employment base to provide jobs for less well qualified.
- Improve service and cultural opportunities available in villages.
- Allow satellite development well connected to Cambridge by public transport and cycling.
- Southwest quadrant (quarter to six quadrant) is a good example of high quality of life and public access e.g. villages like Grantchester and Coton.
- Review of Green Belt should be need focussed.
- Is all the land within the Green Belt necessary for its purpose?
- Need to retain Green Belt to prevent coalescence but harms sustainability.
- Green Belt needs to be reviewed more often, but still maintain physical and visible separation.
- Definitely time to review the Green Belt again.
- Need to look at the Green Belt as a reasonable alternative for development.
- Green Belt is worthy of defence.
- Need to work with landowners around the edge of the City to deliver better visions.
- What is the Green Belt for? Will be needed to provide open space for high-density development on edge of Cambridge, so needs to be accessible and linked to existing open spaces. Develop the Green Belt into a country park.

Discussion 4a: Housing Provision Issues

- Certainty of delivery in changing economic circumstances is important.
- More opportunities for phasing on larger sites.
- Encourage provision of self build and Community Land Trusts to provide more choice of tenure.
- Consider self build needs.
- Not necessary to have a self-build policy, but greater flexibility for development in village would allow more self-build.
- Phasing policies need to be flexible.
- The plan needs to be able to respond to changing circumstances by providing reserve sites.
- Need a policy to allow and encourage small sites. Need a mix of different sized sites and locations.
- Need to plan for ageing population.

- National housebuilders say that site phasing is not realistic on small sites in villages; don't normally look at sites of less than 10 years. Upfront infrastructure requirements are likely to make this undeliverable for any housebuilder.
- Consider Community Right to Build.
- Providing a prompt service for the discharge of conditions will help deliver large sites – consider planning performance agreements.
- Need to be realistic on the timing of delivery of large sites.
- The National Planning Policy Framework encourages planners to think creatively and work with landowners / developers to achieve a solution acceptable to all.

Discussion 4b: Housing Density Issues

- Recognise that average household sizes are shrinking.
- Density should vary depending on the location and should respond to the context.
- Quality of design is paramount. A design led approach to density should be used so that the development suits its locality and purpose e.g. special needs bungalow, character of the area.
- The density of a development should be character led but not to the detriment of delivery.
- Need fairly high density to deliver the required number of homes and support village facilities.
- Density and design of developments needs to improve privacy and provide suitable gardens.
- Need more flexibility to provide smaller developments e.g. schemes of 5 houses in villages, and at a density equivalent to rest of the village. Traffic generation would also be less. Lower density developments provide opportunities for granny annexes to be provided within the plot.

Discussion 4c: Housing Mix Issues

- Current policy mix does not meet market requirements and is imposed with no flexibility. The market should determine housing mix. However, if the market has a bias towards certain sized houses, need for some policy intervention.
- Need flexibility in space to accommodate elements of lifetime homes.
- Policy should specify an indicative housing mix – analysis of need and demand to be undertaken at the time of an application.
- Need flexibility in housing mix.
- Need more diversity of plot sizes e.g. some 3-bed houses with small gardens, other 3-bed houses with larger gardens. Small developments on the edge of villages offer greater flexibility for larger plots.

- Space is an issue - need more diversity in floorspace of different sized houses e.g. variety of floorspace in 2 bed houses to accommodate first time buyers (to be affordable need to be smaller) and also downsizers (looking for space), which have different requirements.
- Need to provide homes for executives e.g. £1m+. Consider introducing a quality panel to assess design of large houses. Seek to integrate the dwelling into the landscape e.g. enhance surrounding countryside rather than hiding the house behind high walls.
- Need to provide bungalows in large plots in landscape setting – other districts are doing this. Allocate land specifically for this purpose.
- Need to provide lifetime homes to address the ageing population and also accessible market homes to accommodate disabilities.
- Encourage provision of self-build and Community Land Trusts to provide more choice of tenure.
- Should be a policy to provide guidance and control mix to some extent.
- Need a good mix of housing on all types of sites.
- No market for 1-bed units.
- Mix of sizes and tenures can work together; so only need a single mix policy.
- Use evidence from the SHMA.
- Leave the provision of lifetime homes to building regulations.
- Housing mix policy sometimes restricts smaller developments from coming forward.

Discussion 4d: Affordable Housing Issues

- The threshold at which affordable housing is required is too low and is discouraging development. It also creates difficult design issues and has an impact on small site viability.
- Allow cross subsidy on exception sites.
- Consider taking financial contributions for off-site provision.
- Need to ensure information on housing need is up to date.
- Must have a robust viability assessment. The HCA viability toolkit is not designed for small sites and is onerous for small developers. The viability process should be outlined in policy rather than an SPD.
- Funding for affordable housing is drying up.
- Local subsidy could support local housebuilders and support local economy.
- Need to focus on intermediate housing which has been neglected.
- Look at what South Hams have done.

- % affordable required is too high.

Discussion 4e: Issues relating to Housing in the Countryside

- Time for change, we have the smallest homes in Europe.
- Need a defined % limit for expansion and also set criteria.
- No need for specific policy, rely on the National Planning Policy Framework.
- Allow some development on the edge of villages but outside of the development framework – how do you control this? Rely on Neighbourhood Plans?
- The 15% and 50% extension rules are applied too rigidly and don't protect 1 bed and 2 bed properties. The % should be a guide only. For replacement dwellings, the size of the new dwelling should relate to the plot.
- No need for a policy for large country houses.
- Question need, but could be ok if brings landscape and other advantages.
- Treat country houses as an exception.
- Blanket % restriction on size of extensions is not appropriate.

Discussion 5a: Key Issues relating to Sustainable Development & Climate Change

- To go above national standards (e.g. Code for Sustainable Homes) needs to be justified locally.
- Need most development in most sustainable locations, so residents are less likely to travel by car.
- Need better distribution of employment.
- Question extent to which policy can ensure provision of local facilities.
- Is it socially sustainable to put houses in villages with no gas supply? Would only be sustainable if houses do not rely on fossil fuels.

Discussion 5b: Key Issues relating to Economy & Growth

- Allow conversion of rural buildings for employment.
- National Planning Policy Framework allows easier conversion of employment buildings to residential use. Risk that this could lead to loss of employment buildings.
- Most service sector jobs are in Cambridge, need developments that encourage creation of service sector jobs in South Cambridgeshire.
- Need premises for small businesses, employment parks focus on large businesses. Need to allow small businesses to be provided near housing.

- Need a better understanding of the local business market.
- Need to encourage a full range of employment opportunities in the district across all business sectors.
- Need to create an employment equivalent of 'affordable housing'.
- SCDC needs to intervene in the market to provide starter and incubator units. Could be done through a public – private partnership.
- Use reduced business rates to support local businesses.
- Change or die, if existing cluster led strategy is maturing then need to diversify.

Discussion 5c: Key Issues relating to Design & Heritage

- Need a proportionate response to saving heritage assets - change not always a bad thing and need to make sure we are not wasting unused assets.
- Conservation officers are too prescriptive about protecting what is not worth keeping e.g. modern changes.
- Need to take account of viability of reusing heritage assets for alternative uses.
- The conservation policies are applied too strictly and make development not cost effective.
- Need Lifetime Homes that allow flexible accommodation through design.
- Change to heritage assets must be allowed, and should not be prevented.
- Need constructive approach to proposals for development that help protect heritage assets.
- Design codes and Supplementary Planning Documents are needed to ensure that the Local Plan does not become too long.
- Local authority role is to find the balance between the costs incurred by the housebuilder and the long-term design and quality required by the occupant.
- Council needs to be brave enough to create own policy for heritage but must not be too prescriptive.

Discussion 5d: Key Issues relating to Natural Environment

- Be creative in use of green space and create better edges to open areas.
- Use the Green Infrastructure Strategy to improve the predominantly agricultural landscape – loss of green fields should be balanced by countryside enhancement.
- Offset damage to environment from development by encouraging enhancements works elsewhere or accepting financial payments to undertake works elsewhere.
- Do we want to protect the prairie landscape of South Cambridgeshire? Although very boring that doesn't mean we should destroy it.

- Support small business growth into the countryside.
- There is still capacity to expand the campus type business parks created from old country estates (e.g. Wellcome Institute, Babraham Hall) without impacting on the natural setting.
- There is scope to enhance green infrastructure in the district.
- Need more woodlands, and work to put hedges back to create smaller fields again.

Discussion 5e: Key Issues relating to Travel

- Car travel will still happen.
- Need stronger links between funding and operators.
- Parking standards need to consider local context.
- Need flexibility, can't control car ownership.
- Need improved public transport – Chesterton Station will help, and strategic allocations should create opportunities to integrate public transport.
- Need better planned footpaths, bridleways and cycle ways, and signage.
- Reduced car spaces does not necessarily mean less cars, need to plan for on-street parking through lay-bys, wider roads.
- Make sustainable modes of transport easily accessible, efficient and cost effective.
- Greener technologies might make cars more sustainable as a form of transport in the future.

Discussion 5f: Key Issues relating to Services & Facilities, Water & Drainage

- Needs to be considered at a strategic level e.g. Community Infrastructure Levy.
- At a local level, need Parish Councils and neighbouring residents knowledge and experience to feed into very early stages of a development proposal through community steering groups.
- Developers need to consider infrastructure needs important to local residents.
- Use an element of the Community Infrastructure Levy to fund upfront infrastructure costs.

Discussion 6: Current Policy Feedback

- Policy NE/1 (energy efficiency) – relates elemental method in building control regulations which is now out of date, also refers to 'current' and unclear whether this is current at the time of the policy or at the time of a planning application, and although referred to in decision notices it is not explicitly considered in committee reports.

- Need to make policies future proof.
- Refreshing to work in an area where policies are included in an up-to-date suite of plans.
- Policy ST/3 (reuse of previously developed land) – requirement for high percentage could limit the delivery of much needed development.
- Remove anomalies from development framework boundaries.
- Policy DP/7 (development frameworks) should be retained as it provides clarity, but development framework boundaries need to be up to date.
- Policy HG/8 (conversion of buildings in the countryside to residential use) – this refers to market demand OR planning considerations, planning officers interpret this as AND.