



In-depth review of sustainable communities policy

Report on the Area Based Assessment of
Cambridgeshire

November 2006

CAG CONSULTANTS
Gordon House
6 Lissenden Gardens
London NW5 1LX
Tel/fax 020 7482 8882
hq@cagconsult.co.uk
www.cagconsultants.co.uk

For direct enquiries about this report please contact:

Susan Parham

Tel: 020 7704 0018

Email: sp@cagconsult.co.uk



Contents

- Contents 3
- Introduction 4
- The area 5
- Main findings 8
 - Active, inclusive and safe 8
 - Well run 8
 - Environmentally sensitive 10
 - Well designed and built 19
 - Well connected 24
 - Thriving 27
 - Well served 28
- Conclusions 30
 - Strengths 30
 - Areas of concern 31
- Appendices 34
 - 1. People interviewed 34
 - 2. Documents and other material reviewed 34



Introduction

CAG Consultants were appointed by the Sustainable Development Commission to undertake an in-depth review of sustainable communities policy (the SCP and subsequent linked policy). The aims of the review were to: -

1. Investigate if and how the delivery of sustainable communities policy has helped to make communities more sustainable.
2. Learn lessons about how delivery of sustainable communities policy could better support the achievement of more sustainable communities.
3. Learn lessons about how to absorb the aims of the UK sustainable development strategy into government policy and practice more generally.

The review focuses on two proposals at the heart of the SCP – Housing Market Renewal Areas (HMRAs) and Growth Areas. It had two components:

1. A review of national policies on the Sustainable Communities Plan (SCP) and any existing performance assessments of sustainable communities policy by Government Departments and independent bodies.
2. Four area based assessments. Two in Growth Areas (Barking & Dagenham and South Cambridgeshire) and two in Housing Market Renewal Areas (East Lancashire and Newcastle / Gateshead).

This document is one of four reports on the area based assessments and presents our findings for Cambridgeshire in the context of the London-Stansted-Cambridge-Peterborough Growth Area.

There is a separate report which draws together the conclusions from the area based assessments and national policy research.

The area

The London-Stansted-Cambridge-Peterborough Growth Area and the Cambridgeshire Sub Region within that were chosen as one of the two growth areas to be assessed. The Corridor contrasts with the Thames Gateway (the other growth area considered) in being a more affluent area of urban extension, with the areas for in-depth study located outside London.¹

The London-Stansted-Cambridge-Peterborough Corridor was designated as one of the Government's four Growth Areas in the 2003 Sustainable Communities Plan and is considered to have potential for significant housing and employment growth. DCLG states that the London-Stansted-Cambridge-Peterborough (LSCP) runs from the north east in London to the city of Peterborough. The area is expected to develop 129,000 new homes between 2001 and 2016 as well as investment in green space and transport.²

The planning of the LSCP Growth Area will reflect the policies contained in the draft East of England Plan (RSS) which was published by the East of England Regional Assembly (EERA) in December 2004. This has been consulted on and undergone an independent examination in public which reported recently and proposed a number of changes to the RSS. The draft Plan "sets out a broad 15-20 year development strategy for the region covering housing, economic development, transport, environment and culture" with "housing allocations for each of the districts in the east of England".³ It will form "the framework for the spatial development of the region to 2021".⁴ Following the independent panel's recent recommendations, the Government will then consult on any proposed changes to the plan around the end of 2006, and the final plan will be issued in spring 2007.

In the Cambridgeshire subregion delivery is being undertaken through Cambridgeshire Horizons which is a non-profit making company funded by local authorities and DCLG. It was formed because "All the local authorities and key agencies have recognised the need for an independent body to ensure that the planned growth of the Cambridge Sub-region is implemented in a co-ordinated way".⁵ Cambridgeshire Horizons' over-riding responsibility is to "ensure that the growth strategy for the Cambridge Sub-region is implemented in line with the timescale and quality standards set out in the adopted Structure Plan".⁶ It has four main objectives which are to:

- Co-ordinate development and infrastructure implementation

¹ As explained in Supplier Information to SDC from CAG Consultants, 1st August, 2006.

² <http://www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1140042>

³ East of England Regional Spatial Strategy, 2004

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ http://www.cambridgeshirehorizons.co.uk/faqs.asp?sec_id=809

⁶ Ibid.

- Overcome barriers to development projects
- Ensure that new developments offer a high quality of life to residents and
- Communicate the benefits of the planned development to the wider community.

It is responsible for “driving the delivery of 47,500 new homes and £2.2bn of support infrastructure in the Cambridge Sub-region by 2016”.⁷ The role is intended as one in which it uses the Cambridgeshire Structure Plan as a blueprint for the creation of sustainable communities. Cambridgeshire Horizons “brings together local councils and development agencies to ensure a coherent and comprehensive response to the diverse challenges this presents.”⁸ In this task it is supported by the relevant councils including Cambridgeshire County Council, Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council, within whose boundaries a substantial number of the planned new settlements and urban extensions are located.

Among actions/milestones so far are:

- The Regional Spatial Strategy has been examined in public and the Plan Panel Report released, making some changes to the RSS including housing numbers.
- The Cambridgeshire Horizons delivery vehicle has been set up to run the implementation of the growth area policies in the Cambridgeshire Sub Region.
- A number of new settlements and urban extensions have been planned for Cambridge and environs; developed according to SD principles in line with the Sustainable Communities Plan. These have not yet been built.
- Relevant councils include South Cambridgeshire District Council which has undertaken substantial work to develop a Local Development Framework to cover proposed new developments within the context of the SCP. The LDF is expected to be adopted in 2008.
- For example, an Area Action Plan and Strategic Design Statement for Northstowe, an urban extension proposed in South Cambridgeshire has been developed by South Cambs. We understand that a master plan was developed for Northstowe but recently a new master plan has been commissioned from a second urban design consultancy following concerns about the first plan.⁹
- Major transport infrastructures have been approved such as the Cambridgeshire guided busway to provide high quality, reliable and frequent local public transport along the A14 corridor. This is being part funded by government and

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ <http://www.cambridgeshirehorizons.co.uk/>

⁹ Information supplied by regional interviewee

the rest made up be developer contributions. Construction work is due to start in 2007 and the busway operating by the end of 2008.¹⁰

¹⁰ <http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/NR/exeres/722D5285-E832-42E4-9076-442E12C67E09.htm>

Main findings

Active, inclusive and safe

Community cohesion and identity

Policy proposals for the future have excellent suggestions for enhancing community cohesion and identity. The Northstowe Area Action Plan is an example of very well developed proposals in this area. Expert interviewees also comment on this issue of cohesion and identity, stating that this is very important. Among interviewees there is a stress on the notion of creating “mixed, balanced communities” which appears in particular to refer to mixing incomes and family types within new developments. At the same time a number of those interviewed express a concern that higher density may be difficult to make safe and desirable. It is argued that excellence in the design of the environment is important in this regard but so is achieving local democracy and sense of place. The Section 106 system, by which contributions from developers for social infrastructure are elicited, it is argued tends to mean facilities are not provided until after development has been completed and this can make community building difficult.

Community safety

South Cambs' AMR says that “most residents enjoy a safe living environment with little threat of crime” and “South Cambridgeshire has a low crime rate, with 48.5 crimes being recorded per 1,000 population in 2004.”¹¹ This compares favourably with other Cambridgeshire Districts and with the national average. The Cambridgeshire Quality of Life Survey, undertaken in 2003, shows that residents also perceive there to be a relatively high level of community safety in the District, with 69% of South Cambridgeshire residents considering that they felt “safe” or “relatively safe” after dark”.¹²

Well run

Community engagement

Cambridgeshire Horizon says that the County Council and partners are working to ensure that all new development takes account of community requirements. The issues they refer to are the need to involve the community in the development process and in the design process. It is suggested that new developments must be designed for all types of people and ways of doing so include by ensuring a mix of housing (for example in terms of size and price), and by designing to minimise opportunities for crime.¹³ At local level South Cambridgeshire District Council has undertaken ongoing public

¹¹ Annual Monitoring Report, p.10

¹² Results quoted in AMR.

¹³ <http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/environment/sustainable/sustainable+communities.htm>

participation processes associated with, for example, planned new developments at Northstowe and on Cambridge's southern fringe.¹⁴ The SCDC's website makes substantial reference to submissions received in preparing its LDF but does not clarify the degree to which these have influenced planning policy for specific developments. While the Inspector's report on the South Cambridgeshire Core Strategy Plan Document¹⁵ stated that South Cambridgeshire DC had yet to produce a Statement of Community Involvement, it found that the Council had given all parties a chance to comment on the document.

At the same time, it is not clear from information available from the relevant planning bodies or experts interviews if, or in what ways, local residents' opinions are influencing planning and development decisions. At the regional level, there has been an explicit statement that these views will be listened to but will not affect policy judgements. The Inspectors for the RSS review, for example, make clear that their planning decisions are based on independent judgement despite numerous submissions from residents among others.¹⁶ Public opinion research may be able to assist in defining the degree to which community engagement is affecting planning outcomes at district and county council level and thus having an influence in the development of the growth area.

The impression we gained from the evidence collected was that true community *engagement* was more evident in theory than in practice. Participation – which in terms of community engagement is a lesser activity - was more evident and is evidenced in ways such as the use of consultative processes around key planning and design documents, and information provision about development proposals.

Delivery partnerships

The main delivery partnerships for the roll out of development according to the principles contained in the SCP is the previously mentioned Cambridgeshire Horizons. This partnership is in relatively early days of its operation as yet so judging performance can only be done on limited evidence. This is the main delivery vehicle in Cambridgeshire and acts as a non-profit making company funded by local authorities and the DCLG. It was formed in October 2004 because it was recognised by all the local authorities and key agencies that an independent body was needed. Its role would be to "ensure that the planned growth of the Cambridge Sub-region is implemented in a co-ordinated way".¹⁷ Cambridgeshire Horizons' has two main over-riding responsibilities. The first is to ensure that the growth strategy for the Cambridge Sub-region is implemented in line with the timescale set out in the Structure Plan. The second is to make certain that it meets the quality standards that have been set out in the Structure Plan.¹⁸

¹⁴ <http://scamb.s.jdi-consult.net/ldf/readdoc.php?docid=91&chapter=1&docelemid=8681#8681>

¹⁵ July 2006

¹⁶ East of England Plan Panel Report, 2006: p.3.

¹⁷ http://www.cambridgeshirehorizons.co.uk/faqs.asp?sec_id=809

¹⁸ Ibid.

Cambridgeshire Horizons is responsible for a large infrastructure and housing budget and meeting substantial housing targets. By 2016 it has to make sure that 47,500 new homes are delivered. It also has to ensure that £2.2bn of support infrastructure is provided in the Cambridge Sub-region.¹⁹ Cambridgeshire Horizons describes the Cambridgeshire Structure Plan as a blueprint that it is using for the creation of sustainable communities. Local councils and development agencies are being brought together “to ensure a coherent and comprehensive response to the diverse challenges this presents.”²⁰ In this task it is supported by the relevant councils. These include Cambridgeshire County Council, Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council, within whose boundaries a substantial number of the planned new settlements and urban extensions are located.

Expert interviewees at regional level appear satisfied with the quality of partnership working being led by Cambridgeshire Horizons. Among others, this is the view of an interviewee from a regional agency who felt that work in the London Stansted Cambridge Peterborough corridor has been very effective “with excellent people”. Cambridgeshire Horizons is viewed at regional level as an example of very progressive work on Sustainable Communities. Independent evidence to support this view is not yet available. Although we understand that Cambridgeshire Horizons is currently being scrutinised by DCLG no details as to the nature of the scrutiny or results are available yet.

Our sense is that the structure, work programme and early ‘process’ outcomes (such as developing partnership structures and working practices) – as described on the website – and discussed with experts in the region, seems appropriate to the tasks being undertaken. It is harder to make a clear judgement about outcomes in terms of content because virtually all of the housing and infrastructure delivery with which Cambridgeshire Horizons is charged is yet to be rolled out.

Environmentally sensitive

Climate change

The Regional Sustainability Strategy²¹ discusses energy, water efficiency and climate change adaption at a strategic level but provides no details in relation to housing performance (housing is not listed as a category for discussion). Specific policy for sustainable construction is equally difficult to identify in local planning documents although the RSS says that these will relate energy policies to the SCP requirements for growth areas. The RSS meanwhile argues broadly for the region to reduce its energy needs while moving towards energy self sufficiency. It should promote and encourage renewable energy (with a target of 44% by 2020), actively promote community based energy schemes, markedly improve water efficiency and come to grips with climate

¹⁹ <http://www.cambridgeshirehorizons.co.uk/>

²⁰ <http://www.cambridgeshirehorizons.co.uk/>

²¹ 2001.

change adaptation.

According to the RSS, developers in the growth area will in future be expected to maximise energy through sustainable design and construction, community heating and CHP schemes among other actions, which will be above standards required in the relevant building regulations. Energy consumption statements will be required for developments greater than 50 dwellings and they will be required to generate renewable energy for at least 10% of their needs.²² A regional interviewee argues that energy is a real challenge but at the same time the region is relatively well positioned in energy terms. The argument runs that the East of England has the advantage of resources off and on shore for wind farms and there are also opportunities for energy production from biomass fuels based on the region's share of 50% of the UK's cereal production. The region could also develop micro grids. This interviewee points out that the BRE is doing work with developers on low carbon/low energy use housing so technologies are emerging. However, these opportunities need to be translated into development. "Action on the ground is still needed".

At sub-regional level detailed information on actual or proposed energy standards for new housing is difficult to find. There is a little bit of information in terms of renewable energy installation, with an Annual Monitoring Report indicator noting in general terms that the Local Plan 2004 includes policies promoting the development of renewable energy based power sources in the District, and promoting energy conservation. It suggests that the Local Development Framework will go further by setting the target that 10% of the proportion of the energy requirements for new developments will come from renewable energy sources. It also notes that data on the success with which new developments are achieving this target will be included in future Annual Monitoring Reports.²³

The AMR explains that one wind turbine was built at Bassingbourn during 2004-2005. It says that while there are a number of renewable energy schemes in the district that have planning permission, these have been prevented from coming forward due to constraints including funding. What the other constraints consist of is not stated.²⁴ Equally, for core strategies and action plans associated with the proposed LDF, for South Cambridgeshire specific information on energy standards expected of new housing appears nonexistent (at least in the core strategy). The Core Strategy for the Local Development Framework says that it will be monitoring renewable energy provision as a core indicator but does not define what housing standards would be required to go toward meeting renewable energy needs.²⁵

Housing design (at least in the South Cambridgeshire part of the growth area) is expected to take account of the need for adaptation to climate change such as overheating and storms. The action plan for Cambridge's southern fringe, for example

²² Regional Spatial Strategy, East of England, 2001: p190.

²³ AMR, 2005: p.21.

²⁴ AMR, 2005: p.81.

²⁵ <http://scambs.jdi-consult.net/ldf/readdoc.php?docid=92&chapter=2&docelemid=9895#9895>

(which is part of its LDF in preparation), proposes flexible design that is energy efficient, built to be an exemplar of sustainable living with low carbon and greenhouse gas emissions and able to accommodate the impacts of climate change.²⁶ The Local Plan (adopted in 2004) does not make clear what energy standards are for housing currently.

Water supply

It is not altogether clear that plans for new water supplies will be able to meet the increased demand from new housing, and without causing damage to water reserves and biodiversity. On the one hand, the RSS suggests that local planning authorities should produce detailed supplementary planning guidance to implement water conservation and sustainable drainage solutions, and all developers should include water conservation measures in new development and promote public awareness of the need to reduce water consumption.²⁷ On the other hand, the Inspector's report on the RSS states that "truly sustainable development will mean marked change, indeed a reversal of the habits and attitudes of the region and its people, to, among other things, water use, energy consumption and waste".²⁸ The report goes on to say, "without action going well beyond the remit of the RSS and the planning system the changes needed to secure truly sustainable development will not occur".²⁹

A regional interviewee agrees that across the region, water is a big issue. They argue that to manage growth the region needs to be 25% more efficient in its water use in new homes and 8% more efficient for existing homes. Also at the level of water efficiency standards of new or refurbished housing, another Cambridgeshire interviewee suggests that the region would like to have placed higher demands on developers but can't be absolute in its demands. The argument here is that high levels of water or energy performance in this context are still only mediocre in an international context. They question the argument put by developers that providing such things will just be another cost loaded onto their Section 106 contributions. The interviewee suggested that improved water conservation and use requirements should be built into development regulations.

Based on the evidence available, our assessment is that, as the RSS Inspector's report suggests, a considerable change in attitudes and actions will need to occur to improve water use to the degree required for sustainability in the medium to longer term. It may be as interviewees argue that regulatory methods will be needed to force developers to improve their performance sufficiently.

²⁶<http://www.scambs.gov.uk/Environment/Planning/DistrictPlanning/LocalDevelopmentFramework/default.htm>

²⁷ East of England Regional Spatial Strategy, 2004: p.193.

²⁸ East of England Plan Panel Report, p3.

²⁹ Op cit.

Flood risk and drainage

As we noted in the interim report, the East of England has significant areas that are flood prone and the situation will worsen with climate change. This has implications for proposals for new housing that are in flood risk areas. RSS Policy SS14 states in regard to development and flood risk that “Coastal and river flood risk is a significant factor in the East of the England. The priority is to defend existing properties from flooding, and where possible locate new development in locations with little or no risk of flooding”.³⁰ The RSS therefore requires that local development documents will:

- promote the use of strategic flood risk assessments to guide development away from floodplains, areas at risk or likely to be at risk in future from flooding, or where development would increase the risk of flooding elsewhere
- include policies to protect flood plains and land liable to tidal or coastal flooding from development, based on the Environment Agency's flood zone maps, supplemented where necessary by historical and modelled flood data (e.g. Section 105 maps) and indications as to other areas which could be at risk in future (including proposals for 'managed retreat' where appropriate)
- require that all developments and, where subject to planning control, all land uses (including agricultural activities and changes to drainage in existing settlements) should not add to the risk of flooding elsewhere and should reduce flooding pressures by using appropriate sustainable drainage systems
- only propose development in floodplains, areas at flood risk or at risk of flooding in future, or where development would increase the risk of flooding elsewhere, where land at lower risk of flooding is not available, where there is a significant overriding need for the development (how this is defined is not stated), and the risk can be fully mitigated by design or engineering measures.

South Cambridgeshire did a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment in 2005. They note that their assessment provides a “detailed and robust assessment” about the extent and nature of the risk of flooding to specific growth areas within South Cambridgeshire. The assessment also considers the implications for land use planning. They argue that this assessment enables the council to “better meet the obligations created by Planning Policy Guidance Note 25: Development and Flood Risk”.³¹

Concerns about sewerage and drainage capacity in the development areas tend to be couched by interviewees in terms of positive work being done to combat or mitigate. One local interviewee said that they work closely with the Environment Agency about where development goes and that they have already been through the process of

³⁰ Regional Spatial Strategy, East of England, 2004: p39. The RSS also includes an indicator which refers to development that occurs against the advice of the Environment Agency.

³¹

<http://www.scambs.gov.uk/environment/planning/districtplanning/localdevelopmentframework/supportingdocument/floodrisk.htm>

determining development areas as part of the preparation of the Structure Plan. It is interesting to note that there may be some local authority resistance to installing Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) based on anxieties about maintenance costs thought to be associated with it. One local government interviewee noted that with SUDS, the big issue is “balancing longer term liability and maintenance issues with the benefits to the environment but developers want to provide it”.

It should be noted that sustainable flood mitigation measures are proposed for new settlements such as Northstowe. In this case it is argued that surface water needs to be managed because this is a place in which watercourses in the area are flood prone. It is suggested that this provides something of an opportunity to “create a true fen-edge town where water management in the form of Lodes, Dykes or Canals within the urban fabric of the town will help to give Northstowe its distinctive character”.³² It is further proposed that “surface water attenuation lakes will help to create a fenland landscape on the lower parts of the site to which water will naturally drain. Water can be stored here if necessary before being released at a controlled rate into water courses which will take it to the river”.³³

The picture in this policy area looks mixed. On the one hand, proposals for specific places such as Northstowe appear to be state-of-the-art, and policy at local level through the use of strategic flood risk assessments is laudable. However, existing developments have not been subject to such sophisticated policy attention on flooding, while it is unclear that those developments currently approved but not yet built have been located or designed to meet such high standards.

Greenfield land, greenbelt, biodiversity & countryside

As was noted in the interim report, the growth area has suffered a dramatic decline in biodiversity historically and in recent years. Even so, building on greenfield sites is a much more significant part of the development of the growth area than it is for the Thames Gateway, albeit with a caveat in the Regional Spatial Strategy that developments must be sustainable in form.³⁴ This can be taken to mean that they should be compact, walkable, mixed-land use, of medium to high density built-form, centred on activity nodes with transit orientation and of appropriate in scale to adjoining or nearby urban areas.³⁵ Given the region has significant areas of urban fringe land (that is transitional spaces between urban and rural) the role of sustainable urban extensions and new towns is also more critical than in the Gateway and this is reflected in the considerable number of urban extensions proposed to be constructed.

The South Cambridgeshire Local Development Framework Core Strategy says that part of its vision is “To create new and distinctive sustainable communities on the edge of Cambridge connected to the rest of the city by high quality public transport and other

³² <http://scambs.jdi-consult.net/ldf/readdoc.php?docid=91&chapter=5&docelemid=8860#8860>

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Regional Spatial Strategy, East of England, 2004: p.14.

³⁵ See objectives section in LDF Core Strategy (proposed) <http://scambs.jdi-consult.net/ldf/readdoc.php?docid=92&chapter=2&docelemid=9878#9878>

non-motorised modes of transport which will enhance the special character of the city and its setting"³⁶ but figures for the actual area of greenspace to be developed are not given.

In line with national requirements, the growth area requires that at least 60% of new housing development take place on previously used land or buildings by way of conversions. South Cambridgeshire meanwhile is aiming at the lower figure of 37% arguing this reflects local conditions more appropriately. Like the Gateway, the sequential test by which brownfield sites are considered first for housing development still applies to the growth area.

The green belt is not treated as sacrosanct; rather, reviews are suggested as the method through which to resolve potential conflicts between greenbelt and sustainable patterns of development. The greenbelt around Cambridge was reviewed in 2003 and certain areas released for housing and economic development. The RSS seems to suggest that there has been 'compensation' of equal value in terms of making high quality green space that contributes to biodiversity, and/or can be used for leisure and recreation (see quote below) but does not make clear if the net area is the same. It is argued in the Regional Spatial Strategy that "Where land is released from the green belt for development, substantial interventions may be needed, particularly in the Sustainable Communities Plan growth areas, to protect and improve the landscape, and to secure improvements to the quality of adjoining/nearby green belt (e.g. by landscape/biodiversity enhancement and public access/recreation provision) to mitigate the impacts of development".³⁷

In the context of these principles, local interviewees say that broadly there has not been significant loss of or changes to designated biodiversity sites, landscapes or greenbelt as a result of the Sustainable Communities Plan. Rather there have been and will be overall biodiversity and amenity gains that are quite substantial. One regional interviewee meanwhile suggests that Cambridgeshire exemplifies the problem that the countryside doesn't automatically equal biodiversity and access. At the same time, it is noted that as part of the biodiversity agenda, there has been massive investment in green infrastructure. This includes development of local green corridors, SUDS, green spaces, and cycling corridors. Moreover, there has been major investment from DCLG, and EEDA to develop a number of wetland reserves (including Great Fen, Wicken Fen, and Berry Fen). From this interviewee's perspective these activities are enhancing and opening access to the countryside and "in 20 years these will be spectacular reserves and assets". Another regional level interviewee argues that the development of the Structure Plan has allowed regional identification of areas where it might be appropriate to change the green belt for biodiversity reasons while noting that this area is fiercely protected. The interviewee says that long-term changes are being made to protect the character of Cambridgeshire.

A third interviewee concurs that there had to be some greenbelt release and review

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Regional Spatial Strategy, East of England, 2004: p.28

around Cambridge City for a few sites in the Structure Plan and that in this process lower quality agricultural land was earmarked. At the same time they note that there has been a huge investment in green spaces, in order to make them accessible. For example, the Growth Area Fund has funded a nature reserve at Coton - including footways, signage, tree planting, and encouraging habitats.

The density of developments (completed and proposed) tends to be less than 50 units per hectare. The RSS refers to a rather low overall density requirement of no less than 30 dwellings per hectare, although it suggests that "in appropriate locations and with high quality design...densities up to or in excess of 100 dwellings per hectare can be fully acceptable and sustainable and can facilitate highly desirable, vibrant communities".³⁸ In reality, high density examples seem hard to find despite the potential to "delivers greater intensity and density of development in places with good public transport accessibility, while respecting local building styles, character and identity".³⁹

The density of current development at Cambourne for example ranges from 31 to 37 dwellings per hectare; the Area Action Plan within the context of the proposed Local Development Framework for South Cambs proposes a density of at least 40 dwellings per hectare (with higher densities around centres) for the Northstowe settlement.⁴⁰ Meanwhile for the urban extensions planned on the southern edge of Cambridge for example the densities are expected to be around 50 dwellings per hectare. "At Trumpington West a range of densities will be provided following a design-led approach, including higher densities closer to Trumpington village centre and at public transport stops with lower densities on the sensitive outer edge facing the River Cam. Subject to the design-led approach and the need to provide a full range of house types and quality, the average net site density will be at least 50 dwellings per hectare".⁴¹ For East Cambridge though there is an indication higher densities could be accepted: "the average net site density across the urban quarter will be at least 50 dwellings per hectare, but development will aim to achieve an average net housing density in the order of 75 dwellings per hectare".⁴²

Our assessment in this area is that the arguments for some review of greenbelt land are justified where good biodiversity arguments can be made. There appears to have been considerable infrastructure improvement to green spaces in order to protect biodiversity sites and/or increase accessibility, all of which is in line with SCP principles. Less positive in our view is the comparatively low densities being set as targets or achieved in actual development proposals. Although these appear likely to rise as developments such as Northstowe are built, and density nodes are developed around

³⁸ Op cit, p.45.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Northstowe Area Action Plan, <http://scambs.jdi-consult.net/ldf/readdoc.php?docid=91&chapter=5&docelemid=8960#8960>

⁴¹ <http://scambs.jdi-consult.net/ldf/readdoc.php?docid=93&chapter=5&docelemid=11570#11570>

⁴² Cambridge East Area Action Plan, <http://scambs.jdi-consult.net/ldf/readdoc.php?docid=94&chapter=4&docelemid=12324#12324>

public transport stops and hubs, the low overall performance to date and the unambitious targets for the future are worrying in sustainability terms.

Waste

The aspiration in the proposed LDF is for construction materials to be recycled. There is no mention of these being fairly traded, locally sourced, and having low environmental impacts. Thus, as an example of proposed approaches, part of the proposal for constructing Northstowe is that a Resource Re-use and Recycling Scheme be put in place. This would require the nature and type of waste or surplus material arising and its volume to be categorised, and proposals for dealing with each component to be made. The idea is to promote waste minimisation, and at the same time to maximise opportunities for materials re-use and recycling.⁴³

Cleaner and greener

The proposals for greenspace in the new settlements around South Cambridgeshire are closely related to the overall vision for future development. South Cambridgeshire DC has developed a vision for its area that it believes “will contribute to satisfying the development needs of the Cambridge Sub-Region rather than those generated by pressures to the south or elsewhere”. It thus quite overtly suggests that inward settlement pressure should not be a basis for its future development despite the housing targets set out for the sub-region. At the same time, it acknowledges the infrastructure implications for new development and says that “the District will plan for enhanced infrastructure to meet the needs of the expanded population”. The South Cambs vision also speaks of “preserving and enhancing its rich built and natural heritage and distinctive character” and the focus is definitely on retaining the rural nature of that character in that: “It will continue to provide an attractive rural hinterland and setting for the historic city of Cambridge. Those parts closer to Cambridge will be protected by a Green Belt. It will prosper in its own right as a rural district that makes up the largest part of the Cambridge Sub-Region”.⁴⁴

The implications for protecting greenspace are bound up with proposals to reuse brownfield land and ensure separation between individual settlements of all types. Thus the vision statement argues for the sequential policy of encouraging a more sustainable pattern of living. This would mean in practice only allowing limited development to take place within villages in the district. Moreover, most of that limited development would be focused into larger rural centres, which are seen as more sustainable places for development. The criteria is that modest growth should “bring about improvements in the relative sustainability of individual villages or groups of villages and the recycling of previously developed land” At the same time all villages are expected to be “kept separate from one another and from Cambridge, Northstowe and the market towns”.⁴⁵

⁴³ Northstowe Area Action Plan, <http://scambs.jdi-consult.net/ldf/readdoc.php?docid=91&chapter=6&docelemid=9465#9465>

⁴⁴ <http://scambs.jdi-consult.net/ldf/readdoc.php?docid=92&chapter=2&docelemid=9878#9878>

⁴⁵ Ibid.

It remains to be seen whether this apparently very gradual and small scale form of development, based on sequencing to retain rural character, will be able to generate sufficient housing units over and above those proposed for new towns and urban extensions around Cambridge to with them meet the sub-region's proposed housing targets.

Eco Homes / Sustainable Buildings Code

We were not able to discover what proportion of new and refurbished homes is built to EcoHomes good, very good, or excellent standard or another eco-design standard. The AMR documents that there are no direct policies on this in the 2004 Local Plan for South Cambridgeshire and no data available.⁴⁶ We could find no mention of EcoHomes in the emerging LDF Core Strategy, in Area Action Plans for Cambridge's fringe or in Sustainability Reports prepared in support of these. There may be mention in masterplans but we were not able to view these.

Meanwhile, one regional interviewee notes that people are puzzled by the non-appearance of a finalised Code for Sustainable Buildings and takes the view that while people are happy using the Eco-Homes standards they need a code for the houses themselves. It is further noted that private sector builders have proved very reluctant to include EcoHomes features although they can use Innovation Funds within Section 106 to do so. It is felt that developers "just want to do the basic that is required by the building regulations whereas RSLs have done much better." The implication drawn from this situation is that government needs to insist on a lot tougher standards.

Another regional interviewees suggest that 'high quality, built to last' housing is high on the agenda regionally. Their organisation has developed a quality of life programme which is promoting sustainable development. In a project funded by the Growth Areas Fund, a training centre has been set up with Cambs Regional College, which is focusing on trainees learning about modern methods of construction. The region will also develop pilots of SMARTLIFE housing, while workshops are being held at DCLG to talk through issues of design quality while using modern methods. The message according to this interviewee is that density doesn't have to mean lower quality.

We judge that it is unclear whether the delay in the Code for Sustainable Homes has impacted on the environmental standards of buildings, or whether existing standards and policies have sufficiently compensated. There is certainly an impression given by sub-regional and local experts that builders are proving recalcitrant in applying EcoHomes (let alone Sustainable Buildings Code type) standards and may need to be pushed further in this direction through government regulation.

⁴⁶ Annual Monitoring Report, South Cambridgeshire District Council, 2005: p.94.

Well designed and built

Design

The vision for design at subregional and settlement level is to protect and enhance Cambridge and environs as a compact city, as well as the character and setting of the market towns and other settlements in the sub-region, and the important environmental qualities of the surrounding area.⁴⁷ There is an intention to deliver renaissance in the region's towns and cities based on sustainable communities policy principles, with a stress on creating communities with mixed land uses and housing tenures, affordability, housing size, and ages.

The focus is on mixed use communities (in the form of 'urban villages')⁴⁸ in each development context in the growth area: existing urban and suburban areas, urban extensions and new settlements. These will be expected to provide a range of housing choices, safe streets to encourage walking and cycling and good access to public transport as well as good access to local facilities such as shops, health centres, schools, sports facilities, parks, green space with biodiversity, etc. Specific supporting policies to protect biodiversity are also found in a range of documents about the growth area.

The aspiration for future development is to design both housing and the public realm to very high sustainability standards. For example, the settlement of Northstowe is intended to be an 'exemplar' project which will be "Building a proportion of the development to advanced practice which fully addresses sustainability issues and minimises any environmental impact by pushing at the boundaries of the proven technology available at the time of the development".⁴⁹

As a regional interviewee points out, the sub region is currently implementing a growth/design strategy based on its 2003 structure plan, which predates the SCP. In his view, while the SCP embraced the existing strategy what is being built now has nothing to do with the SCP. This interviewee also explains that much of what has been built recently has its antecedents in much older planning guidance. For example, Cambourne's development reflects the 1989 structure plan, there is a legacy of dispersed settlement policy from the 1990s, and past approvals for business parks are now coming on stream.

It is clear that design quality has risen sharply in relation to planning for new developments compared with what has been built recently. One regional interviewee notes this, but points out that the sub-region is quite early in the process and the big developments of Northstowe and the urban edges to Cambridge etc are not yet off the ground. They explained that regional planners are working closely with developers on master planning these places including doing quality of life studies through URBED.

⁴⁷ Regional Spatial Strategy, East of England, 2004: p83.

⁴⁸ Op cit, p.43.

⁴⁹ Northstowe Area Action Plan, <http://scambs.jdi-consult.net/ldf/readdoc.php?docid=91&chapter=5&docelemid=9431#9431>

Cambourne is picked out for special mention as failing to realise good design based on sustainable communities principles and there is a view that “We don’t want another Cambourne. That was planned 10-15 years ago”. Meanwhile, the round of development now planned is largely at a strategic stage and it is argued that high quality, high sustainability standards, good open space is now central to master planning.

Character and heritage

Policies at regional and local level suggest that heritage is and will be protected and enhanced.⁵⁰ For instance, South Cambridgeshire DC’s core strategy is intended to ensure that “the district’s built and natural heritage is protected” and at the same time that new development “protects and enhances cherished townscape assets of local urban design, cultural and conservation importance, and character of the landscape”.⁵¹

The AMR for South Cambridgeshire DC discusses character and heritage in a number of places including in relation to protecting village character and amenity. It reports that it did not lose any land in or next to Protected Village Amenity Areas in 2004-2005. It argues that its “Protected Village Amenity Areas” and “Important Countryside” designations are a robust mechanism for protecting the character of villages, which they plan to continue using in the Local Development Framework.⁵² The AMR also notes that the Local Plan (2004) has a large number of policies which are aimed at protecting the built and natural heritage of the District. Most are policies for defining the approach to preservation of buildings in conservation areas and protecting listed buildings.⁵³ There has been a steady downward trend in relation to listed buildings at risk while the total number of listed buildings in South Cambridgeshire in 2004 was 2,630, which the Council argues is a comparatively high number relative to other Cambridgeshire districts.⁵⁴

Meeting housing need

The Sustainable Communities Plan is a key influence on the East of England Regional Spatial Strategy which in turn defines the housing targets for the growth area. Relevant aims are accelerating the supply of housing in the London-Standed-Cambridge-Peterborough growth area and increasing the amount of affordable housing. The RSS (prior to the Inspector’s report) allows for the provision by 2016 of about 26,800 additional dwellings above current provision, which closely relates to the Government’s expressed aspiration for an additional 35,000 to 40,000 dwellings in that period. Through the review of the RSS the East of England Plan Panel found that “delivery in the Cambridge Sub Region (at average 2,073pa in 1996-04) has been considerably lower than the rate that would be required to meet the SP/RSS (average 2,905pa).

⁵⁰ See for example action plans for Northstowe and for Cambridge’s southern fringe.

⁵¹ Annual Monitoring Report, South Cambs District Council, 2005: p.30.

⁵² Annual Monitoring Report, South Cambs District Council, 2005: p.28.

⁵³ Annual Monitoring Report, South Cambs District Council, 2005: p.30

⁵⁴ AMR, 2004: p.30

However in our view there is now a good range of housing delivery locations coming out of the SP and the LPs/DPDs, supported by Cambridgeshire Horizons"...."We generally agree with the view that the area is moving towards a position in which house completion rates could rise by up to 40% over coming years".⁵⁵ The Panel concludes that the RSS housing provision should increase by 27,500 homes, although they state that this is still substantially less than projections of housing demand by ODPM or "any higher level thought necessary to address current and historic housing market issues".⁵⁶

Houses are being built/refurbished around Cambridge, through a number of self contained new settlements (such as Cambourne, Northstowe) and urban extensions (on the fringes of Cambridge) are either being built or planned. These appear to be at the rate intended in the SCP / RSS / local plans. Between 2001 and 2016 it's expected that 8,600 houses will be constructed in the Cambridge built-up area, 8,000 on the edge of Cambridge, 6,000 in the new town of Northstowe, and 21,300 in market towns and rural centres in Cambridgeshire.

In South Cambridgeshire, a local interviewee suggests that uplift is already being seen in the rate of development with 1175 housing units per year. Up to 890 units are being approved without the proposed new development plans yet in place. It is expected that the major development areas will deliver the area's targets for housing. South Cambs' target to 2016 is 20,000 dwellings (ie 1175 per year) which is the highest in the Eastern region. Another regional interviewee says though that there are both advances and frustrations. While they expect that there will be a step change in housing and in terms of qualitative change it will make a huge difference, there is frustration at how quickly developments come forward. But equally there is also an increased understanding of what creates sustainable communities, including defining places' ecological footprint. This interviewee suggests that there are also huge issues around phasing infrastructure and unlocking sites.

Cambridgeshire is a high cost area and house prices do not appear to be moving closer to national or regional averages. The Cambridge area is thought to interviewees to be a housing hotspot where pressure on housing generally and affordable housing in particular is especially intense. House prices, which are traditionally high in the Cambridge area, do not appear to be moving down to national or regional averages. Regional data from the RSS suggests that within a regional provision for an annual average rate of 23,900 units, social rented housing should be provided at a regional annual average rate of at least 7,200 net additional dwellings, or 30% of overall provision. At least 760 net additional units per year should be provided for key worker housing. "The region will also aspire to provide higher provision in the period up to 2015 to reduce the level of unmet housing need and address intermediate housing needs".⁵⁷ The intention through the RSS is to increase affordable housing from around 12% of supply to around 30%, or up to 40% in areas designated as suffering housing

⁵⁵ East of England Plan Panel Report, p.64.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Regional Spatial Strategy, East of England, 2004: p.36

stress.

Work commissioned by EERA shows that about 13,200 additional units are needed in the growth area to address un-met needs, e.g. homelessness, families in overcrowded accommodation, and suppressed households.⁵⁸ Likewise provision for special needs (single person households, large families, elderly, disabled etc) is not deemed adequate. The aspiration in the RSS is that at least 40% of overall housing supply – to meet subsidised social renting, key worker and intermediate needs, and un-met housing needs – should be in the affordable sector in the period up to 2015.

In South Cambridgeshire it is explained that although the affordable housing target of 50% of all new dwellings in 2004/05 has been missed this is due to the target changing in the light of LDF policies coming into play. Between 1999 and 2004, 14.2% of housing has been affordable whereas in 2004/05 it was 19.3% of completions.⁵⁹ The AMR says that the area fell short in relation to meeting targets including for affordable housing provision, housing density and housing mix. However, in mitigation, it is suggested that “the Local Plan 2004 policies were prepared in a different policy environment and were not designed to meet the emerging LDF targets”.⁶⁰

It is expected this situation will change for the better in future. The AMR points out that that with the adoption of the LDF (which itself will reflect the revised national Planning Policy Guidance Note 3 on housing) affordable housing provision will be more fully integrated into the overall housing strategy for the district than it was in the 2004 Local Plan. It also notes that the rates of affordable housing completions have been much higher than anticipated at the major development sites of Northstowe, Cambridge East and Cambridge Southern Fringe. This should mean that given a context of housing shortages and the problem of lack of affordable housing, it will be very important to make sure enough affordable housing comes forward during the LDF period.⁶¹ The AMR goes on to say in relation to affordable housing targets for the LDF that the targets in the LDF “are based on the potential for affordable housing delivery in the major developments of Northstowe, Cambridge Southern Fringe and Cambridge East. The indicative targets for affordable housing that are included in the emerging draft LDF are for approximately 30% social rented and approximately 20% intermediate housing, giving a total of 50% affordable housing on sites of more than 2 dwellings”.⁶²

Regional and local interviewees likewise link the discussion of housing costs to consideration of affordable housing provision. They note that the structure plan target is of 40% affordable housing in the Cambs sub-region whereas in 1999-2005, 15-16% (affordable housing and key worker) was delivered. They suggest that for current sites post-2004 there has been a step change. However, while another interviewee agrees that the Cambridgeshire Structure Plan has an affordable housing target for the whole

⁵⁸ The Affordable Housing Study Stage 2, EERA, 2003.

⁵⁹ AMR, 2004/05: p.60.

⁶⁰ Annual Monitoring Report, South Cambs District Council, 2005: p.42.

⁶¹ Annual Monitoring Report, South Cambs District Council, 2005: p.23

⁶² Annual Monitoring Report, South Cambs District Council, 2005: p.59.

region of 40% of all dwellings (comprising the traditional social rented sector and key worker housing), “a weakness of the plan making process is the development industry can use ploys to unpick things and say it is not possible for the market to be viable at this rate”. They fear that at their forthcoming planning Examination, the development industry will bring its ‘viability’ material to the inquiry because it is trying to lower the target in South Cambs to 35% of the total. “It bothers us that the strategy put in place to meet certain planning targets and make a decent inroad into the affordability of housing should be distorted in this way”.

This local interviewee further argues that under the old strategy, people bought housing further out from Cambridge where it was cheaper and commuted in. The idea was then to get affordable housing closer to Cambridge. They suggest that if the amount of affordable housing included in the new town developments is reduced [as lobbied for by developers] it will have the effect of pricing out some households from the region altogether. “This will be because there won’t be further housing approvals of bits and pieces of housing further from Cambridge, while new larger scale developments will have less than proposed affordable housing. There is a real danger that the private sector will confuse the issues”.

A slightly different analysis comes from another interviewee who takes the view that overall in the next 10 to 15 years it will not be possible to achieve a figure of 40% affordable housing because even if more such housing is delivered in the latter part of that period, lower percentages early will balance that out. They argue this is challenging given the commercial viability issues, with developers saying that the level of the demands by government for the affordable housing component of their development is greater than they can afford to build. “For example, in Northstowe there will be 9-10,000 houses. Then all the Section 106 benefit would go on 40% of housing. South Cambs is aiming for 50% affordable housing. Cambridgeshire Horizon’s work on balanced communities suggests that there is a need for a limit to the amount of affordable housing, or communities will lack balance”. Given such issues it is unclear whether the proportion of affordable (social, shared equity and other) housing planned will be sufficient to meet demand or whether in so doing there would be the danger of ‘unbalancing’ a community’s social and income mix.

Communities are certainly being planned to include mixed tenures, affordability, housing size, and ages; as well as provision for special needs (single person households, large families, elderly, disabled). Thus, a proposal for developing Cambridge’s Fringe at Trumpington notes the need to provide various sizes of housing, 50% affordable housing, housing specifically for key workers, various housing typologies including terrace housing, town houses and family housing, make provision for self build, develop housing in density gradients around centres and transport hubs. This is summed up in the policy to “ensure the provision of a well integrated mix of housing types, tenures and sizes, including affordable housing, to meet the identified needs of all sectors of the community, including Key Workers”.⁶³

⁶³ <http://scambs.jdi-consult.net/ldf/readdoc.php?docid=93&chapter=5&docelemid=11570#11570>

There are numerous references to housing design excellence taking into account and minimising environmental impacts in regional and local planning and strategy documents but it is not clear whether houses are currently being designed to lifetime homes standards. Interviewees do note that off site construction is occurring and the previously mentioned SMARTLIFE centre is deemed central to the modern methods of construction agenda. “We are training people. There are skills issues. We need modularisation to build unprecedented number of schools. This has to exceed quality expectations”.

This is a particularly complicated policy area but some overall trends and implications seem relatively clear. While it seems likely that the region will get close to if not actually achieve its proposed housing target, the Cambridgeshire sub-region may have more difficulty reaching its part of the target especially if the RSS Inspectors’ proposal for raising housing provision to a substantially higher level to 2016 is adopted regionally. It also looks likely that it will be difficult to achieve the RSS’s aspiration of a 40% affordable housing target or South Cambs even higher proposed 50% affordable housing target over the same timeframe. This is in part because the area is a high cost one where pressure on prices is intense, partly because of changes to where housing can be built in future, and because it is feared the target will be undermined by developers pleading issues of commercial viability. Turning to housing design excellence, again we recognise that there are laudable aspirations but like our interviewees, express some concern about how effectively housing design excellence will be built in to mass production housing in a context of modern design methods.

Well connected

As we explained in the interim area assessment, the Growth Area suffers from a high degree of car dependence. South Cambridgeshire DC notes that “road traffic in Cambridgeshire has grown at around 3% per year since 1991. This is higher than both the national and regional level, and is forecast to continue. Forecasts for traffic growth from 1996 to 2006 are 15.9% - 30.5% for South Cambridgeshire, and 16.6% - 32.5% for the county, against a national rate of 9.8% - 24.7%. The largest growth rates have been on those roads affected by the opening of the M1-A1 link, namely the M11 and A14. In South Cambridgeshire, the main problems of congestion are on these two trunk routes and also on the radial routes into Cambridge, where traffic demand is also increasing and results in peak-time queuing in South Cambridgeshire particularly during the a.m. peak, with associated air pollution affecting some of the necklace villages such as Histon/Impington and Fen Ditton.”⁶⁴

At the same time there are a range of policies proposed through the RSS, the Sub Regional Development Framework and proposed LDF policies to address the need for more sustainable transport and access arrangements. For instance the RSS proposes that the need and demand for travel will be reduced, public transport services to regional hubs will be improved and small scale local improvements designed to

⁶⁴ South Cambridgeshire Local Plan, 2004: p79.

encourage walking and cycling, improve public transport services and ease movement to and within local centres will be developed.⁶⁵

Improving access to jobs and services is a major policy theme for transport in the Cambridge sub-region. The RSS says the region will maintain, manage and improve a multi-modal strategic transport network which should in turn provide good public transport links to jobs and other facilities.⁶⁶ The sub-region has a programme of transport infrastructure improvements that are needed to deliver its economic strategy. Cambridgeshire Horizons notes some key pieces of infrastructure that needed to be funded in a timely way if development is not to be delayed. Among these are the A14 upgrading, including A428 'dualling'; the Cambridgeshire Guided Busway; railway station and interchange at Chesterton Sidings; various transport interchanges and bus priorities; and road links and access to new developments.⁶⁷

Despite its lack of fit with sustainable communities principles, increased trunk road capacity such as to the A14 is seen as critical to support new development. This view is shared by a number of interviewees and the reasoning behind this is a (pragmatic) assumption that most of those who go to live in new developments round Cambridge will need to be able to access jobs and services by car. As one local interviewee explains "The biggest drag on the ability to deliver is the trunk road network and its capacity. The trunk road network is a main problem in delivering sustainable communities. The proposed upgrade of the A14 as a major national artery (interregional traffic) keeps slipping. Currently it's programmed for 2011-2015. We need it before then or we will struggle to deliver the housing numbers". Another says that cash for infrastructure is a key issue there is concern about. "If major infrastructure doesn't come on in a timely way it will delay development. The A14 for example is a terrible road. There is a question about how much of Northstowe can happen without that being done".

Other regional interviewees express concern about delays in funding public transport infrastructure. One says that, in relation to travel and transport, the government has been slow in providing funding to unlock the scale of growth. It is argued that there is still a long way to go in modal shift and congestion management and the sub-region needs demand reducing mechanisms. Meanwhile, it takes a long time to get public transport schemes through the system such as the guided busway from Addenbrooke to Huntingdon". Work on the Guided Busway which runs along a disused railway line from St Ives to the Cambridge Science Park (stopping at Northstowe among other places) is expected to start in January 2007 and will take nearly two years to complete, with the first bus services running on the Busway in late 2008.⁶⁸

Proposals for walking, cycling and public transport facilities have clearly not always been funded and happened in tandem with housing developments as the example of

⁶⁵ Regional Spatial Strategy, East of England, 2004: p26.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ http://www.cambridgeshirehorizons.co.uk/programme_det.asp

⁶⁸ <http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/NR/exeres/722D5285-E832-42E4-9076-442E12C67E09.htm>

the settlement of Cambourne makes clear. Very poor or nonexistent public transport facilities have resulted in high levels of car dependency in order to access distant jobs, services and facilities. For Northstowe by contrast there is a cycling, walking and public transport route network planned as well as the guided busway to link with key locations in the sub-region.

The spatial strategy for Cambridge's future is predicated on substantial mode shift but data to quantify this is difficult to find. One direct comment comes from a regional interviewee who says that "Hopefully the guided busway will sugar the pill on Northstowe but even with the best modal split projected, it is expected there will only be 15% of all trips taken by bus". Where these figures are derived from was not explained, however if they are accurate the point is that the Busway will still be a minor travel mode (at 15%) with the implication that a much larger percentage of trips will be taken by car, so that Northstowe may not rate particularly well in mode shifting terms.

South Cambridgeshire DC meanwhile says that in its Local Plan it is working within the Cambridgeshire Local Transport Plan in trying to encourage modal shift⁶⁹ but provides no projections for bus/train/cycling/walking share. The Local Transport Plan prepared by Cambridgeshire County Council says for the future it will support "ambitious targets for public transport and for people cycling in Cambridge, coupled with the extension of schemes such as the Cambridge Core Traffic Scheme to discourage unnecessary car journeys and encourage walking and cycling and public transport use"⁷⁰ but has no specific mode shift targets.

Meanwhile, policy in line with sustainable communities policies seeks to shorten commuting distances, but regional and local interviewees are not convinced that car dependent commuting is necessarily going to be seriously challenged by planned new developments despite excellent strategic frameworks focused on sustainable development and more sustainable transport arrangements. The comments made about Northstowe above are one example. Another interviewee notes that there is still a lot of housing being built around market towns (on sites approved through the old system) which will mean further commuting. Another argument is that some proposals are at real risk they will become commuter places for London. "This is a concern. However, we can plan to make them as well located and well connected as possible. Settlements will go through a cycle. The SCP sets the right conditions as does the Cambs Strategy and the LDF for South Cambs".

In principle, according to regional, sub regional and local policies, there should be good public transport links to jobs and other facilities. One regional interviewee says that mixed use and mixed tenure regionally is very much at the heart of planning. Proposals for new development are thought to be very much more integrated in terms of tenures, but also in terms of links to jobs and retail services because there has been better master planning in the last 3-4 years. However, in the light of the discussion above it would be wise not to be too sanguine in this area.

⁶⁹ South Cambridgeshire Local Plan, 2004: p.80.

⁷⁰ Cambridgeshire Local Transport Plan, 2006-2011, p.18.

Home Zones were being planned for the new town at the 'tertiary' level of the street hierarchy. As the Northstowe Strategic Design Statement explains⁷¹: "At this level of street typology there is the potential to integrate Home Zone style streets which will promote pedestrian-priority and accessibility". It is argued in this document that "'Home Zone' principles further reduce the impact of the private car by promoting pedestrian and cyclist access on an equal footing to that of motorised vehicles. Home Zone principles allow localised traffic access to homes whilst allowing pedestrians and residents to share and dominate the space through the introduction of deliberate obstacles to traffic movement".⁷² However, we understand from a regional interviewee that the existing master plan for Northstowe is being reviewed and new master planners have been engaged so it is not clear whether this approach will be retained.

Although we were not able to discover the average parking provision per dwelling at Northstowe, parking standards for new housing at Northstowe also represent the most sustainable *approach* being employed in the Cambridgeshire Sub Region. Policies in the Area Action Plan suggest that "secure cycle parking will be provided in accordance with the minimum standards and car parking in accordance with the Development Control Policies DPD to reduce over-reliance on the car and to promote more sustainable forms of transport".⁷³ Meanwhile "car pooling and shared use of car parking facilities will be encouraged, particularly on mixed-use sites, to minimise the amount of land given over to car parking. This must be explored through the Transport Assessment and Travel Plan".⁷⁴

It seems most unlikely that Cambourne would have been approved under present interim planning policies or those currently in preparation for the forthcoming Local Development Framework for South Cambs as it fails in a variety of sustainability fronts that are now embedded in policy through the RSS and the LDF and specific master planning documents for new developments. Areas of failure would include in relation to provision of too low housing densities, insufficient housing mix, lack of transit orientation, lack of a walkable catchment for a good range of local services and facilities and lack of sufficiently green infrastructure for water, energy and waste.

Thriving

There are well developed proposals for job creation close to planned new development areas. The proposed spatial interconnection of housing and jobs fits the overall vision for Cambridge and environs. The Cambridge sub-region is a critical centre for economic growth and the recent greenbelt review⁷⁵ was intended to help meet land requirements

⁷¹ Northstowe Strategic Design Statement,
<http://egov.scambs.gov.uk/northstowe/readdoc.php?docid=82&chapter=4>

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ <http://scambs.jdi-consult.net/ldf/readdoc.php?docid=91&chapter=5&docitemid=9129#9129>

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Held in 2003.

for the sub-region's economy and housing. Broadly, the intention is to avoid economic overheating and associated commuting/congestion and rather to ensure that new or refurbished housing has easy access to centres of employment, and there are jobs close to these areas within for instance high technology clusters.⁷⁶ The RSS review found however that "the idea of a jobs led strategy is largely illusory and the limits to 'sound science [data on which such claims are based] begin to be apparent".⁷⁷

Specific development proposals for new settlements and urban extensions have excellent jobs policies as part of the overall approach. At Northstowe for example it is argued in the Northstowe Area Action Plan that the town will promote the Cambridge Sub-Region as a leader in technological innovation and be built with appropriate employment⁷⁸ within an overall spatial framework of mixed use areas and vibrant town centres. However, looking a little more deeply, it appears that employment provision has a rather a complex balancing act to play with the need to provide substantially more housing. The Action Plan for Northstowe suggests its must provide "Sufficient local employment to create a balanced community rather than a dormitory, but which ensures that the current lack of housing close to Cambridge is also addressed". Further, the employment must reinforce regional economic strengths: "With an appropriate mix of jobs whilst providing for the continuing needs of the high technology research and development industry".⁷⁹

Well served

The policy aspiration through a range of strategic documents is for proposals for new facilities to be funded and happen in tandem with housing development, allowing good access to local services. For Northstowe the Area Action Plan speaks of "A town centre which meets most of the needs of its residents and those of nearby villages for shopping, leisure and entertainment on a scale and with the variety of facilities appropriate to a market town, with landmarks (both built and natural) and other points of interest, including public art, to create a legible sense of place".⁸⁰

Funding for services and facilities is to be met through planning obligations, (Section 106) as well as regional delivery bodies and central government. For example major pieces of transport planning infrastructure tend to be funded nationally, such as the proposed A14 upgrades and the guided busway. This latter scheme will cost a total of £116.2m to build and Government will pay £92.5m towards that cost. The rest of the funding will come from developers in the area who are building new houses.⁸¹

⁷⁶ East of England Regional Spatial Strategy, 2004: p.86

⁷⁷ East of England Plan Panel Report, p.4.

⁷⁸ Northstowe Area Action Plan, <http://scambs.jdi-consult.net/ldf/readdoc.php?docid=91&chapter=3&docelemid=8702#8702>

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ <http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/NR/exeres/DD6F2CFD-0AC7-4CB7-9E16-2F77953832CE.htm>

The system for ensuring timely infrastructure provision appears to be becoming increasingly sophisticated. For Northstowe (and the other planned urban settlements and extensions) the advent of Cambridgeshire Horizons as a delivery vehicle set up by planning authorities and service and infrastructure providers has been central. Cambridgeshire Horizons is meant to ensure that “sub-regional infrastructure is provided when it is needed, that appropriate levels of funding are secured from the new development and that a consistent approach is taken to securing contributions from individual developments to the service, facilities and infrastructure that will be provided at each development”.⁸²

Cambridgeshire Horizons also explains that it is developing a planning obligation strategy for sub-regional infrastructure and this will be incorporated into the planning obligation and conditions strategy for Northstowe”. However, according to one regional interviewee, a weakness in terms of creating community, is perceived as the way funds for facilities come in after housing is built. Another regional interviewee says that the sheer complexity around Section 106 agreements is something they struggle with. “For Northstowe it will be a massively complicated document, trying to anticipate everything in one legal agreement that has to be robust for a 20 year period. How do you make sure you get reasonable contributions from developers? How do you ensure timely provision of infrastructure? Add in the huge complexity of the new planning system and it’s all pretty cumbersome”.

The main issue in relation to areas being well served appears to be the timely and adequate provision of infrastructure. Although the system appears to be getting more sophisticated through the use of delivery vehicles which connect up providers and other partners, facilities that are funded out of Section 106 agreements as planning obligations will not necessarily be delivered until after housing is built, a situation which is hardly ideal.

⁸² <http://www.cambridgeshirehorizons.co.uk/>

Conclusions

Strengths

A number of important areas appear to be working well.

Overall the proposals for *future* development are very much in line with the Sustainable Communities Plan or more broadly with sustainable communities policy. They place a heavy emphasis on designing and building much more sustainably than in the past. Sustainable development thinking permeates regional, sub-regional and local level policies and strategies. Stakeholders point out that much of this agenda was already embedded in the 2003 Structure Plan, so the SCP did not require much change of development direction.

In relation to current (and more so for future) development the sub region appears to be doing a reasonable job at protecting its countryside and green belt areas from inappropriate development. Proposals for new green infrastructure to compliment development appear well thought through in biodiversity, flood mitigation and amenity and access terms.

A number of excellent action plans and master planning exercises have been developed for key urban extensions and new towns, based on sustainable urban form models within the compact city tradition that are sometimes in this context described as 'urban villages'. If the current frameworks are followed, these should produce compact, medium density, transport oriented (to some extent), self contained (to some extent), places focused on town and village centres that will in some case be exemplar projects in sustainable development terms.

The level of consultation and engagement appears good for newer developments, with detailed statements of community and stakeholder engagement process and outcomes (at Northstowe for example). Some of the engagement and consultative work is well documented on key websites (South Cambs DC, Cambridgeshire Horizons) which provide details of forms of engagement/consultation that have been carried out and a wealth of information about progress in key areas.

The delivery body for the Cambridgeshire subregion, Cambridgeshire Horizons appears well structured and clear about its objectives. It has only been in operation for 2 years (it is currently being evaluated by DCLG although details of the coverage of the evaluation and results are not yet available) but has undertaken a great deal of planning and development work at strategic level that is fundamental to successful delivery in future.

The Cambridgeshire sub region appears to be likely to meet its housing targets under the SCP through development of urban extensions and new towns including

Northstowe. It is rightly using development to push a wider sustainability agenda in line with the Sustainable Communities Plan.

There are therefore examples of good practice that might be recommended to other Growth Areas in terms of policy development and content such as the South Cambs LDF, delivery structures such as Cambridgeshire Horizons, public transport provision such as Cambridgeshire Guided Busway, community engagement such as for the development of Northstowe, and (relatively) sustainable spatial design, again such as Northstowe.

Areas of concern

There are also a number of areas of concern, derived from the data, interviews and our own analysis.

A number of the issues raised relate to development that was built, or was in the pipeline before the 2003 Structure Plan and the advent of the Sustainable Communities Plan and related policy. The sub region is still building developments that reflect earlier, far less sustainable approaches, reflected in planning approvals that would not be granted today. Among these are housing being built on sites around market towns based on previous approvals, a dispersed pattern of small scale housing developments at a distance from Cambridge previously approved, out of town business parks also already approved, and new settlements - in particular Cambourne - that are not sufficiently based on sustainable design principles as explained in the text above.

The assessment found a fair amount of negative comment about the quality of the architecture, public realm and sense of place in recent development. This suggests more attention is needed to build on existing local character and identity and create new places that match existing quality. This should in turn reinforce local sense of place, identity and thus community cohesion.

There is therefore at least in the short to medium term the appearance of a substantial gap between aspirations in current policy and the actual performance on the ground. This is most definitely not a result of the Sustainable Communities Plan but largely an effect of previous planning and development practices. However, great care will be needed to ensure that the SCP aspirations for sustainable compact urban towns and neighbourhoods, which as yet remain in the abstract policy domain, do result in equally well-designed and functioning places in reality.

Turning to proposals for the future, these largely reflect the thrust of the Sustainable Communities Plan but there are still aspects which cause some concern. One of these is around densities which seem to have been set relatively low, generally averaging less than 50dph. It at least begs the question of whether a better yield could be achieved in certain places if not uniformly, and the use of land be more efficient and thus sustainable than is currently proposed up to 2021.

Another issue is around the proportion of affordable housing. There is an argument that 'too much' affordable housing will unbalance communities and/or prove too expensive for developers to include at required levels. It may well be that public and private tenures are not sufficiently finely mixed in developments like Cambourne but this should not be taken as an argument to simply provide less affordable housing. We see a risk that the affordable housing component of new developments may be watered down in the light of arguments about market viability and community balance.

There appears to be a risk that best practice in sustainable energy arrangements will not be implemented at developments like Northstowe which should have CHP or some kind of district heating scheme. It would be a huge missed opportunity if best practice in energy terms were not delivered at key new developments.

Interviewees point to a tendency by developers to stick with minimum standards where not required through regulation to do otherwise. For energy and a number of other best practice areas there appear good arguments for including requirements in regulations so that developers must include the most sustainable forms of provision in their development proposals.

Interviewees also note that the complexity and 'one off' nature of the Section 106 system, especially in relation to major developments that will be rolled out over many years, makes it a rather cumbersome and crude mechanism for providing crucial community facilities. We do not have an answer to this problem but raise it as an issue that is impacting on the delivery of optimum sustainability in new developments.

The viability of building such developments is also challenged by likely delays in providing social and transport infrastructure in a timely way, and the balance between car based and other modes in these proposed improvements. A number of stakeholders point out that government needs to make a stronger commitment to funding major infrastructure in good time for development to take place. That in turn will affect the sub region's capacity to meet its housing targets. At the same time it seems perverse to be arguing for road capacity increases (such as for the A14 widely believed to be of too low a standard in terms of capacity and quality to adequately serve new developments) when more sustainable modes can be seen to be receiving too little attention.

There is the related problem of achieving the necessary degree of modal shift. Although the proposed urban design of new developments puts substantial stress on increasing local employment and services, reducing the need to travel, and making walking and cycling more attractive options, most interviewees expect commuting to continue to grow as it is doing currently. This suggests even more radical approaches need to be considered in future as the RSS Inspector's report touched on (see discussion in the assessment).

Finally, as for the Barking assessment, much of the hard data about performance simply isn't yet available, as the bulk of what is planned has not been actually developed or evaluated. Nor have key frameworks such as the LDF for South Cambs

yet been adopted. We have referred to evidence where possible. However the analysis also relies on qualitative judgements such as the subjective views of interviewees and it should be read with this caveat in mind.



Appendices

1. People interviewed

Alan Dodgson, GO East

Jamie Merrick, Acting Director Sustainable Communities, EEDA

Graham Hughes, Director of Sustainable Infrastructure, Cambridgeshire County Council

Keith Miles, Manager Planning Policy Team, South Cambridgeshire District Council

Peter Stoddart, Cambridgeshire Horizons

Did not respond to interview invitation: Dr David Bard, Council Leader

2. Documents and other material reviewed

Affordability and Supply of Housing. House of Commons, ODPM Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions Committee, Third Report of Session 2005-06, Volume 1

Annual Monitoring Report, South Cambridgeshire District Council, December 2005

Balanced and Mixed Communities, A Good Practice Guide, Cambridgeshire Horizons

Cambridge Southern Fringe Area Action Plan

Community Cohesion and Housing: A Good Practice Guide, Chartered Institute of Housing/Housing Corporation, 2004

East of England Plan, Revision to the Draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the East of England, East of England Regional Assembly, December 2004

East of England Plan Panel Report

Housing: Building a Sustainable Future, House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee, First Report of Session 2004 -2005, Volume 1

Housing Market Renewal, Housing Best Practice Handbook, Audit Commission, 2005

Making it Happen, ODPM Progress Report on London and Growth Areas

Northstowe Area Action Plan, South Cambs District Council



Northstowe Strategic Design Statement, South Cambs District Council

Sustainable Communities: Homes for All. A Five Year Plan from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, ODPM, January 2005

Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future, ODPM, 2003

For details of web references, please see footnotes.