

REVIEWING AND REFINING THE CAMBRIDGESHIRE QUALITY CHARTER FOR GROWTH

Ten years after the launch of the innovative *Cambridgeshire Quality Charter for Growth*, and with one of the highest rates of house building in the UK, the time is ripe to review its impact.¹ Specifically the local authorities need to know how the Charter is influencing what is built and whether changes are needed in the way projects are assessed. Work is also required on a possible new theme of *Cohesion* or social inclusion, and to set in train methods for learning from the quality of what is built

The end product will be a short report so that the lessons can be used in new developments in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, and possibly elsewhere. This proposal therefore summarises the context, proposes a methodology and budget, and explains how the work would be undertaken to come up with a draft report and presentation in the Autumn.

Context and aims

Dr Nicholas Falk, who devised and produced the original Charter, with inputs from many others, was inspired by work he had done for CABI on making higher density housing work.² While advising on the best form of management arrangements for the new town of Northstowe, he realised a new form of learning was needed that went beyond lengthy design guides produced by experts.³

Recognising the time and resources wasted in conflicts over new housing, he came up with the idea of a 'charter' drawing on examples of good practice. The chance to test out the approach came when Cambridgeshire Horizons supported a programme of study tours aimed at 'looking and learning' from examples of good practice both in the South of England, and then in the Netherlands and Germany. Over a hundred people were involved in discussing the elements that went into the final draft.

The Charter was innovative in that:

- The themes were summarised in terms of five Cs: Connectivity, community, character and climate-proofing, with the cross-cutting theme of collaboration (or cash flow)
- The principles under each theme were drawn up with the help of a range of practitioners and debated at subsequent workshops where others were added
- The charter was published and illustrated with examples from the places we had visited together
- It was then adopted by some of the local authorities and developers engaged in building new settlements
- The charter is used by a Quality Panel set up by Cambridge City Council to consider applications for development with a range of experts on each of the themes, with over 20 members over the last few years.

¹ A Quality Charter for Growth in Cambridgeshire, Cambridge Horizons 2007 www.urbed.coop

² Better Neighbourhoods: making higher densities work, CABI 2005

³ Nicholas Falk and Marilyn Taylor, Growing Sustainable Communities: Northstowe management study, 2006 www.urbed.coop

The aims were summarised in the original leaflet as:

- **Communicating a shared vision** with local authorities exercising leadership in place-making
- **Working together over many years** with developers, ensuring that the principles in masterplans are implemented, and the public sector is playing its part in providing the social and physical infrastructure
- **Encouraging smarter growth** with the use of innovative forms of finance to secure better infrastructure early on
- **Building skills and capacity** through supporting efforts to learn together, and spread the lessons beyond Cambridgeshire.

Proposed methodology

While it is hard to assess the impact of the Charter without a proper evaluation of what has been built, to make the project as practical as possible within limited resources, we propose that the work is divided into three phases, each leading into the next.

Phase 1: assessing the process and its impact on cohesiveness

The first phase will include a mixture of interviews and a brief online survey, as well as a workshop on social cohesion in Cambridge. The work will be undertaken by Dr Nicholas Falk, founder of URBED and executive director of The URBED Trust, with inputs from Steve Platt, a founding partner of Cambridge Architectural Research.

- a. We will **interview** 6-10 people who were involved in the Charter process, and/or have worked on innovative projects. These may include not only local authority planners and councillors but also developers and their designers, perhaps focussing on projects in the Southern Fringe. This element will be led by Steve Platt of Cambridge Architectural Research (CAR) with support from Nicholas Falk. The interviews will include Peter Studdert, who played a key role, who will help suggest other people to interview.
- b. We will **survey** members of the Quality Panel, past and present, and supporting officers to get their views on the impact that has been made on the quality of what is being built, and ideas for any changes, including an extra theme on cohesiveness. This will be undertaken by URBED's Manchester office using a digital questionnaire, and we will have the support of Robin Nicholson, who chairs the Quality Panel in ensuring we get a good and honest response.
- c. We will **advise** on how greater *Cohesion* or social inclusion could be achieved in future developments, by considering the current principles in the light of published research and international best practice. The start will be research by URBED and the University of Westminster on *Managing Mixed Communities*.⁴ This report drew on an extensive literature review as well as a series of case studies in the UK and Europe.

We will also draw on a fresh set of ten international case studies on affordable housing we are undertaking for Shelter's Commission on the future of social

⁴ *Mixed Communities: good practice for management and service provision*, URBED and the University of Westminster for the Housing Corporation and English Partnerships, 2008

housing. Other recent reports, such as by the RSA Commission on Inclusive Growth, will be summarised as a concise working paper and possible principles will be discussed at a half-day workshop with officers and councillors in Cambridge in early September. This will be undertaken by Nicholas Falk with support from Jonah Rudlin and inputs from Steve Platt.

- d. Finally we will prepare a short **report** drawing together the results of this stage with a proposal for an amended Quality Charter. To make this most effective, we suggest the report is in the form of a presentation that can be shared with the different authorities and developers involved in future projects, along with an amended charter in Word, but not designed up.

Phase 2: assessing the products, and what has been achieved

The second phase, which could run alongside the first stage, would involve an independent **diagnostic visit** by members of the Academy of Urbanism following visits to projects on the Southern Fringe, Eddington (North West Cambridge) and Cambourne (which was undertaken before the Quality Charter was produced). This would enable an independent group of experts to meet up with resident associations and others to draw conclusions on how well new housing is meeting their range of needs, and what might be done differently. An attachment sets out how this can work, and examples can be provided if there is interest.

This would be a direct commission with the Academy of Urbanism, whose current Chair David Rudlin also leads URBED's office in Manchester, and who will ensure that an appropriate team is put together.

Phase 3: evaluating future developments

The third phase would suggest further **research** to be undertaken with the involvement of the Quality Panel to meet the need for further and ongoing research into the success of both the new housing and the neighbourhoods they form. This will involve proposals for a web-based survey to achieve an economic and reliable form of post-occupancy assessment, which might be tested out on some of those interviewed.

This element would be undertaken by Steve Platt, who has been a member of the Quality Panel from the start. It may also involve further discussions with the Department of Land Economy at the University of Cambridge, where relevant research has been undertaken by a number of Dr Nicky Morrison's post graduate students.

Budget and responsibilities

We have prepared a budget on the basis of the work set out above. Our normal day rates for this kind of work are £700 for Nicholas Falk and £500 for Stephen Platt and members of URBED's Manchester office. The project would be managed from London by Nicholas Falk and support staff will be charged at £300 per day. The contract would be with the URBED Trust, and therefore VAT would not need to be charged on the main amount, and will be included in the fees for CAR. Meeting room space for the workshops could be provided by CAR or take place at Council offices, so that expenses can be kept to a minimum.

