



Cambourne Enhanced: An altered streetscape

Higher densities are achieved by creating contiguous streetscenes and clustering buildings into "places" at the intersections of streets

From micro to macro



The resident

"We're not getting what we were sold" is resident Roger Hume's view of Cambourne Enhanced. Hume moved from Cambridge to Cambourne four

years ago, his choice driven, as so often, by location. "We were attracted by the ease of the commuting journey, the choice of homes and the concept of facilities like the health centre. Then when my wife got mugged in Cambridge that decided us," he says.

Hume says the scheme has failed to live up to its promise in other ways, too. He catalogues amenities, from sportsfields to shops, that are being delivered late. He complains that the 40-bed hotel has become a 120-bed one, and the proposed country foodstore has been replaced by a Morrisons supermarket. The village square, shown in the development consortium's illustrations hosting a thriving market, has not witnessed a single turnip, although the residents have tried to get permission for a farmers' market. As a result of such issues, Hume describes relations between residents and developers as "pretty fraught".

Now Hume is concerned that the extra homes will generate sprawl and overstretch roads and schools. He accepts that Cambourne has become a dormitory settlement. "A stream of taxis leave here for the station at seven o'clock in the morning," he says. But he blames the developers for marketing homes to Londoners. "It would have been better if it had been marketed in the local area," he says.



The development

The consortium's proposals will change not only the housing density, but the streets and landscaping of Cambourne. Homes are divided between

Lower and Great Cambourne, which are under construction, and Upper Cambourne, which is still unbuilt, and the target for most of the densification. Lower Cambourne is being developed at an average density of 12.5 units an acre, and Great Cambourne at about 13.3 units an acre. The average density of Upper Cambourne under Cambourne Enhanced's proposals is increased to 15 units an acre. All areas will have the same types of houses, which range from detached to three-storey apartment buildings.

Changes to highways design and landscaping will include such measures as making walking more attractive for pedestrians by increasing the number of connections between routes. The proposal has been undertaken with input from masterplanner Roger Evans Associates, transport consultant RPS Transport and planning consultant Wood Frampton.

Karl Kropf, a senior associate at Roger Evans Associates, says his firm has taken into account the "enormous amount of guidance that has come out since 1995", including PPGs 3, 6 and 13; Places, Streets and Movements; and the Urban Design Compendium. "But we're seeking to work with the original masterplan, to maintain what everyone sees as something positive."



The policy

The Cambridge area is a focus for residential development, through the London-Stansted-Cambridge-Peterborough housing growth corridor.

How the area will accommodate housing growth will be defined by the new regional planning guidance RPG14.

RPG14 combines the old RPG6 (covering East Anglia) and RPG9 (covering the South-east). The East of England Regional Assembly's map of the area is peppered with potential development activity; a growth area here, a regeneration area there. There is a lot going on there, or should be: the RPG14 territory contains parts of three growth areas: London-Stansted-Cambridge-Peterborough, South Midlands and the Thames Gateway.

RPG14 is still in the making because the government wants to increase housebuilding numbers in the London-Stansted-Cambridge-Peterborough growth area. The target in the first draft of RPG14 was 23,900 homes a year, but the government wants that figure increased by 900. The guidance is timetabled for publication in 2006.

► jobs in Cambridge or London.

After an audit of the scheme that took into account design, environmental and transport considerations, the developer is pressing to build 1559 more homes. "We were trying to achieve a number at the lower end of the PPG3 spectrum and thought it would be palatable," says David Chare, project director of Cambourne. The housebuilder consortium proposes to build most of the extra homes within the yet-to-be developed Upper Cambourne.

The density increase will be achieved not by building on open green space or by building higher, but by improved design, says Karl Kropf, senior associate with Roger Evans Associates, masterplanning consultant for Cambourne Enhanced. "The range and types of houses to achieve the increase have already been built in the village. But it is how they are put together that is changed under Cambourne Enhanced," he explains. "Design allows you to put homes more closely together if you work in streetscenes."

The consortium has attempted to win over Cambourne buyers with direct mail and exhibitions at local schools, but with little success. "Turn-out at the exhibitions has not been that spectacular, and the reception has been mixed," says Chare. "There are people who don't want one more than 3300 houses built here and others who are more philosophical. You don't hear about the silent majority; you tend to hear from the vocal minority." Chare is more surprised by the council's dismissal of the application. "We are following government guidance – but that's politics," he says.

The district council rejected the proposal because it feels a moral obligation to stand by its original decision. Cambourne residents believe that the developers are going against their word. There has been talk of taking the developers to court under the Property Misdescriptions Act, which makes it an offence for developers or estate agents to make misleading statements, and of picketing showhomes.

Roger Hume, who bought at Great Cambourne, says the community are not nimbys but are fearful that the vision of village life that the developers marketed to them is being diminished, and that Cambourne's three distinct areas will be turned into sprawl. "The developers don't refer to Cambourne as a village any more. They refer to it as a town now," says Hume.

The reality of living in a housing growth area is also starting to hit home. "There's a proposal for a 2500-home development for an airfield site next to Cambourne, a consortium wants to build an 8500-home settlement on the other side of the A428 and there's another proposal nearby. Development is joining villages up and swamping them," says Hume.

The consortium's Chare, however, maintains that intensification of Cambourne could help to prevent sprawl elsewhere. "This is a golden opportunity – it's a fantastic development, and densification here will take pressure off other areas. To have 1000 acres with 3000 homes on is a waste of land," he says. Planning inspector Dennis Bradley may concur with that view when he gives his verdict later this year, but that is not going to make building in the growth area any easier.



David Curry

Government wants councils to ensure all social housing achieves the Decent Homes standard by 2010, if necessary by transferring their housing stock. But it may not be that simple

THERE ARE FEW MORE ICONIC ISSUES FOR THE Labour Party than council housing. The word council house is engraved on many a Labour breast. Margaret Thatcher's right-to-buy programme was opposed so bitterly because it disposed of the very altar plate of the Labour temple. Labour councils resented their dethronement as social housing providers by housing associations. They objected even more to the Conservative transfer programme, only to find that the incoming Labour government not merely did nothing to stop it but actually set a target of 200,000 transfers a year. Now, near the end of Labour's second term in power, a last-gasp campaign is being launched to defend the traditional concept of the council house.

The chosen battleground is the programme to achieve the decent homes standard for all social housing by 2010. The government has given councils until July of next year to set out how the decent homes standard will be achieved.

Government argues that tenants in transferred organisations have the highest levels of satisfaction

Unless the council is able to finance the programme out of its own resources it has to choose between three options:

- Transfer to a new owner (Large Scale Voluntary Transfer, or LSVT)
- Transfer to a council-owned but independently managed company (the arm's length management organisation, or ALMO)
- Transfer under a private finance initiative package, usually under a 30-year contract.

The one thing that the government expressly rules out is the so-called "Fourth Way" – government funding of councils to bring their stock up to the necessary standards while councils retain ownership and management. John Prescott told the House of Commons "the fourth option they talk about is not an option."

A pamphlet by Labour rebel Jane Sillett entitled *Housing: the Right to Choose* claims that funding councils to carry out the work would be cheaper than transfers. Other Labour MPs are pressing for investment allowances – an idea floated in a paper two years ago within the ODPM. Prescott now says the borrowing regime

for councils means the idea has no future.

Sillett's pamphlet also asks what happens to housing in areas where tenants reject all the options set out by government. The government's answer is a straightforward one: hard bloody luck. If tenants say no then the tenants will have to live with the consequences.

But the government has got dilemmas of its own. There are still more than 2.5 million council homes, and it needs to maintain the momentum of the transfer programme. The problem is that over recent years the ALMO option has outstripped the classic LSVT transfer because councils have preferred to retain ownership of the stock. There are 400,000 homes on the ALMO programme against half that number on the transfer schedule. The problem for the government is that while transfers do not score against public debt, ALMOs do because the funding takes the form of borrowing approvals.

The government has acted to make transfers more attractive by paying off overhanging debt (where the capital receipt does not meet the full debt); allowing partial transfers; and, most recently, making £180m available to bridge the gap where income from rents

does not meet the cost of renewal. Objectively, an LSVT transfer is still the "best buy." There is no limit on the investment which a receiving owner can make, while ALMO funding is designed to meet the decent homes standard and no more. No one expects PFI to play more than a marginal role in the programme. The government argues that tenants in transferred organisations have the highest levels of satisfaction and the highest involvement in management of the estates.

The government needs to recover from the failure of the Birmingham whole-stock transfer of more than 80,000 homes, vetoed in a tenant ballot. A pattern is emerging of estate-by-estate transfers using a mixture of classic and ALMO transfers with occasional PFI deals permitting more involvement of tenants in the process.

It is just worth remembering that before a single "Barker home" opens its doors 1 million council houses will have transferred to the private sector. Now that's a pretty iconic figure.

David Curry is MP for Skipton and Ripon