

Centre for Science and Policy

Third Local Government Forum

Report of the Policy Workshop on:

Facilitating knowledge exchange between local government and the University of Cambridge

5 July 2016
Pitt Building, Cambridge

Summary

This policy workshop was convened to discuss how research carried out by academics at the University of Cambridge could help policy makers in local government. The workshop was funded by the ESRC IAA at Cambridge.

Discussions focused on a number of key questions including:

- National vs local decision-making in housing (in the context of devolution of powers to some localities in England)
- What additional powers (if any) do local policy professionals think they need?
- What research is currently being undertaken at Cambridge? What is the best way to communicate this?
- What are the key housing/planning issues that need further research?
- What types of research would local government like to see carried out?
- What can academia learn from local government?
- How can the CSaP Policy Fellowship better serve the needs of local government?

Agenda

- 16:00 Arrival and tea
- 16:10 Welcome & Introductions
- 16:20 Opening statements:
 - Mark Reeve, Chairman, Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough
 - Michael Oxley, Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research
- 16:50 Chaired Discussion
- 18:30 Networking & drinks
- 19:30 Close

Attendees

- **Dr Robert Doubleday** (Chair), Executive Director, Centre for Science and Policy
- **Quentin Baker**, Cambridgeshire County Council
- **Dame Kate Barker**, Chair of Advisory Board, Centre for Business Research (CBR), University of Cambridge
- **Liz Bisset**, Director of Customer and Community Services, Cambridge City Council
- **Nicola Buckley**, Associate Director, Centre for Science and Policy
- **Matthew Bullock**, Master, St Edmunds College, Cambridge
- **Dr Gemma Burgess**, Senior Research Associate, Department of Land Economy, University of Cambridge
- **Alan Carter**, Head of Strategic Housing, Cambridge City Council
- **Rob Carter**, CEO, RG Carter Construction
- **Martin Clark**, Director, Allia
- **Dr Andy Cosh**, Assistant Director, Centre for Business Research, University of Cambridge
- **Neil Darwin**, Chief Executive, Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough
- **Emma Fletcher**, Director, Hill Group
- **Claire Flowers**, Project Manager, Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough
- **Marla Fuchs**, ESRC IAA Coordinator, Research Strategy Office, University of Cambridge
- **Ben Furr**, Partner, Calford Seaden
- **Philip Guildford**, Director of Research and Finance, Department of Engineering, University of Cambridge
- **Dr Ying Jin**, Senior Lecturer, Department of Architecture, University of Cambridge
- **Stephen Kelly**, Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development, South Cambridgeshire District Council
- **Anne-Cécile Larribau-Smith**, Local Political Affairs Manager, Office of External Affairs and Communications, University of Cambridge
- **Andrew Matthews**, Partner, Proctor and Matthews Architects
- **Karen Mayhew**, CEO, Havebury
- **Dr Nicky Morrison**, Lecturer, Department of Land Economy, University of Cambridge
- **Kathryn Muir** (Note-taker), Research Assistant, Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research
- **Will Nichols**, Partner, Strutt and Parker
- **Professor Michael Oxley**, Director, Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research
- **Dr Deborah Pullen**, Group Research Director, BRE
- **Dr Tony Raven**, Chief Executive, Cambridge Enterprise, University of Cambridge
- **Mark Reeve**, Chairman, Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough
- **Michael Soper**, Research & Performance Team Manager, Cambridgeshire County Council
- **James Stevens**, House Builders Federation
- **Professor Peter Tyler**, University Lecturer, Department of Land Economy, University of Cambridge
- **Judi Wilson**, Regional Framework Manager, Wilmott Partnership Homes Ltd

Introductory presentations

The roundtable began with presentations from Mark Reeve, Chairman, Greater Cambridge, Greater Peterborough Local Enterprise Partnership (GCGP LEP) and Michael Oxley, Director, Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research (CCHPR).

Mark Reeve outlined that housing was not originally on the agenda for LEPs but now they are being asked to play an increasing role in housing policy.

Mark stressed the importance of housing delivery as part of the devolution deal for the Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough area, with £170 million set aside for affordable housing. In this area, 4700 homes are year are being produced and 7400 are needed. £2.3 billion of housing in this area is planned for the near future

Mark listed key questions such as how transport links could better connect the Fenland area to Cambridge; and how to address an apparent skills gap – the building sector lost many jobs in the economic downturn after the global financial crisis and credit crunch. These jobs and the skilled people to do them need to be replaced. Overall, Mark said there was a need for high-level thinking to address the transport and skills questions.

Michael Oxley then gave a presentation on the work of the **Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research (CCHPR)**. He highlighted a current bid to host a National Evidence Centre on UK Housing, to be funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and Joseph Rowntree Foundation. CCHPR would lead the National Housing Evidence Centre's stakeholder engagement, communications and dissemination work. Michael and his colleagues are keen to engage with the kinds of stakeholders represented at this roundtable.

Michael also made general points on the role that academic research can play in housing. He drew attention to the way research can produce evidence – helping policy development move from opinion to evidence. Academic research can also help generate new ideas and different ways of thinking about big problems. Finally, when new ideas have been generated, academics can help investigate relevant background context, such as looking internationally for comparable programmes.

Discussion

Several speakers highlighted that the Cambridge area has had some success in its housing development, one participant noting that “We have one of the highest housing growths in the country so the planning system must be doing something right”.

The question was asked whether the target for affordable housing set out in the Cambridge Futures plan was met, and the answer provided was that it has been met through the North-West Cambridge development, but not in other areas.

Need for a regional plan

The need for a regional plan was articulated, and the need for long-term thinking to prepare the landscape for 30-50 years. It was discussed that the LEP may play a role in this, as a strategic facilitator.

The success of house building over 10-20 years can change the economic geography of a region so a regional plan needs to be tied into spatial planning.

It is important to understand the different needs different households have - the needs of existing and potential city residents. There are issues of economic development and social justice in understanding the market and housing needs.

There was discussion about methods for generating consensus about how to house the next generation. There is a need to understand the tenure mix that's viable –and how to ensure new schemes are delivered to meet those needs. The need for housing zones which bring together housing, infrastructure and jobs was expressed.

Issues:

- The growth of housing in Cambridge doesn't keep up with demand. Factors influencing this include the 'stickiness' of residence in Cambridge. The city has social networks, education, a very attractive image and so on. But actually less than a third of the city is really the most popular to live in (and this is where it's most difficult to build).
- There are different types of urban areas in the region. Findings were reported that nationally about 20% of people are happy to have a truly urban way of living, mostly in London. In Cambridge a very small percentage are looking for this. People in this area express preferences for peace and quiet, even though they live in a city.
- Cambridgeshire as a whole is a very rural area – so the question was asked how growth in existing rural communities will meet people's needs? It will be important to deliver in Peterborough, Fenland etc. and not just Cambridge.
- The issue of failing to demolish much existing housing stock was discussed. As a country, there is a tendency to "hang onto every house" – which can create problems.
- It was argued that the Cambridge area needs to advocate more to central government about finance to support economic development through housing and infrastructure investment. A financing bond could be created with central government trusting bodies at regional and local level to invest this.

Devolution as opportunity

The devolution context was discussed, which has encouraged collaboration among local authorities in the area. The example of Manchester was cited as an example of the benefits of strong civic leadership.

Links between housing and transport

The close link between housing issues and transport issues in this area was discussed.

The need for investment in major infrastructure and particularly rail in this area was raised.

Transport issues contribute to a North-South divide in Cambridgeshire, with a lack of connectivity. Cambridge is a global city and it was argued that it needs major investment into infrastructure (like Crossrail in London). Devolution may help enable development in this area.

It was questioned whether enough advantage was being taken from existing transport networks, for example, building along the Cambridge rail line which goes through Shepreth and other villages on the way to Hitchin.

Links between housing and employment

Cambridge Ahead and the Department of Land Economy are carrying out research among businesses in the city on patterns of employment growth and the effect on housing and transport. It was recommended for future research that public sector employers should be included as well as private.

Migration

Internal and external migration drives housing growth. Research into migration within the UK is needed in order to accurately plan.

The planning system

As there is a lot of variation from one locality to another in how many houses are built, it was suggested that there could be more research into the reasons for these underlying differences. Factors to be investigated might include the effects of the planning system, capacity among house builders, the individual drive of some key players, and fundamental restraints on land supply.

For effective planning, there is a fundamental need to define and make the place you're going to have. There is also the need for clarity and confidence about infrastructure investment.

Local authorities need to set out the vision for a clear, coherent spatial strategy. It is also important to get community members involved at this stage.

Construction

Housing delivery is dependent on the private sector. Under the devolution agreement £170 million is set aside for affordable housing – but how will this be achieved?

It is concerning that workers are still leaving the construction trade altogether – with numbers not yet recovered since before recession. The construction trade is first hit in recession and lost a huge number of jobs.

There may be a growth in smaller self-build/custom-build models.

New methods of construction

New methods of construction were discussed including modular building. The benefits include addressing the skills problem. Potential constraints are that this method can be more expensive unless volumes can be increased. It was questioned whether developments then potentially end up with a more standard product. Perspectives were shared from the Engineering Department at the University that modern methods of construction need not lead to boring buildings, and the price will go down. Two centres at Cambridge were mentioned: the Centre for Advanced Construction and the

Centre for Smart Infrastructure and Construction. In the future it will be possible to monitor how buildings are performing through sensors and make timely interventions into maintenance and renewal. Investors will be able to understand and monitor buildings better through their life-time, thus better protecting their assets.

Judi Wilson from Wilmott Partnership Homes offered to organise a visit for any interested participants to off-site manufacturers they are talking with at the moment.

Private sector, social housing and housing association

Another potential area of research was discussed regarding the amount of housing it can be expected will be built by the private sector as compared with how much more needs to be delivered in social housing output.

The question of how to empower and help housing associations and get them involved from the beginning of developments was discussed.

The Cambridge K1 – Cambridge Co-housing project example was described as an interesting example.

Pace of building

The pace of building is still strongly dependent on private sector decision-making. Housing developers build and release houses at the rate they think there is market demand for them.

Size of sites

There is a tendency for local authorities to have 'stodgy' land supplies – this is in response to the political problem that people often don't like housing development in their areas. This leads to big developments on certain sites, when potentially a better approach is an assortment of sites of different sizes in different areas across local authorities.

Alconbury Weald is an example of a large site including an enterprise zone and it has taken 5 years to develop houses there. Each large site is so different.

There are significant infrastructure needs for large sites, including investment in new facilities like schools. Smaller sites are actually more of a challenge for local councils, as new residents then impact upon existing infrastructure.

Investment frameworks for big infrastructure projects e.g. transport were discussed and it was asked why they can fail to gain government investment. The point was made that it can be very difficult to predict likely returns on investment.

Civic engagement

Some Cambridge residents' criticism of City Deal proposals were mentioned. Transport plans may mean road widening in some areas, as well as housing development. There is likely to be a growing conflict between people who live in Cambridge and those who want to travel into Cambridge for work.

Increased urbanisation is in progress in Cambridge so there needs to be an honest dialogue about that. For civic engagement, it was suggested that it would be increasingly important to involve people early in deliberation and decision making about how to address the area's challenges.

The issue of how younger people will be able to afford homes in future was suggested as an issue for community engagement.

There are two forums running in the North and South of Cambridge for people to raise issues which have proved very useful environments to raise and discuss issues people have.

Architects can make a contribution to discussions with local communities. People tend not to like the idea of very standard and anonymous housing developments in their area. Architects can help make suggestions about how to make housing specific to certain communities and areas and involve residents in these conversations.

Role of research, and its interface with policy and practice

There was general discussion about new ways of doing things and new investment models. For example, if new transport infrastructure e.g. railway lines/ stations are built, what is the model for raising a 'stamp duty' on housing developments built as a result of that transport development.

The importance of developing longer-term visions and ways of working was discussed, which could include partners from industry, academia, local authorities and beyond. The constraints on local politicians were discussed, with local members elected for 4-year periods. If they know that the building of even a small amount of housing in particular villages will be received negatively, there is political pressure to oppose. Industry, local authorities and researchers need to work with key stakeholders to help develop longer-term thinking.

There is an opportunity to make the case that the Cambridge economy is important to the national economy, and to link Cambridge's housing and transport needs to the economic growth argument in discussion with central Government.

Academic research can inform policy and practice by providing evidence, generating new ideas and different ways of thinking about big problems, and carrying out international comparisons.

The [Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research](#) is very keen to engage with all attendees and talk about ideas for future research.