



South
Cambridgeshire
District Council

Arbury Park



October 2008

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www.scambs.gov.uk

The scrutiny and overview committee (SOC) acts as a local watchdog for the people of South Cambridgeshire, looking at how to improve local services, whether or not they are provided by the Council. This work is designed to complement the work done by the council's cabinet. It provides a forum for non-cabinet councillors to use their knowledge and skills to benefit residents.

The committee can also challenge decisions made by cabinet members, or help them to develop new policies. This work demonstrates the council's commitment to openness and accountability.

SOC often sets up small task and finish groups to look at an issue in depth. These groups are usually cross-party and often involve other participants, such as residents or representatives of partner organisations.

In January 2008, SOC set up a small task and finish group to the development of Arbury Park, now Orchard Park, and to recommend learning points for use in the ongoing development and at future developments on the Cambridge fringes and at Northstowe.

The following councillors made up the task and finish group:

Cllrs Jonathan Chatfield,

Neil Davies, Roger Hall,

Liz Heazell,

Tony Orgee,

Mike Mason; and Impington parish councillor Denis Payne.

The relevant cabinet members were copied on all documentation.

In January 2008 the Scrutiny and Overview Committee (SOC) held one of its regular 'off-site' meetings near to a new housing development at Arbury Park on the northern fringe of Cambridge. Many of the new residents attended and told the committee about several issues of concern.

SOC set up a task and finish group to examine these issues and to recommend learning points for use in the ongoing development and at future developments on the Cambridge fringes and at Northstowe.

The group included the chairman of Impington Parish Council, within whose boundary the development sat.

In the following six months the group met seventeen times and interviewed developers, builders, social landlords, health partners, a representative of the residents' association and officers and councillors from the City, County and District councils. They also visited Huntingdonshire District Council to compare experiences on new developments there.

The review identified many achievements of which to be proud: an excellent, wide ranging Section 106 (planning gain) settlement; a rapid build of affordable housing, more than anywhere in the region; tireless and dedicated support from Impington Parish Council, far more than they or anyone could have predicted, and a majority of satisfied residents.

The review also found some learning points for future developments as follows:

Affordable Housing – the need for registered social landlords to work in a consortium from the outset. This worked well at Arbury Park.

Building site environment – the need for developers to register on a considerate constructors scheme, and the need for planting street trees at an early stage.

Communication – the need for a single point of contact for all stakeholders to raise and resolve concerns.

Community Development – the need for a community development plan to give early priority to bringing residents together in small and larger numbers until networks are self-sustaining. There were also several recommendations for improving the information pack for new residents.

Design Guide - the need for timely agreement of a Design Guide for a phased development



Environmental Health – the need for good communication, consultation and expert advice regarding noise issues

Foul and Surface Water

Drainage – the need for SCDC officers to help Anglian Water with early notification of any concerns regarding construction of foul and surface water drainage systems

Governance – the need for to fund parish councils supporting large new developments and settle governance arrangements as early as possible

Health Facilities – the need for surgeries to plan for incoming residents as soon as a large development begins.

Maps and Road Nameplates

- the need for making road nameplates and road maps available for the first residents of a new development.



Phased construction - the need to phase the building work, starting at one or two points and building outwards, with commercial and community facilities funded in the first phase, and later reimbursed via the S106 agreement.

Planning service – the need for SCDC to develop a stronger reputation for rejecting unacceptable proposals without negotiation

Primary School – the need for

- a central location with safe walking access from all directions
- available places as soon as the first residents move in
- building design to fit the location and with adequate outdoor space
- phased admissions to accommodate all in-catchment pupils as they arrive.



SI06 Agreement - the need to ensure compliance with agreed trigger points

Urban Design and Enforcement - the need for the specific skills of an urban designer to oversee design quality and support enforcement



Utilities – the need for utilities providers to be consulted at the strategic planning stage regarding feasibility and timescales.

A final issue was the delay in some residents moving in, caused by some buildings being wrongly located. Such errors are not unusual on a large development and can be easily accommodated; but at Arbury Park the buildings encroached on land intended for the new cross-county guided busway, which was far more difficult to resolve.

Achievements during the review

Inevitably the review focussed on issues which were then resolved such as chasing overdue Section 106 targets and official road signs.

The review identified the need for an officer and Member or portfolio holder with responsibility for new communities. From May 2008 the Cabinet was restructured to create a portfolio for New Communities. Additionally, an officer restructure brought together planning, community development and economic development officers, headed by a corporate manager for new communities.

The new residents' welcome pack was improved in content and timeliness.

The review provided a forum to resolve two families' applications for primary school places and to agree a way to avoid over-subscription in future.

The review also led to progress regarding a safer route for cyclists at the nearby A14 interchange.

An issue raised by a resident regarding refuse bin stores was resolved.

This review won a Good Scrutiny Award in 2009 from the Centre for Public Scrutiny.

Judges described this as “an excellent piece of work ... with an impact on the primary care trust, county council, developers and many others”. They also commended the imaginative use of limited resources.



How to get involved

The process of scrutiny is strengthened by involving partners, residents, service users and so on. They bring expertise, local knowledge, fresh ideas and an element of external challenge.

If you would like to know more, please ring the Scrutiny Development Officer, Jackie Sayers on **01954 713451** or email **scrutiny@scambs.gov.uk**