

Please note: this is not the final version of the interim report.

This has been drafted for discussion at the Scrutiny & Overview Committee meeting of 17 April and will then be updated for publication by 30 April

Arbury Park

Scrutiny Review

Interim report

April 2008

South Cambridgeshire District Council

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Foreword

South Cambridgeshire District Council is under unprecedented pressure to balance the need for thousands of new homes against the desire to safeguard the area's rural quality of life.

There are housing developments at various stages of completion at Cambourne, the fringes of Cambridge and Northstowe. It was during a visit to Arbury Park, to the north of Cambridge that we decided to carry out a scrutiny review of the development there. Our aim was to identify recommendations for the ongoing development at Arbury Park and future developments at the fringes and Northstowe developments.



Councillor Tony Orgee
Chairman of Arbury Park
Task and Finish Group

Chairing the review group has been a pleasure and a privilege. It has meant a great deal of hard work for the whole group and I thank them sincerely for their time, energy and commitment. I am grateful too to the officers who have supported our review and to the many partners who have answered our questions openly and honestly.

Equally I need to pass on our admiration of the work of Impington Parish Council in supporting the emerging community. The workload has been far greater than they, or the District Council had envisaged and the residents of Arbury Park have much to thank them for.

This report naturally focuses on the areas where improvements can be made to processes in the future; but it is important to record here that Arbury Park itself is emerging as an attractive place to live, with excellent facilities and easy access to town and countryside.

The work of the task & finish group is not yet done; it will extend into 2008/09. But as we come to the end of the current civic year we have decided to make this interim report, to reflect on our findings to date and the areas we need to cover next.

Councillor Tony Orgee
Chairman of Arbury Park Task and Finish Group

Arbury Park Review

On 17 January 2008 South Cambridgeshire District Council's scrutiny and overview committee held one of its regular 'off-site' meetings, designed to discover local people's concerns. The meeting, at the Meadows Community Centre, was attended by residents of Arbury Park and nearby Impington. The committee received several questions regarding the new housing development at Arbury Park.

They decided that, to give due attention to the issues, they should set up a task and finish group, to "examine the development of Arbury Park and to recommend learning points for use in the ongoing development and at the fringes and Northstowe developments".

The group, consisting of five district councillors and the chairman of the parish council, held their first meeting on 12 February 2008 and agreed the scoping document at Appendix A.

In the following seven weeks the group has met five more times and interviewed developers, builders, social landlords, health partners and officers from the planning, environmental health, building control and community development sections of the council. A list of the interviewees is at Appendix B and copies of the meeting notes are available on request. A report regarding welcome packs is copied at Appendix C.

Meetings were attended by the two relevant Cabinet members: Cllr David Bard, Growth and Sustainable Communities Portfolio; and Cllr Nick Wright, Planning Portfolio.

The meetings were cordial and constructive, allowing all present to openly share their experiences, and the learning to be gained for future development projects. Indeed, the master developer, Gallagher, paid tribute to the council's commitment and increasing readiness to engage openly in this way.

The group drafted, tested and refined a long list of findings which were then used to agree the recommendations listed below. These are early findings and will provide a basis for further work, and for discussion with residents during 2008/09.

The group would hope to make its final report to the scrutiny and overview meeting on 4 September 2008.

Interim Recommendations

The following recommendations are aimed at improving processes in the future. However, the task & finish group recommends that, wherever possible, they be implemented immediately at Arbury Park.

1. Design Guide

Many of those interviewed identified that a key lesson from Arbury Park was the need for the Council to formally agree a Design Guide with the master developer. Resourcing this at the early stages will lead to clearer and more efficient processes later on, benefiting the Council as well as the developers.

Recommendation A:

A1. The master developer should be required to produce a Design Guide at the outset of a project in consultation with the Council; this should be formally adopted by full Council and then enforced when evaluating applications.

A2. The Guide should spell out the approach to crime and safety design issues; encouraging joint working with police and the council's sports and community development team.

A3. Planning applications should not be registered if they lack any of the required elements listed in the Guide.

A4. In the case of Arbury Park, there is a draft Design Guide and this should now be adopted and enforced by the Council without delay.

2. Urban Design and Enforcement

The review identified the need to engage the specific skills of an urban designer. The Council has now agreed to establish a joint urban design team with the City Council. There was evidence that these skills were needed not just at the initial stages but throughout the development, overseeing strategic as well as detailed building decisions, where planning enforcement was also needed.

Recommendation B:

B1. The urban designer and planning enforcement officer should closely monitor the development at every stage, from initial planning to on-site execution of the plans.

B2. In the case of Arbury Park the Council should now attach a priority to enforcement regarding planning breaches, such as satellite dishes and external pipework.

3. Community Development

The review group interviewed representatives of the consortium of registered social landlords (RSLs) and the Council's community development officers. It was clear that all had worked hard to serve the new residents of Arbury Park. However, they identified ideas for improving future community development work at Arbury Park and elsewhere.

Recommendation C:

C1. A community development plan should be produced at a very early stage for each new development. It should be clear who has responsibility for delivery, monitoring and regularly updating the plan.

C2. The work of community development staff should be agreed and managed via a Service Level Agreement. This should be reviewed quarterly as the number of residents grows.

C3. An early priority should be to arrange regular community activities, bringing residents together in small and larger numbers until networks develop and become self-sustaining.

With regard to Arbury Park, the group intends to explore this aspect of community work early in 2008/09 to identify any more immediate opportunities for improvement.

C4. Another key service is the initial 'Welcome Pack' which should be supplied within the first 3 days of moving in; inclusion of a current map should be a priority. A fuller 'Information Pack' should be supplied, preferably in person, within three weeks. These packs

should provide information that is: timely, concise, self-explanatory, accurate; and signposting any further sources of help.

C5. All the information should also be available electronically.

C6. In the case of Arbury Park the two types of welcome pack need to be refined and delivered without further delay, not necessarily waiting to do face-to-face delivery.

4. Phased construction

A recurrent message was the need to phase the building work. At Arbury Park it had been necessary to complete the complex infrastructure first; this led to a time pressure on developers when they eventually came on site. Therefore the site was crowded, with pockets of housing spread across the area; and isolated streets reached via a busy, muddy building site, albeit with completed roads and recreation grounds.

Residents also spoke of the social infrastructure; communities were developing in pockets, rather than as one cohesive settlement, growing outwards from a core.

Recommendation D:

D1. Large developments should be built according to a phasing plan, starting at one point then building outwards. The aim should be for residential streets and areas to be completed such that residents suffer minimum disturbance by ongoing building works.

D2. Commercial and community facilities should be included in the first phase, with the community development officer being on-site as soon as properties are occupied, perhaps initially located in a community house.

5. Health Facilities

Ian Burns, Head of Infrastructure at South Cambridgeshire Primary Care Trust, described the PCTs work with nearby established surgeries in preparing for Arbury Park residents, advising them to communicate from the outset. The review group stressed that

residents may not choose nearby surgeries, but those accessible by bus.

The PCT now has a member of staff monitoring all new planning applications to consider the impact on health services, and whether to apply for revenue or capital funding via the planning gain process (S106). The PCT's funding situation is such that they did not pursue the option of seeking accommodation within the community centre at Arbury Park as they did not expect to be able to afford it. The PCT is currently challenging their funding formula with the Government.

Recommendation E:

E1. The PCT should work with relevant surgeries to communicate with incoming residents as soon development begins. Relevant surgeries may not be the nearest, but the one most easily reached by public transport.

6. Water services

Anglian Water is responsible for Arbury Park's water supply, sewerage and land drainage. The infrastructure is installed by the developers' contractors and then adopted by Anglian Water if and when they are able to approve the standard of the installations. However, Anglian Water is unable to resource ongoing inspections during the construction and so installation errors are not spotted early on. This can lead to unnecessarily long delays in adoption, during which time residents are unsure where to direct any problems. Since the Council plans to increase its monitoring service, there is an opportunity here for partnership working.

Recommendation F:

F1. The District Council's monitoring officer should alert Anglian Water early on, of any concerns regarding water supply, land drainage and sewerage during construction. This would reduce the delay in their adoption later in the process.

F2. Where drainage adoption is delayed, the Council should keep residents informed as to who is responsible for dealing with any concerns.

7. Environmental Health

An Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) is monitored at Arbury Park and the potential impact has been estimated in the Health Impact Assessment; the actual health impact will not be known for 5-10 years. Monitoring is already arranged for Northstowe. The existence of an AQMA can be queried in a house-buyers search, although in practice few lawyers do so.

A barrier was constructed alongside the A14 to protect Arbury Park residents from traffic noise, until the commercial premises were built. However, residents on the opposite side of the A14 now report an increase in reflected traffic noise. The master developer engaged an expert to investigate this and the Council engaged the same expert to verify the findings.

Furthermore, the construction of commercial premises as a barrier has been delayed, following a downturn in the demand for such units.

Recommendation G:

G1. Noise readings should be taken before and after any barrier is erected, and on both sides of the road. Any expert hired to verify the findings should be independent of the developers.

G2. Landscaping should be used where possible as a noise barrier; this eliminates the uncertainty about the location, timing and nature of buildings used as a barrier.

8. Governance

Arbury Park falls within the boundary of Impington Parish Council, who have worked closely and effectively with South Cambridgeshire District Council to support the emerging community. They received revenue funding via a planning gain settlement and this is desirable, but not enforceable, for future settlements.

Due to the size and location of Arbury Park, c900 homes south of the A14, the parish council requested a boundary review, with a view to creating a new parish. However, this was delayed pending new legislation which is now expected to be enacted during 2008.

The review group recognised the strain that this had placed on the Parish Council, and the need for Arbury Park residents to identify with, and develop their own community.

Recommendation I:

I1. Governance arrangements for new developments should be settled as early as possible to enable early community facilities to be properly managed and to provide residents with a sense of a cohesive community. This might include the establishment of a Community Trust.

I2. With regard to Arbury Park, the District Council should attach the highest priority to completing a boundary review for the area of Arbury Park as soon as possible.

9. Communication

The group agreed that residents and parish and district councillors should be regularly involved and briefed on the progress of new developments in their wards. There had been a forum at the outset, which could perhaps be revived.

Recommendation J:

J1. A mechanism should be established by the master developer from the outset to provide a regular forum for all stakeholders to raise and solve concerns.

J2. In the case of Arbury Park the erstwhile forum should be re-established without delay. This should aim to meet in the early evening at least monthly.

10. Accuracy of building locations

Many residents have been unable to move in on time when it came to light that their homes were built around 450mm out of line with the building plans. The group heard that ‘this occurs when starting to build in the middle of a muddy field with no fixed reference points’ as at Arbury Park. Such a deviation might not normally have much impact, but at Arbury Park there is a guided bus route which cannot easily accommodate the loss of 450mm.

With this, and a delay in gas connection, more than fifty homes have been delayed.

Recommendation K:

K1. Developers' contracts should stipulate installing fixed GPS coordinates on site before buildings are laid out.

11. Affordable Housing

Another area identified in the original scope of the review, at Appendix A, was affordable housing. The review group heard that the Council had appointed one officer to oversee the affordable housing negotiations and the RSLs had formed a 'ground-breaking' consortium. This consortium was involved right from the start and was included in S106 negotiations.

Both these factors led to a strong and co-ordinated approach to the provision of affordable homes. Although the RSLs may have been disheartened by the delays mentioned above, they are rightly proud of the quality of the affordable homes at Arbury Park.

Recommendation L:

L1. Developments should emulate the practice used at Arbury Park of involving a consortium of RSLs in planning and negotiations from the outset.

Arbury Park Review - Plans for 2008/09

The review group plans to continue its work into 2008/09 with a view to making a final report on 4 September.

There are several more people for the group to meet, some for a second time, as listed at Appendix B.

Other enquiries will be made via email, for example asking the PCT how it addresses, and plans to address 'new town blues'; and asking planners whether new technology could be used to improve planning, for example 3D modelling, exploring whether satellite dishes could be avoided by requiring underground cabling.

There may be scope to further examine the S106 (planning gain) process. At Arbury Park S106 money funded community art projects, which included road name signage. Could this be better used for directly funding signage?

The group would like to see a revised traffic impact analysis now that the number of planned dwellings has increased.

An early issue encountered at Arbury Park was the lack of a current map. This impacts not only on residents but also emergency services, taxi and delivery drivers. Ordnance Survey update their records quite quickly, and royalties can be avoided if their map is adapted and OS are acknowledged as the source. Alternatively an Open Street Map team would produce a map quickly without charge. But in a fast moving development new maps might be needed frequently, so who could dedicate the resources to producing them? And could there be a roadside map on site? This is an area for the group to explore in 2008/09, perhaps with the master developer.

The review group will also invite input from Arbury Park residents before completing the final report.

The hope is that the final report will help the Council to produce a checklist to use when planning future developments.

SCRUTINY ENQUIRY SCOPING DOCUMENT

Parent Scrutiny Committee	Scrutiny & Overview Committee
Enquiry name	Arbury Park
Terms of reference	To examine the development of Arbury Park and to recommend learning points for use in the ongoing development and at the fringes and Northstowe developments
Summary of enquiry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek answers to the questions raised at the scrutiny meeting of 17 January 2008 • examine the S106 process, affordable housing process and master planning/design processes; build quality and resourcing; governance and community development • Identify any learning points • Present findings and recommendations to the Cabinet
Reason for enquiry	Request by residents and parish council Council desire to learn from experience and continually improve
Potential outcome/s	Improved processes for use with the Northstowe development and growth agenda
What will not be included:	Individual planning matters
Relevant corporate and/or community strategy/ies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High quality, accessible, value for money services • Successful, sustainable new communities at Northstowe and other major new settlements
Portfolio holder(s)	Cllrs Bard and Wright
Members of the task & finish group	Cllrs Chatfield, Davies, Heazell, Orgee & Mason Parish councillor Denis Payne
Key stakeholders	Residents, parish council, City Council, County Council
Potential evidence givers:	see list of witnesses
Officer involvement	Lead officer: Gareth Jones
Start date	12 Feb 2008
Proposed completion date	31 March 2008 – likely to be revised
Report date(s) to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scrutiny & Overview Committee 17 April • Cabinet 8 May tentative

List of witnesses

18 February

Andrew McClaren and Greg Mitchell – Gallagher's

28 February

Gary Parsons - Anglian Water
Jane Thompson – Cultural Services Manager
Paul Grainger - Planning & GIS Manager

3 March

Brian Heffernan, Environmental Health Officer
Julia Holmes & David Keeling - Bedford Pilgrims Housing Assn
Sarah Lyons – Development Officer
Simon McIntosh - Corporate Manager
Susannah Harris - Community Development

12 March

Andy Beyer - Building Control
Iain Green - Environmental Health Officer, Public Health Specialist
Ian Burns – Primary Care Trust
Jane Green - Major Developments Manager
John Pym - New Village Senior Planning Officer
Wayne Campbell - Principal Planning Officer

26 March

Rod Denis - Places for People – and Steve Heywood
Peter Studdert - Growth Director
Chris Howlett - Bedford Pilgrims Housing Assn

Date tbc:

Residents

Joseph Whelan - Head of New Communities, Cambridgeshire County Council
Sue Reynolds and Ian Dyer - Cambridgeshire County Council Highways
Bob Menzies - Cambridge Guided Bus
Persimmons - Tim Slater
Inspace – Phil Lewis
Martin Grant Homes - John Matuszewski
Wimpey - Ian Fieldhouse
Cambridgeshire Constabulary?
Peter Studdert - Growth Director (2nd session)
Afrieen Patel, Urban Design Officer
Gallagher's (2nd session)
Abbie Mason, Community Development Officer

**SCDC Welcome Pack Project - Report by
South Cambridgeshire District Council Community Development Officer**

Background

The purpose of the Welcome Pack Project is to research and produce welcome packs for new residents in South Cambridgeshire's growth areas.

Many new residents know very little about their local community, facilities and services when they move in. Community Development Managers in Cambourne and Arbury Park have mentioned how this can make it very difficult for them to become involved in their community and take advantage of the facilities and resources in their area. In addition to knowledge of the local area, new residents are also often lacking knowledge of local procedures and contacts for advice and information. Good examples of this are the council tax forms and advice, which they need to have as soon as they arrive so they can set up payment for their council tax.

The purpose of the welcome packs is to provide new residents with a single folder as soon as they arrive that gives them everything that they initially need to know about local resources, as well as providing them with as much information as possible that we as a council need them to receive.

Returning to the example of the council tax forms, these have to be filled out by new residents to set up a direct debit for their council tax as well as informing them of what is required of them. Usually it is difficult to get these documents to new residents because our own departments have to hear about a change of resident and then send letters addressed to "the new residents".

With the welcome packs we can get these documents to the people we need them to get to as soon as they arrive.

We will be piloting this project in Cambourne with a view to using it in Northstowe and other growth areas.

Research

In order to build the welcome packs in was necessary to seek advice and information from a number of sources:

New Residents

In order to help us understand not only what new residents in Cambourne require but also what they are already receiving we consulted with people who had recently (within the last 2 years) moved to Cambourne.

Cambourne Community Development Officer

As Community Development Officer for Cambourne, Laura Parkinson, has constant contact with new residents on recent development and a front-line insight into their needs. She will most likely be directly involved in the deployment of a welcome pack in Cambourne.

Arbury Park Community Development Officer

Abbie Mason has similar front-line experience to Laura Parkinson, making her another useful source of advice and information. In addition, Arbury Park has already had a form of welcome pack running for a year handed out by Abbie, which has proved informative.

Housing Associations

The primary Housing Associations active in Cambourne, and much of South Cambridgeshire, are Granta, Cambridge Housing and Circle Anglia. Most housing associations give new tenants a tenant's handbook on arrival. This provides us with an opportunity not only to complement the information they provide, but also a possible method of distribution.

Littleport Parish Council and St. Ives Town Council

Both councils provide a welcome booklet for new residents to their areas. They have kindly provided us with sample copies to examine.

SCDC

The different departments at South Cambridgeshire District Council were consulted regarding any information that they would like to see included in the packs.

Estate Agents

We contacted estate agents active in Cambourne to find out what information they already give to new residents, as well as looking into the possibility of distribution.

Findings

Residents

Cambourne Community Development Officer

After discussion with the Housing Association Community Development Officer for Cambourne the following items were suggested for a Cambourne Welcome Pack roughly based on the Arbury Camp Welcome Pack:

Leaflets for libraries	Info on Housing Surgeries
Faith group leaflets	Secondary/primary school newsletter
Surgery opening times	Community Café info
Bus timetables	New Horizons flyers
Map – facilities and shops etc.	Info on Activities for parents
Information about the Hub (community centre)	

Arbury Community Development Officer

Arbury Community development officer reckons it's hard to make contact with new residents so welcome pack provide chance to personally welcome new residents.

Arbury Packs

For a full list of the contents of Arbury Welcome Pack please see appendix:1

The pack comes in the form of an A4 plastic wallet filled with leaflets from local groups and services as well as newsletters and timetables.

It was found that the lack of organisation within the folder, as well as the overwhelming number of items, many of which would not be relevant to the majority of users, make the pack difficult to use and update.

There are, however, a number of items that both residents and the Community Development Officer for Cambourne felt would be very useful to new residents (most of which can be found above in the Cambourne Community Development Officer's suggestions).

Littleport Packs

The Littleport Welcome Pack essentially provides a list of contacts for local businesses and community groups active in Littleport. It is likely that the Cambourne Packs will contain some, but certainly not all, of the key contacts suggested in the Littleport pack. The pack comes in the form of a small stapled booklet. This was considerably easier to read than the loose packs, the presence of a contents page making it particularly easy to use. It cannot, however, be updated without releasing a new booklet or collecting a set of errata.

Tenant's Packs

Cambridge Housing produces a tenant's handbook similar in format to the Arbury Park Welcome Pack. Content was mostly irrelevant as far as community development is concerned (being concerned with housing), however it is worth noting that the format made finding specific information difficult and knowing which information was more important than others almost impossible.

Circle Anglia rely primarily on a website called Upmystreet.com to find useful information to give to new residents. It appears that they print off the page for a local area, which has details and distances for a number of local shops and facilities, and distribute it to new tenants along with a stapled tenant's handbook

The tenant's handbook produced and distributed by Granta contains similar information to those of Cambridge Housing and Circle Anglia. The main difference is in the format, which was decided upon after consultation with Granta tenants. The use of a hardback ring binder folder means that important information doesn't have to be hunted out amongst less useful flyers. The folder uses of dividers and a contents page not only to allow easy access but also to allow ease of updating specific pages and sections. Flyers and pamphlets with community information are kept in a couple of plastic sheets at the end of the pack, separate from information specifically produced for tenants.

South Cambridgeshire District Council

A list of suggestions for inclusion into the pack from SCDC staff can be found in appendix 1. Some suggestions were appropriate for the pack and others less so. A particular concern was to avoid including too much information, which might not be directly and immediately relevant to new residents. As mentioned above, some residents found other examples of packs to have an overwhelming amount of information.

Conclusions

Timing:

Ideally we would like new residents to receive a welcome pack as soon as they move in. Housing Associations, Estate Agents and Developers are the primary (often the only) contact for new residents and will be able provide a welcome pack when the new residents move in.

In order to prevent us from overwhelming new residents as soon as they arrive and possibly lose any key information amongst less immediate content it would appear best to prepare a 'pre-pack' to be received on arrival by housing associations or estate agents and a 'full' pack to be delivered by the overall Community Development Officer or housing association Community Development Officer within three weeks of moving

in. This would allow the immediate delivery of key information whilst also preserving the link between the Welcome Pack and Community Development Services.

Content: See appendix 1

Format:

Our main concerns with the format of the packs are ease of use, accessibility to different sorts of information and the ability to be readily updated. and what needs to be taken into consideration eg ease of use, accessibility to different sorts of information, ability to update

The format used by Granta in their tenant’s handbook appears to be the easiest to use. A ring binder would allow easy access and the full use of a contents page, removing many of the problems associated with having loose pages in a wallet folder. It would also make the addition of updated material and the removal of obsolete pages a lot more straightforward. In addition, it would also be possible to use dividers, which would make information easier to find and less overwhelming.

Costs:

If produced by South Cambs DC:

- Print £0.19
- Folder £1.79
- Divider £0.17

Total £2.15 each

Housing Association subsidies?
Charge £1 each to residents?

Recommendations:

Appendix 1

- Two packs for new residents.
- Pre-Pack delivered with the keys by the Housing Association or Estate Agent responsible for the new resident.
- ‘Full’ Pack delivered within three weeks by Community Development Officers.

<p>Pre-Pack: Wallet/Folder Cover sheet/Welcome letter Contents Council Tax forms Bin information Map Doctor’s Surgery opening times Important Contacts (Community Development Officers, Council, Police) Bus times Nearest Faith centres</p>	<p>‘Full’ Pack: Ring-binder folder Cover sheet/Welcome letter Contents Bin information Map Doctors Surgery opening times Important Contacts Community Safety info Electoral Registration Form General South Cambs Council info Useful websites (UpMyStreet.com etc.) ‘Flyer Pack’ one or two plastic sheets with flyers for local groups/services Library open times Introduction to the Hub Page about the school(s)</p>
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