

CAMBRIDGESHIRE HORIZONS

Agenda Item No: 15b

Cambridgeshire Quality Panel

To: **Cambridgeshire Horizons Board**

Date: **24th September 2009**

From: **Director of Joint Planning (Cambridge's Growth Areas and Northstowe)**

Purpose: To agree to the establishment of a Cambridgeshire Quality Panel as part of the Quality Charter programme and to allocate appropriate revenue funding for 2009/10 and 2010/11

- Recommendations:*
- (i) That a Cambridgeshire Quality Panel is established as described in the report for an initial period to March 2011.
 - (ii) That the Board endorses the arrangements for the Appointments Panel described in paragraph 3.3 of the report.
 - (iii) That the Panel is administered by Cambridgeshire Horizons on behalf of the local authorities, with technical support from the appropriate Planning Directors and the Head of the Joint Urban Design Team.
 - (iv) That £10,000 is allocated from the 2009/10 revenue budget to enable the Panel to be up and running by January 2010, and a further £30,000 is agreed for 2010/11.
 - (v) That the effectiveness of the Panel is reviewed in autumn 2010 before funding is agreed beyond March 2011.

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 A need has been identified to establish an independent Quality Panel to provide ongoing review and scrutiny of the emerging master plans and design codes of the major growth sites in Cambridgeshire, and to assist officers and members in upholding and reinforcing the high quality aspirations set out in the Cambridgeshire Quality Charter for Growth.

1.2 The need for the Panel has emerged from several sources:

- The views of the Chairman of the City Council's own Design and Conservation Panel that the issues raised by the major growth sites are too large and complex to be handled effectively by the local Panel.
- An increased awareness by officers of the limitations of the conventional 'one-off' design review service provided at a national level by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE), and at a regional level by Inspire East, when it comes to reviewing complex and large scale master plans.
- The feeling that it would be helpful to both members and officers to have a 'standing' Panel of experts who understood the high aspirations for quality that are embodied in the Quality Charter, and who would also develop an understanding of the key issues surrounding the major sites and so be able to provide well-informed scrutiny and challenge on an ongoing basis.

1.3 In view of the particular potential relevance of the Panel to the major growth sites on Cambridge's fringes and at Northstowe, an initial discussion was held at the meeting of the Joint Strategic Growth and Implementation Committee on 13th May 2009. It was agreed to defer giving any view on the matter until a meeting could be arranged with the Leaders and Planning Chairs of all the Cambridgeshire Authorities, and this meeting was held on 7th July chaired by Sir David Trippier. The meeting was generally supportive of the proposal and it was agreed that this report be brought to the Board for approval.

2.0 Proposal: the Cambridgeshire Quality Panel

2.1 As stated in the introduction above, the principal purpose of the Cambridgeshire Quality Panel would be:

'to provide ongoing review and scrutiny of the emerging master plans and design codes of the major growth sites in Cambridgeshire, and to assist officers and members in upholding and reinforcing the high quality aspirations set out in the Cambridgeshire Quality Charter for Growth'.

2.2 It is suggested that the key features of the Panel would be:

- It should be relatively small and focussed - a maximum of 8 people is suggested but with a wide range of skills that would cover all four 'C's of the Quality Charter: community, connectivity, climate and character (i.e. taking a broad view of 'design' rather than a purely architectural view).
- It would meet 4-6 times a year for a whole day, to enable projects to be reviewed in some depth and at key stages in their development.
- It would contain experts with a national or regional reputation but who know the Cambridge area reasonably well, and would ideally be chaired by someone with an international reputation.
- It would be supported by an experienced Panel Secretary who is skilled in writing accurate, concise and technically competent minutes that are also written to convey the Panel's opinion in layman's terms to a Planning Committee;
- It would be independent of any particular planning authority as it would be managed and funded by Cambridgeshire Horizons, and its members would observe the normal protocols covering declaration of interests. The views of the Panel would therefore carry weight in the development control process.
- It would receive technical support and advice on specific sites from the relevant Planning Directors and the Head of the Joint Urban Design team as appropriate.

2.3 The main focus of the Panel would be on the emerging master plans for the major growth sites (i.e. sites of at least 1000 homes), but there is no reason why it could not also review other strategic projects such as market town expansion programmes or specific topics such as school design if this was felt to be helpful. Having established the Panel, it will be up to the Authorities to make the most effective use of it within the constraints of the time and finance available. Detailed Terms of Reference can be drawn up once these principles have been agreed by the Board.

2.4 It will be important for Authorities to continue to support their own local Design and Conservation Panels to comment on small and medium sized planning applications, and also to make maximum use of the Regional Panel run by Inspire East where a more conventional 'one-off' review is needed for a particular scheme. In addition, CABI have the right to ask for a scheme to be presented to their own national Design Review Panel if the scheme is considered to be of national importance (and reviews have already taken place in the past on some of the major schemes such as Northstowe). It would therefore be desirable to involve CABI in the establishment of the Cambridgeshire Quality Panel so that as far as possible CABI would feel happy to endorse its views in any comments that they might make in the future.

3.0 Financial and administrative issues

- 3.1 Assuming that we offer to pay the Panel members and Secretary at the current CABE 'Enabling' day rate of £400 per day plus expenses, the annual cost of the Panel would be approximately £20,000 for fees plus say £10,000 to cover administration costs, expenses, meals and room hire, so an annual budget of £30,000 would be required. If the Panel is to be up and running in January 2010, this would require a revenue budget of £10,000 for 2010/11 (to cover costs associated with the appointments process as well as initial running costs) and £30,000 for 2011/12. It is important to note that the calibre of people that we are seeking for the Panel would normally be able to command a day rate well in excess of that offered, so we are to a large extent hoping that people will put themselves forward mainly because of the exciting issues that the Panel would be addressing, rather than for financial reward.
- 3.2 I suggest that a review of the effectiveness of the Panel is carried out in autumn 2010, and that this review, together with an assessment of the prevailing financial position, would inform a decision on whether to continue the operation of the Panel beyond March 2011.
- 3.3 Panel members including the Chair, and the Panel Secretary, will be sought by advertisement in the technical press. It is usual for this type of Panel not to formally interview prospective Panel members (except possibly the Chair) but to appoint from written submissions, curriculum vitae and by taking up references. I propose that the Appointments Panel is composed of Horizons' Director of Development, the Director of Joint Planning (Cambridge's Growth Areas), the Head of the City/South Cambridgeshire Joint Urban Design Team and a Planning Director/Head of Planning from either Huntingdonshire, East Cambridgeshire or Fenland (nominee to be agreed at the meeting of the Chief Planning Officers in September), and the Board is asked to endorse these arrangements. It will be important not to make the appointments process too onerous as this may discourage potential applicants, yet it will be important to ensure that we appoint people of the highest calibre and with an appropriate range of skills, and that the process is fair and transparent. The appointments would be made for an initial period to 31st March 2011.

Peter Studdert
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