

Speech by Sir David Trippier for Conference on 17th June 2009

This is my review of the last twelve months.

Whilst the serious economic situation has meant a change in our expectations of achieving our housing targets within the original timetable **it does not change the underlying arguments in favour of sustainable growth.**

Nor does it change the basic philosophy of how we want to deliver that growth as set out in the original Structure Plan and confirmed in the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS).

The focus must remain on the growth of Cambridge and its fringe sites, the **new town** of Northstowe and the key market towns.

Nor should it detract from the 'Quality of Life' agenda and the principles set out in the Cambridgeshire Quality Charter for Growth. Put simply – it would be a huge mistake to sacrifice **the quality** of developments which will be with us for decades simply to pursue a numbers game.

It is equally essential that we do not forfeit the success of Cambridgeshire which over many years has made it environmentally attractive and economically vibrant. It is imperative that when the economy recovers – as it surely will - people throughout **the County** constantly need to be re-assured that the historical success of the area which has made it unique in the United Kingdom will be **enhanced** by the sustainable growth being proposed. Without that

development, the infrastructure deficit will not be addressed, future economic progress will be constrained and the labour market will shrink.

So our commitment remains clear, constant and consistent. It will never be good enough for us just to hit the target figures for house building or road widening. We must always set our sights higher than that. We must deliver sustainable development which is **the envy** of all other regions in the land.

As an acknowledgement of the support we require to stimulate action on a number of fronts, on the 10th December 2008 the Communities and Local Government Department announced that we were to be awarded just under £29 million for the 2 years from 2009 to 2011. Again, this was the highest award for any single growth area.

Nonetheless it fell well short of the bid we made to the Department in October last year.

In his address this morning, our Chief Executive Alex Plant will spell out the work we are pursuing with our partners to develop flexible funding solutions to bring housing and infrastructure projects forward.

I admire the zeal and professional effort which Alex and members of the Horizons team have put into this work, leaving us better placed to mitigate the inevitable impacts of the recession on our housing growth plans.

Since I spoke at our Conference in 2008, I feel that the past year has seen a strengthening between Horizons and all the Local Authorities within this County. It was always good, but

it is **especially** strong now. Maintaining that close relationship and trust is very important to us and I place on record my sincere thanks to all members of our Board, including the founding local authority partners and our principal stakeholders.

I also pay a sincere and warm tribute to all the Horizons staff for all their hard work in what has been a difficult year.

I am pleased to say that we now have responsibility for the whole County area which was not the case when we were formed in 2004.

Another key relationship for us will be with the newly formed Homes and Communities Agency. Although the Agency was only formally launched on 1st December 2008, most people here will recall that we were quick off the mark in getting Sir Bob Kerslake to be the principle speaker at our Conference in June last year in his capacity as Chief Executive (Designate) of that Agency. Now in his 'confirmed' role he and Terry Fuller, the Regional Director for the East of England, are crucial to our success. Our relationship with them has already been extremely productive.

Turning now to the overall programme. As you might expect, the story is mixed:

First, a piece of good news. The business case for work to support the Cambridge Station Gateway Scheme to create an impressive entrance to the City was submitted by the County Council to government at the end of November last year. I'm pleased to say that the £3 million requested was agreed and announced on 27th March. This is in addition to the £1.5m of Housing Growth Fund that we have put in.

County officers are working with stakeholders/partners towards an anticipated start on site early next year.

This quite rightly is warmly welcomed by Cambridge City Council who have also worked hard on the scheme.

The overall picture is of a significant slow down in progress across all major development sites as a result of the economic downturn and limited supply of credit.

Some sites that have been started, such as Cambourne, were experiencing difficulty in progressing. (Although that is now moving). I am pleased to say that work at Orchard Park (formerly Arbury Park) has recommenced last month, and that sales have been strong. Both ourselves and South Cambridgeshire District Council injected funds to kick start this revival.

Since our last conference the summary of progress with the Major Development Sites is as follows:-

Cambridge Southern Fringe

All major housing sites have been considered by the Joint Development Control Committee and approved subject to completion of Section 106 agreements:

- Trumpington Meadows (1,200 homes)
- Clay Farm (2,300 homes)
- Glebe Farm (350 homes)
- Bell School (360 homes)

But, since our last Conference, however, the depth and severity of the economic crisis have become apparent and we are having to look at innovative packages to get some of the sites moving.

North West Cambridge

We are very shortly expecting an Inspectors report on development of the University and NIAB land in Northwest Cambridge. There is potential for up to 6,000 new homes, plus 2,000 student flats in the area. It will be another sizeable development in the Cambridge Fringes, presenting considerable challenges in terms of transport, education, community facilities and retail provision. Planning permission for the first 187 dwellings was granted in May 2008, and discussions are taking place on master-planning the rest of the sector.

Cambridge East

Strategic level meetings have taken place between Marshall, Defence Estates, and GO-East and a public announcement has been made that relocation of Marshall's aviation facilities to Mildenhall will not be possible. Marshall is considering alternative options and has undertaken to produce a report in 10 days time setting out the proposed way forward and the timescales involved.

On Northstowe

It is now considered likely that the revision to the current outline planning application will be submitted in early 2010. The Joint Promoters, Homes and Communities Agency and Gallaghers, are currently discussing heads of terms to agree their future involvement in the delivery of Northstowe. Ultimately, Government will have the final say and we are hopeful that CLG's approval will be announced towards the end of 2009.

The A14 widening scheme keeps us on our toes through the challenges of transport modelling and Uttons Drove land drainage solutions are very close to resolution.

I am very pleased to say that a lot has been happening in the market towns, as it has always seemed that the pressure was focussed on the City and South Cambridgeshire Councils. The details of progress on Market Towns is as follows:

Ely: A revised masterplan is being worked up by East Cambridgeshire District Council, supported by Horizons, including three technical design workshops that covered

- the proposed Northern Housing Growth Area,
- improving the city centre, and
- Riverside area & the proposed Country Park.

Output from the workshops was used as the basis of a public exhibition in Ely in mid-March.

Consultants are nearing completion of the transport modelling and a review of a case for an A142 Ely southern by-pass.

St Neots: Not that long ago we thought that development on Love's Farm would be problematic due to the recession. However, development is moving on now due to Hunts District Council having done a deal with the HCA which now means there will be 40% affordable homes out of the 1,250 that will be built.

Horizons has been supporting Huntingdonshire DC in development of a sustainable urban extension to the town of St. Neots. The Government has confirmed that this proposal will receive specific recognition of its growth status. More recently, the parties have been negotiating with the Homes & Communities Agency about potential for the extension to be an eco-quarter demonstration project (whatever that means) I don't know who dreams up these

titles. I'm confused dot com. It's something straight out of Yes, Minister, which I always thought was a documentary.

Transport modelling for the town expansion in St. Neots has been completed. The district council has worked with Horizons and Renewables East to let a tender for a renewable energy project in the proposed town extension.

Huntingdonshire DC is nearing completion of the design of the proposed Huntingdon Western Link Road that will open up land for mixed development in the west of the town. A planning application is to be submitted imminently.

The development at Mayfield Road, Huntingdon, comprising 29 affordable homes built to Code Level 5, has full planning permission and is on programme.

Fenland Market Towns: Fenland DC is finalising its core strategy. Proposals are emerging for “Shaping Fenland”, a sustainable development strategy for the district, supported by Horizons.

Fenland DC is preparing a housing and regeneration project for the town of March to deliver up to 800 homes and other associated works, supported by Housing Growth Fund. Fenland DC is working with Horizons and the HCA on funding options for the Wisbech Waterfront scheme.

Quality of Life and Climate Change Programmes

The Quality Charter was successfully launched in May last year. We have developed three strands of work to support the Charter including:

- a Quality Charter Growth Agenda Training Programme;
- embedding the charter in planning and corporate policy making and
- a programme of looking and learning from others

The training programme has included events on water resource management; zero carbon developments; planning for project managers and training on the Charter

itself. In total, over 150 individuals have participated in these events.

Climate Change mitigation and adaptation remain firmly on our agenda. Key pieces of work we are developing include three Water Cycle Strategies – these will identify a strategic programme of water services infrastructure to deliver growth and help our communities to adapt to climate change impacts such as flood risk and water stress and help us towards water neutrality for growth.

A Review of the Green Infrastructure Strategy has been commissioned – this will include how we can use green infrastructure to help adapt and mitigate climate change. For example supporting the Wicken Fen Vision and the Great Fen Project allows strategic flood risk management and storage as well as opportunities to sequester carbon, particularly through the regeneration of peat soils. I look forward to the results that emerge from this work.

Cambridgeshire Horizons is also working closely with Renewables East to identify renewable energy solutions for the growth sites. During 2008/09 Housing Growth Fund monies sponsored a project to identify renewable energy solutions for Northstowe and we look forward to working with partners and the developers to progress this work.

Cambridgeshire Horizons is also working to reduce carbon emissions from transport by supporting sustainable travel. For example, supporting the Cambridge to Wandlebury cycle path and improving some 50km of paths around Cambridge which will allow residents to travel for work and relaxation without needing to use the car.

Some of you may also have been involved with the Community Stadium or Conference/Arts Facility discussions. These are major projects identified in the Horizons Arts and Culture and Major Sports facility

Strategies. My colleague John Onslow the Deputy Chief Executive is looking to progress these projects further during the next year.

“The Impact of the Recession”

A recent report from the County Council entitled ‘Dwelling and Visual Assessment of Progress’ reflects the economic slowdown in stark reality.

The completion figures for the last three quarters up to 31st December 2008 do not reflect the slowdown. (There is always a time lag). The average number of completions per quarter during the period 2001 to 2008 was approximately 400. The average rate per quarter for the period 1st April 2008 to 31st December 2008 was 460. However these recent completions can be attributed largely to a specific number of locations where progress now appears to have slowed down.

Commitments and Number of New Starts

The number of outstanding planning permissions may be used to gain an idea of potential future supply of housing. The number of dwellings on major permitted sites not yet started in Cambridgeshire has stayed fairly constant at around the 5,000 mark. But the number of dwellings under construction has fallen rapidly from a fairly consistent number of 1,600 to just over 1,000. Moreover, it has been calculated that there were only 54 individual new starts on major sites in the last quarter for which we have data (Q3, 2008/09).

The combined information on starts and completions points to the supposition that current progress is largely restricted to finishing off sites that had already been started in better times. **In order to maintain recent average completion rates of around 400 per quarter on major sites, the number of new starts needs to roughly match the same average.** With the estimate of starts dropping to 54 in the

latest quarter, it is clear that there will be a significant drop in the rate of completions in 2009 on major sites.

However, it is not all bad news by a long way.

1. Recent figures on overall house completions show that (circa 26,257) new homes have been built between 2001 and 2009 and that is over 36% of our housing target for Cambridgeshire to 2021 as published in the Regional Spatial Strategy;

2. We launched the Faith Facilities best practice report on 4th November 2008 which has received widespread support. Phil Kirby, the President of The Society of Planning Officers has agreed to disseminate the summary to his 800 members and I am hoping that the Communities and Local Government Department will use our recommendations in its Policy Guidance. I believe that this is a pioneering project.

3. The local authorities and other statutory bodies have come together through the new body called Cambridgeshire Together to create a vision for the future which aims to deliver quality of life for existing and new communities. The Chairman of this body is Councillor Jill Tuck the Leader of the County Council. Managing growth is one of the key themes of this partnership and the Horizons Board has been identified as the body to oversee this aspect of the work, I was delighted that Councillor David Bard, as an Horizons Board member, agreed to take up the role of representing the Managing Growth theme on the Cambridgeshire Together Board.

The initial targets for the three year Local Area Agreement became unrealistic as a result of the recession. However, with the cooperation of the Government Office, we were able to renegotiate those targets. The new targets are still very challenging, but in all this we must not forget that there is an acute need for new housing in Cambridgeshire and we must

continue to work together and with our national, regional and private sector partners to achieve what we can.

4. In addition, we formally launched the Quality Charter for Growth in Cambridgeshire and the Cambridgeshire Design Guide all of which will help to inform decisions on planning new developments to ensure that the County remain at the forefront of innovation and design. The Quality Charter was also shortlisted for a prestigious Royal Town Planning Institute award.

5. As we know, the Guided Busway will formally open later this summer and I congratulate the County Council for their foresight and tenacity in developing this scheme which is absolutely crucial to the growth agenda.

6. We received confirmation that the funding for the A14 will be in place and that work could commence at the latest in 2010, subject to formal procedures/public enquiries.

Hanley Grange

I said at the Conference last year that the then proposed eco-town at Hanley Grange near Hinxton was an unwelcome distraction.

As a result of a very visible campaign which incorporated local Members of Parliament, District and County Councils, ourselves and many others, the proposer – Jarrow Investment – withdrew its application from the eco-town process. It was a fine example of what we can do if we work closely together in partnership.

Honesty and Openness

At every Annual Conference I have emphasised the need for us to be open and frank with everyone within the county.

This is obviously the most difficult address that I have had to deliver at any of our Conferences because it is delivered against the backdrop of an economic recession- the like of which I have never witnessed in my lifetime – but it is also delivered at a time when in this nation, political spin and sleaze seems to be the order of the day, - **not for this organisation!**

Cambridgeshire Horizons cannot and will not go down that route.

If I am right in saying that in Horizons we enjoy the confidence and trust of our partners and stakeholders, then we can only retain that respect by being open in our business dealings and by telling the truth – even if the message is a tough one.

As an example of life being tough, I have to tell you that during my five year chairmanship of Cambridgeshire Horizons I've had 6 Ministers for Housing and I have got on with them all. It's tough having to brief each one, then as soon as you've got them up to speed you have to start again. I was Minister for Housing for three years, maybe nobody else wanted the job.....?

So What is My Conclusion

Demanding times call for innovative and proactive efforts to not only get through current challenges but, as importantly, to prepare this County to be in the **front rank** as we move from difficult times into the economic recovery that will follow, as surely as day follows night.

It is in no small measure a testimony to the efforts of those working in the private and public sectors that Cambridgeshire is both a highly regarded and desirable county in which to invest and a vibrant contributor to the wider UK economy. This County punches above its weight so, far from settling for a comfortable but unremarkable future, the area is carving itself a place of prominence in that future and I am absolutely certain that that future will be bright.