

**Speech by Sir David Trippier to Cambridgeshire Horizons Conference at The Maltings,
Ely on 10th June 2010**

I begin by welcoming you to this – our sixth Conference. It is a delight to see you all and it gives me the opportunity to thank everyone of you for supporting us not just over the last twelve months but from the moment we were formed in April 2004.

It is good to be in Ely and it is wholly appropriate that we should move this Conference around the County.

I particularly welcome our two guest speakers – Robert Napier, Chairman of the Homes and Communities Agency and Robin Nicholson, Chairman of the Cambridgeshire Quality Panel, who I will introduce to you more formally later on.

In my address last year, I emphasized that the serious economic situation could never change the arguments in favour of sustainable growth. That it must not detract from the ‘Quality of Life’ agenda and that despite any set back caused by the economic recession, it must not compromise in any way the quality of developments which will be with us for decades.

Those statements are still true now but this year I see that there are encouraging signs of an economic recovery in the Housing sector in Cambridgeshire. That is reflected in the increase in house building in the quarter ending in December 2009 and the fact that house prices have increased during that same period (5.6% between September 2009 and February 2010 – average throughout the County).

Whilst we are aware that the Regional Spatial Strategy is now no longer, as the new Government has made clear, nonetheless the six local authorities within this county had already agreed to a Cambridgeshire Growth Strategy in the original structure plan of 2003.

If you look at this slide you will see that the latest draft figures show that:

- Between 1st April 2009 to 31st March 2010 2121 homes were built
- That is less than the previous year when 2813 homes were built

As part of the Cambridgeshire Together Local Area Agreement, a target over 3 years (from 1st April 2008 to 31st March 2011) of 7,848, 63% has been delivered. The target for 2009/10 was 2042 so that figure in fact was exceeded.

The figures that the RSS targeted for 2021 were calculated from 2001.

As a result of these new completion figures, we now see the total after 9 years of 28,378 which is nearly 39% of the original total of 73,300.

Therefore we have seen 39% of that target delivered over 45% of the timetable.

- a) I have to convince you that this is not as bad as you might think, having witnessed the longest and deepest recession that any of us here have known. I don't think that anyone here was alive in 1929. This is the longest and deepest recession of those we have known.

and

- b) I am mindful of the major developments which will take place in Northstowe and the fringe sites around Cambridge which will accelerate the annual house building programme in the next few years.

As a result of the recent General Election the change in Government has once again thrown the spotlight on our commitment to sustainable housing growth within this county and I am encouraged so far by statements made by the new Coalition Government and the new Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Eric Pickles, and the Housing Minister, Grant Shapps. Their support for our strategy and the infrastructure required to sustain it is vital to the success we all wish to see. It is perhaps fortunate that those two MPs represent constituencies

within the Eastern region. Both are already familiar with Cambridgeshire and are aware of our enormous strengths as well as the challenges that we face.

We continue to work very closely with the Homes and Communities Agency and we're grateful for their constant support and enthusiasm for what we seek to achieve.

It must be stressed that the dramatic cut in our Housing Growth Fund of 43% for 2010/11, announced by the last Government in June last year, had a terrible effect on our funding programme for infrastructure and housing support across the county. That news was a blow! I suppose, like 'old age' it always comes at a bad time. This cut was not the fault of the HCA. They have had to grapple with the implications of those cuts, as we have.

The second piece of disappointing news was that the largest development site in Cambridgeshire, which is in Cambridge East, is not going to be available in the near future. The Marshall Group, working with Horizons, the local authorities and Government, have explored several alternative sites for their aerospace business, including Mildenhall, Waterbeach and Wyton.

None of these has proven to be feasible and Marshalls therefore announced before Easter that the Airport and aerospace operations will remain on the current site for the foreseeable future, although the company has not ruled out that circumstances may change. The policy implications of this decision will now be addressed by the local authorities.

Despite these two setbacks, we have had more good news than bad.

An example of good news was the outcome of the appeals on the Clay Farm/Glebe Farm sites (total around 2550 homes). That was announced in February this year. The Secretary of State upheld the local authority's requirement in respect of 40% affordable housing and community infrastructure contributions. The decision is of special significance as if we'd have found the figure of 40% been compromised, it would have undermined the Housing Policy for Cambridge City and South Cambs and had a 'knock on' effect on policies designed to deliver affordable homes throughout the County.

As an example of using our combined determination and resources, the Trumpington Meadows loan (£4.5m of HGF) has been drawn down and the developer proposes to start building this summer, with the first houses available by 2012. The loan is geared to encourage the build of 300 homes by September 2014, of which 40% will be affordable and the development will also deliver a primary school with community facilities from 100 homes as well. Without this loan that I've referred to, Trumpington Meadows would probably not be ready to start now.

Another piece of good news was that the Government eventually agreed to the request made by South Cambridgeshire District Council, the County Council, the local MP, Andrew Lansley, and ourselves that the new town of Northstowe should be designated as an Eco-Town.

Furthermore, in March this year, there was an award of £1.5m from the Government to enable Northstowe to achieve eco-town standards.

North West Cambridge

It is anticipated that the planning application for the NIAB site (1,593 homes) will be considered by the JDCC later this month. The frontage site (187 homes) has already started with support from the HCA's National Affordable Housing Programme.

The developer of the NIAB Extra site has begun initial work on an application for the site. The developer is meeting with South Cambridgeshire District Council officers this month to discuss how to take that site forward.

The University is working with local authority officers on the Masterplan for the Cambridge North-West University site, particularly addressing key issues such as demographics (including the crucial role of the lettings policy for the proposed key worker housing), addressing problems like transport and access, noise, air quality, and retail proposals. A Members briefing was held on 28 January. The draft master plan will be taken through the University's internal processes up to July 2010, working up to anticipated submission of outline planning application to Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire District Councils later this year.

Work on the retail study in the North West Cambridge area is nearing completion and the transport implications and other planning issues are now being assessed. The findings will be considered by the local authorities in the summer.

Cambridge Station Gateway CB1

Cambridge Gateway (CB1) Project: The section 106 agreement relating to the CB1 development (now being taken forward by Brookgate Development) has been signed.

The County Council is preparing a planning application for the transport interchange to enable it to be constructed by mid-2011, using the £1.5m of HGF capital allocated. The interchange system is dependant upon the link road between Hills Road and the station, which is reliant on funding from the CIF monies that were secured in 2008. Those funds are time-limited (the funds must be used by end March 2011).

Cambourne

As far as Cambourne is concerned, development continues and 2,950 homes have now been completed.

The police station has now been built and is due to formally open soon. Planning for the fire station and a garage have been granted.

The current outline application for 950 additional homes is the subject of viability discussions at present, along with refinement of the S106 obligations. Amendments to the application are expected shortly.

Market Towns - East Cambridgeshire

If I could now cover what's happening in Market Towns, which is equally impressive.

The Ely Masterplan was adopted as Council Policy in February 2010. The plan sets out key proposals to enable the City to accommodate growth sustainably over the next 20-25 years. 3,000 homes are proposed in that Plan.

It is clear that a major package of infrastructure measures is required to ensure that the impacts of this growth are mitigated successfully, in particular major improvements around the railway station. The next stage is to consider detailed development options.

The first phase of works for the Ely Country Park project commenced on site early this year with enhanced play areas, landscaping and wildlife habitats.

Linked to all of that planned growth, East Cambridgeshire District Council are preparing a planning application for a District Leisure Centre, based here in Ely, including a new swimming pool and indoor and outdoor sports provision. This will create a sports hub for the District and surrounding areas, amalgamating at least 10 different sports on one site. The application will be complete by the end of 2010 with a view to a decision in March next year. Robert Limbrick Architects have been appointed to develop that scheme.

Work is also progressing on a Masterplan for growth in Soham. The draft Masterplan explores the potential for substantial growth of the town in the next 30 years, including the possible reopening of the Soham railway station.

In Fenland, exciting developments in Nene Waterfront. The scheme is receiving a total of £1.7m from the Housing Growth Fund to build up-front infrastructure to prepare the site for marketing. The first phase, which is the link road to open up the site, is being built now, and Fenland District Council anticipates bringing in contractors for the next phase in July this year, with a view to starting in August and completing in February 2011.

Fenland District Council have just started to work with AECOM on what is known as the 'Shaping Fenland's Future' study. This work will create a vision that will generate public and private sector activity and investment over the next 20 years. Partly funded through the Housing Growth Fund, 'Shaping Fenland's Future' will address challenges and opportunities and put forward an ambitious (but I think realistic) picture of what living and working in Fenland will be like in the coming years.

In doing this work, Fenland District Council are seeking to ensure positive impacts on the people of Fenland now, and in the future, to create a more sustainable area.

In the town of March, Fenland District Council is continuing work on a housing and regeneration project that should deliver up to 400 homes and other associated works.

In Huntingdonshire, the Love's Farm development in St Neots is of strategic importance to the district. In addition to about 1,400 new homes, it will include a new school, sports facilities, and a community building. Bedfordshire Pilgrims Housing Association has almost completed 275 of the 477 affordable homes that will be built here and the next phase will soon be under way. They will offer a range of affordable tenures including rent and shared ownership and a scheme that offers applicants a chance to rent a home now with the option to buy it later. Aldwyck Housing Association also secured funding for 14 homes, which are now complete. The number of affordable homes to be provided on Love's Farm will exceed the number initially sought in the planning agreement, supported by £19.8 million of grant funding secured from the Homes & Communities Agency. Robert, thank you!

The remainder of the site to the east of the railway at St Neots is shown in the Adopted Core Strategy as a strategic direction of growth for circa 4,000 homes and associated infrastructure. Discussions have now commenced with the landowners & developers with a view to drawing up a joint masterplan. A Delivery Board has been established and has had its first meeting under the chairmanship of Cambridgeshire Horizons. It remains an aspiration for this area to be developed in the style of an "eco quarter". Consultants have completed a report on the potential for renewable energy for the "eco quarter" and the town as a whole, including waste heat from the adjacent Barford Power Station.

In Huntingdon, the regeneration of Huntingdon Town Centre including an extension to the west is reaching a critical stage. The detailed design of the 'link road' is progressing and the Compulsory Purchase Order documentation being prepared. Discussions with landowners are continuing. The District and County Councils have commissioned further studies and design work to facilitate the redevelopment of the Chequers Court Area to provide a critical mass of retail floorspace and additional parking. Development Agreements to deliver the schemes are now at Heads of Terms stage.

I'd just like to talk about the Quality of Life and Climate Change Programmes now.

In February, Lord Smith, the Environment Agency Chairman, visited Cambridge and Alex Plant and I were able to give him a briefing on Horizons and our contribution to the growth agenda. We covered the Uttons Drove project which is something the Agency hopes to use as a template for other parts of the country.

Uttons Drove has been a barrier to growth over the last ten years because there has been no capacity to deal with the additional waste water. The challenge has been to identify a solution that will reduce carbon, contribute towards sustainable development and save costs whilst also being technically robust and acceptable to the local communities.

Through the efforts of the Environment Agency, Anglian Water, South Cambridgeshire District Council, the developers for Cambourne and Northstowe and ourselves, a solution is now agreed in principle and close to being delivered.

Quality Charter for Growth

The work programme for the Quality Charter for Growth has been reviewed by the Quality Charter Steering Group (comprising selected Members and officers of the authorities, and a representative from the Housing Associations). Meanwhile, work continues on the completion of a learning and development prospectus, to encourage all authorities in Cambridgeshire to incorporate the Charter principles in planning processes, for example local development plans, transport planning and community plans. We have completed the process of recruiting for the Quality Panel that will provide independent advice to the authorities on major developments across the County. The Panel meets for the first time later this month to review schemes at North West Cambridge and the Southern Fringe. I am sure you will hear more about all of that from Robin Nicholson shortly.

A number of training activities have been held or are planned, including Sustainable Construction, Planning for non-Planners, and Transforming Utilities, the last of which aims to equip the authorities with a clear understanding of the elements required to procure renewable energy for new developments, including legal, financial, and logistical considerations.

So you will have realised by now that there are an enormous number of exciting schemes being planned and / or executed in every corner of Cambridgeshire. That is amazing, in the teeth of the recession. It shows that when “the going gets tough”, the “tough get going”.

In all cases, where the initiative is taken by the District Council or the County Council, the responsibility for the policy decisions must always lie with them.

In cases where we in Cambridgeshire Horizons are in partnership with the Local Authority and where we assist with the funding of those schemes through the Housing Growth Fund – again – the local authority in question will always be in the lead.

Our role is very straightforward. We are the Local Delivery Vehicle and we are privileged to work in partnership with the various councils and others to ensure that things get done, that together we make a difference and that we all play to our strengths to deliver sustainable solutions which meets the aspirations of the families who live here now and those who will live here in the future.

Maintaining our close relations with all our partners is vital to our success. By increasing the levels of mutual trust, we are finding practical solutions to problems around housing, climate change and infrastructure, notwithstanding the inevitable reduction in public sector funding.

I am certain that this approach will enable us to overcome many of the hurdles we face in delivering sustainable high quality communities.

So finally, may I thank all our staff in the Horizons team, the Directors and Board members of Horizons for their hard work, enthusiasm, loyalty and support throughout what has been a challenging year.

All those people I have just referred to believe – as I do – that there is no point in being a responsible member of society unless you try to shape it. That is what we are all trying to do.

The only way that we are intransigent is that we never mind pleading guilty to sticking out for durable solutions.

So there we are. The past is history, the present is a challenge and tomorrow is an opportunity.