

Dear Barker Review Team,

**The planning system: delivering economic growth and other sustainable development goals.**

**A Case Study of the Cambridge Sub-Region.**

I have thought carefully about how best to respond to the invitation to make 'representations' about the above theme.

After some consideration, I have decided to respond in an unusual way.

For the past four years, I have been working on a study of urban region spatial strategy making, which has included developing three detailed case studies of practices in Amsterdam, Milan and the Cambridge Sub-Region. Each focuses on most recent experiences, but set in the context of the inter-relation between evolving planning practices and the economic, social and environmental dynamics of each area.

There is no doubt in my mind that the Cambridge Sub-region encapsulates many of the challenges of promoting economic growth, along with consideration of environmental quality and attention to (at least some) social considerations. It is also a story which shows the interactions between different levels of government and different government policies well, and how these affect the relations with the development industry.

I have tried to write the book in as readable a way as possible, given the complexity of the stories I have to tell.

So I am submitting the Cambridge Chapter to the review, as a piece of 'qualitative' evidence, which may help to show why the struggle to combine economic, social and environmental goals in the development of 'places' is no easy challenge.

I think it has something to say with respect especially to your questions 1, 2, 5, 6, 14 and 15. The book as a whole has a good deal to say about the English experience compared to other experiences but once firmly against easy transfers of instruments and practices from one place to another!

I am about to send the final text of the book to the publishers who expect publication later this year. I supply an overall contents list, along with the Chapter (I am afraid without the illustrations). Please do not circulate too much, or this could breach copyright, but hopefully, if you find the account interesting and/or useful, you will buy the book!.

I am posting this as hard copy, and in email form.

Yours sincerely,

Patsy Healey

# **Urban Complexity and Spatial Strategies:**

**Towards a relational planning for our times**

Patsy Healey

School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape  
Newcastle University

[\(Healey@phealey.freeseve.co.uk\)](mailto:Healey@phealey.freeseve.co.uk)

to be published by  
Routledge/TandF

(late 2006 or early 2007)

# **Urban Complexity and Spatial Strategies: Towards a relational planning for our times**

(as revised: 7<sup>th</sup> March 2006)

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## **Chapter 5**

### **The transformation of identity in the ‘Cambridge Sub-Region’**

**(March 2006)**  
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‘One cannot make a good expanding plan for Cambridge’ (Holford and Wright 1950: viii)

“Previous policies have sought to protect the historic character of Cambridge by dispersing housing to villages and towns beyond the Cambridge Green Belt.. However, efforts to limit employment growth within and close to Cambridge and to encourage spin-out to other centres have only partially succeeded ..... The planning framework which nurtured the emergence of the Sub-Region as the home of the ‘Cambridge Phenomenon’ is no longer sustainable” (CCC 2003: 98/99). |

## Introduction

The previous two cases ~~have been~~were ~~been~~ of large cities with long histories as major urban centres in Europe. The story of the emergence of the ‘Cambridge Sub-Region’ shifts the focus to places beyond such centres. Yet Cambridge too has a long history as a significant city in the European imagination and especially in the consciousness of the British elite. Over the past half century, the area has been drawn into the nexus of an expanding London metropolis, with the centre of London only 50 miles (80 Km) away. More than this, however, Cambridge has become a major growth node in London’s outer metropolitan area, in which, by the turn of the century, English government capacity at all levels was being tested in a struggle to achieve a ‘balanced’ and ‘sustainable’ approach to managing growth.

Like much of southern Britain, the Cambridge area has a geography of medium and small-sized administrative centres and market towns and villages, in a landscape of undulating green fields, meadows and woodland copses celebrated in English literature, painting and poetry. But it is history not geography which has created Cambridge as a special place within the culture and politics of the nation’s elites. Until the end of the twentieth century, Cambridge was as much a university as a market town, a training ground for the political and administrative class, for many in the business world, and for the higher echelons of the educational establishment. Over the centuries, the university has claimed large areas around the old city core for its own, and remains a major landowner and developer in the area, as well as a substantial employer and generator of activity. For centuries, the university acted as guardian of a contemplative, ‘ivory tower’ tradition of the role of an academic institution, an existence apart from the bustle and noise of commercial and industrial society. Then in the late 1960s, sections of the university turned ‘entrepreneurial’ (Allen et al. 1998). The result was the emergence of a dynamic cluster of high tech and bio-technology companies, which, by 1985, was named by a group of consultants as ‘The Cambridge Phenomenon’ (SQW 1985).<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, with improvements in infrastructure and massive increases in car ownership and use, general metropolitan growth pressures around London threatened the treasured landscape (see Figure 5.1). The story ~~told in~~of this case centres on the struggle to manage the space demands of this transformation while retaining the traditional landscape imagery. The arenas of

the British planning system and its power to regulate the amount and location of this development are central to this account. The case illustrates the strengths of the system (Brindley et al. 1989), the power of national government to determine the parameters of local discourses and practices and the increasing difficulty, in the British governance context, of co-ordinating regulatory power with resources for development investment.

### **Figure 5.1: The location of the Cambridge Sub-Region**

It is also a story of the power of spatial strategy to shape attention and maintain a degree of local control over the scale and form of urban development in the face of external pressures. The first guiding strategy, drawn up in mid-century by one of the well-known planners of the period, William Holford, sought to ‘cap’ the growth of the city and disperse growth pressures elsewhere in the region. The ‘ghost of Holford’<sup>1</sup> still shadows the imaginations of key actors now shaping the area’s future. The story of the Cambridge Sub-Region is both an exemplar and a test of a national commitment in the early 2000s to a ‘sustainable’ approach to managing growth pressures through a strategically-oriented spatial planning (ODPM 2003). The ambition is to find ways to accommodate growth pressures, whilst limiting environmental resource use, and providing accommodation for those on middle and low incomes as well as the increasingly affluent. But there are many challenges to be overcome, affecting all levels of government, if this ambition of ‘sustainable development’ is to be achieved. As with the previous accounts, the story starts in mid-century, and concludes with a major emphasis on the period between 1995-2005 when the new, growth-oriented strategy for the Sub-Region took shape and began to be translated into key development projects.

### **Preserving the Ivory Tower: the defence of Cambridge**

In the mid twentieth-century, the Cambridge area was a key test for the powers of the new national 1947 Town and Country Planning Act, and the ideas of the planning movement which informed it. By the late 1920s, growth pressures were building up in the area, threatening the conception of the city as a quiet university town in a relatively remote region of the country (East Anglia). In addition, the growth of motor traffic was causing difficult problems of congestion in the city’s medie val road

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<sup>1</sup> A phrase used by a key actor in the 2000s

system, which was also the crossing point of two significant regional routes, the A10 from London to the north Norfolk coast and the A14 from east coast ports to the south Midlands<sup>2</sup>. Ribbon development to the south and west, enabled by the extension of sewerage and the sale of housing plots by the ~~Universities~~-University and Colleges, helped to mobilise local concern about the landscape impact, which in turn drew in key figures in the national Town Planning movement of the period, as well as national politicians and civil servants. This interest was in part a reflection of the significance of Cambridge in the geographical imagination of politicians, civil servants and professionals. But it was also a result of the active and well-connected campaign of the Cambridge Preservation Society (CPS), founded in 1928 (Cooper, 2000).

The advocates of a coherent planning approach to ~~preserve~~-preserving the traditional Cambridge environment were active in establishing a Regional Planning Committee in 1928, with a remit to “make a general inquiry into the present state of the county ..with the .. purpose of preserving its native character and providing for development” (Davidge 1934: forward). This resulted in 1934 in the Cambridge Regional Planning Report, produced by planner William Davidge, a former president of the national Town Planning Institute, ~~in 1934~~. The report ~~was~~-expressed a well-established imagination ~~of~~-an area of villages with market towns beyond, all centred on Cambridge, a university centre and a market town<sup>3</sup>. Although this was clearly ~~of~~-a well-established conception, a key proposal was for a ring road around the city, to resolve the traffic problems in the ~~city~~-centre. But this involved a bridge across the river Cam and Grantchester meadows, (romantically associated with the nineteenth century English poets, Lord Byron and Rupert Brooke), and was hotly contested. In addition, the University and Colleges objected to any interference with their rights to develop their own lands. In this early period, four planning issues emerged which still have resonance in the twenty-first century: the attempt to combine preserving the city’s character with accommodating development; the transport dilemmas; the intense contestation over proposals; and the creation of informal networks and arenas through which to promote planning ideas and strategies.

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<sup>2</sup> Road numbers in the area have changed. The current A14 was formerly the A45. I have used current numbers.

<sup>3</sup> The report was written in the format of a survey, followed by analysis and then the strategic spatial conception. A major theme was to prevent industrial development in the city, with echoes of the fate of Oxford and the expansion of the Morris car plant there re-inforcing a preservationist stance.

During ~~the~~2nd World War, further growth occurred in the city, as industry was moved out of the London area to less vulnerable locations. The Ministry of Defence also created a number of airfields, several of which subsequently became the focus of development attention. Such development greatly increased the fears of those trying to safeguard the particular ambience of the city. It also caused problems for the University, which had always relied on a cheap labour force to service the various colleges in which staff and students had common dining areas and 'rooms'. The new industries provided better paid work opportunities. More jobs also created demand for more housing, and more facilities. Meanwhile, the road system still directed both local and regional traffic through the centre of the city, where it intermingled with the movement of students and staff between colleges and the flow of shoppers coming in from the surrounding villages and market towns.

The British 'town and country' planning system before the war had been evolving as a mechanism to regulate the 'sprawl' of development surrounding urban areas. There was a strong strain of anti-urbanism within the movement. However, the ability to regulate development was limited by difficulties over compensation to land and property owners for loss of development rights (Ward 1994). During the war, as in the Netherlands, the issue of the spatial pattern of development became linked to ideas about post-war reconstruction of war-damaged areas and of poor housing in the major urban areas. This spatial planning effort was-became located as a significant part of the creation of the welfare state, with its ambition of-to delivering better living and working conditions for all. The national strategy was to shift industrial development from the congested southern parts of the country to the northern parts hit by the 1930s depression, and to regulate development around all settlements to prevent sprawl. Densities in the over-crowded cities were to be reduced, with accommodation to be provided outside cities in free-standing new towns. Rights to develop land were nationalised, with a 'once-and-for-all' compensation settlement. Development rights had therefore to be obtained from the state, via the planning system. This was a revolutionary move, only possible in the particular postwar conditions of a collapsed property market (Cullingworth 1975). ~~With the concern~~Concerned to prevent development sprawling around cities, the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act

extended ~~this~~ ‘development control’ to both urban and rural areas, and gave the major powers over the regulation of development to the county level of government.

In the Cambridge area in 1947, the County of Cambridgeshire covered the area of Cambridge City<sup>4</sup> and a band of about 100 villages around it, organised into rural districts. Beyond this were other boroughs and rural districts in a circle of market towns, some of which later became part of an enlarged county. In the 1940s, there were not only major disputes about the proposal for a Cambridge by-pass. ~~There had but~~ also ~~been~~ concerns about whether the primary planning authority should be the City or the County ~~should be the primary planning authority.~~ The university was also resisting the imposition of planning controls. A Joint Planning Advisory Committee was established for the county area, including county and city councillors, as well as university representatives, the university having formal seats on both county and city councils. This Committee evolved into the County Planning Department, with planner Leith Waide as head<sup>5</sup>. Waide had good links with the national planning movement and with those developing the national legislation. Through these, the national Ministry of Housing and Local Government (MHLG) agreed to fund a study to provide a framework for the preparation of a county development plan<sup>6</sup>. The Committee commissioned Professor William Holford to undertake the study, jointly with Myles Wright, drawing on staff resources from the newly-staffed County Planning Department. Holford and Wright had both worked for the national Ministry (Cherry and Penny 1986, Waide 1955)<sup>7</sup>.

Holford’s biographers state that he was reluctant to take on the Cambridge commission. “In Cambridge, powerful interests dominated the area to be planned. (It) reeked of history and tradition, and .. possessed micro-political systems of distinctive character and utmost complexity” (Cherry and Penny 1986:141). What is striking about the plan is the way it speaks directly to these ‘micro-political systems’, by focusing on the key areas of dispute and providing carefully-constructed arguments to

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<sup>4</sup> Cambridge was designated a City in 1951.

<sup>5</sup> Local government departments in the UK are headed by fulltime appointed professionals, answerable to council committees, or (since the late 1990s) to a Cabinet of elected members.

<sup>6</sup> The Ministry had a special interest in Cambridge during the war, due to the opposition of the University to planning controls. **A study by Dykes Bower** for the Ministry ~~suggested~~ a cap of 100,000 on the growth of Cambridge and the separation of settlements (Cooper 2000).

<sup>7</sup> Holford held the Chair of Planning at University College London.

support the proposed strategic framework. Nearly half the report discusses the pros and cons of different road proposals. The remainder of the report considers the general development strategy, the situation of the ~~universities~~ university and the colleges, and development in the city centre, as well as what should happen next (Holford and Wright, 1950).

The Holford Plan, as it subsequently became known, largely adopts the ‘preservationist’ viewpoint, so actively promoted by the Cambridge Preservation Society. Its central concern is to preserve the special identity of Cambridge in its rural setting.

“Incomparably beautiful in many things, miserably defective in others, Cambridge is still one of the most pleasant places on earth in which to live. Moreover it is now perhaps the only true ‘University town’ in England. The question is whether it can control its own destiny in the face of a multitude of unplanned events that will tend to change it. When these changes come, and even before they take place, can they be arranged to maintain and enhance the essential character and virtues of the town?” (Holford and Wright, 1950: vii)

The key proposal was to limit the growth of Cambridge to 100,000 (or even 125,000, ~~ibid: p-viii~~), allowing for some growth beyond the then estimated population of 86,000, in order to sustain needed services and retail provision. In effect, this meant deliberately restricting housing development. However, increased car ownership and use were accepted as inevitable. Therefore measures were needed to deflect through traffic from passing through the centre itself<sup>8</sup>. The proposed Outline Development Plan (Figure 5.2) aims to control:

“the physical spread of Cambridge and nearby villages, with the aim of maintaining their present general character while allowing for necessary changes and some general growth. Sites for housing and other new buildings have been chosen to encourage reasonably compact development, to keep the sequence of open spaces along the river and to prevent neighbouring villages becoming merged with the town” (Ibid: viii).

### **Figure 5.2 The Holford and Wright proposals.**

The argumentation of the plan establishes the case for limiting the city’s growth and explains the basis for proposed developments and improvements. The emphasis is

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<sup>8</sup> Holford and Wright rejected the bypass proposal of the 1934 Davidge report, in favour of an inner ring road largely using existing roads

always on improving conditions and providing a good quality environment for the ‘ordinary citizen’, who ~~enjoyed~~enjoys living in Cambridge as it then was. To achieve this, Holford and Wright argued that any industrial development not related to particular Cambridge needs and initiatives should be deflected to other parts of the country. This required persuading national government to amend the rules applying to the distribution of industry<sup>9</sup>. However, and significantly as it later turned out, University development was considered an exception to this restriction. The University and its colleges were major landowners in and around Cambridge, particularly to the south and west. They had a number of expansion projects in mind and were deeply embedded in city, county and national governance arenas. Some key University figures were also active in the Cambridge Preservation Society (Cooper 2000). In the Holford and Wright plan, university developments were allowed to escape the emphasis on compactness, being allocated a ‘reserve of development land’ in the west. Nevertheless, such development was expected to be contained within a setting of small villages, fields, woods and meadows, with ‘green wedges’ penetrating into the heart of the city. This concept became a prototype for what became the Cambridge Green Belt.

Such a proposal to limit growth was not accepted without controversy, both from those against any further development at all, and from those believing the town should develop further. These controversies were played out through letters to the national press and in formal objections to the plan. With the backing of national government for the strategy, both with respect to the ideas for limiting the growth of the city, and for restricting industrial development, the Holford plan became the basis for the first County Development Plan for Cambridge, approved in 1954 (Brindley et al. 1989).

This was despite:

“.. several weeks of a long public inquiry, a considerable area of *The Times* and other leading newspapers and finally .. a day in the High Court” (Waide 1955:83).

The Cambridge Preservation Society largely supported the Holford strategy. But there were tensions between the County and the City as to who had control over planning strategy, and between the University and the local authorities over restrictions on the

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<sup>9</sup> The *Distribution of Industry Act* 1945 required all firms proposing industrial developments over 3000 sq ft (27 m<sup>2</sup>) in building area in congested areas such as London to seek a permit (called an *Industrial Development Certificate* in 1947), providing the power to force firms to seek locations elsewhere.

use of their lands. The City Council also believed that the city should be allowed to expand further (Cooper 2000, Waide 1955). The strategy was, however, in line with the broad thinking within the planning movement at the time, which at this period had a powerful influence on general opinion and on the national Ministry. The approach also suited the balance of university interests. The Holford plan in effect squeezed out competition for both labour and development opportunities, while allowing the university and the colleges substantial freedom for manoeuvre on their own lands.

The 1954 County Development Plan anticipated an expansion of population in Cambridge itself from 86,340 in 1948 to 100,000 in 1971, and in the county as a whole from 164,700 in 1948 to 187,400 (Cooper 2000). To explain and justify the plan's approach, the County Planning Officer commissioned respected journalist and planning commentator, Derek Senior, to write a 'guide' to the plan, to 'expound' the plan, so that interested people locally and all over the world 'who love Cambridge', could see the Plan 'in the round', free of all the technical and legal requirements necessary for a formal plan statement (Senior 1956:1). He presented a development plan as a framework which would steer growth processes. "A plan is not a blueprint or a working drawing, but a statement of policy" (ibid:2), which gave an indication of the approach which would be adopted by national and local planning authorities to the exercise of their powers with respect to the Cambridge area.

"It follows that a development plan is essentially a compromise – between what we have and what we should like; between conflicting claims on the same land, labour and materials; between incompatible ideas and between differing scales of value. The test of a good plan can never be whether it completely solves one problem, fully meets one need, or wholly satisfies one claim, regardless of other problems, needs and claims. The test must always be whether a different compromise would yield a total result for the same expenditure of time and resources" (Senior 1956:2)

This is an early statement of the conception of a development plan as a statement of policy, rather than as a masterplan blueprint or a specification of development rights, reflecting the distinctive approach to planning system design developed in the UK since 1947 (Davies et al. 1989).

The Holford and Wright plan largely shaped the pattern of urban development in the following forty years. In 1957, its ideas about open spaces and green wedges were converted into the principle of the Cambridge Green Belt, relatively tightly defined

around its inner boundaries, but extending 3 to 5 miles (4 to 8 km) around the city, very wide compared to other urban green belts in England (Elson 1986). Meanwhile, national policy pursued a strategy of deflecting industrial activity from the ‘congested’ London and South East to the northern industrial areas. New Towns were initiated across the South East, beyond the metropolitan green belt (the nearest to Cambridge being Harlow and Stevenage), and Town Expansion Schemes were negotiated with the London County Council. Huntingdon and Haverhill, among the market towns around Cambridge, set up such schemes<sup>10</sup>.

In the ~~the~~ period of economic prosperity in the 1950s and 1960s, growth pressures once again built up (CCC 1961). The County had prepared a ‘Town Map’ or detailed development scheme, for Cambridge itself<sup>11</sup>, following the approval of the County Development Plan. But the University and other interests continually sought more room for development. While making minor adjustments, the County maintained the position that growth pressures should be deflected to the market towns beyond the green belt and the ring of villages, or even further afield to areas in the north and east of East Anglia which were suffering from economic problems. Some concession to the need to provide for growth within the Cambridge area was made in the proposal for a new settlement beyond the green belt to the northwest, at Bar Hill, approved in 1964. This started a practice which has since continued of creating more ‘villages’ around Cambridge rather than expanding existing villages too much or letting Cambridge’s expansion swallow up the distinct village identities<sup>12</sup>. The growth being accommodated in these developments was in part ‘council housing’ (subsidised housing built for rent by local authorities), but mainly consisted of estates of private housing, with services provided by the public sector.

Later, with substantial growth pressures across the whole of the London metropolitan region, proposals were made for further large new towns. Two of these affected Cambridge. One was the substantial transformation of the City of Peterborough to the North, beyond Huntingdon, and Milton Keynes to the west, though much less

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<sup>10</sup> These New Town and Town Expansion Schemes allowed urban councils seeking to expand to import firms and households from the London area, as part of the London decentralisation strategy.

<sup>11</sup> This was finally approved in 1965.

<sup>12</sup> The County also designated some villages as ‘growth villages’, an idea evolving in the 1950s (Morrison 1998)

accessible to Cambridge due to the difficulty of east-west road and rail travel. These seemed to provide a strong deflection of growth pressures away from Cambridge. The only major road proposals achieved in the 1960s within the Cambridge area itself were a northern bypass (now the A14), a few road improvements and a bridge over the Cam to create an inner ring road. However, during the 1960s, some major transport proposals began to take shape. The first of these was the construction of the M11, from London to Cambridge, creating what was in effect a wide bypass to the City to the west, onto the A14 Huntingdon road. The second was the electrification of the rail system, allowing a one hour journey to London. The third was the complex decision process about a Third London Airport, initiated in the 1960s, resulting finally in the decision that this should be sited at Stansted, 25 miles (40 km) to the south of Cambridge<sup>13</sup>. The Cambridge area was being drawn into the orbit of the rapidly expanding London metropolis.

By the mid-1960s, some local actors recognised the scale and significance of these growth pressures. Cambridge City Council continually challenged the county strategy (CCPO 1977). City Architect and Planning Officer, Gordon Logie, argued that:

“The situation revealed is a startling one .. Nostalgia for the past is very strong in Cambridge and many will argue against change of any kind. If so, they will be profoundly misguided. The best of Cambridge as we know it today has been built on changes far more sweeping than any proposed in this report; the worst of Cambridge is the product of inertia and lack of positive thinking” (Logie 1966:intro page).

Logie postulated several possible future scenarios, but favoured accepting substantial growth generated both by ‘science-based’ and other research-linked industries, and the expansion of commuting from London. His strategy broke away from Holford’s ‘compact city’ approach, to propose ‘tongues of development’ along the main radial routes. By the late 1960s, a working group including the local authorities, the university and the national ministry were examining the future size of Cambridge (CCityC 1968: [24 para 158](#)), p.24, para 158.

Another ally in the struggle to break growth constraints was the East Anglia Economic Policy Council, set up under the auspices of the national Department of Economic Affairs, created by the 1964 Labour Government (Cullingworth 1972). The members of the Council included business, university and property interests, as well

<sup>13</sup> The Third London Airport Commission was appointed in 1968.

as local authority councillors from the counties of Cambridgeshire, Norfolk and Suffolk. Their first report (EAEPC 1968) highlighted growing infrastructure deficiencies, with growth pressures being experienced across the region. A particular emphasis was given to the need for better east-west routes, including the northern bypass for Cambridge. To grasp the spatial organisation of the region, the study subdivided the area into 'city regions', then being promoted in the discussions on local government re-organisation<sup>14</sup>. The study emphasised the scale of growth pressures affecting the 'Cambridge Sub-division'. Along with Logie, the study proposed that development should be in close proximity to the city, rather than dispersed to the outer villages and market towns<sup>15</sup>.

Yet despite the momentum to reconsider the growth limits on Cambridge, the Holford strategy was upheld in a national decision in 1968 to refuse an Industrial Development Certificate for IBM, a major company developing computing technologies, to set up its European headquarters in Cambridge. This seemed so misguided to those in the university who recognised the potential for 'science-based' development in new technologies that it gave momentum to ideas developing for a university-initiated science park development (While et al. 2004). The University set up an inquiry into the value of promoting science-based industry in Cambridge. The resultant report was completed in 1969, and in the same year, Trinity College proposed the Cambridge Science Park on land the college owned near the A10/A14 to the north of the city (Garnsey and Lawton Smith, 1998, SQW 1985). This was the start of the economic growth dynamic which has since grown into a 'globally-significant' 'cluster' of new industrial activity, centred on high-tech innovation.

This early stage of the Cambridge Sub-Region story illustrates well many of the characteristics of British planning at this time, as developed in a situation of constant and well-informed public and elite attention. It shows the regulatory power of a spatial strategy to shape physical development opportunities if all levels of government give it support. It illustrates the significance of national government in

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<sup>14</sup> See *Royal Commission on Local Government in England, Vol 2, Memorandum of Dissent by Mr D. Senior, Cmnd 4040-1, HMSO, London, 1969*

<sup>15</sup> The study emphasised the contribution that Cambridge made to the national economy and its important role as a centre for the wider region. It noted that the University needed more space for expansion and that there was an urgent need for more housing in or near the city.

local development policy but also the power of well-placed local actors to influence national policy. It shows the tensions in government policy between the spatial strategy backed by strong powers of land use regulation, and the spatial consequences of major infrastructure investments. One shapes the geography, the other changes it. In the Cambridge case, a clear spatial strategy was developed, which was continually challenged and reviewed, with discussion structured by attempts to conceptualise the urban region, its particular qualities (essences) and its dynamics. In these debates, key stakeholders (the university, the large farming landowners) and lobby groups (the spokespeople of the Town Planning movement and the Cambridge Preservation Society) were co-involved in structuring the arguments, along with representatives of the city, the county and national government. These debates flowed out into media stories and letters to the [news](#)papers, and were reinforced by an articulate citizenry. The continual contestation helped to raise development standards, ~~as~~ [since](#) those advocating development had to demonstrate its positive qualities. In these contestations, the overall strategy of the limit on the city's growth was continually both reinforced and challenged by demands for space for economic activities and for more housing. Yet for the next twenty-five years, the strategy was maintained.

### **Growth management through regulatory planning**

During the 1950s and 1960s in Britain, urban development processes were managed within a framework of development plans which allocated land for new development, specified areas for comprehensive development (largely bomb-damaged areas, town centres and areas of poor housing), defined green belt boundaries and indicated major transport improvements. At the national level, the policy framework emphasised dispersal of industry, and later offices, away from the congested south east to the older industrial areas, and to the new and expanded towns. It was assumed until the 1960s that the primary driver of development was the public sector, through these projects and its social housing programme. However, in areas with strong economies, the private sector undertook most of the development (Hall et al. 1973). The development plan, and the concept of settlements contained by green belts, provided a limited supply of sites. This helped the expanding private house-building industry by maintaining the high value of development sites. A close nexus slowly evolved

between the development industry and the planning system. Development sites were steadily released through reviews of development plan allocations and greenbelt boundaries (Ball 1983, Healey 1998b). The strategy of ‘urban containment’ provided certainty to the industry, reducing its risks, while the regular adjustments provided ‘flexibility’. The house building industry continually demanded more flexibility and argued over which (and whose) sites to release for development, in a rhetoric which rarely acknowledged how residential land and development markets were [themselves](#) structured by the practice of a ‘drip-feed’ release of sites.

By the mid-1960s, the growth forecasts of the early postwar period were proving far too low as the national economy prospered, leading to major growth pressures in the South East, and to strong pressures for further land release. The perspective of planning activity, which had become focused around managing redevelopment projects and regulating development in line with rather conservative development plans, was under pressure to enlarge, to take on a broader awareness of social and economic dynamics as these played out at the regional scale (Wannop 1995). In this context, a new planning act<sup>16</sup> introduced two levels of development plan, the structure plan and the local plan. The first was very similar in concept to the Dutch *structuurplan*, but, unlike the *bestemmingsplan*, the local plan remained advisory, as rights to develop were only given with the grant of planning permission. In parallel, regional and sub-regional studies were promoted to produce strategies for accommodating the growth pressures foreseen (Cowling and Steeley 1973, Wannop 1995). The Cambridge area, and East Anglia generally, was not in focus in this search for ways of accommodating growth. The Strategic Plan for the South East 1970 (SEJPT 1970) sought to shift some of the growth dynamic from the west of London to the east, and foresaw the M11 stretching into Cambridgeshire, but the major growth areas were to be in the Southampton area, around Milton Keynes, in the Reading area (and near London Heathrow airport), in South Essex (along the Thames Estuary) and in the Gatwick/Crawley area (around London Gatwick airport). These ideas shaped the development allocations in structure and local plans in the south east of England for the next twenty years.

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<sup>16</sup> The 1968 Town and Country Planning Act

However, the urgency ~~of to accommodate~~~~ating~~~~accommodating~~ growth slipped away in the 1970s. The early 1970s property boom was suddenly cut ~~suddenly~~ short by the rise in oil prices produced by the OPEC oil crisis. There followed a period of economic recession, in which the industrial foundation of the British economy was to be radically eroded, to be followed in the 1980s by the expansion of producer services and the financial sector. In this context, the strategy of forcing businesses out of London and southern England was challenged by local authorities in these areas suffering from industrial closures, and by firms claiming that their locational choices were no longer contained within the national economy but were being made in a European or global context. IBM, refused permission to set up its headquarters in Cambridge, was just such a company.

In parallel, national government in the mid-1960s had initiated a process of re-organising local government tasks and boundaries, in the search for an administrative structure which matched more appropriately the functional relationships of localities. This led to the re-organisation of local government in 1974. In this re-organisation, a two-tier structure of formal local government was created, with advisory regional councils remaining in existence. In planning matters, ~~counties was~~counties were~~was~~ responsible for strategic planning (the structure plan) and for transport, while districts were given responsibility for the preparation of local plans. Planning staff were expanded at both levels. Counties were also responsible for education and social welfare services, while districts were responsible for social housing provision and local environmental management. In Cambridgeshire, the City of Cambridge became a district, completely surrounded by the previous rural districts consolidated into a new district of South Cambridgeshire (see Figure 5.3). The representation of the University on the County and City Councils was abolished. Cambridgeshire County Council thus emerged as a very strong player in growth management in the area, although challenged by the district councils, whose planning powers were also strengthened. Cambridgeshire was grouped with the counties of Norfolk and Suffolk in the administrative region of East Anglia.

**Figure 5.3: Administrative boundaries in Cambridgeshire and East Anglia**

Economic activity in the area, and in East Anglia as a whole, was much less affected than the rest of the country by the 1970s recession, as it had never had a strong base in the traditional heavy manufacturing industries. Growth pressures were felt across East Anglia, modest in scale relative to some other parts of southern Britain, but substantial in the more rural context of the region<sup>17</sup>. This was accommodated, as Holford and the 1954 County Development Plan had intended, in the nearby market towns, in other parts of the region (Peterborough, Norwich, Ipswich), and within villages around the major centres. The ‘cap’ on population growth in Cambridge was successfully maintained, in part because household sizes were falling. Most new housing was provided through the private sector residential development industry. This operated by acquiring land, obtaining permission and then constructing ‘housing estates’, producing standardised terraces, semi-detached and detached dwellings in batches. The planning authorities during the 1960s had to learn fast how to regulate this production process, not only to ensure that it was restricted to land allocated in plans, but to negotiate for the provision and maintenance of public spaces and payments for infrastructure provision<sup>18</sup>. Achieving quality in residential development thus became increasingly market-driven, in a market highly structured by very limited supply and dominated by an oligopoly of producers<sup>19</sup>. Throughout southern Britain, the poor design of residential development and the lack of adequate services fuelled what would anyway have been opposition to large scale new development (Rydin 1986, Short et al. 1986).

Meanwhile, in the Cambridge area, the expansion of science-based industry was underway. In 1971, responding to the University’s policy on promoting science-based industry, the restrictive policy on industrial location was modified at national government level with respect to Cambridge, “to include greater provision for science-based industries largely in the interests of the University” (CCPO 1977:48).

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<sup>17</sup> Growth was welcomed in the north and east of the region which was suffering from the fall in employment in farming.

<sup>18</sup> During the 1970s, with the development industry in recession and a Labour government, attempts were made to create a more structured process for capturing and distributing land values generated by urban development between public and private interests (the 1975 Community Land Act), but this foundered on developer opposition and implementation problems. Instead, ‘planning gain’ or developers’ ~~contributions attached~~ contributions attached to each planning permission became the main tool for redistributing value. For a summary of this complex story, see Healey et al. 1995.

<sup>19</sup> The new village of Bar Hill suffered from this, with the quality of development delivered ending up well below that which the initial design brief had hoped for.

This formalised the policy of selective restraint on employment-generating activity. Only businesses which directly serviced local activities (including university expansion) or which were linked to science-based initiatives could escape the restrictions of the strategy for dispersing employment away from Cambridge. In the shadow of this apparently restrictive policy, employment in the area steadily grew.

Local government reorganisation placed Cambridgeshire County in a strong position as regards the strategic orientation of the regulatory power of the planning system. However, throughout the 1970s, resources for public investment became more limited and uncertain due to national fiscal crises. The focus of national 'urban policy' in England centred on the areas of social and economic difficulty in the major urban centres. Environmental arguments were also beginning to emphasise the importance of conserving resources. Investing in the infrastructure for growing areas was less of a priority. By the mid-1970s, the strategy of 'urban regeneration through peripheral restraint' had become strongly established, supported not only by those arguing for help to urban areas with problems of poverty and obsolescence, but by all those seeking to protect the countryside from development (Healey et al. 1988). This general ambience coloured the County Planning Department's careful approach to the development of its first structure plan.

The work on the structure plan had been preceded by a more developed study undertaken for the East Anglia Economic Planning Council in 1974. The Council had commissioned a special study of the Cambridge area, as one of a series of city region studies, looking forward twenty to thirty years. The resultant report, *Strategic Choice for East Anglia* (DoE 1974), focused on issues relating to the economy, quality of life and distributional issues, and sought to identify how much change there would be and who would be most affected. As regards Cambridge, the study concluded that growth pressures around Cambridge would increase, but that development should be encouraged elsewhere. It thus re-asserted the restraint policy. There had also been two consultancy studies in the Cambridge area, one on transport and the other which focused on retail provision<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> The R.Travers Morgan Study proposed a range of measures to reduce congestion within Cambridge, including a new eastern bypass. Most of these measures were incorporated into County transport policies (CCPO 1977). The retail study was undertaken by J.Parry Lewis, a Manchester University

The County Planning Department's structure plan team, with around 20 staff, undertook a number of studies which served as technical inputs to the development of alternative strategies. This followed a common practice in England at the time (Drake et al. 1975). The planners sought to develop strategies based on analyses of social, economic and environmental conditions. In recognition of the special sensitivity of the Cambridge area, a Sub-Area Study was also produced in 1977, as a basis for consultation on options for the scale and location of growth. This recognised the special character of Cambridge:

“..(this) lies not only in its wealth of historic buildings, but more particularly in the relationship between three distinct elements, the historic town centre, the surrounding ring of colleges, and the associated public and private open spaces adjacent to the river Cam” (CCPO 1977:1).

This study emphasised the role of the town as a sub-regional centre, a centre for small businesses unrelated to the university and a tourist destination. It reflected a politics which sought to escape from the 'University town' concept of the city. From the 1940s to the 1970s, political control of Cambridge City Council shifted between Conservative and Labour, but from the late 1970s, the emerging Liberal Democrat party became an important third group, and by the 1990s, a Liberal-Labour majority dominated the council. Labour councillors emphasised provision for poorer citizens while Liberal Democrats took up the 'green' agenda. Both sought a richer and more inclusive recognition of the city's qualities and dynamics.

While opening up various options, the 1977 report provided a careful argument for maintaining the restrictions on growth in the Cambridge area. However, within the Cambridge area, the strategy of deflecting growth to the villages beyond the green belt was called into question. Two problems with this strategy were appearing. Firstly, it increased commuting, both from the villages into Cambridge, and across the South Cambridgeshire area, as there had been a scatter of industries located in villages because of limited space within Cambridge itself. Secondly, many of the villages lacked services, particularly schools and health centres. The Cambridge Sub-Area

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professor who argued strongly for the creation of a new major sub-regional centre outside the city, with a substantial growth in population of the area to support such a centre at an appropriate scale (DoE 1974). This attracted hostility even during the preparation of the study, and the idea was definitively rejected, thereby confirming that the historic central area would remain the core of retail provision..

Study, and the subsequent structure plan, therefore argued for more housing development to be located in and around Cambridge itself, as well as in larger villages where increases could support better services. There was also a strong emphasis on road improvements in the area and on expanding public transport and cycle provision. In this context, the Study outlined alternative strategies for locating development. This focused on an agenda of locations, several of which were former airfields owned by the Ministry of Defence. This agenda was regularly re-visited over the next thirty years, as pressures to accommodate further development built up (see Figure 5.4).

#### **Figure 5.4: Development locations identified in 1977**

The authors of the study were clearly uncertain about growth prospects. In the late 1970s, businesses and the development industry were relatively cautious in estimates of future growth potential, but the county planners could see that growth momentum might pick up in the future. They were aware of substantial growth potential in electrical engineering and instrument-making and in other activities linked to university scientific activity. They also foresaw that the function of Cambridge as a major regional centre was likely to generate more employment (CCPO 1977). They therefore argued that the structure plan should consider short term allocations for development, in ways which would not compromise future development needs. A critical concern was to reduce commuting, as a way to achieve both social objectives (better work/life conditions) and economic/environmental ones (the reduction of congestion). The key to this was locating housing nearer employment centres, which meant within or around Cambridge itself. This in turn meant some modification to the inner boundaries of the green belt. The growth dynamic of the sub-area was to be restrained by limits on non-essential employment-generating developments. The public consultation required by national legislation for structure plans was framed around the discussion of specific growth locations.

The county planners approached the consultation process very systematically, doing more than the legal requirement. In this way, the resultant structure plan was formally legitimated, having followed correct procedure, been approved by two legitimate

political bodies (the county and the national government), after careful technical assessment and extensive public discussion<sup>21</sup>. Both the University and the City Council sought less restriction on employment expansion in the city, and some of the villages wanted more employment opportunities locally. But overall, the predominant message was that the growth rate should be lower than that previously provided for (CCC 1979). The ‘drip-feed’ land release of development sites thus proceeded in an open and transparent way, providing landowners and housebuilders with a relatively stable policy context in which to acquire an interest in potential development sites.

The Structure Plan was approved in 1980 (Figure 5.5). It carried through much of the strategic direction established previously, limiting employment growth by selective restraint policies within the Cambridge area, dispersing other growth to the north and east. It consolidated a classification of settlements into four types related to their capacity to accommodate housing development, a ‘planning vocabulary’ used ever since. The Plan was structured into statements on policy topics (settlement, employment, housing, shopping, transport, etc), and statements on ‘sub-areas’. For the Cambridge Sub-Area, the locations where provision was to be made for housing development were listed, with the numbers of houses anticipated in each area for the period 1981-1991. Provision was to be made for 8400 new dwellings in this period in the Cambridge area itself (CCC 1980). The Green Belt was to be maintained, though the proposal for a substantial extension to the south was rejected. The selective restraint of employment-generating development was also retained.

### **Figure 5.5: The 1980 *Structure Plan*: Key Diagram**

In this way, a clear strategic frame was re-articulated, embodying the evolving county strategy over the past twenty-five years. Settlement growth was to be contained within

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<sup>21</sup> There was consultation on initial problems and issues, on the county’s technical analyses and on the issues arising from the public consultation. This led to the production of a draft ‘Written Statement’ of the structure plan, which was given widespread publicity. Finally, and accompanied by a report on the public participation and consultations, the text was submitted to the national government Secretary of State for approval, following a public inquiry. The county planners worried about the breadth and depth of voices expressed through their consultation processes, but noted the diversity of views on some issues, particularly over the scale and location of employment growth.

clear boundaries by planning regulation, with strategic planning practice focusing on struggles between planners, conservationists and developers about how much land to allocate, when and where. The practice not only served the interests of the house building industry. ~~I-~~It also helped to support the investment value of housing and hence owner-occupiers.

Structure plans were intended to provide a strategic framework for the preparation of more specific local plans. The Cambridgeshire planners attempted to be as specific as possible, but were aware that over-specification would be resisted by the districts and by the national ministry. It was left to the districts to prepare local plans for the main development sites. The county planners then turned to the preparation of a Green Belt Local Plan<sup>22</sup>. However, this plan was continually held up by pressures from Cambridge City and the University to release sites on the inner edge of the Green Belt, and overtaken by reviews of the 1980 Structure Plan. The Green Belt Local Plan was approved by the County Council in 1987, but national government intervened to prevent adoption until the 1986-89 structure plan review process had been completed. By this time, a neo-liberal national government had created a more market-oriented environment for growth management and a development boom was underway. Aligning the policies of districts, county and national government became increasingly difficult.

The Cambridgeshire county planners in the 1970s built on a tradition which had evolved locally, but was also infused by a wider planning approach which had been developing in the postwar period. A new social, economic and environmental consciousness among the planning profession at large was particularly strong among the strategic county planning teams created after the 1974 reorganisation. Rather than articulating visions of place, these teams sought to analyse the dynamics of local economies, of the relations between people, jobs and travel, and the balance between development and environment. Yet the economic analysis built primarily on trends in sectors of employment. There was little understanding of the dynamic evolution of different kinds of companies and their time-space relations. The only discrimination was between 'local' and 'non-local' businesses. Nor did the planners foresee that the

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<sup>22</sup> The inner boundary had been defined in the 1960s, but now needed amending. The outer boundaries had never been approved in a statutory plan.

electrical engineering and scientific research activity they noticed was developing into a powerful economic dynamic. They also believed they could control the commuting and other development pressures arriving along the extending M11 and through the growth of Stansted Airport. This was not just a technical failure of prediction. It also reflected the mood of the late 1970s, dominated by economic difficulties.

It was this mood which helped to elect a national conservative government in 1979. The Structure Plan was approved at the point of a major 'turn' in British politics, towards a pro-growth, pro-market philosophy. Development initiative, in this philosophy, was to be released from over-regulation and every area was to have a '5-year supply' of housing land, based on market estimates of demand (DoE 1980). This destabilised the 'drip-feed' practice of making sites available, signalling that many more development opportunities might be negotiated through the planning system. The rhetoric of entrepreneurial initiative as a driver of economic prosperity also reinforced the context in which a new identity was emerging for Cambridge as the locus of a major economic 'cluster' of high technology industries.

### **Breaking through: Sustainable Development and a 'high-tech' Cluster**

#### *'The Cambridge Phenomenon'*

During the next two decades, county and district politicians and planning officers struggled to provide a coherent and consistent strategic framework for growth management, in a situation where strategies were continually challenged by developers seeking to break through restraint policies, and where the power to resolve conflicts lay with a national government itself uncertain about its planning policies. This struggle was experienced throughout prosperous southern England, where a de-regulating government encountered its own heartland supporters who were increasingly assertive in protecting their local landscapes from further development. This struggle was particularly acute in the Cambridge area where the growth dynamic generated by science-based high-tech industry and the steady incorporation of the area into the London commuting range took off in the 1980s. In this situation, the county and district growth management strategies had to be continually adapted to meet changing and unstable national policy positions, a process which became increasingly

frenetic in the 1990s (see Table 5.1). Within the British planning system, the formal power of national government lies in the capacity to review plans and specific development decisions. Inquiry processes undertaken under the auspices of national government are required for development plans and wherever a developer ‘appeals’ a planning decision on a specific development. In these processes, consistency with national policy has always been a major concern. These provisions allow a national government with centralising tendencies to exert a powerful influence on local development strategies.

**Table 5.1: Chronology planning strategies 1974-1995**

The Thatcher administrations of the 1980s was just such a government (Gamble 1988, Thornley 1991). Suspicious of both local government, and the planning system, early national policy statements in the planning area emphasised the relaxation of ‘bureaucratic’ planning regulations and demanded that greater priority be given to ‘market’ assessments of when and where development should take place<sup>23</sup>. With tough policies restricting public expenditure on public services generally, it was also expected that private developers would pay for the service and infrastructure needs which they generated. In theory, this provided a helpful context for those promoting substantial further growth in and around Cambridge. The economic arguments were looking increasingly strong. By 1985, 400 high tech firms employed 16,000 people, about half in 8 major companies (SQW 1985). The University made good use of its status as an ‘exception’ to growth restraint policies. Following the opening of the Cambridge Science Park in 1973, a further Science Park, in Melbourn, was opened in 1982.

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<sup>23</sup> There was little understanding of the extent to which the development industry, especially housebuilders, benefited from a clear regulatory framework.

~~‘market’ assessments of when and where development should take place<sup>24</sup>. With tough policies restricting public expenditure on public services generally, it was also expected that private developers would pay for the service and infrastructure needs which they generated. In theory, this provided a helpful context for those promoting substantial further growth in and around Cambridge. The economic arguments were looking increasingly strong. By 1985, 400 high tech firms employed 16,000 people, about half in 8 major companies (SQW 1985). The University made good use of its status as an ‘exception’ to growth restraint policies. Following the opening of the Cambridge Science Park 1973, a further Science Park, in Melbourn, was opened in 1982.~~

The scale of this development marked a shift in the economic culture of the sub-region. A dynamic cluster of new technology industries and business services, with a culture of scientific research innovation and entrepreneurial initiative to exploit the results of research, was emerging in what had been imagined as a university town and a sub-regional centre. A ‘paternalist’ University culture was transformed into an entrepreneurial ambience at the leading edge of new technology industries (Allen et al. 1998). The Cambridge example became an iconic myth of the economic success of Thatcherite neo-liberalism (Crang and Martin 1991). By the late 1990s, the Cambridge ‘cluster’ was being recognised not just as of national importance, but comparable (if on a smaller scale) with a select group of such innovative ‘clusters’ internationally<sup>25</sup>. The notion of a ‘cluster’ implied not just a group of companies in the same industry, but an ambience of interaction and exchange of ideas and contacts which fostered innovative development, both scientifically and economically (Crouch et al. 2001). But Cambridge could use its university tradition to provide a ‘prestige’ address for companies (Morrison 1998). A Cambridge location meant accessing this address as well as tapping into a distinctive ambience. This in turn could be used by companies not connected to the University to argue for an exception to the county’s selective dispersal policies.

<sup>24</sup> ~~There was little understanding of the extent to which the development industry, especially housebuilders, benefited from a clear regulatory framework.~~

<sup>25</sup> In the UK, it was positioned with a group of high-tech clusters which were seen to be emerging in ‘Silicon Fen’ (the Cambridge area), ‘Silicon Glen’ (in the Scottish central lowlands) and the ‘M4 corridor’ to the west of London (Haugh 1986).

The contradictions in the county planning strategy between allowing selective growth related to university science-based industries in Cambridge and the dispersal strategy were pointed out in an influential report by consultants Segal Quince Wicksteed in 1985. This identified and named what was happening in the Cambridge economy ('the Cambridge Phenomenon') and identified the pressures that selective growth was creating, particularly in the housing market and in traffic congestion<sup>26</sup>. The 'Cambridge Phenomenon' study presented high technology industry as 'clean and green', as opposed to the traditional image of industry. This idea was materialised in the 'science park' development concept. The Cambridge Science Park became a model which spawned a wave of science and business park developments across southern England in the later 1980s (Massey et al. 1992)<sup>27</sup>. In the Cambridge area, two science parks and 6 general-purpose business parks were opened in the period 1985-1990, with a further 6 parks opening in the late 1990s (SQW 2000, While et al. 2004).

This 'naming' of a new economic dynamic in Cambridge served to position its development impetus as a significant asset in the new 'Thatcherite' neo-liberal politics (Crang and Martin 1991). But economic growth in Cambridge was not just the result of the impetus of this 'cluster'. It was also a consequence of the emerging geography of southern England, in which the city was an increasingly important regional centre for economic, social and administrative services, a major tourist destination, and ever closer to the London metropolis. The 'drip-feed' release of development sites in the sub-region inevitably came under severe pressure in such conditions.

Through major infrastructure investments, Cambridge was being increasingly absorbed into the London metropolitan area. By 1990, Cambridge had bypasses to the west (the M11), the east (the A11) and the north (A14). Electrification was in progress, linking the city to two central London stations in less than an hour. The prolonged inquiry into the third London Airport concluded with a decision in favour

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<sup>26</sup> The report also notes the value of the strategy of selective restraint in protecting both sites and labour supply from competition from other economic growth pressures (SQW 1985).

<sup>27</sup> Changes in 1987 in the national 'Use Classes Order', a regulatory tool which defined land use categories, created a 'business' class, which allowed companies to shift easily between light industry and office uses.

of the expansion of Stansted in 1985, although it took a further decade and the growth of the low cost airlines before the scale of activity there took a quantum leap. All of these generated demand from both households and firms to locate in the area. In the flexible and booming development climate of the late 1980s, the area also attracted the interest of land and property developers. These quickly responded to any sign of a weakening of national and/or county policy restraining development on greenfield sites. Projects focused not just on science and business parks, but on major housing schemes and large out-of-town retail complexes. These development pressures led to a spate of major inquiries, about road proposals, about out-of-town centres and about 'new settlements'. It was in the arenas of these inquiry processes, as much as in the revisions to prevailing structure and local plans, that planning policy in the Cambridge area was progressively adjusted.

*Co-alignment in a changing policy framework*

Strategic planning in the Cambridge area had proceeded since the 1940s with a degree of sophistication and continuity which realised the best hopes of the designers of the 1947 Town and Country Planning System. The planning work was well-informed, carefully argued, and combined flexible recognition of local circumstances and debates about the scale and nature of growth with a robust capacity for using regulatory powers effectively (Brindley et al. 1989). This capacity came under severe pressure in the 1980s. The rolling forward of development land allocations within a strong regulatory framework was undermined not just by the promotion of a market-led view of development at national level. Resources for public investment were also cut back, infrastructure agencies were privatised, and local authority staff cut. The Regional Economic Planning Councils were abolished. The team available to prepare structure plans in the county was reduced from around 20 in the late 1970s to around 5 in the late 1980s<sup>28</sup>. New regional advisory bodies were formed, but staffing was limited. A major consequence of staffing cutbacks was that, instead of in-house technical work, increasing use was made of consultants, a practice which escalated in the 1990s and 2000s. But the major problem for all levels of the planning system was uncertainty over strategic policy.

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<sup>28</sup> However, the planners were able to draw on expertise available in other county departments.

At national level, government expressed its ‘policies’ in statements<sup>29</sup> on particular issues, such as green belts, housing allocations, retail provision and developers’ ‘obligations’. These statements had overriding standing at appeals against the refusal of planning permission and were a mechanism through which national government could steer local planning policy and developers’ expectations. In the mid-1980s, the emphasis was on allocating land for growth. In Circular 9/80 (DoE 1980), as previously noted, planning authorities had been required to allocate a ‘5-year supply of housing land’ in their plans. In Circular 14/85 (DoE 1985), they were expected to grant planning permission for development unless to do so would ‘cause demonstrable harm to interests of acknowledged importance’<sup>30</sup>. This put a premium on the quality of argumentation and on consistency with national policy, both in planning documents and in relation to specific development decisions. In 1986, at a time when development pressures and neo-liberal ideas about de-regulation were at their height, Cambridge County Planning Department began preparing a revision to the County Structure Plan. But by the time the revised plan was approved, in 1989, national government had realised that market-led development in boom conditions caused major problems of infrastructure overload and led to strong public resistance with electoral consequences. At the end of the decade, the development boom collapsed, leaving developers arguing for greater certainty and stability in government policy, to protect them from their own poor judgements.

By the late 1980s, concerns for environmental quality also began to creep into the government’s agenda. In 1990, the then Minister for the Environment, Chris Patten, ~~managed to get agreed~~secured agreement for a cross-departmental report, *This Common Inheritance* (SoS 1990). This argued that the concept of ‘sustainable development’ should pervade all government policies. In the fields of transport and land use planning, this brought notions of demand management and growth control back into favour. For many councillors and planners in the Cambridge area, the ‘sustainable development’ philosophy signalled a revival of their role in growth management, and a significant counterweight to the 1980s emphasis on market-led

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<sup>29</sup> Until 1987, these were called ‘circulars’. Then they were given a more explicit status, and referred to as *Planning Policy Guidance (PPGs)*. In 2004, this term was replaced by *Planning Policy Statement (PPS)*.

<sup>30</sup> Cambridge City Local Plan 1996 makes frequent reference to ‘interests of acknowledged importance’ in justifying a whole raft of limitations on development.

development strategies. Many councillors and planning officers recognised the importance of supporting the expansion of university-related, science-based industries, but they were also concerned about weakening the selective restraint strategy. Such weakening allowed companies with no ties to the area or links to science-based industry to add to the growth pressures in the area. The 'sustainable development' philosophy provided an argument for a return to a clear selective restraint strategy. This philosophy was also attractive to more traditional Conservatives, to business interests aware of the value of a quality environment for their companies and workforce, and to the rising electoral power of Liberal Democrat and Labour councillors at county and city level. But it was not clear until the mid-1990s how stable the national government commitment to sustainable development actually was.

Between 1985 and 1996, the County revised its structure plan twice, a Regional Report was produced, there were several public inquiries with major policy implications, a Green Belt Local Plan was finally approved, and Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire districts produced their first district-wide Local Plans. As noted above, the first County Structure Plan review sought to allocate more capacity to accommodate 'high-tech' growth in the Cambridge Sub-area but retained the overall emphasis on dispersing growth as far as possible to the north and east of the county, where economic difficulties remained, while resisting commuting pressures from Hertfordshire, Essex and London. At the same time, the rural setting of Cambridge was to be maintained. But concern about the increase in commuting from the villages, market towns and further afield into Cambridge led the county planners to propose the allocation of development sites for housing and business development near the city, concentrated in locations either adjacent to the city boundary or in 'village-scale' new settlements.

The result was a small increase in the numbers of dwellings to be accommodated in the 'plan-period', mainly in the South Cambridgeshire area (see Figure 5.6). The County Structure Plan (CCC 1989) proposed that two new settlements should be accommodated, one along the A10 to the north and the other along the A14 either to the east or west, both beyond the Green Belt. The Structure Plan also indicated that one major out-of-town major retail superstore might be accommodated, to relieve the

retail pressure on Cambridge. Inevitably, these allocations aroused intense controversy, from those with alternative sites as well as those seeking to resist further development. The county planners would have preferred to indicate with some precision where these projects should be located, but districts argued that it was their job to locate sites precisely in their local plans. Following a practice emerging nationally, they argued that the County Structure Plan should primarily focus on the criteria for selecting locations. Shortly after the plan was completed, the County also undertook a transportation study. This proposed further road schemes, but also developed proposals to accommodate a shift from road to public transport modes around Cambridge, with proposals for a light rail route from Oakington near the A14, along a disused rail route via Histon to the mainline and Cambridge station, and south via the new Addenbrooke's hospital to Trumpington. This study also proposed a system of Park-and-Ride sites around the city and recommended road pricing measures, all of which attracted controversy.

**Figure 5.6: Allocations for new housing in planning strategies: 1980-2005**

This strategy was then rolled forward into the production of Regional Policy Guidance. By the 1990s, the production of such Guidance, in the form of national planning policy statements, became a requirement for all regions in England. This was a response to various lobbies pressing at national level for a more coherent approach to development site allocations and infrastructure investments. This Guidance was produced in draft by local authorities and then submitted to national government for amendment and approval. The three counties in East Anglia had already been working together for some time on regional issues<sup>31</sup>, and their ideas framed the East Anglia Regional Planning Guidance 6 (RPG6 1991) (DoE 1991). While largely carrying forward the county strategy, RPG6 1991 stressed the economic significance of high-tech development in the Cambridge area. It also emphasised the emerging national practice of a hierarchical allocation of numbers of new dwellings to be accommodated in each region, which the regions and counties then had to distribute to districts. This

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<sup>31</sup> In the arena of a Standing Conference of East Anglia Local Authorities (SCEALA)

was combined with the specification of criteria based on environmental sustainability principles intended to govern the choice of development locations. These stressed a 'sequence' of locations, from those already developed and near public transport to those furthest away (Vigar et al. 2000, Murdoch and Abram 2002)<sup>32</sup>.

RPG6 1991 primarily gives an indication of government policy in the planning field<sup>33</sup>. It was unclear at the time how far national government would back its own sustainability principles. Meanwhile, the combination of the 1989 *Structure Plan* and the policies in *RPG6 1991* had encouraged even more development sites to come forward in the Cambridge area. This was exacerbated by the lack of site specificity in the structure plan. Given the uncertainty of the national commitment to a new, more sustainable, policy direction, it was left to the arenas of major public inquiries to determine how far policy had really changed<sup>34</sup>. These inquiries focused on a group of new settlement proposals around the A10, another group around the A14, and on major retail projects. Arguments raged about how far it was wise to emphasise increasing road provision, rather than managing demand by limiting provision for cars and expanding public transport. Eventually, with one exception, all the projects were refused permission, indicating a firmer stance on sustainability principles at national level. One new settlement was allowed, however, which became the new village of Cambourne, on the A429, not far from the A14 and the end of the M11, given planning permission in 1993. This was a relatively low density proposal for a development of 3000 dwellings, with poor potential for developing light rail or guided bus provision, and was not one of those put forward by the county planners.

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<sup>32</sup> In this way, the 'drip feed' approach had become a demand-driven 'housing numbers game', which in turn was challenged by the concept of 'plan-monitor-manage' and the assessment of urban capacity (Wenban-Smith 2002, Gunn 2005).

<sup>33</sup> By this time, although other government departments had a regional presence and concerns, there was little co-ordination between them. It was therefore civil servants in the regional offices of the national Department of the Environment who examined the draft RPG6 1991 to assess how far it was consistent with, and developed, national policy. In 1994, Government Offices in the regions were created to improve co-ordination. In East Anglia, the relevant government office was GO-East.

<sup>34</sup> The planning system allows for four opportunities for a review of local planning decisions. Such a review involves some form of public inquiry, all held under the authority of the Secretary of State for the Environment (ie, national government). Those who are refused planning permission by a local planning authority are entitled to lodge an objection, which will trigger some form of inquiry. Or the Secretary of State may 'call in' a major planning application for national level determination. A structure plan (and now a regional spatial strategy) is examined through an 'Examination-in-Public'. A local plan or other local development planning document is examined by a local public inquiry. These inquiries are organised through the well-regarded national *Inspectorate*. The consistency of local decisions with national policy is a key criterion for Inspectorate judgements.

These developments all required amendments to precise land allocations in local plans and to the county structure plan, although, due to the property slump of the early 1990s, the pressure on decision making was not quite so great in the early 1990s. The Green Belt Local Plan was finally adopted in 1992 after its 11-year gestation period. As the inquiries proceeded into the major development proposals, the outer boundary was determined in such a way that any new development likely to be approved would be beyond the Green Belt. With this fixed, South Cambridgeshire could proceed to approve its own first district-wide local plan, in 1993, as required by national legislation in 1990. Cambridge City, meanwhile, started preparing its district-wide local plan in 1990, in order to develop the policies indicated for the city in the structure plan and to incorporate the small area local plans prepared in the 1980s. However, its preparation was caught up in the uncertainties generated by the major inquiries. The City Council's Labour and Liberal Democrat councillors sought a stronger emphasis on environmental sustainability and social equity issues across the whole of the council's work, with more emphasis on the provision of 'affordable housing'. The resultant plan, adopted in 1996 (CCityC 1996) was carefully linked to the City Council's community strategy, a statement of values and a concept of 'urban structure', with longstanding concepts of green wedges re-expressed as 'green corridors' and 'structurally important open spaces'<sup>35</sup>.

The 1989 County Structure Plan and the 1991 East Anglia Regional Planning Guidance 6 had left questions hanging over the 'sustainability' and practicality of continuing with the dispersal strategy. The outcome of the major inquiries, coinciding with a weak property market and an economic downturn, suggested also that the pace of housing development in the Cambridge area could be reduced from ~~the late 1980s~~ expectations of the late 1980s. National government was also defining the 'sustainable development' agenda more emphatically (Owens and Cowell 2002). In this context, in 1992, the County embarked on yet another structure plan revision. Political control at county level had swung to a Labour/Liberal Democrat majority, and councillors were keen to promote more environmentally-sustainable land

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<sup>35</sup> An important role for the plan was to provide procedural grounding for the demands on developers for contributions to infrastructure, for compensation for loss to environmental assets due to development and for contributions to providing more affordable housing.

allocation strategies and to resist development pressures from Hertfordshire and London seeping into the area south of Cambridge. The 1995 Structure Plan, approved after modifications through the relevant inquiry process, clearly signalled that the policy of restraining Cambridge's growth and the dispersal of economic pressures further north and east was no longer viable, although re-iterating many earlier policies<sup>36</sup>.

The new county councillors wanted to initiate a move away from the development opportunities created in the 1989 plan, but did not have time to revise the draft structure plan prior to the inquiry. The inquiry inspector recognised the policy shift among councillors and at national government level, and removed two controversial sites from the revised structure plan, arguing that a strategic assessment of development needs and green belt allocations was needed. The first was for a major housing project near Trumpington. Cambridge City Council strongly favoured the release of this site for housing, having resisted its allocation as a science park. The second was for an additional new settlement. Development conditions in the 1990s did not seem to demand this project, with all the controversy and uncertainty this would generate.

Thus, by the mid-1990s, the overall justification for the policy of selective restraint and growth containment had shifted from a conservation and landscape argument for protecting the 'special character' of Cambridge and its setting, to arguments grounded in the co-evolving agendas of the economic dynamic of a high technology growth node and principles of 'sustainable development'. This latter argument was being elaborated nationally into an emphasis on developing on brownfield rather than greenfield sites, reducing the need to travel by locating jobs and homes nearer together and protecting environmental resources. Meanwhile, there were continuing concerns about economic growth and the strains this put on the housing market (with

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<sup>36</sup> The County nevertheless maintained the 1989 policy of continuing to attempt to slow the rate of growth in the Cambridge sub-area, re-iterated the policy for compact settlements, classified into types, and affirmed the need for selective restraint on economic activity in Cambridge itself, while accommodating high technology firms which 'needed' to be in Cambridge. Particular attention was given to achieving a better integration between new development and transport provision, with an emphasis on the promotion of public transport, including some form of 'advanced' public transport system. Concerns about water supply were also creeping into the discussion about accommodating development. South of Cambridge, large areas were included in a designated 'area of restraint'.

serious affordability problems building up and fuelling outmigration and hence commuting), on the labour market and on traffic congestion (Morrison, 1998). Sustainability, in this context, also called up an earlier planning idea of ‘balanced’ development – of housing, work opportunities and transport.

This period illustrates very well the nature of the relations between levels of government in the planning system at this time. Although the counties and districts undertook much of the work of developing the details of planning policies, this was performed in the consciousness that national policies and inquiry decisions could overtake and derail their strategies at any time, and that these national initiatives were by no means consistent with each other. The instability of national policy created continual problems for the county and districts as they struggled to keep up with the twists and turns of a national orientation to both sustainable development and the reduction of regulatory pressure on developers. To retain their regulatory power over the location of development and their ability to negotiate with developers for contributions to mitigate the impact of growth, they needed firm and clear county and district policies expressed in plans vertically-aligned with national policies—were needed. Any uncertainty and inconsistency were liable to be exploited by developers and their legal advisers. In southern Britain, the planning system as a whole was becoming increasingly legalised and shaped by inquiry decisions and legal challenges in the courts. Counties and districts needed robust and legitimised strategy, to ground their positions and to reduce market uncertainty about the scale and location of development. But producing formal development plans inevitably took time, as procedures allowing consultation, objection and inquiry/review had to be followed and the different levels of government had to somehow co-align their shifting positions. These practices consolidated a regulatory planning policy community of civil servants, local planners, consultants, developers and lobby groups, with a distinctive vocabulary and techniques (Murdoch and Abram 2002).

But in this process of vertical alignment in Cambridgeshire, although there was careful consideration of the Cambridge sub-region, there was no real debate about the qualities of the area. Cambridge was portrayed as a university town, a market town, a regional centre, a dynamic economic cluster, a tourist destination, an accessible city, a green and civilised one, a sustainable one, offering life opportunities for all. But these

~~different identities fluttered across the policy landscape without providing clear directions for the kind of place that the city and the surrounding area around might be growing into evolving into. This period illustrates very well the nature of the relations between levels of government in the planning system at this time. Although the counties and districts undertook much of the work of developing the details of planning policies, this was performed in the consciousness that national policies and inquiry decisions could overtake and derail their strategies at any time, and that these national initiatives were by no means consistent with each other. The instability of national policy created continual problems for the county and districts as they struggled to keep up with the twists and turns of a national orientation to both sustainable development and the reduction of regulatory pressure on developers. To retain their regulatory power over the location of development and their ability to negotiate with developers for contributions to mitigate the impact of growth, firm and clear county and district policies expressed in plans vertically aligned with national policies were needed. Any uncertainty and inconsistency were liable to be exploited by developers and their legal advisers. In southern Britain, the planning system as a whole was becoming increasingly legalised and shaped by inquiry decisions and legal challenges in the courts. Counties and districts needed robust and legitimised strategy, to ground their positions and to reduce market uncertainty about the scale and location of development. But producing formal development plans inevitably took time, as procedures allowing consultation, objection and inquiry/review had to be followed and the different levels of government had to somehow co-align their shifting positions. These practices consolidated a regulatory planning policy community of civil servants, local planners, consultants, developers and lobby groups, with a distinctive vocabulary and techniques (Murdoch and Abram, 2002).~~

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was envisaged as a compact settlement, surrounded by its green belt, ~~despite its~~ ~~if~~ internally ~~structure d-of~~ ~~structured by~~ major open spaces. The city was presented as situated in a landscape of villages, with market towns beyond. Ideas about development corridors sometimes emerged, with a proposal for an M11 growth corridor spinning off from a study of growth corridors in the South East in the 1980s (Crang and Martin, 1991), but these remained muted and primarily linked to arguments about locating development near public transport routes.

In this context, some local actors began to press for a more coherent assessment of the city's future. As principal policy and plans officer with Cambridge City Council said after the inquiry into the Structure Plan:

“The result (of past policies) has been that dispersal has been of housing, not jobs. Cambridge's commuting hinterland has expanded rapidly and commuters overwhelmingly arrive by car, causing the city's notorious congestion. The new structure plan pays lip service to sustainability, but perpetuates the split between jobs and homes. ... (it is time for) a clearing of the decks for a major strategic review of the Cambridge area. (In this review, we need to consider) what sort of city (..) we want Cambridge to be and how .. urban expansion (is) to be accommodated. ..Holford's maxim that one cannot make a good expanding plan for Cambridge seems increasingly untenable. The (structure plan inquiry) panel has given Cambridge's planners the challenge to work out how it might be done.” (Hargreaves 1995:1112).

To mobilise to meet this challenge, some City councillors and officers made approaches to the University to press for a more positive strategic approach to growth in the sub-region. This led, in 1996, to the creation of the informal growth promotion network, Cambridge Futures.

## **Mobilising for ‘Sustainable Growth’**

### *Creating the ‘Cambridge Sub-Region’*

By the mid-1990s, the policy of restraining the growth of the immediate Cambridge area and dispersing its development energy to more distant areas, always contested, had finally lost its support at both county and national level. Without such backing, the regulatory power to restrain development around Cambridge was weakened. At national level, the potential of the Cambridge high technology economic ‘cluster’ had become too important to be endangered by restraint policy. Further, the concept of sustainable development, which had significant leverage locally and was also

strongly supported in the national level department responsible for planning, housing and urban policy, undermined the planning arguments for dispersal if the result was to increase car-based commuting. The national government's modifications to the 1995 Cambridgeshire Structure Plan, while backing the plan, set the stage for a major review of spatial strategy, a position which was not affected by the change of national government in 1997 to a large Labour majority. In fact, this accelerated the momentum for a review, by strengthening and altering the regional level government agencies, and, in 2003, introducing a de facto, if partial, national spatial strategy for England in the Sustainable Communities 'programme for action' (ODPM, 2003).

The story of strategic planning in the Cambridge area between 1995 and 2005 is one which moves up and down the levels of formal government and in and out of an array of actors - public, private, formal and informal (see Table 5.2). By the early 2000s, the importance of promoting the various high technology economic activities and of their location in the immediate Cambridge area was widely accepted (While et al. 2004). Substantial economic growth in Cambridge was in the interest of promoting national economic competitiveness. Buttressed by sustainability arguments, this implied major housing and retail development in and around Cambridge, with major infrastructure investments, particularly 'high quality public transport', to support such growth. Locally, key stakeholders arguing for substantial growth agreed on the importance of demanding more infrastructure investment from national government. Local politicians, well-aware of citizens' concerns about environmental qualities, struggled to promote a full range of sustainability arguments (from reducing resource use and the impact of climate change, to provision for walking and cycling and an emphasis on high quality design). They also sought to ensure a strong connection between the allocation of sites for development and the provision of physical and community infrastructure. To some extent, this could be accommodated by speeding up the post-1950s practice of selective release of sites for development on the boundary of the Cambridge built-up area and the allocation of development sites in the villages or in new settlements beyond the wide Green Belt. But sustainability arguments encouraged ~~the concentration of~~ ~~concentrating~~ development along public transport 'corridors'. This corridor concept, however, challenged the well-established imagery in the Cambridge area of a city in a rural setting of open land and villages with market towns beyond.

**Table 5.2: Chronology of planning strategies: 1995-2005**

This nexus of political and planning actors around local development issues, however, carried insufficient weight to influence national government and lever in the resources needed to tackle the growing infrastructure deficit, let alone cope with substantial growth. Moves were therefore made to connect to with other networks to raise the profile at national level of the growth needs of the area. Cambridge has always had a dense array of networks, many well-connected to influential groups nationally and internationally (Keeble et al. 1999, SQW 2000). The University had already in the 1990s set up the Cambridge Network and CULIL (Cambridge University Local Industrial Links) to promote local linkages. The Chamber of Commerce was also involved in considering growth needs<sup>37</sup>. The task now was to make a link from these university-business concerns to a regional development focus. This was partly encouraged by the creation of the Greater Cambridge Partnership in 1998, under the auspices of the East of England Development Agency (EEDA)<sup>38</sup>. A more important arena for a while was the Cambridge Futures group. This arose as a joint initiative between the University, via Vice-Chancellor Alec Broers, and the City Council (via Mayor John Durrant). For City councillors and officers, an alliance with the University and business interests linked them to the promotion of Cambridge's national economic significance.

There was significant overlap between the various groups. Cambridge Futures quickly drew in the county level and focused on studies to develop options for future growth. A key resource was the University School of Architecture, whose head, Marcial Echenique, ~~lead~~ led a study of future development options. A further study, undertaken for the Cambridge Network by a team including Echenique and the Vice Chancellor Alec Broers, looked at the role of information and communications technology in minimising the impacts of growth. Meanwhile, the County had

<sup>37</sup> The Cambridge Preservation Society, so active in mid-century, was in contrast little in evidence at this time.

<sup>38</sup> The Labour government established development agencies in each English region, with powers to distribute regeneration funds and grants for local economic development.

commissioned a study of development options, undertaken by consultants Chesterton (Chesterton Consulting 1997). This explored the relative merits of concentrating or dispersing new development, and the potential for public transport corridors ~~as-and well-as~~ the idea of a further major new settlement. These initiatives gradually came together, united by the recognition that any growth strategy needed to be inserted into revised regional planning guidance and into the priorities of the ministries controlling funds for transport, health and education expenditure. The problem for a rapidly-growing area in England was that core funding for local government was based on existing populations and their relative prosperity, not on future growth. This implied that provision for growth could only be made through normal local expenditure once it had occurred. Yet locally, people resisted growth if it was accompanied by such lag effects. The struggle was to get access to investment funding for urban growth, which for many years had been targeted to areas in need of regeneration. In the Cambridge area, the resistance to growth was quickly articulated around the agenda of house price rises, damage to the historic city centre and traffic congestion (Kratz 1997, Dawe and Martin 2001). In this context, those arguing for a growth strategy had to show that planning regulation and infrastructure investment could proceed in a co-ordinated way, a difficult enterprise in a centralised and functionally-divided government context.

Until the 1990s, the Cambridge 'area' was contained reasonably well within the boundaries of Cambridgeshire County. In previous strategies, it was referred to sometimes as a sub-area, or a sub-division, usually encompassing the City and South Cambridgeshire District Council areas. By the late 1990s, however, it was clear from the various studies that the functional linkages of the area were wider, at least as far as commuting flows were concerned. This led to the definition of the 'Cambridge Sub-Region' as a unit for statistical purposes that included parts of surrounding counties, some of them not even in the East Anglia region. The task of the promoters of planned growth in the Sub-Region was to get their ideas incorporated into the emerging revision of Regional Planning Guidance 6. This would not only frame and legitimise the strategies in a new county structure plan. It would, they hoped, help to lever in the needed infrastructure investment.

There followed another period of policy development across all the levels of government, during which the East Anglia area was incorporated into a larger East of England Region, including Hertfordshire and Essex. New planning instruments were also created which were proclaimed as a radical reform of the planning system (DTLR 2001). The revision of RPG6 1991 was underway by 1997. The first draft acknowledged the importance of sustainable development principles, and suggested that development could be located in public transport corridors. Despite the reference to corridors, a planning idea which was gathering momentum in debates on spatial strategy in the neighbouring South East region, the core spatial organising principle in the East Anglia draft strategy centred on sub-regions, reflecting earlier city region ideas. Following a national emphasis on increasing housing output to meet projections of increasing population in southern England, the amount of new housing to be accommodated in the Cambridge area was increased significantly (see Figure 5.6). The revision of RPG6 was then overtaken by the re-organisation of regional planning procedure. Until the late 1990s, local government conferences had prepared the guidance and submitted it to national government for approval. The nationally-approved statement then became the basis on which local planning authorities prepared their structure and local plans, in a clear hierarchical relationship. However, there was no public consultation or formal inquiry into these policy statements, nor were they debated in the national parliament. This raised difficult problems of legitimacy. The procedure was therefore amended, in the future expectation of the emergence of elected regional authorities, to require an inquiry<sup>39</sup>. The East Anglia Regional Planning Guidance revision became the first to be subject to such a procedure. But by 2000, when RPG6 was approved, it was clear that new regional guidance would need to be prepared for the newly-expanded East of England area, and that the Cambridge Sub-Region would be re-located in a much wider context. By this time (2002), the emerging planning legislation proposed transforming 'guidance' into a Regional Spatial Strategy, designed to replace structure plans. The advocates of the Cambridge Sub-Region as a growth node had therefore both to lock their ideas into RPG6, into the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan

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<sup>39</sup> In the form of an Examination-in-Public

which followed, and into the emerging regional spatial strategy for the new, wider region<sup>40</sup>.

The inquiry into the draft Regional Planning Guidance in 1999 provided the opportunity for the presentation of clearer ideas about the scale and location of growth in the Cambridge Sub-Region. ~~However, although~~ its primary leverage ~~would be was be~~ on allocating funds for urban regeneration and transport projects, in ~~allocating deciding the~~ amounts of development to be accommodated in different parts of the region, and in establishing criteria for development locations. The final Guidance, **RPG6 2000, (ADD Reference)**, combines economic competitiveness arguments with environmental sustainability considerations<sup>41</sup>. It incorporates many of the ideas developed in the *Cambridge Futures* studies and positions the ‘Cambridge Sub-Region’ as of key regional and national significance. The region is acclaimed as a ‘world class, innovation capital of Europe’ (p.xx?? – somewhere in section on the regional economy!). Many of the 1995 Cambridgeshire Structure Plan policies are re-stated, but with more emphasis on sustainable development. 50% of development is to be on already developed (‘brownfield’) sites. A ‘sequential approach’, as advocated in national policy, was used to define criteria for the location of housing sites; ~~this, which~~ embodied a conception of a compact city, with higher density sites nearer the city centre. But a study of growth locations and urban capacity was still awaited. This was eventually undertaken by a team led by consultants, Colin Buchanan, along with a further study of how the ideas of the Cambridge Sub-Region Strategy could be implemented, undertaken by consultants Roger Tym and partners<sup>42</sup>.

RPG6 2000 thus envisages substantial growth, based on expectations about the growth impetus of the ‘Cambridge Phenomenon’. By this time, such an impetus was taken as a given force, to be nurtured and promoted by all levels of government, as well as by key players such as the University. The hyping up of science-based high

<sup>40</sup> The situation was made even more complicated by local government re-organisation in the 1998, which had sliced off Peterborough from Cambridgeshire County, although working relations among politicians and planning staff at the strategic planning level remained good.

<sup>41</sup> Its economic analysis draws on the **Regional Economic Development Strategy, produced by EEDA** in 1999.

<sup>42</sup> The key issues in these studies centred on which sites should be released from planning constraints for housing and other development, and what conditions and obligations should be imposed on developers, the location of major retail investment, the possibilities for public transport investment and the priorities for highway improvements.

technology growth in the 1980s (Crang and Martin 1991) had been moderated since then by the property slump of the early 1990s and by the ‘dot.com’ bust of the early 2000s. Cambridge companies survived the former quite well, but were inevitably hit by the latter, though without serious consequences for ~~its~~the area’s long-term growth trajectory. The area’s economic dynamism has been increasingly based on a large number of small enterprises, spinning out from one company to another, and overlapping with each other. It is supported by a very large number of consultancies, again overlapping, and by some significant venture capital financiers. The result is a cultural ambience which supports new enterprises and expects considerable redundancy (ie firms fail as well as succeed)<sup>43</sup>. Commentators and academic analysts were all according credibility to ~~the~~claims for the national and international significance of the economic cluster in Cambridge<sup>44</sup>.

But the Cambridge Sub-Region local economy was much more than just a high technology cluster. It was a major centre of public administration and of all levels of education. The city attracted large numbers of tourists, overlapping with education in the large number of language schools. The area’s economic dynamics ~~was~~were by this time part of the complex nexus of the overall London metropolitan economy. It had become increasingly attractive to enterprises linked to the development of Stansted airport, which by 2000 was expanding rapidly. Cambridge had therefore become not only the major economic growth node in East Anglia, but a major city within Eastern England, a trajectory that the Holford plan could hardly have imagined. The struggle for growth in the Cambridge area was thus not just-only about what scale of growth could be accommodated with adequate infrastructure and sufficient quality; ~~it~~was also about how to discriminate between the demands of the ‘world class, high technology cluster’ and those of all kinds of other economic activities for which Cambridge was a prestigious and preferred location. The idea of selective restraint and managed growth thus still permeated the strategies for the Cambridge Sub-Region.

<sup>43</sup> See Garnsey and Lawton Smith 1998, Keeble et al. 1999, SOW 2000, Crouch et al. 2001, Cooke 2002.

<sup>44</sup> It was referred to as a ‘maturing milieu’ (Garnsey and Lawton Smith 1998); as demonstrating ‘institutional thickness’, with strong external linkages (Keeble et al. 1999). In 2000, comparisons were no longer made with other UK areas, but with a few international clusters (Crouch et al. 2001). According to *The Economist* 21 Feb 2004, the area was “Europe’s nearest equivalent to Silicon Valley”.

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RPG6 2000 had reversed the overall strategy of dispersing growth pressures away from Cambridge. The promoters of the Cambridge Sub-Region had argued that it was desirable to accommodate more housing in the region. The County Structure Plan now needed to be revised to provide a strategy for the location of this development. Rather than the in-house assessments of trends and options which were undertaken in the 1970s and 1980s, the technical knowledge base for the Structure Plan was provided by consultancy studies. During the period between 1997-2004, a large number of studies of development issues in and around the Cambridge Sub-Region had been undertaken, by a number of different consultants (see Table 5.3), reflecting a strong national tendency to contract out the production of research and intelligence for public policy purposes. Two studies had already been commissioned, on growth locations, from Colin Buchanan and Partners, and on how to implement major developments, from Roger Tym and Partners. A further study was undertaken of the prospects for developing 'multi-modal' transport provision along the Cambridge to Huntingdon 'corridor'. The purpose of the Buchanan study (Buchanan and partners 2001) was to assess the 'capacity' of Cambridge City to ~~take~~ absorb more development and to undertake a strategic review of the Green Belt, both issues left 'hanging in the air' from the 1995 structure plan. The main focus was on the allocation of housing numbers<sup>47</sup>.

**Table 5.3: Planning studies undertaken by consultants: 1997-2004**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Consultancy</b>	<b>Client</b>
1997	Cambridge Capacity Study	Local Authorities, and Chesteron Planning and Consulting	County Council

<sup>47</sup> The consultants took the housing figures from the RPG, developed a database of possible development sites to get an idea of 'capacity', and then arranged these into various options which could be evaluated according to a range of criteria, broadly intended to measure various dimensions of 'sustainability'. The various options were structured in terms of ideas about transport corridors and the possibility of new settlements (Buchanan and partners, 2001). The data used was primarily supplied by the county, and most of the sites assessed had already been the subject of development interest over the previous twenty years.

1998	Cambridge 2020: meeting the challenge of growth	A working group including Alec Broers and Marcial Echenique	Cambridge Network
1999	Cambridge Futures	Marcial Echenique, Department of Architecture, Cambridge University	Cambridge Futures
2000	The Cambridge Phenomenon Revisited	Segal, Quince Wicksteed/PACEC?	Cambridge Futures
2001	Cambridge Sub-Regional Study	Colin Buchanan and others	SCEALA
2001	Implementing the Cambridge Sub-Region study	Roger Tym and Partners	County, EEDA, and GO-East
2002	Key worker and affordable housing	Department of Land Economy, Cambridge University	Cambridge City Council and SCDC
2001	London-Stansted-Cambridge Study	ECOTEC Research and Consultancy, & others	GO-East (or ODPM?)
2003	Employment growth scenarios	Experian business strategies	EEDA
200x	Cambridge-Huntingdon Multimodal Study	???	??
2003	Stansted/M11 Development Options Study	Colin Buchanan and Partners	EERA
2004	A study of the relationship between transport and development in the London, Stansted, Cambridge, Peterborough growth area	Colin Buchanan and Partners with GVA Grimley	ODPM

(Demographic studies were also undertaken by Dave King at East Anglia Polytechnic University, for the local authorities).

The outcome of these studies, as expressed in the Cambridge and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 (CCC 2003) was a re-iterated version of the locational criteria which had been evolving since ~~the 1991~~ RPG6 1991. The critical shift was to emphasise that both Cambridge and Peterborough were key locations for new development. Another new settlement location was also specified. Once again, a choice was made between a location on the A10 going north, and on the A14 to the northwest. The latter, Longstanton/Oakington (now Northstowe), was selected in part because it was on the hoped-for light rail rapid transit route. The Structure Plan maintained the strategy of selective employment restraint, now expressed in terms of the selective promotion of specific clusters, a position likely to be helpful to most existing companies in a tight labour market. The regional dispersal policy remains in the attempt to link Cambridge's growth dynamic to Peterborough, and in the continuing promotion of market towns and some larger rural centres on good public transport routes as locations for economic development projects. Reflecting national policy, housing development in the county area as a whole was to be at higher

densities, with a larger provision of affordable housing, to meet local housing needs and to redress the imbalance in the housing market. This also implied less pressure to allocate potentially controversial greenfield sites.

New development was only to be allowed where “the additional infrastructure and community requirements can be secured, which may be by condition or legal agreement or undertaking” (Policy P6/1, CCC 2003:57). The text of the plan emphasises the enhancement of the landscape and the provision of cycleways, walking and waste recycling. In relation to the boundary between urban and rural landscapes, the plan calls for districts in their local plans to “maintain a clear transition between settlements and the countryside” (Ibid: 70). There is also a strong emphasis on conserving the landscape qualities of the countryside and promoting access to it from urban areas. This was a clear signal for the Cambridge area that a strong green belt should be maintained, but with the old idea of ‘wedges’ or corridors of green penetrating into the heart of the city. On the transport front, the structure plan continued to emphasise the development of public transport and the exercise of strong ‘demand management’ measures to reduce congestion in cities such as Cambridge. The County hoped to promote more frequent public transport in accessible and environmentally-friendly vehicles, and to promote two long-standing rail proposals – the rapid transit route and an east-west rail route connecting through Cambridge to Oxford in the west and the East Anglian ports to the east.

For the Cambridge Sub-Region itself, these ideas were translated into a clear policy argument explaining that the strategy of limiting Cambridge’s growth was no longer sustainable (see quote at the start of this chapter). This argument expresses the consensus arrived at among politicians in the County, in the City, and, by this time, in South Cambridgeshire District Council<sup>48</sup>. The planning framework of selective restraint which ‘nurtured’ the development of the Cambridge high-tech cluster was now to be directed at nurturing a sustainable strategy for a more ‘balanced’ form of development, with more mixed uses on major development sites, combined with an emphasis on reducing commuting, increasing housing supply and affordability, enhancing the quality of the built environment and ensuring a vision of “Cambridge

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<sup>48</sup> Although SCDC politicians did feel that they had been dragged into a scale of growth they would have preferred not to accept.

as a compact, dynamic city with a thriving historic centre ... framed by its Green Belt setting” (Ibid: 106). The new strategy is expressed in an overall vision statement and diagram (see Figure 5.7).

### **Figure 5.7: The Cambridge Sub-Region Vision**

The plan then allocates ‘housing numbers’ to each location type within the Sub-Region and specifies the locations where sites on the inner boundary of the Green Belt are to be released to allow more development. Once again, sites previously considered are brought back into play, following the assessment by Buchanan and partners, notably in the east and south, along with a new site in the north west, promoted by the University for its long-term expansion needs<sup>49</sup>. Major retail expansion was firmly resisted except in Cambridge city centre. These proposals were presented in a Key Diagram (Figure 5.8). But while the **CPSP 2003** reflects a major shift in strategy for the location of new development, and asserts the importance of attention to environmental qualities and the integration between development and infrastructure, it has little to say about what kind of place the Cambridge area was to become as a city, rather than merely an economic cluster in an attractive environment. Its place-framing attention is limited to the specification of criteria to shape new development projects and the definition of the morphological boundary between built up and ‘green’ areas.

### **Figure 5.8. Cambridge Sub-Region: Key Diagram.**

It was left to the districts to locate development sites precisely in their local plans and to produce ‘master plans’ as planning briefs for each site. Although many of the arguments at the structure plan inquiry were about sites around Cambridge itself,

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<sup>49</sup> Cambridge City had hoped that development could be extended in the east across the Cambridge Airport site into the villages of Teversham and Fullbourn, as an alternative to a new settlement beyond the greenbelt, but South Cambridgeshire District Council argued successfully at the EIP against this, on the grounds that the latter were villages which needed to be kept separate from the built up area, in line with Green Belt policy.

South Cambridgeshire had to accommodate more of the housing total, with the new settlement of Northstowe accommodating only 6000 of the 20,000 that had to be provided for. However, since many sites had been proposed for development and evaluated over the years, selecting sites was not so problematic. It was clear that large sites were available and in suitable locations to accommodate more development than even the targets allocated in RPG6 2000. But for local stakeholders, the availability of sites as such was hardly the issue. Well before the Structure Plan was approved in 2003, the county, the districts and other promoters of the 'Cambridge Sub-Region' were arguing that it would not be possible to proceed without major funding for infrastructure. This could only be obtained from national government. There was also an issue about how to co-ordinate and manage so much development, with several sites overlapping the boundary between Cambridge City and SCDC. The position of the County as a possible co-ordinator was by this time seriously weakened as most of their strategic planning powers were to be taken from them by the emerging planning legislation, which re-located the strategic spatial planning instrument to the regional level. The production of a Regional Spatial Strategy for the new East of England region was required, the preparation for which was initiated in 2002. In this context, key stakeholders under the umbrella of the Greater Cambridge Partnership, produced in 2002 a list of key investments to underpin the growth strategy which they presented to national government (While et al. 2004).

The districts, Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire District Council, had now to revise their own plans, in the context of the changing approach to development plans introduced by the new national planning act, passed in 2004<sup>50</sup>. By 2003, Cambridge City was already revising its local plan. This was adjusted after a period of public consultation to bring it in line with the approved structure plan. It repeats many of the criteria for new development, emphasising achieving design quality, compactness, environmental benefits and the relation of physical and social infrastructure in all new developments. This provides an agenda for negotiations about design and about developer contributions with project developers. In terms of urban structure, the City's plan maintains the long-standing concept of landscape corridors stretching

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<sup>50</sup> This required local authorities to produce a Local Development Framework, consisting of a Core Strategy, a Statement of Community Involvement, and a suite of Local Development Documents relevant to particular projects and issues. A district-wide Local Plan was no longer required.

through the city, and introduces the idea of ‘peripheral mixed-use centres’ in the new development areas, to provide future employment-generating development as well as housing. A strong emphasis is given to accessibility, enabled by ‘high quality public transport’ (CCityC 2004)<sup>51</sup>.

The struggle for multi-level co-alignment of spatial development policy thus remained very complex, while at the same time, key stakeholders needed to turn their attention to the implementation of major development projects. This underlined the need to obtain funding for infrastructure investment, not merely for transport, but for community services such as health and education, and for affordable housing. Since the early 1980s, the expectation had been that such funding could be obtained from developers’ contributions through the power to demand ‘obligations’ when planning permission was given. But this inevitably meant that infrastructure lagged behind development, which was not only against the new Structure Plan policy but extremely unpopular locally. Therefore, the sub-region stakeholders had little option but to campaign hard for more ‘upfront’ investment, although this meant that their local initiatives were re-positioned within a larger and much more complex regional and national governance landscape.

#### *Local success in an unstable governance context*

British local government has traditionally had substantial capacities but limited autonomous resources and virtually no formal power to legislate. This situation was re-inforced from the 1980s and continued with the Labour government of 1997, although the latter promoted building a stronger regional tier of government and in theory a ‘new localism’ (Corry and Stoker, 2002). To obtain investment funding, the promoters of growth in the Cambridge Sub-Region had to target the national level, to capture attention to their needs. Such attention built on a well-developed base, through the traditionally-strong networks between the University and the civil service and the government’s enthusiasm for the ‘Cambridge Sub-Region’. The national Treasury was also increasingly concerned about the link between the supply of new housing and macro-economic stability, with a house price boom in full swing, with rising numbers of households combined with investment shifts from equities to

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<sup>51</sup> South Cambridgeshire District Council waited until 2004 before starting to revise its local plan, and were pulled into observing the formal requirements of the new Act.

property following the dot.com bust, but yet new housebuilding was not expanding. This led to an interest at national government level in the relation between economic performance, housing prices and production and the planning system's role in allocating land for housing development. But critical for the Cambridge area was the link between new housing and infrastructure, which meant that the attention of the government departments responsible for transport, education and health was also needed. For the promoters of the 'Cambridge Phenomenon', central government was the 'problem' (SQW 2000).

The main national Department dealing with planning and urban development issues, by this time called the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM<sup>52</sup>), was responsible for local government, the regional agenda, urban policy, housing policy and the planning system. With respect to this range of functions, the ODPM and its predecessors under the Labour government had been pursuing an often conflicting agenda of managerial improvement, promoting 'modernisation', 'holistic' or 'joined-up' government, 'urban renaissance', sustainable development and quality environments, as well as 'new localism' (Johnstone and Whitehead 2004, '6' et al. 2002, Corry and Stoker 2002), though with a very weak conception of how different policies and initiatives connected together in cities (Marvin and May 2003). In the planning field, the emphasis was on expanding housebuilding, particularly of affordable housing negotiated through the planning system via developers' contributions, and 'modernising' the planning system into a more flexible, pro-active and responsive form of 'spatial planning', rather than time-consuming bureaucratic land use regulation<sup>53</sup> (Tewdwr-Jones and Allmendinger 2006).

~~The main national Department dealing with planning and urban development issues, by this time called the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM<sup>54</sup>), was~~

<sup>52</sup> There have been continual re-combinations and separation of functions in this national department. The most recent re-organisation was in 2001, when transport was allocated to a separate department, and 'environment' was moved to a new department where it combined with agriculture and rural development.

<sup>53</sup> That regional planning as promoted in the Cambridge area might have positive benefits in protecting landscape, maintaining high land and property values and excluding some competition for sites and labour for favoured industries was not often recognised.

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The Cambridge Sub-Region experience was very attractive in this context. Here was a part of the congested outer Metropolitan area accepting growth and not fighting it, showing how a locally-articulated strategic approach could succeed in a very sensitive local environment, with an integrated, ‘spatial’, approach to managing development. As a planning strategy, the ODPM had no problems in backing the planning framework. Providing resources was another matter, however. Through its urban policy remit, the department provided investment funds for urban regeneration. It had not been providing resources for areas of growth, which, it was assumed, could ‘pay their way’. Lobbies promoting increased investment in Northern England, and in the major cities outside London, well-connected to Labour ministers, sought to protect and enhance these allocations (Jonas et al. FF, Marvin and May 2003). Within the growing areas of southern Britain, many stakeholders were clamouring for more infrastructure investment, responding to the same kind of citizen complaints as in the Cambridge area. Appealing to the national level therefore catapulted the Cambridge Sub-Region promoters into a highly competitive governance landscape.

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~~<sup>55</sup> That Regional Planning as promoted in the Cambridge area might have positive benefits in protecting landscape, maintaining high land and property values and excluding some competition for sites and labour for favoured industries was not often recognised.~~

In this context, the ODPM took the bold step of producing the nearest thing to a national spatial plan for England achieved since the 1960s<sup>56</sup> (see Figure 5.9). *Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future* (ODPM, 2003) was an attempt to balance the various claims for development investment between the regeneration and growth lobbies. Its focus was primarily on how to produce quality living environments and on the housing production agenda, but it was intended to provide a framework for co-ordinating the inputs of other departments to the areas targeted for investment. In addition to the well-established urban areas where regeneration funds had been focused for some time, the Sustainable Communities ‘Plan’ (actually called an ‘Action Programme’), identified four ‘growth areas’ around London. Two remain from the 1970 Strategic Plan for the South East, the Milton Keynes/South Midlands area, and Ashford, in Kent on the eventually appearing Channel Tunnel high speed rail line. The third, Thames Gateway, was prefigured in 1970 but evolved in the regeneration strategies for the London docklands and industrial areas along the mouth of the Thames and had been strongly promoted as a way of counterbalancing growth in London’s western M4 corridor, which was no longer considered a growth area. The fourth, the ‘London-Stansted-Cambridge’ area, is much more recent, deriving from the debates on the Regional Planning Guidance 9 for the South East at the end of the 1990s<sup>57</sup>. The Sustainable Communities ‘plan’ mentions the possibility of another new settlement in the Cambridge area. The ‘Plan’ was followed up in 2004 with two new funding mechanisms, the *Growth Area Fund (GAF)*<sup>58</sup> and a *Community Infrastructure Fund*. John Prescott, Deputy Prime Minister, also worked hard to persuade his cabinet colleagues to allocate funds from transport, education and health budgets to the growth areas<sup>59</sup>.

**Figure 5.9: The Sustainable Communities Action Plan.**

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<sup>56</sup> However, as some have pointed out, this plan just emerged, without any public debate or any approval in an elected chamber of government (see letter to *Planning* 2 July 2004, p.10)

<sup>57</sup> The M11 growth idea had been revived from the 1980s during the EiP on RPG9 for the South East (pers.comm S Crow, 07.05).

<sup>58</sup> £164m was allocated in the SCP for the growth areas outside the Thames Gateway. This was divided up to give the M11 corridor £xxm, for which bids to the GAF had to be made (ch. Mike Hargreaves interview!). The GAF was originally called the Growth Areas Development Grant.

<sup>59</sup> In this, he was backed by Gordon Brown, Chancellor of the Exchequer, who wanted to see a substantial increase in housing provision in southern Britain, to cool the housing market.

By 2004, therefore, the Cambridge Sub-Region promoters had acquired a new national status as a major growth node in a newly-defined growth area, access to a new investment fund, and some priority in other government departments for infrastructure spending in their area. But it still remained to work out where and how the available funding would be disbursed, and how major developments would be managed. On the planning front, despite general support for the strategy embedded in the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003, two factors at national level generated uncertainties. One was the new Planning Act, eventually approved in May 2004 after a two-year gestation. This relocated the structure planning role of counties to the regional level, weakening the co-ordinative power of the county, and required districts to convert their local plans into 'local development frameworks', which meant considerable extra work. The other destabilising factor was a review sponsored by the Treasury of the relation between the house building industry and the planning system, the Barker review (Barker 2004)<sup>60</sup>. This opened up the policy debate about how much developers should contribute to the direct costs which their projects imposed on a locality and how much they should pay as a tax on the value generated by the conversion of 'greenfields' into urban development. Developers also tended to adopt a 'wait and see' attitude in negotiations over contributions, until there was more clarity about what infrastructure the new government funds would provide. As local actors commented in 2005, this uncertainty had the perverse effect of slowing down rather than speeding up the delivery of new housing development.

With all these changes in government responsibilities and in policies, the critical arenas for urban development strategy had moved from the County Planning Department and the informal networks promoting the Cambridge Sub-Region to the national level and the wider regional level, with the Government Office for the East of England (GO-East)<sup>61</sup>, and the East of England Regional Assembly (EERA), consisting of appointed local politicians and other stakeholders, as key players, along with the regional development agency (EEDA).

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<sup>60</sup> This had been set up by the Treasury to investigate why the supply of new houses was not responding to demand.

<sup>61</sup> The initial regional idea had been to create elected assemblies at the regional level, but this collapsed when voters in the North East of England overwhelmingly rejected such a proposal.

The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan 2003 was largely absorbed into the emerging Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS). This was partly because Cambridgeshire politicians felt they had already made their contribution to accommodating growth<sup>62</sup>. In addition, however, it was known that there was capacity in sites already approved to accommodate further development, so that a roll-forward in housing targets to 2021 was easily achievable if development on these sites got underway. The issue for the Cambridge Sub-Region stakeholders by this time was not capacity but delivery. The big struggles over the RSS centred further south, in Hertfordshire and Essex, where county/district relations had been riven by conflicts for some time. National government once again felt that a major ‘strategic assessment’ of the location and form of development in the London-Stansted-Cambridge growth area, now stretched to reach Peterborough, should be undertaken. ECOTEC consultants had already carried out an assessment of the Harlow area, complementing that undertaken by Colin Buchanan and partners for the Cambridge Sub-Region. The draft of the EERA Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS), available in February 2004, was put on hold at the request of the government, while this new study was undertaken, again by Colin Buchanan and partners (Buchanan and partners, 2004).

The impetus for this study was the problems now being experienced by government ~~was experiencing~~ in persuading local stakeholders in Hertfordshire and Essex to accept further growth in the Stansted to London part of, what was increasingly referred to as, ‘the M11 corridor’. Into this study was lobbed the requirement that the East of England should accommodate a further 18,000 dwellings by 2016. The study largely left the established proposals for the Cambridge Sub-Region intact, as did the draft RSS, which focused on identifying development nodes to the south. It makes much use of the corridor concept. In contrast, the RSS had extended the well-established concept of regional sub-areas, each with a predominant urban node, into a general idea of a region composed of city regions. Both studies sought to develop a stronger concept of the spatiality of territorial organisation than had been common in structure plans in the previous twenty years (see Figure 5.10).

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<sup>62</sup> Cambridgeshire councillor John Reynolds who had steered the structure plan through to approval took on a similar position in EERA.

### Figure 5.10: Corridors and Sub-Regions in the East of England

The Regional Spatial Strategy was then re-assessed in the light of the Buchanan study and the increased housing numbers, and approved in November 2004 by the East of England Regional Assembly (EERA) to go out for consultation, prior to amendment and an inquiry due in Autumn 2005. Almost immediately, however, the conservative councillors on *EERA*, with a national election due the following May, withdrew their support for the strategy, on the grounds that the infrastructure to support such development was not available<sup>63</sup>. However, by March 2005, the councillors came back into the discussion arena, while maintaining their concerns about infrastructure provision. By this time, the consultation period had ended, generating 26,000 objections to the strategy. Few of these related to the Cambridge Sub-Area. However, by early 2006, in response to new demographic projections, the pressure to increase still further the numbers of dwelling units to be accommodated was revived.

Locally, the focus of attention had shifted to getting the major development sites in the Cambridge Sub-Area underway. During 2004, there was much discussion in the nationally-designated 'Growth Areas' about the appropriate 'delivery mechanisms' for managing growth. In the Cambridge area, there was little support for an agency with powers taken from the local authorities, yet it was recognised that some agency was needed to manage development sites and to make bids to the national 'growth area' funds. The outcome was the creation of Cambridgeshire Horizons (CH) in 2004, a semi-independent agency, funded for 3 years principally by *ODPM*, to act as a development facilitator and co-ordinator for the major sites. All bids for the growth area investment funds were to be channelled through CH before ~~they are being~~ sent on to GO-East. By 2005, CH had become not merely a development co-ordinator, bringing different parties together, smoothing out difficulties and speeding up the development process. It also had a networking and knowledge circulating role, acting

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<sup>63</sup> This was a political position that the Tory party were to take nationally in the May 2005 general election, with the cancelling of the Sustainable Communities Plan announced in their election manifesto, but also reflected real local concerns.

as an arena for discussing common problems, for open debate about project priorities and for exchanging experience<sup>64</sup>. While each major project had its own stakeholder group seeking to develop masterplans, co-ordinating and phasing development, and linking public realm requirements with development practicalities and profitability considerations, CH acted as a useful arena in which they all met<sup>65</sup>.

Thus, in the decade from 1995-2005, a local stakeholder coalition was successful in mobilising behind a growth strategy for the Cambridge Sub-Region, breaking the long-standing hold of the 'Holford' plan, and inserting an agenda of development sites and infrastructure needs into regional and national policy arenas. The practice of regulatory drip-feed of sites released for development had not been changed, but the quantity of land released was substantially increased, and connections between planning regulation and infrastructure investment made in a more co-ordinated and strategic way. By late 2005, funds for the guided busway from Northstow to Cambridge had been approved. But there were costs to this success. The local coalition lost some of its powers to the regional and national level, and, in focusing on the implementation of the major growth projects, did not continue to sustain strategic debate about the nature, qualities and urban morphology of an expanded Cambridge.

In addition, the coalition's efforts were forced into the procedures and discourses established by national government. Although by the early 2000s, a vigorous movement had developed within the national planning policy community to transform the practice of planning from its narrow emphasis on regulatory issues to a more strategic 'spatial planning' focus (RTPI 2001), the politics of vertical mobilisation reduced engagement with citizens in debating urban region futures. Instead, key actors in planning and development arenas depended on their various networks to connect to local concerns. Many citizens remained continually active in their interest in the qualities of the area, and councillors were largely responsive to their viewpoints. What was missing in all this strategy-making work was a wide-ranging debate to 'summon up' any new orienting idea of what the rapidly changing urban

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<sup>64</sup> Two of the top management team of Cambridgeshire Horizons had previously worked for the County and the City Council and were well-networked into Cambridge planning and development arenas.

<sup>65</sup> However, its funding was short-term and its support vulnerable to shifts in the local political climate as development emerged into physical form and generated new pressures on transport and social infrastructures

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Citizens and other stakeholders in the Cambridge area were typically both proud of the recognition of Cambridge as a 'special place' and very protective of its particular qualities. But the 'special place' of Cambridge by 2005 was very different to that of

the ‘university and market town’ of the mid-twentieth century. It had become a key economic driver in a regional and national context, an important locale in the wider economic nexus of southern England, positioned in a group of locales globally significant for a particular industrial form which emerged around new technologies in the late twentieth century. But it is also a small historic town, cut into by green tongues of landscape, and surrounded by villages in a rural landscape, accessible by cycle and on foot. Those seeking the space for growth also know that all these special qualities have to be respected. They live with multiple views of the city’s identities and continual contest about changes. They also know that economic growth on its own will not be tolerated by a vocal and well-informed citizenry, who care about environmental conditions and are aware of all kinds of ethical responsibilities to the environment and to fairer and more equitable forms of development. In this climate, it might be possible for an exemplary case of multi-level political and administrative co-operation to manage growth [within](#) a perceived territory which [itself](#) escapes formal administrative boundaries.

But this potential is undermined by the weakness of the formal governance capacity for a locally-driven development strategy. Informally, the various parties over the years have managed to work out how to ‘balance’ steady expansion with keeping hold of key qualities of place. The County and the City have been critical arenas in achieving this balance, with the University a powerful third party, with its own contradictory interests in both conservation and growth promotion. Now the University is only one party among many, the county’s planning powers have been curtailed, and the key formal arena for arguing over planning strategies and investment priorities is at the much wider level of the region, which is itself merely a slice of the London and South East metropolitan complex. Because of the difficulties of managing growth in such a large urban agglomeration, and because this complex is so important and near to national government, any conflicts are played out up and down all the levels of government, and encounter the contradictions over planning, development and infrastructure policy at interregional and national level. The result is an unstable wider governance context, with the potential to undermine the stability and local support which the growth coalition in the Cambridge area has sought to achieve around a new development trajectory.

## **Concluding comments**

The story of planning and development in the Cambridge area over the past half century illustrates the power of local forces first to limit development pressures and then accommodate substantial growth according to locally-articulated principles. But it also shows that this only succeeds in the UK context if continual efforts are made to gain support nationally and to express local concerns in the discourses and procedures articulated at national level. Although the Cambridge area has been an exemplar of how a new planning system should be practiced, the relations between levels of government in the system have been hierarchical and sectoral rather than multi-level and integrative. Co-alignment between the regulation of development and development investment is particularly difficult in such a context. The Cambridge politicians, planners and other stakeholders succeeded because they continually took initiatives to articulate their position in relation to evolving economic and social conditions and in awareness of how planning ideas nationally were evolving.

The major material outcome of this effort is visible in the protection of the valued landscape – of villages in their rural settings, of small market towns and of a still-small city connected to its green surroundings by ‘wedges’ of attractive undeveloped landscape. But it is also apparent in the increasing levels of traffic moving along the expanding road network, and in the very high house prices with consequent effects on labour costs and commuting levels, a phenomenon evident across affluent southern England and particularly visible in periods of national economic growth and housing market boom. Despite much local concern about the environmental and social costs of selective growth, these costs threaten to undermine the idea of a ‘balanced’, environmentally-sustainable and socially-equitable growth strategy.

The planning system, with its procedures for plan-making and for inquiries into plans and specific development proposals, has provided the critical arenas for both articulating and legitimating growth management strategy. In contrast to many other parts of the country, spatial strategy-making legitimated through the planning system has been a key tool through which local actors have sought to realise a ‘selective’ approach to growth. Plans have been continually adjusted to retain strategies in good

currency and appropriately aligned with the discourses and techniques advocated in national policy. This has been necessary to defend planning decisions against strong developer challenges whenever weaknesses or uncertainties in strategy have been perceived. These strategies have typically been carefully crafted, and focused on key strategic issues, with arguments directed at both local audiences and national government expectations. They have also been infused with a strong perception of the local landscape. The idea of a city region, in a terrain of small market towns and villages in a rural setting, has retained its imaginative pull on planning strategies, despite a shift from a strategy of growth dispersal to one of compact urban expansion. This in turn is justified by concepts of city region housing and labour markets which are relatively self-contained, even as Cambridge itself grows in its impacts across the wider region, and the area becomes absorbed into the complex geographies of the vast metropolitan region of southern England.

A rather traditional geography continues to pervade spatial strategy-making in the Cambridge Sub-Region. This is partly related to the continued significance of the old 'small university town' identity which still has substantial meaning for powerful local actors. But there has also been a shift in the knowledge resources mobilised to underpin strategy making. Whereas in the mid-twentieth century, the emphasis was on developing a careful account of the local territory, which could inform strategy-making, an approach still manifest in the technical survey work undertaken by the county planners in the 1970s and 1980s, by the 1990s, there was no longer the staff for such work. Instead, knowledge has been provided through discussion in the various network arenas, through occasional special studies carried out by the University's Departments of Architecture and Land Economy, but most particularly by consultancy companies skilled in addressing policy issues structured by national government preoccupations. This material is often not easily accessible to the general public.

The Cambridge Sub-Region story thus illustrates a situation with substantial local capacity to manage development processes in a situation where there are always conflicting values and claims about development options and trajectories. This capacity uses formal government arenas, but activates these through the informal

networks which connect different groups to politicians and officials, and link local actors to national politicians and civil servants. In this way, the 'Cambridge Sub-Region' has been brought into existence even though there is no formal organisation to represent it and even though it extends across several administrative jurisdictions. However, these networks are still largely those of an 'establishment elite'. How well they will survive in an enlarged Cambridge and in a governance landscape in which they are more exposed to the highly conflictual politics of other parts of southern England, remains to be seen. As throughout this story, much depends on the capacity of national government both to encourage integration between land allocation strategies through the planning system and investment in infrastructure and services in areas of substantial change, and to decentralise itself, to give institutional space for the development of local capacities for the governance of place.