

## **Are exurbs a sustainable city form?**

**Dr Stephen Platt**

Department of Architecture

Nottingham University, [stephen.platt@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:stephen.platt@nottingham.ac.uk)

Phone/fax numbers:00 44 (0) 7970 880046

### **Abstract**

There has been a long tradition in the UK, from Garden Cities and New Towns to proposal for new Eco-towns, of building new settlements. This paper provides an insight into the development of Cambourne, a new settlement of 4,200 homes due west of Cambridge. Firstly, does it meet the objectives of the original Master Plan? And secondly, can we learn lessons that can guide future large-scale development and perhaps provide a model for a new kind of distributed city.

The master planners of Cambourne imagined that the traditional character of an English village would give the settlement its image and identity and sustainability was the big idea that would provide a sense of purpose. However, neither in terms of size nor character, is Cambourne a village as was originally conceived. Nor is it a small town. It is in fact a new hybrid – an 'exurb'.

Nor have the key objectives of self-sufficiency, high performance environmental design and the use of renewables been met. Cambourne is not self-contained in terms of jobs, secondary schools or services. Nevertheless, Cambourne is successful and popular. The landscaping is sensitive and imaginative and the houses are, in the main, well built and pleasing. The level of amenities and services is much greater than in surrounding villages and transport access is good.

All this makes Cambourne an attractive and popular place to live. But it is not a sustainable settlement and this analysis casts serious doubt on the UK Government's plans to create carbon neutral housing and sustainable Eco-towns.

**Keywords:** new settlements; sustainability; master planning; eco-town; exurb.