

CASE STUDY

Suffolk Design

North-West Cambridge

Location: Eddington, Cambridge

No. of units: 1,500 homes for University and College staff; 1,500 private houses for sale; Accommodation for 2,000 postgraduates;

Architect: WilkinsonEyre, Mole Architects, Stanton Williams, Mecanoo, Sarah Wigglesworth Architects, RH Partnership, Marks Barfield Architects, MUMA, Maccreeor Lavington, and Witherford Watson Mann

Year of construction: opened 2017

BACKGROUND

The development aims to tackle this issue facing Cambridge University of the lack of affordable accommodation for its staff and post-graduate students.

The size of the development allows for a sense of place to be created and this mixed-use development for the North West Cambridge site includes:

- 1,500 homes for University and College staff; 1,500 private houses for sale; Accommodation for 2,000 postgraduates; 100,000 sqm of academic and research and development space of which up to 40% may be private research with University connection or Research Institute; Community facilities such as a primary school, community centre, health centre, supermarket and local shops; A hotel; Care home; Sustainable transport provision including cycle ways; Sports Centre and playing fields; Public Open space.



KEY LEARNINGS

- Northwest Cambridge is inspiring, yet we are reticent that it represents decades of focus, energy and sustained priorities. Quality is achieved not by chance, but by continuity, control and innovation. Here, quality means a dedicated Quality Review Panel, design coding, and thoughtfully structured relationships between landowner, designer and eventual contractor; architects have to be novated to contractors. Typical decisions taken - by both developer and designer - are questioned, innovated simply. The result is compelling. For example, a plot is not signalled by nature of where the gaps in-between the street network are, but drawn across streets, with each site developed in collaboration, by two architects. Schools are not square and long, with classrooms along corridors, but circular in form. Water bodies are not left as isolated, abstracted pools - footbridges are drawn across so people can engage with them.
- Development control and design codes can be restrictive and flatten outcomes, but with space for innovating simply, through the form and mass, the results are compelling.
- Development and planning boundaries should be drawn with a critical eye - a less obvious path can yield depth and richness.