

CASE STUDY

Suffolk Design Abode at Great Kneighton, Cambridge

BACKGROUND

- Visited as part of the first Suffolk Design Study Tour, Abode, Great Kneighton, a major housing and mixed-use development in the city's Southern Fringe growth area.



Location: Great Kneighton, Cambridge

No. of units: 2,250 dwellings

Architect: Proctor and Matthews

Developer: Countryside Properties

https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/asset/document/DC%20CABE%20HOUSING%20CASE%20STUDY_2_ABO DE_310316%20FINAL.pdf

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.