

# Planning for growth: planning reform and the Cambridge Phenomenon.

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The 'Cambridge Phenomenon', the remarkable growth of research, development, high technology industry and employment clustered around the city's world-class university, has achieved global recognition (Segal Quince and Partners, 1985; Keeble, 1989; Crang and Martin, 1991; Segal Quince Wicksteed and Partners, 2011a, 2011b)). Visiting the University's Molecular Biology Lab in April 2014, the UK Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne praised both the scientific achievements of the University but also its economic impact which he hailed as 'an extraordinary story' and a model for the country as a whole: 'What you've achieved here has been called "The Cambridge Phenomenon". I want it to be the British phenomenon' (HM Treasury, 2014). He was, he said 'here to tell you: we will continue to back Cambridge'. Meanwhile, however, his ministerial colleagues in charge of the national planning system were playing to what was potentially a very different script. Radical reform of the planning system in England, culminating in the Localism Act 2011, had swept away both strategic planning in the form of Regional Spatial Strategies (RSS) and top-down targets for new house building at a local authority level (Baker and Wong, 2012; Gallent et al, 2013; Boddy and Hickman, 2013; Monk et al 2013). The Localism Act, together with the new National Planning Policy Framework introduced a 'presumption in favour of sustainable development'. At the heart of the new localism, however was the principle of 'passing new powers and freedoms to town halls' and that 'power should be exercised at the lowest practical level – close to the people who are affected by decisions' (CLG, 2012a, 6). In practice, the introduction of the new planning framework led many local councils, especially across prosperous southern England, to announce significant reductions in levels of new house building set out previously in Regional Spatial Strategies and projected levels of new house building were rolled back (Tetlow King Planning, 2012; Boddy and Hickman, 2013).

The Cambridge city-region had seen particularly strong growth in high-technology, university-linked businesses and employment, starting in the 1970s. For much of the post-war period the planning context, here, as across much of southern England, had in fact been one of constraint with only limited concessions to these pressures for growth. It epitomised what Brindley et al (1996) termed 'regulative

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planning' (see also Crang and Martin, 1991; While et al, 2004; Healey, 2007). University expansion and the growth of the high technology cluster were increasingly frustrated by continued planning constraints. Shifts in the planning framework in 2000 to 2003 (detailed later) had however reframed the strategic context in support of growth. This included significantly higher levels of housing development and employment. These growth plans were confirmed by the RSS for the East of England which emphasised the importance of the delivery of already agreed upon plans for physical expansion across the sub-region. The demise of strategic planning and RSS and the rise of localism thus posed potentially very significant questions for the future trajectory of the city-region – and for the future of the Cambridge Phenomenon itself.

This paper examines how planning reform, including abolition of regional strategy and top-down targets, and the advent of localism, has played out in the Cambridge city-region. It looks at how a wide range of stakeholders have viewed and responded to reform and at why stakeholders have responded in the way that they have. It goes on to look at potential implications of planning reform for continuing growth and the future trajectory of the city region and the wider Cambridge Phenomenon – does localism pose a potential threat to the neo-liberal growth strategy which some have seen as epitomised in the recent history of the Cambridge phenomenon? In doing so it will explore both shifts in neo-liberal strategy (recognising as Allmendinger (2009) points out that neo-liberalism itself includes different emphases and traditions) and also the tensions between neo-liberal growth strategies and what might be termed neo-conservative localism as played out in the field of planning. It will also explore the basis for what are apparently very different outcomes of an avowedly National policy framework as this has been played out in different local contexts, in what Allmendinger and Haughton (2013), and Haughton et al (2013) have intimated may be a period of experiment and innovation and which Raco (2012) and Deas (2012) have suggested may represent an era of 'post-politics', counter neo-liberalising tendencies (Brenner et al 2010) and even the end of the neo-liberal project.

### **Planning for growth and the Cambridge Phenomenon**

The response to localism and planning reform in the Cambridge city-region needs to be understood in the context of post-war planning history in the area and the particular trajectory of knowledge-based, high technology growth captured in the mid-1980s in the idea of the 'Cambridge Phenomenon' (Segal, Quince and Partners, 1985). For much of the post-war period growth was highly constrained (While et al 2004; Healey 2007; Morrisson 2010; Allmendinger 2011). The 1950 *Holford Report* established the principle of the Cambridge green belt and the planning concept that growth should be dispersed beyond the green belt to surrounding towns and villages to protect the historic core of Cambridge.<sup>3</sup> Major growth of Cambridge itself was to

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<sup>3</sup> Proposals developed earlier by the influential Cambridge Preservation Society, forerunner of Cambridge Past, Present and Future (Cooper, A., 1998).

be restricted on the basis that “one cannot make a good expanding plan for Cambridge” (Holford and Wright, 1950, viii).

High technology businesses including spin-outs and other university-linked developments started to grow through the 1970s including the development of the Science Park by Trinity College from 1973. The University had pushed for research-related development to be allowed as early as 1969 (Mott, 1969) and there was some relaxation to this end (Cambridge County Council 1971) but there was no revision of the green belt at this time and restrictions on housing, industrial uses or corporate headquarters remained tight. The ‘Cambridge Phenomenon’ began to take off in the 1980s. Segal, Quince and Partners stressed the importance in this of high technology including individual entrepreneurs linked to the university, research and development rather than large-scale production or assembly. At this time, the university, in its desire to foster high technology growth to meet the developing needs of the university and university-business links, began to push for planning reform (Segal Quince and Partners, 1985; Keeble, 1989; Crang and Martin, 1991). Development remained, however tightly constrained. House prices rose sharply through the 1980s and there was mounting concern that the existing planning framework in representing a constraint on development potentially negatively impacted the trajectory of the Cambridge Phenomenon itself. Revisions to the County Structure Plan in 1989 provided for two new settlements and some adjustment to the green belt to the north of the city adjacent to the Science Park but housing restraint at Cambridge itself remained tight.

In 1997 the *Cambridge Futures Group* was formed, promoted initially by the University and was a non-profit making group of local business leaders, politicians, local government officers, professionals and academics looking at the options for growth in and around Cambridge. Its purpose was: “to investigate possible planning alternatives for Cambridge and its surrounding area .... and engage stakeholders outside the statutory planning processes as a way of achieving politically acceptable plans” (Echenique 2005, 113). It evaluated a relatively balanced series of options and the consequences that were likely to flow from these - including future restraint as well as growth focussed options. It is widely reported that this work enabled broad consensus to be reached about Cambridge being at a ‘tipping point’: the advantages of ‘growth’ would outweigh the negatives, and that despite tough political decisions, ‘ditching the existing policy of restricting growth suddenly seemed the obvious thing to do’<sup>4</sup>.

The agenda for growth which followed has been set out in detail elsewhere (Morrisson, 2010; Platt 2013). In brief, the sub-regional strategy for Cambridge set out in 2000 by the government in Regional Planning Guidance for East Anglia (RPG6, Government Office for the East of England, 2000) provided the strategic context for major development in the Cambridge sub-region including green belt review. This represented a fundamental shift in the planning strategy for the sub-region that had remained relatively unchanged for almost 50 years, despite substantial challenge and

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<sup>4</sup> Brian Smith, Director of Planning and Transport, Cambridgeshire County Council, quoted in Platt, 2013, 10.

‘fierce’ debate, particularly about whether “attempts to inhibit the spontaneous growth of new enterprise and high-tech enterprise, by means of planning controls, [are] in anyway justified from the national economic perspective” (Keeble, 1989, 167). This was then reflected in the 2003 Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan a key document which supported major release of land in the greenbelt and substantial housing growth (see table 1). Seen by many as building directly on the work of the Cambridge Futures Group, the Plan detailed the requirement for development both within the built-up area of Cambridge and on its edge including within South Cambridgeshire, subject to green belt review— a total of 32,500 dwellings over the plan period. This confirmed a major change to the policy of preceding decades. It seems, however, to have coalesced around a process driven at a local and sub-regional level, rather than reflecting external, national pressures. In support of this strategy, a local delivery vehicle, Cambridgeshire Horizons was established across the sub-region in 2004, in recognition of the need to project manage and work across sectors and authorities to deliver this level of planned growth. The development strategy for Cambridge set out in the 2003 Structure Plan was then carried through, largely unchanged, into the Regional Spatial Strategy for the East of England (Government Office for the East of England, 2008). A subsequent review did try to push up housing numbers further in the sub-region but had not been adopted before it was overtaken by the 2010 general election and abolition of RSS.<sup>5</sup>

The University itself maintained a strong interest in the physical development of new sites as it expanded the scale and scope of research, teaching, academic staff and student numbers, moved out of congested city-centre sites and worked increasingly closely with external partners located in the sub-region. Development of the West Cambridge site continued alongside plans published in 1999 for a major, university-led urban extension at North West Cambridge finally approved in February 2013 - the largest single capital development project the University has undertaken in its 800 year history. The impact of the scale and influence, formal and informal, of the university and university interests including extensive landholdings and access to financial resources thus played a considerable role in support of growth and physical expansion over an extended period of time (see Glasson et al 2013).

After decades of constraint, the last twenty years have thus seen the sub-region embracing growth. This has been reflected in a period of rapid expansion of technology-related business, university-related activities and, to an extent, levels of new house-building. Its population grew by 14,000 to 123,900 over the period 2001–2011 (fourth fastest city in the UK<sup>6</sup>, Centre for Cities, 2014) and is forecast to grow by a further 28% by 2031 (Cambridgeshire County Council, 2011). It had the lowest unemployment rate of UK cities at 1.4% in 2013 (November) and private sector jobs grew by 3.6%<sup>7</sup> fourth fastest<sup>7</sup> (ibid). It was also one of very few cities where

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<sup>5</sup> RSS for the East of England also referred explicitly to the need to implement the strategy for growth set out previously in Regional Planning Guidance (RPG 6, Government Office for the East of England 2000)

<sup>6</sup> Behind Peterborough, Milton Keynes and Swindon, all three of which are designated new or expanded towns

<sup>7</sup> Behind Aldershot, Peterborough and Telford.

economic growth continued through the recession (Centre for Cities, 2013). Its economy was recently described as “substantial, productive and competitive” (SQW 2011a, ii). Reflecting its employment structure (including the university impact) 66% of the workforce had higher level qualifications (NVQ 4 and above) the highest for any city nationally and it accounted for 66 patents per 100,000 population, compared with 19 in the next highest, Swindon and 12 in Edinburgh (Centre for Cities 2014), evidence of why Cambridge is ranked as one of the top three ‘innovation ecosystems’ in the world (Naughton 2013).

Housing supply has, however, failed to keep pace with population growth and both house prices and rents relative to incomes are amongst the highest outside of London (Centre for Cities, 2013; Havergal, 2012). The house-price affordability ratio of 11.7 is second only to London and Oxford. House-prices grew by over 10% in 2012/13, almost three times the national average (Centre for Cities, 2014). The Home Builders Federation (2013) reported a 60% slump in house-building in Cambridge in 2012-13 compared with 2006-7, lower than in any year since 2002 and with only 14% of these across the County as a whole classed as ‘affordable’. The University cited the shortage of high quality, affordable housing as a major constraint on its further growth given the increasingly global competition to attract the top academics and researchers (Cambridge University Special News Supplement, Michaelmas 2012). Consultants SQW, with a long history of involvement in the sub-region, identified in a review of ‘The Cambridge Cluster at 50’, that housing and infrastructure constraints could have strong negative impacts on future competitiveness (SQW, 2011a). So whilst the ‘Cambridge Phenomenon’ brought economic success, the challenges, particularly of housing affordability and congestion identified by Holford and Wright in the 1950’s, still being ‘wrestled’ with by today’s planners (Baker 2010), provide a striking context within which to examine the potential impacts of planning reform.

Comparatively small in absolute population terms compared to other cities within the UK, the economic performance of Cambridge, particularly its capacity for innovation and business start-ups, has meant that it is perceived as a driver of economic growth well beyond its immediate hinterland: ‘an important locale in the wider economic nexus of Southern England’ (Healey 2007, 163). The international status of the university together with its links to many high-profile, high technology businesses and research establishments has contributed to the status of the Cambridge phenomenon itself ‘as being of national and international significance’ (Moules and Pickford, 2013; Segal Quince Wicksteed, 2011b). Successive governments have supported its development and celebrated the economic success of the Cambridge region. Crang and Martin described the Cambridge sub-region as classic ‘Thatcher country’, ‘the epitome of the sort of local economic development on which Britain’s renewal depends’ (1991, 92). More recently, visiting the University’s world-leading Molecular Biology Lab in 2014, the Chancellor of the Exchequer praised both the scientific and economic achievements of the University and the wider ‘Cambridge cluster’: “what you have achieved here has been called the

Cambridge phenomenon. I want it to be the British phenomenon” (HM Treasury, 2014). Similarly in the furore over planning reforms and the announcement of the presumption in favour of development in 2012, the Chancellor had cited how smart Cambridge had been in undertaking green belt swaps (see Wallop, 2012).

Nationally, this aspiration for economic growth has been a consistent strand of the narrative on the role of planning over the last three decades, which has located planning within a broadly neo-liberal paradigm (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2012b; Davoudi et al 2013; Clifford et al, 2013). More detailed debate has focused on the role of the state in regulating support for growth and how this has been manifested in the planning system. At issue has been ‘the territorial structure of the state and how that structure can absorb or deflect demands to facilitate growth in the spaces of the new economy’ (While et al 2004, 301). The regulatory reforms of the previous Labour administration set out initially in the 2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act and then superseded by the 2008 Planning Act, sought to respond to the perceived ‘growth crisis’ of the 1990’s - severe under-provision of housing was increasingly seen as a potential brake on economic growth and national prosperity (see Barker 2004). Planning was ‘mobilised’ as Inch (2012b) describes, to support aspirations for growth, with the planning system becoming increasingly focussed on facilitating and legitimising economic competitiveness (see also Inch, 2009; Allmendinger, 2011; Baker and Wong 2012). Growth was to be supported at a sub-regional level through a top-down, macro-approach focussed on identifying growth areas and with targets formulated through strategic policy. Cambridge was explicitly backed by Labour and included as one of four major growth areas identified in the Sustainable Communities Plan (ODPM 2003a) and then RSS, with Cambridge cited as somewhere Government wanted to see development ‘accelerated’: “the issue is not whether growth will continue, but at what level and how that growth is handled” (ODPM 2003b, 7). The 2003 Plan was described as ‘an aspirational planning framework’ (Raco 2012: 156), premised on the notion that as economic and population growth were inevitable, the planning system should support growth in places such as Cambridge where that potential could be realised. In practice many saw reforms as characteristic of an approach begun in previous decades towards supporting growth in places predisposed for success, argued to be to the economic advantage of all. Those such as Raco (2012) thus saw RSSs as a manifestation of an explicitly neo-liberal, growth-first strategy, ‘roll out’ or ‘interventionist’ neo-liberalism, involving active state-building through prescriptive planning guidance and national house-building targets focussed on supply side activities - oriented towards the delivery of higher levels of new housing and economic growth. This was perceived as a ‘dramatic’ up-scaling of the planning system (Marshall 2007), and privileged strategic thinking and focussed spaces of intervention at the regional level.

There is every sign that the current Coalition Government equally wishes to support the economic success of Cambridge. *Unlocking growth in cities* (HM Government, 2011) outlined plans for ‘city deals’ to give cities with growth prospects, including Cambridge, freedoms to invest. The Heseltine Review (2012),

seen by many as currently having a strong influence on the Coalition's approach to city-regions, cites Cambridge as the sort of strong city economy from which economic benefit would be derived by tackling challenges such as housing shortage. A city-deal for Cambridge, which could bring up to £500million to the sub-region to invest in infrastructure to support growth, is currently under negotiation (see Elliott 2014), and the Chancellor's pledge of continuing support for the City in his 2014 speech has been noted earlier (HM Treasury 2014).

Whilst competitiveness and growth remain the language of government, the Coalition's strategy to support growth has, however, clearly shifted. The 'top-down targets' of the previous government were criticised as undemocratic, creating a generation of NIMBYs and so acting as a brake on competitiveness. The new rhetoric was that of 'localism', focussed on local authorities determining their own strategic direction, albeit within the context the National Planning Policy Framework – a form of 'roll-back' as opposed to 'roll-out' neo liberalism' with less emphasis on regulating and directing and more on enabling and anticipating development (Boland 2014). The discourse, at least at a rhetorical level, privileges, or 're-animates', the local (Davoudi et al, 2013; Padley, 2013; Haughton and Allmendinger, 2013) with responsibility for decision making supposedly 'returned to town halls' (Gallent and Robinson, 2012). This language has been deployed alongside a discourse of the further dismantling of the state (Deas 2012), yet strong state direction in the form of the localism bill indicates that local planning powers must be used to promote 'more not less development'. The Coalition clearly therefore intends its reforms and associated vision of localism – with its emphasis on community empowerment, local autonomy and local decision making – to offer a more tangible chance of achieving growth than its predecessors. As Inch (2012b) argues, Grant Schapps' stated intentions of "turning NIMBYs into homebuilders", is a "rhetorical move that constructs opposition to development as a perverse effect of flaws in the existing planning system that can be corrected through reform" (522).

### **Planning reform and the new localism**

The Conservative Party had signalled its intention to abolish Regional Spatial Strategies (RSS) and top-down housing targets ahead of the 2010 general election and the incoming Coalition Government moved quickly to put this into effect. Seen by many as the most radical reform of the planning system in the post-war period, the Localism Act 2011 included the legal power to abolish RSS and the final version of the National Planning Policy Framework (CLG 2012b) set out the principles for planning under 'localism'. This amounted to the abolition of any form of strategic or spatial planning across England as a whole (Boddy and Hickman, 2013), in marked contrast not only to Scotland and Wales but also mainland Europe as a whole where the principles practice of spatial planning remain central (Faludi 2010; Walsh, 2014). As described elsewhere (Holman and Rydin, 2012; Haughton et al, 2013; Boddy and Hickman, 2013; Gallent et al 2013; Jones 2014) the NPPF included a 'presumption in favour of sustainable development' described as 'a golden thread running through both plan-making and decision-taking' (CLG, 2012b, 3). There was a strong emphasis

on ensuring that the planning system 'does everything it can to support sustainable economic growth' (ibid, 6). This provoked fierce opposition from local and national groups who feared this represented a 'developer's charter'. In practice, however, the NPPF clearly stated the principle that all applications would be determined 'In accordance with the development plan' (ibid, 3). An approved local plan would therefore give a local council the basis on which to control development in line with locally-determined constraints.

Most local councils, nationally, did not have up-to-date local plans in place and therefore rapidly set about either drawing up new 'core strategies', or rapidly revising strategies in draft, in line with the requirements set out in the new NPPF. Plans were to be based on evidence of future housing need and councils had a 'duty to cooperate' with neighbouring councils where development needs could not be met within their own boundary. Approval of plans is subject to examination in public and confirmation by a government appointed inspector who has to be satisfied, among other things, that plans properly reflect evidence of housing need and that councils have complied with the duty to cooperate. There is evidence that Inspectors are increasingly questioning the adequacy of evidence of future housing need, and conformity with the duty-to-cooperate as well as other issues (Planning Inspectorate, 2012; Carpenter, 2014; Geoghegan 2014). A number of recent cases suggest that inspectors are raising more questions, possibly encouraged by central government, concerned at constraints on housing delivery and economic growth, and these cases begin to expose the contrast between local perspective and national priorities.

Despite this, the process did, initially at least, allow councils to make the case that levels of housing need were significantly lower than housing targets previously set out for their locality in RSS. This is what many local councils across southern England set out to do with the aim of cutting back on planned levels of housing development, in line as they saw it, with the wishes of local communities and electors - and the new localism. A national survey in 2012 (Tetlow King, 2012) showed the extent of these planned reductions, 273,000 down across England as a whole compared with targets set out in Regional Spatial Strategies and with the majority of larger local councils across southern England planning significantly lower levels of house building. These reductions have largely been in places where 'levels of antagonism and opposition' (Inch 2012b) to growth are high, often in Conservative heartlands, and critically, in areas where increasing levels of development is potentially important to economic growth. The evidence thus begins to expose some of the potentially competing objectives and challenges of pursuing a neo-liberal growth narrative through a governance model focused at the local level where conflict is most keenly felt.

Other studies have detailed this process at a more local level (Hamiddudin and Gallent, 2012; Valler et al, 2012 for Science-Vale in Oxfordshire). We have described elsewhere how the four local authorities in the Bristol city-region reduced planned housing numbers by over 35,000, a 30% reduction on RSS targets, and revoked plans for significant urban extensions and green belt revision (Boddy and Hickman, 2013).

In stark contrast to the picture across much of prosperous southern England, the five local councils in Cambridgeshire and the County Council itself acted swiftly following the announcement that RSS was to be abolished to produce a joint statement, publicly reaffirming their commitment to a strategy for growth in the sub-region:

*“The Cambridgeshire authorities remain committed to the strategy for planning in the County, including the provision of housing, as originally established by the Structure Plan and as now partially set out in saved Structure Plan policies and as reflected by the policies and site proposals in the Cambridge Local Plan and District Councils’ Development Plan Documents” (Cambridgeshire Authorities 2010, section 2.1.)*

This reaffirmed a commitment to the existing planning strategy - to growth plans originally set out in the 2003 Structure Plan and subsequently incorporated in the policies and proposals of the district councils.<sup>8</sup> The authorities also jointly agreed to set up formal governance structures initially, in response to abolition of RSS – but subsequently seen as fulfilling the need to demonstrate compliance with the new ‘duty to cooperate’<sup>9</sup>. These included the cross-authority, Joint Strategic Planning and Transport Members Group and the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Joint Strategic Planning Unit – the latter of which describes its purpose as being to “coordinate work on the production of a high level, non-statutory spatial framework for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough on behalf of the constituent local authorities” (C&P JSPU 2012b). The Unit has also produced a report detailing ‘objectively assessed housing need’ for all the local authority areas (C&P JSPU, 2013) to provide a common evidence base for the constituent local authority as they developed their new local plans or ‘core strategies’.<sup>10</sup> Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire have also continued to operate joint development control committees to deal with fringe sites and new settlements. As both councils started to develop their new core strategies, consultation on ‘issues and options’ included a range of growth trajectories including the possibility of a significant increase in levels of house-building which had been set out in RSS – again in marked contrast to many local authorities across southern England. At the time the research reported here was under way, this opened up major debate over the future of the city-region including levels of housing and economic growth, the green belt and the capacity of the city region to accommodate further expansion. The study was based on a combination of face to face interviews and documentary analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with some fifteen respondents including local authority officers and elected members (current and former), planning and development

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<sup>8</sup> Interestingly this rather convoluted statement avoided reference to RSS itself which was under review at the time – proposals to increase housing targets were potentially contentious which may explain this absence.

<sup>9</sup> Minutes of the Cambridge and Peterborough Joint Strategic Planning Unit (2012a) demonstrate concern over the need to demonstrate cooperation in the light of the Inspector’s views on Bath and North East Somerset draft Core Strategy

<sup>10</sup> This provided a key component of the required ‘Strategic Housing Market Assessment’ (Carpenter 2013, 26).

consultants, housebuilders and developers, preservation society members and a range of other stakeholders. Interviews were recorded, transcribed and a thematic analysis undertaken using NVIVO qualitative analysis software. A number of follow-up 'phone interviews were conducted with key informants to cross-check and update the original research. Drawing on this research, the following sections set out the response, locally to planning reform and the possible implications for the future trajectory of the city-region.

### **The significance of RSS and reaction to abolition**

The introduction of Regional Spatial Strategies and to top down targets for housing numbers had been highly controversial across southern England as a whole. Respondents in the Cambridge city-region however, typically referred instead to the way in which growth had been embraced earlier through regional planning guidance and the 2003 Structure Plan and simply rolled forwards into the RSS. RSS itself and provisions set out for the city-region were in this sense non-controversial. Many stakeholders recalled the detail of the earlier debate framed by the work of the Cambridge Futures Group that preceded RPG6 and the 2003 Structure Plan and it was this, rather than processes around RSS which seem to have been more significant to the development of the growth narrative in the city-region:

We'd already set out aims and ambitions through the Structure Plan. They were ours. The RSS was, in strategic direction terms, immaterial (Senior local authority officer).

By and large the scale of ambition and the nature of it as defined in the Structure Plan was rolled forward into the East of England Plan and it's carried on being rolled forward following the demise of the RSS. There's real continuity before during and after and I don't think there's any evidence around here really that the loss of regional planning has adversely affected growth ... My sense is that Cambridge was never doing it because it was told to. It did it because actually it wanted something out of it which it largely has got ... It was never really constructed as a fight with central government, so the changing wider planning framework hasn't had a great impact on Cambridge. I think it has had a big impact on lots of other places so I think Cambridge is a bit unusual, but it's benefitted from good leadership really despite its local government boundaries which are not helpful (Economic development consultant).

As one respondent commented, the strategy for Cambridge was possibly: 'the least controversial in England' (Planning consultant).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The proposed housing numbers in the East of England Plan published in 2008 for Cambridge City were only marginally up on those in the 2003 Structure Plan on a per annum basis and numbers for South Cambridgeshire were almost identical (see table 1). There was some suggestion that revised figures proposed in the later review of the East of England Plan looked somewhat "over-inflated" (Planning consultant), there was no strong sense that the local authorities themselves were pushing to cut back on the growth figures to any significant degree.

This perception that the RSS was in a sense 'immaterial' in strategic terms shaped reaction to RSS abolition and marks out the sub-region in contrast to many other parts of England facing significant development pressure. In these other areas, reaction to abolition was typically polarised between those, mainly local councillors and residents' groups, jubilant at the prospect of locally determined plans and the potential for reduced targets, and those, mainly from the development sector, who bemoaned the loss of strategic planning and the perceived impact of this on delivery (Boddy and Hickman, 2013).

There was also a clear expectation amongst many stakeholders that support for the growth agenda locally would continue despite the demise of the RSS. Many referred to the statement referred to earlier that was issued by Cambridgeshire authorities expressing their on-going commitment to growth and expressed pride that this had been made publically at a time of recession, when many local authorities were seeking to go in the opposition direction:

We understand why government wants to remove top down targetry through abolition of RSS, but we still believe in our spatial strategy and will continue to try and pursue it ... I had this meeting with four leaders, all of them Conservatives on the morning that Caroline Spelman put out some statement urging Conservative Authorities to not comply with RSS and without me prompting it, they all went, 'but this is our Plan, we don't need to withdraw consent from RSS', ... we'd got the bottom up consent for growth (Senior local authority officer).

Even a respondent from the Cambridge Preservation Society observed that 'There's very little opposition to the idea that there needs to be growth'. The fact that the Cambridge sub-region had experienced the benefits of growth – through, for example, associated infrastructure investment - was clearly significant in retaining the consensus on growth. Many also spoke of the strong and enduring political leadership in the sub-region, and the ability of the players to engage in cross-party debate about what was best for the sub-region:

We seem not to have suffered too greatly [from RSS abolition] partly because in the expectation that the RSS would go, we all got together and said we rather like the growth strategy that we adopted. Furthermore, the one that we were working on, the East of England Plan review we quite like that too and we'd like everyone to remain aware of that. It was essentially a message to developers and to some extent the government, business and anyone with a financial interest in development in and around Cambridgeshire, not to panic, that local authorities were going to stick with the growth agenda and ironically, even though we've seen lots of councils around the country wanting to reduce the housing numbers, our districts all seemed terribly keen to have quite a lot of growth and that's partly because we've all got used to growth and we rather like it (Elected member, Conservative).

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Much was also made of the cross-authority Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Joint Strategic Planning Unit (JSPU) set up to co-ordinate work assessing housing need across the area, and to develop an high level non statutory spatial framework but also to help demonstrate compliance with the 'duty to co-operate' about which there was some nervousness locally:

Our role as a small unit is to help bind the authorities together badged under the duty to cooperate ... That's the main raison d'être for us, it's to support them on collective work on the evidence base for local plan reviews, but also, in the absence of a strategic statutory plan, to have something that can demonstrate a more concrete output based way the way that these plans add up to more than hopefully the some of their parts across a wider area, to be a spatial framework ... the crude way of describing it is a light touch structure plan for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough (Local Authority Officer).

Indeed, the ability of partners in the region to agree to establish a joint unit, one of only a handful nationally, was cited as evidence of both the maturity of the debate over growth and the strength of the relationship across authorities and between political parties:

Cambridgeshire is abnormal it its level of appreciation of the need to work together and a generally shared ambition about what we want to do and it's pro-growth ... The proposal that I put forward was, let's have a Joint Strategic Planning Unit because you know, actually we want to keep working on this together. For so long we've tried to work on these things together, we recognise the economic geography and therefore, going back into being only parochial is bad, isn't it? And everyone went, yes, let's try to do that. They [politicians] readily committed to the Joint Strategic Planning Unit (Senior local authority officer).

### **Prospects for an enduring growth agenda under localism**

As indicated, the growth narrative in the city-region had been strongly established prior to the introduction of RSS and appeared to survive its abolition unscathed – abolition was not seen, as it was in many other places, as the opportunity to scale back growth plans and house building targets. RSS became more of a vehicle, carrying forward the established narrative rather than an entirely new chapter in the story. Local plans for Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire were both at the 'issues and options' stage at the time the research was conducted. The consultation included options for growth that both continued and exceeded the trajectories originally set out in the 2003 Structure Plan and RSS (see table 1). Respondents also highlighted the fact that plans were being prepared to joint timetables and with parallel consultation exercises. The sense, that localism would inevitably result in rolling back on established targets for growth was not therefore seen as an immediate prospect. As one local authority officer stated emphatically, "the line [on growth] has held pretty well, despite a lot of challenges". There was, nevertheless,

concern over the demise of both RSS and, prior to this, the long established structure plan:

Without having that strategic framework, particularly for housing and employment provision, Local Authorities are all going to be on their own ... losing the RSS in particular has caused us concerns about how Local Authorities are going to forecast the employment and population requirements. (Planning consultant).

Some respondents questioned whether this could, in the longer term, presage a fragmentation of policy objectives and weaken commitment to established targets for growth. There was a sense of more challenging times ahead in a number of respects: clarity of ownership of the growth agenda going forwards; potentially increasing local opposition to growth; the continuing capacity of the local authorities to work together; issues of delivery; and, finally, the potential effectiveness of non-statutory strategic arrangements. All of these can be seen as manifestations of 'localism' as such.

Looking at these in turn, first, many stakeholders cited a lack of clarity from Central Government on the relationship between 'localism' and 'growth' and felt that this had created a level of uncertainty that had the potential to allow tensions to (re-)emerge:

I think we've got two planning systems: one that's being designed by CLG and one that has been designed by the treasury and the treasury has won out unsurprisingly again ... we had Eric Pickles, Grant Shapps and others talking about localism very strongly and we had George Osborne and others coming forward with a strong view that in terms of supporting construction, economic growth - the needs of the country - housing supply needs to be boosted (Local authority representative).

One developer referred to the 'shifting ground' on localism, making it difficult for local authorities – and other partners – to know how to act and raising questions about the clarity and ownership of the growth agenda. Whereas elsewhere localism had been seized upon as a vehicle for resisting growth, the commitment made by the Cambridgeshire authorities to continue a strategy for growth was seen by some as very much in the spirit of 'localism' - the growth strategy was perceived in the sub-region as 'our strategy' rather than the dictate of Central Government. There remained, however, the potential for fragmentation and divergence of views at a local level.

Second many participants clearly perceived the increased potential, at least, for communities, local authorities and other stakeholders to seek to resist 'unwanted' development. Some felt that localism, as interpreted by local politicians, would mean that local, rather than wider concerns, would gain the ascendance: "particularly at the edge of the Cambridge" (Preservation society representative) with:

South Cambridgeshire in particular ... trying to manipulate the Strategic Housing Market Assessment figures to restrain levels of growth below those previously accepted. (Planning consultant).

We are witnessing the beginnings of some degree of restraint over and above the levels that existed before. (Developer).

The possibility of further land release from the green belt in particular was seen as increasingly contentious: “some would say, actually that it’s sensible to look again, and others that we’ve done it once, not yet” (Senior local authority officer]. Others who had hitherto supported growth questioned whether this should continue at the same rate:

I think there's a genuine feeling which I entirely understand that actually we've taken a significant amount of growth and planned for it and therefore looking at the same again, it's potentially something that both politically, physically, practicably isn't really very acceptable and therefore we may need to temper this (Local Authority Officer).

Developers in particular, felt that localism posed a significant challenge to the extent to which growth, particularly at the higher end of the potential growth scenarios set out in issues and options consultations might be realised. One was convinced that “having offered three levels of growth based on different forecasts, I think they will go for a lower option”. Loss of RSS, meant there was now felt to be greater uncertainty over future support for the implementation of large schemes, despite public pronouncements on growth in the sub-region. Strategic planning was, with hindsight, perceived to have helped to manage some of these tensions and protected the ‘growth agenda’ from more local level perspectives and political challenge. Under localism, divergent views, cross-boundary differences and local opposition could potentially emerge. Strategic planning gave “clarity” over the previous Labour government’s growth plans, a sense that they were “pushing at an open door”. There was therefore, a heightened sense that localism could impact on the growth agenda.

It was suggested that the stipulation in the National Planning Policy Framework that housing need be ‘objectively assessed’ and the more “hard-edged approach” (local authority officer) that Inspectors were now taking in relation to evidence might be very challenging, given the strength of the local economy:

... the other irony is, that when people are required to do a new strategic housing market settlement and it comes up with numbers which exceed the allocations that the RSS gave them they are put in a bit of a quandary, what do we do now? (Elected member, Conservative).

So the sort of statement within the NPPF about what is your objectively assessed need in an area that is economically strong is proving to be very challenging (Local Authority Officer).

Any emerging opposition to growth under localism might therefore be challenged by the requirement for evidence-based planning and pressures for growth – tensions which had previously been managed through formal structures and processes at a strategic level.

Third, the capacity of local authorities and other partners, in the past, to work together across potential geographical and political boundaries was widely acknowledged. The possibility that localism could challenge this was seen as a real possibility, particularly on the part of elected members, potentially most directly exposed to these tensions, one (Conservative) member suggesting that the consensus on growth “could well disintegrate”.

... there’s certainly more resistance this time and the duty to co-operate involves all sorts of risks and uncertainties (Elected member, Conservative).

If there were a change in political direction in one or the other council, then that could jeopardise that (Elected member, Labour).

It is very difficult to second guess because you’re not sure whether they’re going to stay with the same strategy or go off in sort of different directions. It could become extremely political (Planning Consultant).

Similarly, the ‘duty to co-operate’ under the NPPF was at one level second nature: “that’s simply how we work here” (Elected member, Conservative), but its capacity to act as a conflict resolution mechanism when put under pressure was also seen as a potential issue:

If you can't accommodate it [growth] in your area then you’ve got to accommodate it somewhere else, that’s what the duty to co-operate is about - those are the sort of debates we’re having at the moment, that are actually proving pretty challenging. (Local Authority Officer).

The fourth challenge relates to the capacity of the sub-region to actually deliver on planned housing development – and the implications of this for the future trajectory of growth in the sub-region. If the development sector could not demonstrate its capacity to deliver levels of housing development provided for under the current planning framework then arguments about significant levels of future growth would be hard to sustain. This focuses on the issue of so-called ‘stalled sites’, land with planning permission which developers had, for a variety of reasons, been slow to develop but which potentially undermine the argument for significant levels of new allocations of land in future plans. Different stakeholders expressed both surprise and frustration at the fact that despite the clear framework for growth established in the 2003 structure plan, and high levels of housing demand, sites had been slow to be developed: “even in an area like Cambridge where you’ve got very high land values” (national body representative). If sites allocated a decade ago still had not been delivered it would be hard to argue for significant additional land release, particularly if that involved release of land in the green belt:

There was big ambition for development to come forward quite quickly I guess on the back of the 2003 Structure Plan. I mean with hindsight some of the things that were in there were quite unrealistic and challenging, probably the biggest one of all being Northstowe having made a start in terms of planning by 2006 and we're now into 2013 and we haven't had a brick laid (Local authority officer).

There may be public acceptance for delivery of the existing strategy, but a strategy which extends the growth projections considerably beyond that already agreed – may prove more difficult in the context of the perceived success and pace of delivery of existing plans.

Also relevant to delivery was the considerable frustration in the sub-region over Central Government's handling of resources to support growth and key decisions made on infrastructure funding – possibly more so than the planning context as such: Oddly it's not the political nimbyism stuff ... it's the cash thing (Local authority officer).

What has started to become more difficult is this question of funding. Part of what's always made the growth acceptable has been the level of corollary investment in infrastructure. As our grant income shrinks, as our social care costs in particular go very rapidly north, we don't have anything left to cover off the capital investment. So for the first time, in very recent weeks really, I've heard politicians going, can we afford this? ... we still realise this is important for the UK economy and everything else but we can't not have a balanced budget. (Senior Local Authority Officer).

There was a feeling that there is less Government funding available to support growth now – particular infrastructure funding - than over the previous decade. Real or otherwise, this was clearly shaping opinion. The view locally was that if Central Government wants to support areas in delivering the growth agenda and with places like Cambridge well placed to contribute, then Government needs to offer a more proactive and supportive approach. Some were cynical, suggesting that 'localism' could allow Central Government to 'get away' with less financial support for growth – in contrast to the previous administration with its explicitly more macro approach. Others thought that successive Governments had compounded slow delivery particularly where they were owners or part-owners of sites which they were reluctant to release

Finally, the lack of formal strategic structures and processes represents perhaps the most serious challenge. The Cambridge sub-region, possibly more than any other part of the country, had established structures and governance which could provide an ongoing strategic perspective. As one planning consultant put it:

I am bemoaning in general terms [the loss of strategic planning.] I think it's an absolute total disaster to be honest, but I think Cambridge is the one exception that I've seen that has had good enough local leadership and sensible people with a long enough perspective to be able to deal with it (Economic Development Consultant).

These mechanisms, initially at least, had channelled and managed potentially divergent views on the part of the constituent local authorities, providing a consensual but strategic dimension to structures and processes. The question is whether these can survive in the longer term, in the absence of any formal strategic framework:

... in the absence of strategic planning, you're always going to struggle because a District Council strategy on its own won't ever match the economic realities. So the single reason that you need strategic planning is to match reality and if you don't do that, you'll basically hamper the economy's ability to function effectively, and people's ability to access employment effectively. You might abolish RSS but replacing them with nothing, with no structure plans or anything else, is pretty bonkers, it's pretty crazy when actually one of your key objectives is trying to boost housing growth. (Senior local authority officer).

Initially, at least, there had already under localism been a subtle but significant shift in the strategic dimension – from an 'overarching' framework to 'underpinning' - "strategic planning by stealth" as one local authority officer described it:

Quite carefully, we always describe it as being 'underpinning' not 'overarching'. So we recognise that sovereignty is with the Local Plan, but by having an underpinning framework through the JSPU, it creates an environment in which we hope the individual local plans will already try to speak to each other before they come out. Now it's not perfect, but it might be the best you can do in the circumstances. The test will be in looking at what happens when the local Plans come out (Senior Local Authority Officer).

As this suggests, the key question is whether such structures and forms of governance are stable in the longer term or prove to be a step towards the further disintegration of 'strategic planning' based on collaboration and consent rather than the formal structures of the previous decade.

## **Conclusion**

For much of the post-war period, growth and development in the Cambridge city-region was tightly constrained by the greenbelt and planning framework established in the immediate post-war period. This was despite rapidly rising house prices, the university's wish to expand and increasing pressure for university-linked, high technology business growth driven by the emerging Cambridge Phenomenon. The period 1989-2003, however, saw a major shift in the overall planning context. This included revisions to the County Structure Plan followed by Regional Planning Guidance in 2000 which established the strategic context for growth and comprehensive review of the green belt, and the 2003 Structure Plan which provided for major housing growth and land release from the green belt. This strategy for sub-regional growth was then rolled forwards in the 2008 Regional Spatial Strategy for the East of England including explicit targets for significantly increased housing numbers.

Evidence points to a combination of factors both driving and shaping this major shift in strategy and continuing commitment, since then, to growth and development. It was increasingly recognised that long-term constraint combined with pressures of population growth were reflected in rapid house price inflation, problems of housing affordability, piecemeal development in settlements beyond the greenbelt and congestion in the urban core. University plans for both academic development and support for linked research and technology-based business development were increasingly frustrated, combined with external pressure for business investment and the view from central government of Cambridge as a focus for knowledge-based economic development. In this context, Cambridge Futures, initiated by the University but bringing together stakeholders from the local councils, business and the University, played a key role, enabling the consensus for growth to emerge through option setting, evidence gathering, consultation and debate. The timing of this, ahead of the structure plan review was seen as crucial. So too was the capacity of council leaders both district and county, to collaborate around the growth agenda and across party-political lines, but this, in turn depended, upon the support of local communities and electors – and the judgement of elected councillors that the overall balance of opinion had shifted in favour of managed expansion. In practical terms, Cambridge Horizons, set up and funded following the Government's 2004 Sustainable Communities Plan, which recognized the national significance of the sub-region, was an important vehicle for implementing and managing growth and development. Key infrastructure investments including the guided bus route and plans for a new station adjacent to the Science Park also demonstrated practical support.

Proposals nationally by the opposition Conservative Party ahead of the 2010 General Election, to abolish RSS, reiterated once in office, led many local councils across prosperous southern England to announce plans to scale back levels of development and top-down targets for housing growth in particular which had been set out in RSS. Many set out to incorporate significantly reduced housing numbers in proposed 'core strategies' required under the new National Planning Policy Framework. In sharp contrast to this, the five Cambridgeshire local councils and the County Council itself strongly reaffirmed their continued strategic commitment to growth as set out in the Structure Plan and existing local plans.<sup>12</sup> The momentum and broad-based support behind planned growth and expansion in the Cambridge city-region in particular was such that using the opportunity provided by RSS abolition to review this or even consider reverting to the earlier regime of constraint was never going to be seriously considered. Indicative of this, housing numbers included in local plans or 'Core Strategies' submitted by Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire councils in 2014 were only marginally lower than those included in initially in the 2003 Structure Plan and later in RSS.

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<sup>12</sup> As noted earlier the statement did not explicitly refer to the RSS, possibly for reasons of political sensitivity given that proposals to expand housing targets had been under review – existing RSS proposals were however consistent with Structure and Local Plan proposals referred to in the statement.

Initially at least, the growth consensus clearly survived the abolition of RSS and the demise of strategic planning in a formal sense. As we have seen, the sub-region has frequently been held up as an exemplar of collaboration and the successful management of growth and development (see also Platt, 2013, Monk et al 2013). A key question is, however, the ability of this consensus to survive in the context of recession, austerity, the new National Planning Policy Framework and the advent of localism. The Town and Country Planning Association (2010, 2) noted that: "... fragility is especially common where the need for collaborative working is at its most intense – in and around tightly bounded urban areas where expansion pressures bearing upon the neighbouring countryside are strong". There was certainly little appetite, locally, to consider higher levels of growth – proposed upwards revision of housing targets in the original East of England Plan and the possibility of enhanced levels of growth included in options consulted on for local plans gained little support. The authorities also decided against preparing a joint core strategy – an option that was discussed, but discounted - as not politically viable. As noted earlier, there was also a growing feeling expressed by a number of stakeholders, particularly in South Cambridgeshire, that significant growth had already been accepted and that there was growing resistance to further expansion, as representing a step too far. Localism is clearly 'an artificial construct' (Ludwig and Ludwig, 2014) with strong political motivations (Gallent et al, 2013). Setting the context for the local plan consultation and review process, it has however, provided a vehicle for greater questioning of the growth, particularly in South Cambridgeshire, legitimising such views. Consensus around growth was seen as increasingly fragile in the face of increasing resistance to further expansion. Localism has, at the very least, generated increasing risk and uncertainty. This was emphasised in the relatively narrow margin in South Cambridgeshire in support of the proposed Core Strategy which attracted some 11,000 objections and was approved by a majority of only 27 in favour, 21 against and 5 abstentions. Localism does therefore appear to have fragmented to some extent the growth consensus, with continued support for expansion now clearly potentially vulnerable to relatively small shifts in the political make-up of the local councils, particularly South Cambridgeshire<sup>13</sup> but also on the County Council, which previously had been considered significant to brokering consensus on growth (While et al 2004). Opposition has the potential to become highly politicised, and evidence from the Cambridge sub-region shows that it is as potentially vulnerable to political volatility as the next place.

The impact of any such shift is unlikely to be significant, however, in the short to medium term at least and these shifts do appear more subtle than elsewhere.

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<sup>13</sup> In May 2014 elections when a third of each council were up for decision, Labour gained control of the City of Cambridge (formerly no party was in overall control) gaining 7 seats from the liberal democrats and if anything strengthening support for expansion. There was little change in South Cambridgeshire where the conservatives remained the controlling party by a large margin. The leader of the council commented after the election that: 'There's also been a lot of controversy over the [local] plan and I hope this shows we still have the confidence of most people that we are doing our best'. <http://www.cambridge-news.co.uk/Cambridge/Elections-2014->

There is a high volume of development already provided for in current planning permissions and approved plans including significant schemes among them the university-led expansion on the north west of the city now underway. Submitted local plans are, moreover, consistent with the established trajectory of growth and development and, subject to confirmation by the planning inspectorate, will provide a binding context for planning decisions locally over the next five years at least.<sup>14</sup> With one plan in the wider sub-region (Fenland) already having received endorsement of the sub-regional approach to the duty to co-operate and evidence gathering (see Planning Inspectorate 2014), it would be a brave inspector to challenge the evidence in relation to Cambridge, despite some commentary that the numbers proposed still fall short of what is required for anticipated growth in the Cambridge economy (see Carpenter 2013) [HH – this red paragraph could be a footnote?]. In the context of housing market pressures and central government pressure to support economic growth it would seem highly unlikely that this process would result in any reduction in proposed housing numbers or economic development. The impacts of localism in the city-region have, however, exposed the tensions between the government’s meta-narrative in support of growth and development epitomised by the Cambridge Phenomenon and the new National Planning Policy Framework which has dismantled strategic planning and enabled the potentially destabilising discourse of localism which, if this survives any future change in central government alignment, could have more significant effects in the medium to longer term. At the very least, localism poses greater risks for the Cambridge Phenomenon compared with the previous system which more clearly provided a strategic framework in support of growth.

Attempts by successive governments to use the planning system overtly to drive economic growth have often been framed as a form of neo-liberal strategy, promoting growth, development and private sector investment being interpreted, loosely, as support for market forces. Strategic planning in the form of structure plans, regional planning guidance, regional spatial strategies and specific initiatives such as the Sustainable Communities Plan however, clearly represented more overt state intervention and state action to frame and promote development rather than a rolling back of the state and freeing up of market forces as such. Forms of intervention may have shifted over time with the transition from the Thatcher era charted by Crang and Martin to the Blair Governments’ ‘third way’ and the more recent push for ‘sustainable development’ set out in the NPPF. They represent, however, neoliberalism only in the sense of their support for private sector-driven growth and development rather than any freeing up of market forces in relation to land and development. As Allmendinger (2009) noted, Hayek himself pointed

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<sup>14</sup> With one plan in the wider sub-region (Fenland) already having received endorsement of the sub-regional approach to the duty to co-operate and evidence gathering (see Planning Inspectorate 2014), it would be a brave inspector to challenge the evidence in relation to Cambridge, despite some commentary that the numbers proposed still fall short of what is required for anticipated growth in the Cambridge economy (see Carpenter 2013)

specifically to the different nature of the market in land and the role of regulation in relation to land and development which set it apart in this respect.

Localism and the new planning framework might, at one level, be seen as a form of neo-liberalism in practice, with the abolition of strategic planning and, much emphasis in the NPPF on simplifying and slashing back the accumulated mass of planning regulation and leaving local communities to set the framework for decision making through locally-driven strategies. At one level this aligns with the classic neo-liberal project to roll back the state, dismantle bureaucratic structures and red tape, and deregulate markets. The reality, as the tensions between the coalition government's continuing drive for growth and the impacts, real or potential, of localism demonstrate, is rather different. Localism, is far from a 'freeing up of market forces'. As we have seen, it provides, on the contrary, the potential basis for place-based local communities actively to constrain and resist growth, development and private-market driven investment, closer to what might be termed neo-conservatism than neo-liberalism. In the absence of any strategic planning framework or externally-determined growth targets central government now has to rely on exhortation plus the capacity of the planning inspectorate to ensure that local plans adequately provide for (short-term) development needs and that neighbouring local authorities demonstrate co-operation – a loosely coupled system, focused at a local level and with short-time horizons. In this context, the Chancellor's eulogy for the Cambridge Phenomenon could be seen more as a direct appeal to the voters in South Cambridgeshire ahead of local elections later in the month, not to derail the growth project which he framed as symbolising the national ambitions of government.

Finally, as noted, the reaction in the Cambridge sub-region to abolition of RSS and top-down targets contrasted with that across most of economically buoyant southern England. This raises two related questions: first, the extent to which the Cambridge experience represents a unique case, determined by a specific history and set of circumstances; second, whether there are implications for other parts of the country either in terms of understanding processes and outcomes, or in terms of informing policy agendas. A number of commentators have noted the particular features of the Cambridge sub-region. These include the exceptional status and profile of the University, its openness to spin-out and industry linkage, the role of Trinity College as a landowner and founder of Cambridge Science Park and the desire of the university to maintain and expand its activities and reputation driving development including most recently that at North West Cambridge. This and the nature of the historic urban environment together with proximity to London has made it a highly attractive location for entrepreneurs, investors and professionals as a place to live and work – and enabled businesses readily to attract a scientific and professional workforce. The relatively small scale of the city-region has enhanced this attractiveness, has meant the university has been a more dominant influence

than might otherwise have been the case<sup>15</sup> and has facilitated the networking which drove the Cambridge Phenomenon itself (Keeble, 1989).

This served to reinforce the dominant discourse of the city-region as a technology-driven, dynamic cluster of national and international significance – a discourse which has been widely shared across different stakeholders. It was this discourse which, growing in strength through the 1970s and 1980s led to the sea-change in the sub-regional planning framework after 1989. The political acceptability of this major policy shift reflected both pressures from the university, business and other stakeholders articulated through Cambridge Futures together with the realisation on the part of politicians of all parties that there was, on balance, popular, electoral support in favour of growth, with political leaders becoming enthusiastic partners in the growth consensus captured initially in the 2003 Structure Plan and subsequently, RSS. This in turn provided the context for what have been, from the standpoint of other localities, very effective leadership and collaborative working relations between the local authorities which survived through to the submission of core strategies in 2014, albeit, as noted above, some weakening perhaps in the underpinning consensus.<sup>16</sup>

This complex set of factors combining over several decades does suggest a significant degree of uniqueness, reinforced by what we have termed the emergence of a dominant discourse which permeated different stakeholders and interests and which coalesced around a particular vision and future trajectory for the city region.<sup>17</sup> Some have suggested that abolition of RSS and top-down targets may open up an era of ‘post-political’ diversity, a period of experimentation and innovation as different governance models are explored (Allmendinger and Haughton 2013, Haughton et al 2013, Raco 2012 and Deas 2012). The strong element of continuity evident in the case of Cambridge, however, runs counter to this view. Collaboration between local councils and the sorts of new joint structures and working arrangements seen in the Cambridge city-region are more an attempt to maintain this continuity, and to secure established approaches rather than evidence of the emergence of ‘soft spaces’ and experimentation.

Writers from Sayer (1992) on have cautioned against looking for easy policy pointers from the experience of places like Silicon Valley, Berkshire and the Thames Valley or in this case Cambridge (see also Mazzucato, 2014). It is possible, nevertheless, to identify, more modestly, a number of issues of potentially wider relevance. First, the particular role of Cambridge University, historically, is in many ways unique but points to the potential greater role that universities might play in shaping or driving the trajectory of their host-areas - recognised by Goddard, for

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<sup>15</sup> Compared for example to the role of Oxford University within its city-region

<sup>16</sup> Symptomatic perhaps of a perceived weakening in support for the growth agenda, a new, business-led organisation, Cambridge Ahead, was set up in late 2013 to promote continued expansion, but does not appear to have attracted the broad-based support of Cambridge Futures and to date lacks local council representation.

<sup>17</sup> To suggest a dominant discourse is not to recognise that there have been challenges to this and to the benefits and distribution of rewards generated by this trajectory (see Crang and Martin, 1991)

example in the idea of the Civic University (Goddard and Vallance, 2013) and promoted in a series of studies of which the 'Witty Report' (Witty, 2013) is the most recent. Second, the case of Cambridge demonstrates that 'nimbyism' or resistance to the local impacts of development is not an inevitable reaction to proposals for growth even when imposition in the form of strategic plans and top down targets are removed. Local communities, can in particular circumstances, buy in to the bigger picture and the benefits that will follow. Third, shifts of this nature are only likely to take effect over a relatively long time period – in this case at least two decades or more. SQW (2011b: 6) observed that "it took many years for the planning policy framework to change from a stance of strong resistance to growth, to its reluctant accommodation in a dispersed pattern around the county to positive management of growth in and around the city." Dominant discourses can change (and be changed) but this is a complex and long-term process. Fourth, it was clear from the views of many respondents to the study that effective leadership was a critical and necessary part of the process – political and professional leadership in the three main councils, in the University, through Cambridge Horizons, Cambridge Futures and other stakeholders. This was reflected, in turn in effective joint working relations which other localities have looked to as exemplary. Fifth, creating a vision early on in the process, providing evidence and engaging (possibly shaping) wider public opinion through consultation played a key role. Lastly, however, support for growth has been seen by some as increasingly fragile with localism threatening to undermine the trajectory of the previous three decades or more. As one participant observed, the sub-region has been "dining out on the 2003 Structure Plan". It would be wrong, therefore to see the Cambridge city-region as an exemplar of strategic planning in the absence of a strategic planning framework as such.

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Table 1: Housing completions, all tenures, 2004/05 – 2013/14

	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/8	2008/9	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14
Cambridge City	601	731	629	521	588	287	390	331	482	1,120
South Cambridgeshire	571	877	924	1,274	610	611	656	671	587	590
Total	1,172	1,608	1,553	1,795	1,198	898	1,046	1,002	1,069	1,710

Source: Cambridgeshire County Council, Growth and Economy, Research and Monitoring, 2014 and ONS Live tables on house building, Table 253a

Table 2: Planned house-building, Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire since 2003

	Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Structure Plan, 2003	RSS: East of England Plan, 2008	Proposed RSS revisions 2010 (never adopted)	2014 Local Plan: Issues and Options Consultation	Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Joint Strategic Planning Unit (May 2013)	Submitted Local Plans
Period	1990-2016	2001-2021	2011 – 2031	‘Towards 2031’	2011-31	2011-31
Cambridge City	12,500 (735 pa)	19,000 (950 pa)	14,000 (700 pa)	Strategic priority options 2 – 5: Option 2: 12, 700 (urban growth) Option 3: 14,000 (current development strategy) Option 4: 21,000 (enhanced levels of green belt and urban growth) Option 5: 25,000 (significantly enhanced levels of green belt and urban growth)	14,000 (700 pa)	14,000 (700 pa)
South Cambridgeshire	20,000 (1176 pa)	23,500 (1,175 pa)	21,000 (1050 pa)	Lower : 18, 500 (existing + 4,300) Medium: 21,500 (existing + 7,300) High: 23,500 (existing + 9,300)	19,000 (950 pa)	19,000 (950 pa)
Total	1,911 pa	2,125 pa	1,750 pa		1,650 pa	1,650 pa