

## What's so great about Eddington in Cambridge?

*Cambridge resident and Create Streets researcher, Dr Maddalena Iovene asks if Eddington is an appropriate 'case study'*

The vice-chancellor said: "Cambridge is a great, world-leading university. But because our global pre-eminence will be challenged both internationally and domestically, standing still is not an option. We must continue to adapt and develop".



*Eddington masterplan<sup>1</sup>*

Public debate on Cambridge's expansion has been going on since the 1980s and Eddington has taken over a decade to develop. The new development, located 2km northwest of Cambridge city centre, was chosen as the case study for discussion at the 'Design and Quality Conference. Achieving well-designed places' organized by the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government held in London on 25<sup>th</sup> April.

The new neighbourhood covers 150 hectares – not much less than Cambridge historic centre - and is intended to provide 3,000 housing in the long-term, of which 1,500 will be rented to University staff at affordable prices and 1,500 will be sold by private developers. The land on which it was built was the only suitable plot for housing development and is meant to becoming 'urban'. For this reason, together with housing, 100,000 sq. m of research facilities and public services - Sainsbury's, surgery, schools, parks and big shops - were developed.

Its proximity to the scientific research hub makes it the perfect spot for university staff and students. However, for those who are neither academics nor 'hard scientists', the lack of jobs opportunities within the immediate area makes it a rather less attractive, certainly less sustainable, place to live.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: <http://www.nwcambridge.co.uk/>

While on paper it seems to have achieved its main purposes of being a sustainable, affordable and modern neighbourhood, it actually clashes with the *piecemeal* growth typical of Cambridge and traditional towns, and proposes a well-known modernist, suburban development, made of apartment blocks, three to five storeys high and amorphous public spaces.



*Housing to rent in Eddington<sup>2</sup>*

Eddington shows that large-site allocation and Garden City development are still common practices. The intent was to create a neighbourhood that is modern, heterogeneous, yet rooted in the history of Cambridge. After visiting the site, I can reassure everyone that there is neither trace of history, nor heterogeneity of building types and urban forms. The neighbourhood instead looks monotonous with the typical large blocks and modernist design and the absolute lack of streets and public spaces hierarchy.

As Create Streets' (and many other organisations') research has shown most people like the 'local' rather than the 'exotic' and what looks similar and familiar rather than what is 'from far away'. This development seems to have ignored this idea and, although pedestrian areas and scattered urban meadows were designed to encourage social mingling, their rectangular and sharp forms unfortunately do not – certainly based on the emerging work on the neuroscience of architecture.

The result is a suburban neighbourhood which remains isolated from the urban area, surrounded by major roads and fields, made of anonymous, all equal-looking buildings, a city-scale supermarket rather than smaller retails and with no suitable space for informal gathering.

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<sup>2</sup> Source: <https://www.pdoc.cam.ac.uk/blog/NWCambridgeUpdateMay2017>