

NORTH WEST CAMBRIDGE COLLEGE WORKING GROUP

1. Following discussion last year¹, there has been growing support for the idea that North West Cambridge (NWC) should have one or more new Colleges at its heart. We have considered how this may be taken forward as an integral part of the University's plans.

Recent Developments

2. After lengthy public consultation, the University has submitted its planning application to the local planning authorities and has announced a short list of architects. Subject to planning consent, hopefully in August 2012, and the approval of Regent House, hopefully in the Michaelmas Term 2012, work on the first phase of the project should begin in 2013.

3. It is essential that this first phase should facilitate, and certainly not impede, the subsequent setting up of one or more colleges. The University needs a clear concept of how an academic community can evolve as its project proceeds. Given the timetable, this is urgent.

What sort of College(s)?

4. It was tentatively suggested a year ago that the University should proceed initially on the basis of a new College for post-doctoral researchers, because of the scale of the challenge which collegiate Cambridge faced in bringing post docs into the full community of the University. The hope was that the new College would admit postgraduates when it was strong enough to do so, but in the meantime a colony of postgraduates in NWC based on Membership of existing Colleges seemed a good way forward.

5. Things have moved on since then, in at least three respects.

i. The concept of a post-doc college has not won universal support. There is general agreement that more must be done to assimilate postdocs into the University community, but a feeling that they need something more imaginative than a conventional college with its connotation of junior members.

ii. Some ten Colleges have expressed an interest in renting, between them, up to 210 units of graduate accommodation on the site. A further five Colleges have expressed an interest in

¹ *Report by the Working Group on a College model for North West Cambridge (WGCNWC)*. This was considered as Paper CC9(11)28 at the meeting of the Colleges' Committee on Saturday 9 July 2011. Summing up the Chairman said that he had a strong sense of the support of the Committee for the Working Group's plans: CC.11.29(ii)

land purchase for family accommodation. At least four Colleges would be interested in involvement beyond this if they had the resources to finance it although frustratingly they do not at present.

iii. The plans for the first phase include both student housing for graduates and key worker housing for postdocs, and both are located close to the local centre with all its facilities.

6. We think these points suggest a dual approach to the development of an academic community in NWC, with two communities evolving side by side, developing an association with each other as they evolve.

7. The graduate housing will initially be rented by Colleges. After years of expansion, Colleges are reaching the limits of their ability to meet the University's needs from within their existing facilities, for the time being at least. The graduates in this NWC housing will remain members of their respective colleges. But if the Colleges, supported by the University, wanted, there could be a deliberate policy over, say, 5 to 10 years of converting these College colonies into a single community, which could in due time form the nucleus of a new College with its own facilities and identity, akin to our present graduate colleges.

8. This approach needs to be implemented flexibly to allow for the inevitable uncertainties, not least of timing. For instance:

i. if a single very large gift were to be made early on, sufficient to endow a new college, the pace of setting up the new graduate College would need to quicken. The rental agreement with Colleges will allow for this. The fact that the graduate population turns over quite rapidly should help manage this process.

ii. the pace could also quicken if two or three of the wealthiest Colleges were to take the initiative in founding the new College, as happened with Darwin College and Clare Hall.

iii. the demand among existing Colleges for graduate rental accommodation in NWC may rise or fall depending on events. It may decline, for instance, if some Colleges were to find the resources to build new graduate accommodation on land which they own. Or it might increase if they decided to expand their graduate population. Phase 1 would accommodate higher demand from Colleges for graduate housing if required.

9. The neighbouring housing to this graduate accommodation will be occupied by postdocs, most of whom will have no connection with a

College. Rather than earmark them as the nucleus of a second new college, it may be more appropriate to see them as a looser academic community drawn together by shared interests and needs and by shared services and facilities, whose evolution would lie in part at least in the hands of postdocs themselves and whatever form of society they chose to establish, under the leadership of a small group of senior figures. They will represent only a small proportion of the total number of postdocs in Cambridge, and it would be open to them to extend their events and facilities more widely to other postdocs if they wanted.

10. It would also be possible over time for the two neighbouring communities, graduate college and post-doc society, to grow closer together and to form an association with each other. They will differ in some respects, for instance more postdocs than graduates will have partners and children. Even so, the two communities may begin to draw together, for instance if graduates of the NWC college on completing their degrees become post-doc researchers and move across to live in the post-doc community. The concept of a graduate college with an associated post-doc community next door is attractive. But it would need to be nurtured. It points to establishing shared facilities, open to postdocs and graduates alike, based around the local centre.

11. If this is the broad concept, a number of questions arise.

What facilities will be needed?

12. Not all the facilities for graduates and postdocs can be provided from the beginning, but we think that the first phase must allow for the construction in due course of buildings for:

i. eating. This must be an early priority. Communal eating is central to Cambridge communities. The plans envisage a 'University café' on the market place. We hope that this can be a flexible space which while meeting the needs of the public in the daytime will adapt to graduate students and postdocs in the evening and also provide a space for formal Hall on occasions if a College develops.

ii. social life. The next priority. Graduates and postdocs will need somewhere to meet with a bar and a space for social activities, like a good-sized MCR.

iii. academic life. Not necessarily a library with books but a quiet place where graduates and postdocs can work with ready access to work stations and wifi.

iv. events. A lower priority but one which must be allowed for. The new College and the post-doc community ought in due course to have the capacity for lectures, seminars and conferences, not least to strengthen academic connections with the rest of Cambridge and to attract other postdocs to events in NWC. This could become a source of income, as well as academic activity, in due course.

v. offices. There will be staff. At the beginning they may only be a small team but a graduate college will need the academic and administrative infrastructure to support its students and they will require offices. It would be a mistake not to allow for this from the outset.

vi. a Porters' Lodge. We would argue for the establishment of a Porters' Lodge early on, to provide a focal point of communication, services and authority within the embryo communities. If its services could be extended to postdocs, perhaps for a modest fee, that would be helpful.

How are we going to make it happen?

14. None of the above will happen unless there is leadership. Confidence is crucial. There needs to be a vision, clearly articulated, of what collegiate Cambridge wants to happen in NWC, perhaps on the lines above. There needs to be a general belief that it will actually happen, which in turn means a critical mass of people and facilities to make it credible, led by identified individuals who believe in it and are responsible for it. And there needs to be commitment across collegiate Cambridge – University and Colleges – to support the development of an academic community in NWC over time.

How will the Colleges relate to NWC?

15. Colleges will have an important role in making these plans a success. An early question for the ten colleges interested in renting graduate housing will be how they will collectively manage their relationship with NWC and their graduates located there: some form of coordinating entity seems likely to be needed. Individual colleges will need to manage their relationship with their graduates to make sure they do not feel like a neglected outpost. And they should react positively if, in the years ahead, the graduates of NWC begin to show signs of a separate community spirit. Colleges may in due course wish, for instance, to offer facilities such as formal Halls or sporting facilities for all the graduates located there, not just their own, as a form of support for the embryo college which we hope will emerge.

What appointments need to be made?

16. We envisage a small initial team, some employed by the University and some by the Colleges. It will be for the University and Colleges to specify the posts, but we imagine that it will include a bursarial figure to look after the finances of the embryo college, some administrative support and perhaps a post-doc coordinator to provide support to that community. We would also urge the University to identify a lead figure who can spearhead the development of these communities. The model used when Wolfson was set up has much to commend it. And we would like there to be some porters.

How will it all be paid for? How much fundraising?

17. Colleges will rent out the graduate accommodation. Postdocs will pay for their own housing. The University will want to make sure that the first phase washes its face as planned, and may be able to free up resources from other areas of its budget to support the project of a new College. There will of course need to be a business plan. But two major points remain.

18. First, it will be important to get the incentives right. Graduates will compare the price of housing in NWC with the price elsewhere. If they find that they can get more and better value from, say, College accommodation, for instance because it includes utilities, wifi and shared services, they will be unenthusiastic about living in NWC. Similarly we should not expect postdocs to be prepared to stump up large sums for associate membership of a graduate college or access to a porters' lodge, though they will need to pay a modest subscription. We need to get the deal right.

19. Second, and most important, there will need to be a big fundraising effort to enable the buildings in paragraph 12 to be built and to provide the income for the running costs of the new College. We think this is a big challenge for CUDO and for the new University fundraising campaign which is being planned. It will need to be a united project with the Colleges, to enable the University to approach the really big hitters. Without major fundraising, the NWC project could fall flat on its face. We might end up with halls of residence, and not very good ones at that.

Conclusion

20. The aim should be to move towards a post-graduate college in NWC within the next decade or so, with a postdoc community alongside sharing its facilities and hopefully developing an association with it. The willingness of nearly half the Colleges to rent or buy housing in NWC is very welcome and promises to provide the nucleus for meeting this aim. But it will only happen with the support of the

collegiate University. In particular there will need to be strong leadership and a major fundraising operation to make it possible.

21. We hope our proposals will be implemented. Assuming they are, however, they will not be the end of the story. The University will still be faced with the wider problem of many postdocs who are not properly part of the academic community and whose position is unsatisfactory. But we will be moving in the right direction.

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