

ACTIVE DESIGN CASE STUDY
**ALCONBURY
WEALD:
DELIVERING ACTIVE
DESIGN IN NEW
COMMUNITIES**

ACTIVE DESIGN PRINCIPLES IN ACTION:

1. ACTIVITY FOR ALL



2. WALKABLE COMMUNITIES



4. CO-LOCATION OF COMMUNITY FACILITIES



5. NETWORK OF MULTIFUNCTIONAL OPEN SPACE



6. HIGH QUALITY STREETS & SPACES



9. MANAGEMENT, MAINTENANCE, MONITORING & EVALUATION



10. ACTIVITY PROMOTION & LOCAL CHAMPIONS



ACTIVE DESIGN CASE STUDY

ALCONBURY WEALD: DELIVERING ACTIVE DESIGN IN NEW COMMUNITIES

ALCONBURY WEALD IN CAMBRIDGESHIRE, IS ONE OF THE LARGEST DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS IN THE UK TODAY AND IS A GREAT EXAMPLE OF HOW THE 10 PRINCIPLES OF ACTIVE DESIGN CAN BE PUT INTO PRACTICE.

In October 2014 outline planning permission was granted for development of the 575ha former RAF/USAF airfield to provide 8,000 new jobs and 5,000 new homes set in a new and extensive landscape setting. The scale of Alconbury Weald also means that a number of exciting sustainable opportunities are being explored, including the provision of a new rail station and renewable energy projects. Urban Designers David Lock Associates led the Design Team for the site owners Urban&Civic. In 2019, Alconbury Weald was the winner of The Planning Award for Mixed-Use Development.

The approach to the development of Alconbury Weald is focused on attracting new investment, jobs and opportunities. The site presents a unique opportunity to deliver significant and transformational change. Through the Enterprise Zone, new employment is focusing on Low Carbon, High Tech & Creative Industries, ICT, Research and Development and advanced manufacturing, engineering and processing. The overall masterplan aims to create both places to live and work, within a layout that encourages walking and cycling.

An essential component of the approach to designing and now delivering new development at Alconbury Weald has been the embedding of **Active Design Principles**. Indeed, Alconbury Weald was featured in both the original Active Design Guidance in 2007 in plan, and in the revised Active Design 2015 version to illustrate both 'Principle 2 – Walkable Communities' & 'Principle 3 – Connected walking & cycling routes'. However, Alconbury Weald shows much more than this. Whilst only in its first phase, it is highlighting key aspects that will help to ensure that the new residents will have an environment to make them active through their everyday lives.

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Mixed-Use Development

*Alconbury Weald Application
Master Plan, April 2013*





EMBEDDING ACTIVE DESIGN PRINCIPLES AT EACH STAGE

Active Design Principles can only be properly implemented if they are fully embedded at each stage of the process. At Alconbury Weald this has become apparent through:

1. Understanding the ambitions of **Active Design** and putting these at the centre of the overall approach to the site from day one;
2. Drawing those principles through into detailed design and guidance for each phase of the development through appropriate mechanisms such as Design Coding; and
3. Enforcing and managing the implementation of development to ensure that the vision and ambitions are realised through the reality of development on the ground.

By adhering to these three core values, the development at Alconbury Weald is now delivering a considered structure of multifunctional green spaces and public realm that is well connected to homes and jobs creating everyday opportunities for a variety of activities and mobility.

MASTER DEVELOPER APPROACH TO ENSURE QUALITY AND SUCCESS

An important aspect to ensuring the success of embedding the **Active Design Principles** into the scheme has been the long term 'master developer' role that Urban&Civic (U&C) have taken. U&C have retained the long-term overall control of the site, which ensures that there is proper phasing of build out and adherence to the design principles and vision for the overall development.

A core element of ensuring that the fundamental design principles for the development are delivered for Phase 1 of the 25-year build out of the site, is through the Design Code that DLA produced in conjunction with the local planning authority.

The Design Code is the main Regulatory Plan for the site and sets out the framework for development and setting the design fixes for Key Phase 1 including:

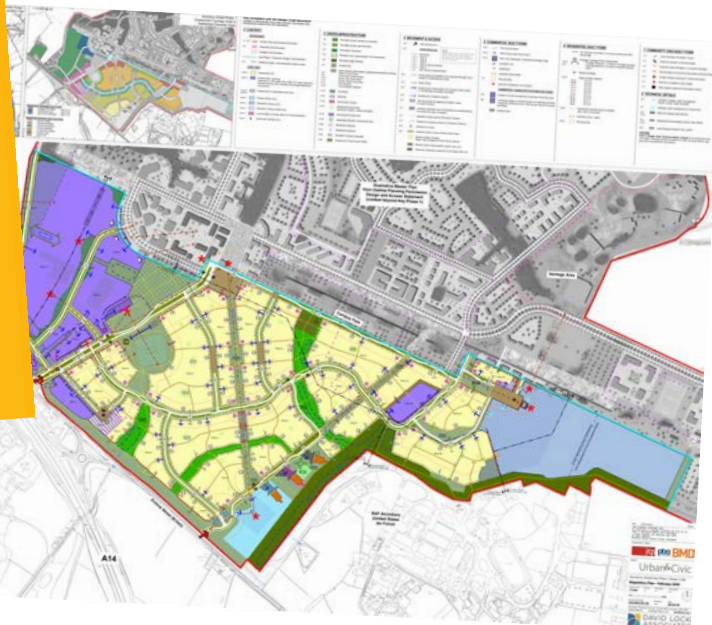
- Strategic elements of green infrastructure;
- Strategic streets / road infrastructure; and
- Individual development parcels (for commercial, residential, mixed use and community uses)

Front loading the provision of the green infrastructure network and also the core community facilities, such as, cricket pitch, allotments, primary schools, skatepark, and MUGA helps to encourage active behaviour from day one for new residents. In order to encourage behaviour change, creating opportunities to be active as part of an individual's daily routine is essential. U&C's master developer role allows these essential community infrastructures to be phased and in place early to meet the daily needs of the new residents.



Above: Alconbury Weald Key Phase 1 Framework Design Code

Right: Alconbury Weald Key Phase 1 Framework Design Code Regulatory Plan



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“The master developer role enables us to work with partners to shape the vision for a new community, and then take that right through the planning and implementation process to detailed delivery and ongoing management.

We knew that Active Design, and healthy communities was a core local priority and one we wholeheartedly share. It also links with our Active Travel commitments to design cycle and walk first places, with safe walkable links to bus stops.

So from the very start the Design Team were able to layout local and strategic green spaces and connections as a fundamental part of the homes and community; and to ensure play and sports had both central hubs and local doorstep opportunities, but all with safe, green connections running between them.

We deliver the green spaces, community facilities and movement network, working alongside the house builders who come on site who work to the same design code and structure. That means we can phase delivery to ensure from first residents moving on, they can access healthy outdoor spaces and key community facilities, like the school, gym and Club building at Alconbury Weald. Early partners using these spaces mean there is activity for people to join: from brownies and skateboarding starter sessions to boot camp and Zumba.

The Welcome Pack we give to all new residents help them make active choices, and our Community Development team at Alconbury Weald have been promoting and developing trails and walking groups to encourage exploration of the new spaces. We have supported and been working with the Active Communities team at Living Sport, supported by Sport England, to ensure we maximise the opportunities people have when they move home, to get into a healthy and active routine. It’s not just about putting the infrastructure in, you need to ensure active encouragement to use the spaces and facilities, and good management to enable them to be accessible and safe.

Planning it in from the start, with input from expert partners, and being thoughtful about phased delivery ensures it not difficult to really make a huge difference to the way people live and enjoy active lives. It’s not a nice to have: it’s an essential part of creating modern sustainable communities.”

Tim Leathes,
Development Director, Urban&Civic

Below: Alconbury Weald New Residents’ Welcome Pack



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ACTIVITY FOR ALL

By considering the needs of users of all ages and types, Alconbury Weald is providing a wide range of facilities to enable everyone to be active. Importantly, this means being aware of and planning for the future needs of the community as it grows, but at the same time responding to the needs and ambitions of surrounding communities in the neighbouring villages. Early investment both on and off sites enables this from day one, bringing new and existing communities together.

As the existing local populations did not necessarily fully reflect the likely demographic of the new population, Urban&Civic sought specific relationships with local sports clubs and community groups. Through sponsorship, workshops and events, Urban&Civic were able to draw in key views and voices to help develop initial ideas and plans. The approach also ensured early use of the facilities on site and establish early connections to the new community, where the local Table Tennis club, Football teams, cycling clubs, Brownies and others were able to use both the existing and new spaces to meet and create new networks.



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Above top: Alconbury Weald Summer Fete, June 2018

Below: Opening of Ermine Street Children's Allotments, November 2018



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Gran Fondo travels past the Incubator Building at Alconbury Weald. The award-winning Incubator is the flagship building of Alconbury Enterprise Campus. Designed by internationally renowned architects Allford Hall Monaghan Morris, it provides flexible inspiring space for small and start-up businesses at the heart of the Alconbury Weald development.



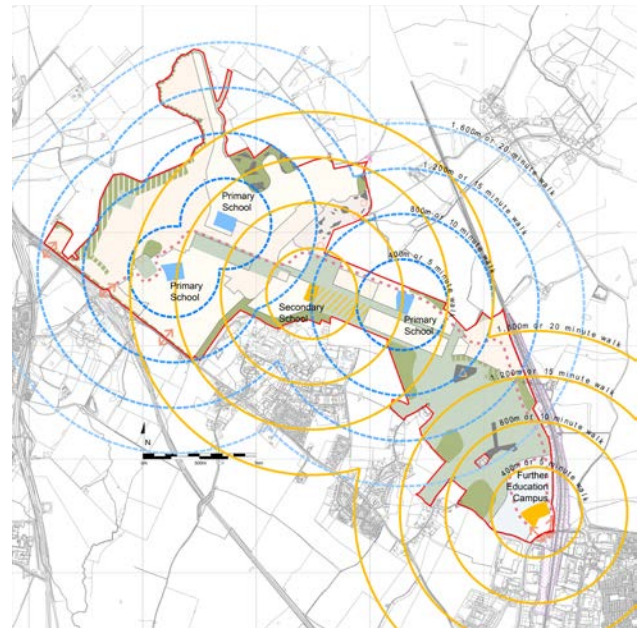


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WALKABLE COMMUNITIES WITH WELL CONNECTED ROUTES

One of the founding principles for the development of Alconbury Weald has been to deliver Walkable Communities, ensuring that the potential to walk to schools, shops and parks is an option for all future residents (all homes to be within 400m to bus stops and green spaces, 800m to local shops and primary schools). This has helped to inform detailed layouts and the delivery on site of the first homes and facilities.

The structure of the former airfield has provided a blueprint for the delivery of a network of paths and cycle routes. The alignment of the former taxiways have been translated into multi-purpose routes that connect the key facilities on site whilst at the same time providing an important nod to the heritage of the site. The main runway will be developed into a linear park that will run through the core of the development, providing segregated walking and cycling routes, and a central greenspace for residents.



Right: 5, 10, 15 and 20 minute walking isochrones from proposed education facilities

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CO-LOCATION OF FACILITIES

By creating multiple reasons to visit a destination, the length and number of trips on site can be minimised whilst creating awareness and convenience of opportunities to participate in sport and physical activity. This is an important element of the place making agenda for Alconbury Weald and is now being played out in the first phase of the development. The co-location of the first homes alongside the early delivery of the primary school, open space and play facilities, and retail has been brought forward specifically to enable joint trips and social interaction from day one of the development.



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THE CO-LOCATION OF THE FIRST HOMES ALONGSIDE THE EARLY DELIVERY OF THE PRIMARY SCHOOL, OPEN SPACE AND PLAY FACILITIES, AND RETAIL HAS BEEN BROUGHT FORWARD SPECIFICALLY TO ENABLE JOINT TRIPS AND SOCIAL INTERACTION FROM DAY ONE OF THE DEVELOPMENT.



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A NETWORK OF MULTI-FUNCTIONAL SPACE

The scale of Alconbury Weald provides the opportunity to deliver a range of green infrastructure at a grand scale, providing multi-functional spaces that offer the potential for a range of formal and informal activities on site. It is also vital that these spaces are interconnected both within the site and externally to the wider environment and communities. A site wide Green Infrastructure Strategy for Alconbury Weald was developed and adopted as part of the outline planning permission for the site. This has now been translated in the design code for the first Phase and is being delivered alongside the first homes and jobs.

Notwithstanding the scale of open space being provided, each space is working hard to provide multiple functions. Landscape buffers SUDS and forest planting are combined with informal footpaths and cycleways to connect the homes and jobs of the first phase. This is enabled by the U&C master-developer approach under which strategic landscape is provided and maintained by the master developer within which development parcels are then delivered by individual housebuilders / occupiers.



Above right: Alconbury Weald Green Infrastructure Strategy

Below right: Alconbury Weald Green Infrastructure Framework Plan

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HIGH QUALITY STREETS, SPACES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Thinking about the streets and spaces as more than just routes has enabled a flexible approach to delivery where high quality public realm is able to perform a number of functions for the early community. Streets and spaces have been designed and implemented with durable materials and integral street furniture and signage. Perhaps the key example of this is the plaza to the Primary School where the external space is doubling up as a pick up / drop off point alongside a community events space.

This approach is not without its challenges and requires some robust and creative conversations with statutory bodies who are not always clear on the benefits that can be achieved.



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STREETS AND SPACES HAVE BEEN DESIGNED AND IMPLEMENTED WITH DURABLE MATERIALS AND INTEGRAL STREET FURNITURE AND SIGNAGE.



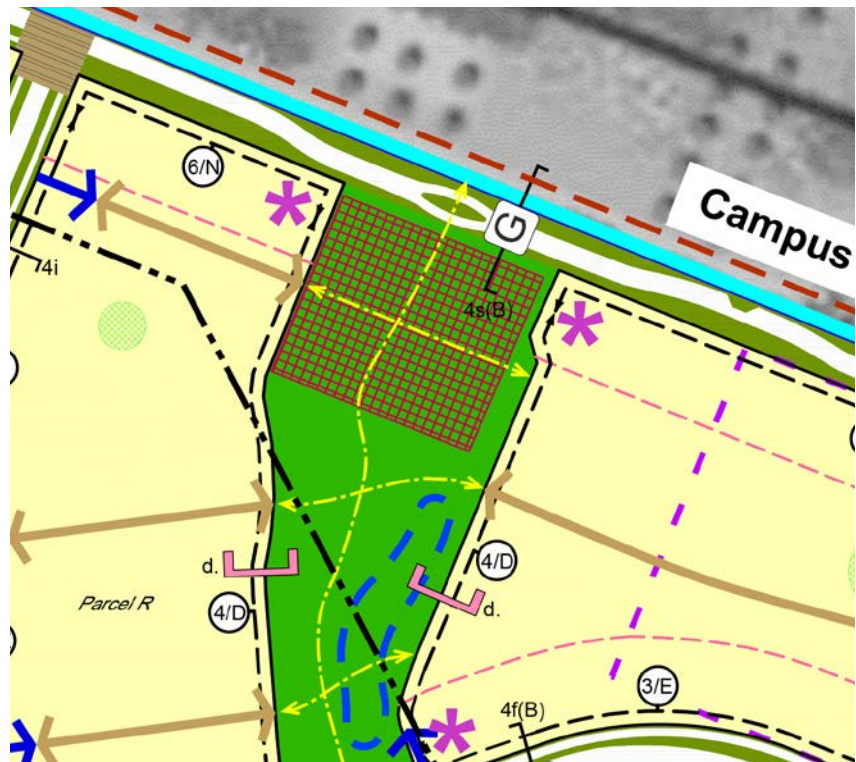
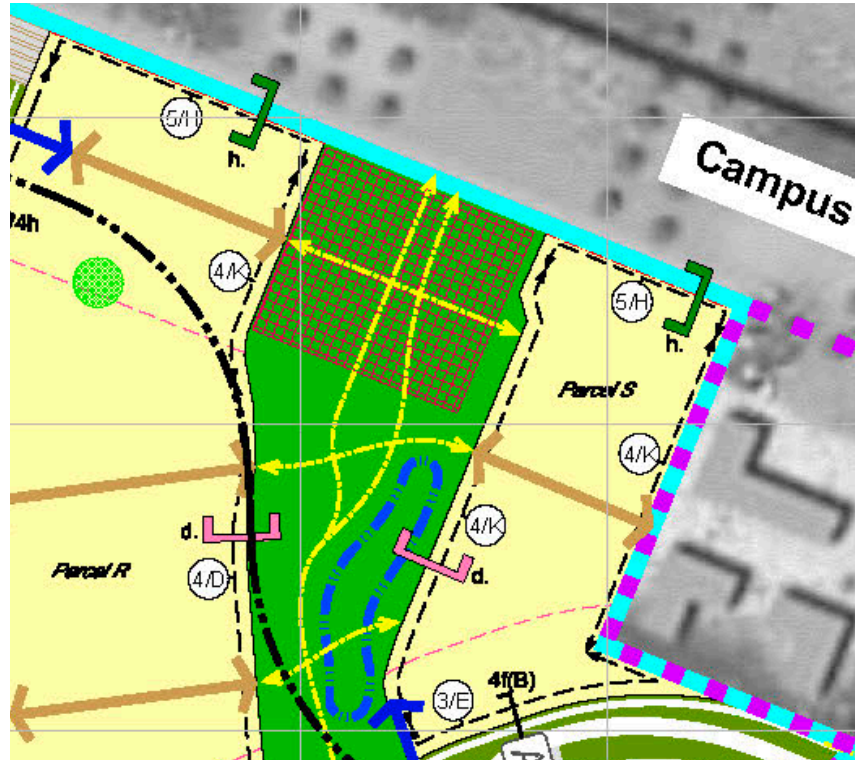
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MANAGEMENT, MAINTENANCE, MONITORING AND EVALUATION

As part of the site wide approach to Alconbury Weald, an Estate Management Strategy has been developed and agreed with local partners including the Planning Authority. This document sets out a clear plan as to how different elements of the public parts of the site will be managed specifically. This responds to heritage, ecology, sport and community buildings amongst other with specific roles and bodies within the umbrella of an overarching strategy. For examples, in line with the Alconbury Weald Estate Management Strategy all green infrastructure identified in the Design Code will be managed by an on-site estate management company.

As an evolving development where Active Design is a core component, U&C will seek to take on comments from residents along with emerging good practice over time. In one such example informal comments suggested that cycling within the site could be improved through prioritising cyclists where cycle paths meet roads. Whilst this cannot be changed on elements already constructed, it can be introduced in future parts of the scheme especially at key green infrastructure nodes. Accordingly, this has been introduced on an update to the Design Code and Reg Plan for the first Key Phase at Alconbury Weald.



Above top: Alconbury Weald Key Phase 1 Regulatory Plan (2015)

Above bottom: Alconbury Weald Key Phase 1 Regulatory Plan (2019) – incorporating revisions suggested by residents through consultation to provide a more appropriate cycle link between development phases

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ACTIVITY PROMOTION AND LOCAL CHAMPIONS

Ensuring that both new and surrounding communities are aware of the opportunities that are being created for them is fundamental to engendering use and activity. At Alconbury Weald, a proactive approach is being taken by the developer U&C, as follows:

- The early employment of a Community Development Worker, based on site and with a remit to secure community cohesion and activity as the development progresses;
- Early delivery of facilities that will create activity such as the Cricket Pitch;
- Partnership with local clubs and associations to maximise the use of facilities such as the local cycle club who train on the former runway;
- Hosting of events, an annual 10k run is held at Alconbury Weald with local running clubs; and
- Promotion via a development specific website and interaction with neighbouring parish councils and communities

Above: Alconbury Weald Big Summer Bash Cricket Festival and opening of Alconbury Weald Cricket Ground, June 2019

Below: Shrove Tuesday pancake races, February 2017



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WHAT CAN OTHER DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS LEARN FROM THE ALCONBURY WEALD APPROACH?

1. **Embed Active Design Principles from the start.**
2. **Shared ownership of the design ambitions from Local Authority and Developer**
3. **Commitment is required to the quality in implementation from all partners**
4. **Quality at scale is achievable!**
5. **Master Developer** – ensures that quality and integrity of the overall vision for the site is achieved
6. **Design Code** – ensuring integrity of the master plan and vision for the development
7. **Front loading of the green infrastructure and community facilities** – helps create active daily habits for new residents from day one of moving in.
8. **Walkable neighbourhood design** – ‘Walker-first’ principle giving the pedestrian priority within the site layout
9. **Community Enabler created as part of the planning consent, becoming a local champion to help create good daily activity habits for the new community**
10. **Engage local community early in a meaningful way to ensure the site integrates within the local area.**

ALTERNATIVE LANGUAGES AND FORMATS:

This document can be provided in alternative languages, or alternative formats such as large print, braille, tape and on disk upon request. Call the Sport England switchboard on 08458 508 508 for more details.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

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