



Cambridgeshire Quality Panel

Wellcome Genome Campus Expansion, Hinxton

Session One: Bridge Designs

Monday 24th April 2023

Pompeiiian Room, Wellcome Genome Campus

Panel: Robin Nicholson (chair), Kirk Archibald, Simon Carne, John Dales, Steve Platt, and Lindsey Wilkinson.

Local Authority: James Tipping (GCSP), Annemarie de Boom (GCSP), and Tam Parry (CCC).

The Cambridgeshire Quality Charter for Growth sets out the core principles for the level of quality to be expected in new development across Cambridgeshire.

The [Cambridgeshire Quality Panel](#) provides independent, expert advice to developers and local planning authorities against the four core principles of the Charter: connectivity, character, climate, and community.

Development overview

The Wellcome Genome Campus (WGC) expansion site is located approximately 13.5km south of Cambridge and the expansion site comprises of a parcel of land within the existing Campus, and the expansion land to the east of the A1301.

Outline Planning Permission (OPP) was granted in December 2020 for a mixed-use development of 150,000 sq.m. of new research and translation floorspace and up to 1,500 new homes specifically for Campus workers. The proposal includes land for community and employment infrastructure to be delivered in a phased approach to comprising of three individual areas known as 'Development Areas (DAs)'

Since the previous Panel meeting in 2022, the applicant has continued to undertake extensive pre-application discussions with South Cambridgeshire District Council Officers (SCDC) and other stakeholders on the preparation of the Design Guide. They have also evolved the bridges and movement plans - which were at an early stage of the design process a year ago- and which are the focus of this review.

Presenting team

The scheme is promoted by Urban and Civic, supported by David Lock Associates (DLA), Wilkinson Eyre (WA), Churchill Thornhill Finch (CTF) and Stantec. The presenting team was:

Nigel Hugill (U&C), Caroline Foster (U&C), Stella Yip (U&C), Julia Foster (DLA), Helen Pearson-Flett (DLA), Tony Musson (WE), Andrew Thornhill (CTF) and James Horne (Stantec).

Local authority's request

South Cambridgeshire District Council asked the Panel to focus on several issues related to the movement flows through the Campus and across the bridges, the ramp interfaces; the at-grade proposals; the function and use of the undercroft car park; and journey experiences for all users of the site.

Cambridgeshire Quality Panel summary

WGC is an exciting and prestigious expansion project for the existing facility. The Panel were greatly encouraged by the progress made with the bridge proposals since they had last met and felt that the designs were heading in the right direction. The Panel welcomed

the way landscape was front and central to the design of the scheme providing an over-all vision to enhance outside links, pull the two sites together and improve the existing setting.

These views are expanded upon below, and include any comments made in the closed session. They relate only to the comments made in Session One; however, it may be helpful to read the report for the subsequent session on the Design Guide, for further context and broader comments.

Two points of clarification were sought on (1) the nature of what is meant by a restorative landscape; and (2) whether crossings of the A11 towards Uttlesford had been considered. The applicant responded that they were seeking to improve on the rural scene of Cambridgeshire and 'wind the clock back' to before the agriculturalization of the landscape and no, they hadn't progressed any ideas on A11 crossings as they had focused on connections with the local communities and four Parishes; there was no perceived need for any connections across the A11.

Connectivity – “*places that are well-connected enable easy access for all to jobs and services using sustainable modes*”

The animated movement plan was highlighted as being particularly useful, although destinations further afield, such as the local railway stations (at Great Chesterford and Whittlesford Parkway) should be included. Overall, the bridge proposals and route network seem sound.

It was noted that there is only one footway along the A1301, but that 'muddy tracks' could emerge on the other side of the carriageway because human nature does not always follow intended routes. Perhaps this should be planned for as if these patterns emerge it may become a safety issue.

There was a discussion seeking to better understand the thinking behind the at-grade paths to and around the roundabouts and whether signal controls or single lane arms had been considered. The applicant advised that they had thought about routes, desire lines and destinations that the people might want to go to, and the plans had been successfully safety audited. There has been extensive consultation with the Highways Authority. The proposed 30mph speed limit has now changed to a 40mph limit due to the changed nature of the relationship between the road and buildings now set back with less of a 'high street' design.

This has also fed into the strategy to focus movement across the two bridges, with secondary at-grade crossings, including one central at-grade crossing.

The Panel highlighted that the crossings must be safe and convenient to use but pondered whether people will take the time and effort to use the bridges when they could potentially 'nip across' the road at-grade. The applicant suggested that they had taken great care to encourage people to use the bridges with the proposed designs and that the flows and desire lines would make the bridges seem the natural way to cross. Plans had been changed to provide a 'hole in the wall' to improve the route from Hinxton/New Road to access the northern bridge as well as provide a more direct route from the village to the northern bridge via the Campus, thus avoiding New Road which has no pavements.

Will the bridges be adequate for walkers and cyclists, especially at peak times, as similar bridge designs in Cambridge can experience conflict? The applicant was confident that their designs will work well for the expected flows and explained that the northern bridge will serve the gym and conference centre primarily, whilst the southern bridge will facilitate a more continuous flow between buildings. The bridges are a key part of the strategy for facilitating serendipity.

In the wrap up session, the Panel further discussed the central at-grade crossing and thought that at peak arrival and departure conference times, for example, this crossing could be heavily used and therefore asked whether the design should be improved to a signal crossing?

Community – “places where people live out of choice and not necessity, creating healthy communities with a good quality of life”

A comparison with the Cambridge University development at Eddington could be useful although there is no road severance issue there, nor is it remote from Cambridge where many people might wish to go.

The train service at Whittlesford Parkway Railway Station is generally very good and therefore good access to it is important (and for Great Chesterford Station too).

Whilst a primary school is proposed in WGC (if required), and a site identified, it was asked if there will be safe routes to school for children if they must attend other schools (because the on-site primary school isn't needed) and for secondary school children, whether they can access the nearest secondary schools at Linton or Sawston?

Will there be walking maps available to future users to show various routes in and around the site, including to the wetlands?

Will the at-grade links at the northern roundabout be safe for Hinxton residents to use if they don't wish to use the bridges? The applicant suggested that the northern bridge would offer the safest and most convenient option.

Will the bridges be considered safe at night by people? The applicant suggested that they are designed to be as safe as possible, with suitable lighting.

If the main users of the undercroft car park will be the conference centre users why put the two uses on opposite sides of the road? The applicant responded that this was a much better solution than the previous surface level proposals and that the car park will be closer to additional accommodation by the northern bridge. It was also added that the current conference car park would be removed as part of the outline planning permission requirements.

Character – “*Places with distinctive neighbourhoods and where people create ‘pride of place’*”

The clear commitment to landscape was welcomed by the Panel and it was recognised that the bridges and ramps are challenging to deliver in such a constrained landscape keeping all the existing mature trees.

The bridges will be significant interventions in the landscape but are too engineered. Will they be suitable for bikes as the ramps look challenging from the existing campus?

The relationship of the strong existing parkland landscape and the very different restorative approach of the expansion site needs clarifying.

The walls, steps, structures, banking, and trees need to work together to enhance the heritage setting and downplay the engineering aspect of the bridges. Maybe consider walls rather than gabions The leading edge of the slab supporting the park over the carpark needs careful detailing to reduce its impact.

The Panel were not convinced by the planting on the bridges which could look too manicured or false in the parkland setting which is traditionally generous in its approach. This is not and does not need to be a green bridge as at Mile End, London; it should be about the right greenery in the right place and the bridge should be seen as a bridge.

Key elements of the public realm need fixing. But how will important features be fixed when the planning applications are supported by a guide, rather than a code?

Simple, high-quality design will work best and there should be less emphasis on landscape being used to solve other problems.

The walls are very important features and there was a discussion about the crinkle crankle walls, flint designs and further discussion on how gabions will be used. The stone-filled walls will be a key feature of the parkland edge.

Climate – *“Places that anticipate climate change in ways that enhance the desirability of development and minimise environmental impact”*

The Panel asked about active travel measures and whether the campus will provide infrastructure for e-bikes and e-scooters? The applicant stated that there is a detailed travel plan and accompanying set of measures to support sustainable and active travel measures.

There will be a lot of concrete and embodied carbon in this scheme, so it is important to minimise this and consider alternative solutions wherever possible.

The carbon impacts must be transparent, reported, and minimised. The applicant responded that they have a strong history of carbon reporting and setting targets, and this scheme will be the same.

Specific recommendations

- The two-bridge strategy was endorsed by the Panel.
- Serendipity theme should be explored to facilitate chance meetings.
- The network and movement strategy is broadly sound but review the ‘muddy track’ point, roundabout crossings, and central at-grade crossing proposals.
- Test misbehaviour and movement patterns and intention versus reality.
- Consider good practice from Eddington.
- How will children access secondary schools?
- Produce walking maps.
- Consider the contrasts between the two sites – enjoy and lean into the constraints.
- Resolve the gabion versus crinkle crankle wall debate.
- Gabions should be fixed in the designs and planted where they are.
- Detail the leading edge of slab over the car park to reduce its impact

- Be cautious about manicured planting.
- Fix the quality of the public realm.
- Ensure the bridges are safe at night?
- Minimise embodied carbon and report the carbon count.
- Ensure there are benefits for both Hinxton and site residents.

The opportunity for ongoing engagement with the developer and design team would be welcomed as the scheme develops.

Contact details

For any queries in relation to this report, please contact the panel secretariat via growthdevelopment@cambridgeshire.gov.uk

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Appendix A – Background information list and plan

- Main presentations
- Local authority background note
- Applicant background note

Framework Plan

