



The Greater Cambridge Design Review Panel

Pre-application PPA/22/0020 (PPA)

**The Welding Institute (TWI), Granta Park, Great Abington,
Cambridgeshire, CB21 6AL**

Thursday 13 October 2022, In-person meeting

Confidential

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

Attendees

Panel Members:

Simon Carne (Chair) - Director, Simon Carne Architect

Vanessa Ross (Character, Landscape) – Chartered Landscape Architect, Director, arc Landscape Design and Planning Ltd

David Knight (Character, Connectivity) - Director at Cake Engineering

Paul Bourgeois (Character, Climate) - Industrial Lead at Anglia Ruskin University

Nicki Whetstone (Character, Conservation) - Associate at Donald Insall Associates

Applicant & Design Team:

Simon Lewis (TWI – Head of Property)

Sean Harries (Number 6 Developments - acting as Development Managers to TWI)

Justin Bainton (Carter Jonas – Planning consultant)

Simon Rainsford (Envision – Sustainability Consultants)

Xuhong Zheng (Hawkins\Brown Architects)

Carole Lees (Hawkins\Brown Architects)

Paul Gibbs (David Jarvis – Landscape Architects)

Jack Williams (Vectos – transport Consultant)

LPA Officers:

Bonnie Kwok – Principal Urban Designer / Design Review Panel Manager

Katie Roberts – Executive Assistant / Panel Support Officer

Michael Hammond – Principal Planner/Case Officer

Ammar Alasaad – Senior Urban Designer

David Hamilton – Senior Landscape Architect

Paul Robertshaw - Senior Conservation Officer

Observers:

N/A

Background, Site Context and Scheme Description

The Welding Institute (TWI) started development on site since 1946. The TWI is the catalyst for the creation of Granta Park. The leasing of office and R&D buildings generate income for the long-term future of the part.

There is a level change within the site. The site slopes down from south to north. The AOD FFL of B2 is 34.5m, while the AOD FFL for B6 is 30m.

The proposals are for an Outline application for the redevelopment of the TWI Estate, which comprises the demolition and rebuilding of 3 existing buildings and refurbishing 2 existing buildings, along with associated landscape scheme and a single storey car park to the north. The new build elements would provide a total of 20,000m² GEFA. There is a Grade 2* Listed Abington Tall located to the east of the site just outside the application boundary. The former gardener's cottage and former garden wall on the site are curtilage listed to the Grade 2* Listed Abington Hall.

The design objectives are: 1. Estate consolidation; 2. Sustainable campus; 3. Support well-being; and 4. Efficient Phasing.

Buildings B1, B2 (3 + 1 storey) and B3 will be retained as they are the newest buildings on site. The plan is to extend building B3 to provide a larger space. Building BBB (behind B1) will be refurbished and rebuilt. Buildings BBH, TG and RJ will be demolished. Building TG will be replaced by B4 (Lab Office): 4 + 1 storey. Building RJ will be replaced by B5 (Lab Office). A service route will be located at the back of Buildings B1, B2 and B3. B6 is a new lab/office building: 3 + 1 storey. There will be a new multi-storey car park located to the north of the site.

In terms of connectivity, a Sustainable Transport Strategy is proposed to promote car share and the use of the Granta Park community bus and cycle to work.

Each new building will be provided with cycle stores and shower/changing facilities within the ground floors.

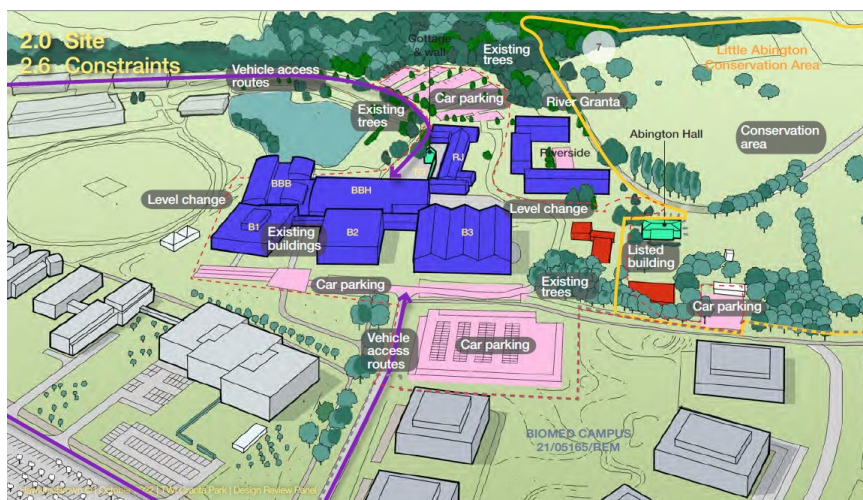
A Landscape Design Strategy is proposed: The aim is to create different characters areas, e.g. Front of House Character Area enclosed by BBB, B4, B5, B6 and the cottage.

Declarations of Interest

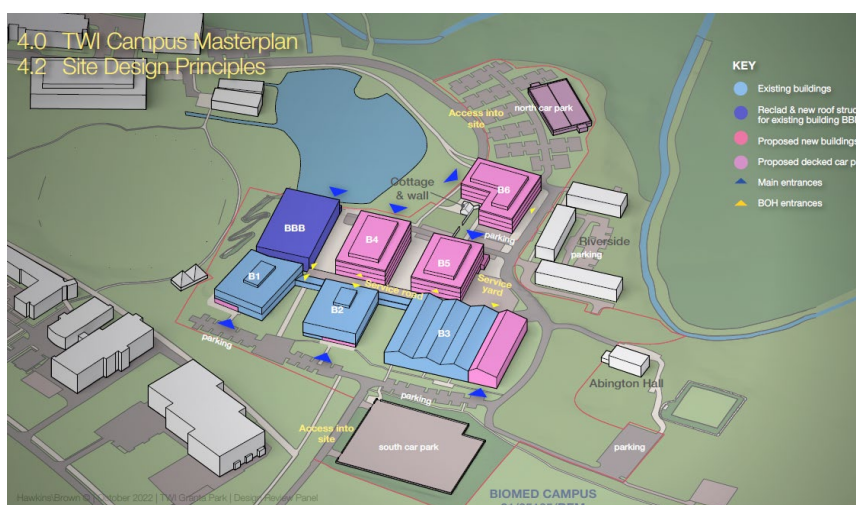
None.

Previous Panel Reviews

None.



Existing site plan – extracted from the applicant’s DRP presentation document October 2022



Proposed site plan – extracted from the applicant’s DRP presentation document October 2022

Greater Cambridge Design Review Panel Views

Introduction

The Panel would like to thank the applicant and his design team for the guided site tour and presentation of proposals for the future development of the Welding Institute (TWI) campus on Granta Park.

The proposals are founded on the overriding need to generate income for the TWI, and to accommodate the existing facilities in a campus that consolidates the activities in a sustainable setting, which would help provide for the well-being of TWI community in a planned affordable and efficient phased process.

The Panel wholeheartedly endorse these aims and appreciate the applicant's consultation with the Panel in advance of the proposed outline planning application later this year.

The proposed development is a long-term proposition and work has been done in advance of appointing the design team. The design brief sets aspirational targets to address the issues of climate, connectivity, character and community. The presentation and site visit understandably focussed on the current proposition in broad brush terms.

Whilst accepting that there was further work in the background, the Panel observed that a design narrative with target metrics showing option development would assist.

The presentation sets out one possible option for the accommodation of desirable and marketable floor space. How much flexibility there is was not part of the main discussion - but the Panel observed in passing that other options were not presented.

There are constraints to the potential options which have not been presented in the design development. The group of well-established oaks on the potential site of Building B4 is an important issue to feed into the Design and Access Statement

(DAS). The proposals can then be better assessed against the background of planning policy as it exists and as it is likely to develop.

Examples of where this could be addressed are covered in the 4 C's – Connectivity, Climate, Character and Community are set out below. The interactions between the different aspects will be an important element in setting out the whole picture.

Detailed Comments

Connectivity

At macro level, Granta Park is predominantly a car-based development. This is characterised by large areas of car parking set in attractive tree lined settings. The Travel plan data shows improved active and more sustainable methods of access with projected increases in public transport and cycle access.

Access routes from neighbouring villages should be shown as part of the emerging outline plan. Making active travel a more attractive proposition is important. Simplicity and ease of use is key to encouraging active travel. The TWI team observed that local residents are part of the workforce and that many walk to work.

At the more detailed level, there were comments on the design and location of cycle parking. Designs will need to demonstrate that the aspirations can be delivered. It is important that cycling is not a second-best option. The Panel were also unsure that level changes in the design would necessarily work as well as envisaged. Whilst the Panel accept that these are early days, an illustrative plan should demonstrate the quality of design set by the standards proposed.

Incorporating electric bike charging in secure and suitably sized bike parking will be essential.

The Panel also recommended consideration of the service yard being a hub, so that HGVs and LGVs don't necessarily need to go any further onto site. This hub could be then serviced by lighter, lower impact vehicles for 'last mile', e.g. electric vehicles

including cargo bikes. This could reduce or alleviate conflicts between pedestrians and deliveries in shared spaces.

Climate

The Panel welcomed the aspirations which largely chime with current policy. The Panel's site visit did not include looking deeper into the internal spaces within the campus. This is not a criticism of the site tour, but an observation that time is a constraint within which the Panel works.

Decisions to retain certain buildings and not others seem to have been part of the pre-appointment of the applicant's design team. Presentation of this as part of the background will be an important element in the DAS.

Within the context of earlier decisions, the Panel noted that the proposals which aim to be carbon neutral by 2035 will need to address several key elements, including: re-use and recycling of construction and other materials; working to limit environmental impacts through local sourcing of materials; proposals for excavation and removal of soils and work arounds for established trees.

The applicant's design team should establish current and future energy demands and investigate in detail the best ways of achieving these needs. A carbon budget (including embodied carbon) should be developed against which to check the design as it develops. Some of the targets mentioned were challenged including 10% Electric Vehicle charging, extent of roof space for solar Photovoltaic arrays, ground source heat pump as well as air source heat pumps as well as using the existing lake as a source. The Panel also recommended consideration of hot water demands and complementary technologies to electricity generating types which may be more efficient.

The fabric first approach is essentially a default. Heat gain as well as loss will be important as the building design develops.

20% biodiversity net gain is a good target, but the Panel were unclear against what it would be measured. Where are the existing habitats? Has the impact of green roofs been included as an option to be pursued? The removal of trees was an important issue highlighted by the Panel on their site inspection. Proposals for tree planting have not been identified.

Character

Two aspects of character dominated the discussion at the outline stage of a planning application. These can broadly be categorised as the wider master planning of landscape, and built interventions and the outline planning of new buildings and their relationship to the existing retained structures.

Little of the historic Humphrey Repton landscape remains. Are there clues how it could be rediscovered as part of the outline application? How can the immediate context of TWI connect to Abington Hall, the curtilage cottage building and remains of the garden wall (physically as well as visually)?

The Panel recommend that this be given serious consideration as the remaining fragments could be celebrated and given meaning in the emerging plans. The present design sees the entrance to the service yard and the entrance to Abington Hall retained in close proximity. The design of this junction and enclosure of the service yard will need careful consideration so as not to negatively affect the approach to Abington Hall. The Panel understand that historic building and landscape consultants will be advising the development. Their work, unseen at the presentation is an important part of the proposals.

Character at the landscape scale will need to address the visual impact of proposals when compared with buildings removed. The base line situation needs to be presented. The impact of new buildings as currently proposed, or as may emerge as part of the design process will be particularly important when viewed from Abington Hall and across the lake looking to the south. The decked car parking at the high point of the north car park site and the extension to B3, highlighted as a concern by the conservation officer may encroach on the view of Abington Hall. Viewpoints will

need to be agreed with the local planning authority and used to aid design not just for validation.

At the more detailed scale, space between existing building BBB and new buildings B4 and B5 is tight. For reasons of orientation and shading the panel consider they will not provide attractive social spill out spaces. The spaces are also not consistent with the open parkland character of the estate and feel disconnected from their immediate surroundings. Whilst the economy and functionality of the proposed buildings remains to be assessed, the Panel is concerned that the form, scale and location of buildings beg many questions of connectivity and climate, including level changes, service access and how movement will be facilitated across a consolidated estate.

The proposed B6 Building is overbearing and out-of-scale with the cottage and wall fragment. It has very little relationship to them despite the close proximity. How the cottage is treated will require sensitivity. Better options for this area are required to give comfort in the outline application. This should include spatial requirements, materiality and future uses for the cottage. The Chair asked whether the complete removal of the Robert Jenkins building was essential. Its more decorative brickwork and appropriate scale is an asset which does not seem to have been recognised. The removal of the existing buildings adjacent to Abington Hall and the restoration of parkland in this area is positive, as is the intention to restore / repair the cottage fabric.

The proposed new buildings were also highlighted for their implications to existing trees. The extra bay to B3 to accommodate an additional testing lab will result in the loss of trees. Whilst these are substantial and well established, the panel did not have significant objection to this beyond the need to attempt to retain them if possible. Detailed design should assess whether any can be retained.

The group of oaks located on the site of proposed Building B4 is, however, an important issue which does not appear to have been carefully considered. This well-established group was retained when the previous development proceeded. In the absence of options, their removal lacks justification. The Panel would strongly

recommend that this exercise been done as part of an assessment of options. They should be retained.

In passing the Panel observed that the height parameters set for this area of Granta Park are lower than those being proposed for the Biomedical campus development. The quantum of development and the impact of new buildings on the consolidated estate could be modified. Parameters should take account of the assessment of buildings to be retained, the visual impact of carefully located modest additional height and consistency with the planning policies. In this way an argument supported by policy objectives could be progressed for a more sophisticated set of constraints.

Community

The Panel acknowledge that the Granta Park estate demonstrates a thriving active community of workers on the site served with many facilities. The TWI can further enhance these facilities. The Panel pointed to the potential for the cottage and its associated buildings and surroundings to be further enhanced as a place. The TWI client should consider how this could be part of the outline planning application.

Summary

The Panel welcome the potential for a significant contribution to the successful development of the estate. Key elements include:

- Communicating options to be part of a design narrative
- Revisiting planning parameters
- Elaborating climate, character and connectivity aspirations and targets
- Providing movement, energy, historic building and landscape baselines.
- Developing operational functioning including servicing and internal movement around the campus.
- Promoting the design and location of Health and wellbeing spaces

The Panel is conscious that the applicant's design team is working to a challenging programme. The first stage to unlock the future is the relocation of the testing workshop in BBH. The relocation and design as an adjunct to B3 is a logical place to

start. The proposals that follow on from that require time to develop. Within an overall planning and development programme of at least 5 years, the opportunity to reassess options should be a priority now.

The above comments represent the views of the Greater Cambridge Design Review Panel and are made without prejudice to the determination of any planning application should one be submitted. Furthermore, the views expressed will not bind the decision of Elected Members, should a planning application be submitted, nor prejudice the formal decision-making process of the council.

Contact Details

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