



The Greater Cambridge Design Review Panel

Pre-application re: PPA/22/00064

**Project Alchemy, Welding Alloys, The Way, Fowlmere,
Cambridgeshire SG8 7QS**

Thursday 9 March 2023, 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, Community) – Simon Carne Architect

Graham Whitehouse (Character, Architecture, Heritage) - Director at GWP Architects Ltd

Chris Bowden (Character, Landscape) - Director at Chris Bowden Consulting

Joel Gustafsson (Character, Climate) - Director at JG Consulting

Applicant & Design Team:

Chris Jones – Director, BCR Infinity Architects

Stuart Morse – Director, KMC Transport Planning

Amy Robinson – Principal Planner, Bidwells

LPA Officers:

Bonnie Kwok – Principal Urban Designer / Design Review Panel Manager

Katie Roberts – Executive Assistant / Panel Support Officer

Elisabeth Glover – Principal Planning Officer (Case Officer)

Ammar Alasaad - Senior Urban Designer

Emma Lilley – Landscape Officer

Paul Robertshaw - Senior Conservation Officer

Observer(s):

None

Declarations of Interest

None

Previous Panel Reviews

None

Scheme Description

Part demolition of existing structures and construction of new buildings for research and development use, with ancillary gym, co-working space and cafe.

Site context

The site is located to the north of the High Street on the northern edge of the village of Fowlmere. Part of the site is situated outside the development framework and in the countryside. It measures approximately 2.2 hectares in area and currently comprises a group of industrial/warehouse buildings with ancillary offices (units 1 to 4) around a hard surfaced yard and a car park together with an office building (unit 5). Access is from the south off The Way which is a private road. The site is currently in use as an industrial/employment use but does not lie within an Established Employment Area.

An awarded watercourse runs along the western boundary of the site. The site lies within Flood zones 1, 2 and 3 (low, medium and high risk). Parts of the site are also subject to surface water risk.

The site comprises a number of mature trees along the western side of the watercourse subject to a Tree Preservation Order. There are also a number of mature trees along the eastern boundary of the car park and surrounding the office building (unit 5).

The site is situated adjacent to the conservation area and within the setting of a number of Grade II listed buildings on the northern side of the High Street.

Planning history

21/00542/OUT – Refused – Outline planning for the demolition of existing buildings and erection of 45 dwellings and office building with some matters reserved except for access.

Greater Cambridge Design Review Panel Views

Detailed Comments

The panel welcomed the opportunity to review the proposals at this stage. The presentation and preliminary information provided a clear and coherent description of the proposal. The site visit was very valuable and gave important insights into the scale and condition of existing facilities, features and landscape opportunities.

It was pointed out that an earlier opportunity to review the proposals, before the two pre-app sessions, would have offered a chance to review the scheme before too much was fixed. It is a well-established principle that the panel contributes more when a scheme is presented once initial investigations are available and options prepared before they are closed down. An earlier presentation, if feasible, could have benefitted the scheme as a whole.

The panel commented on the design under the four C's – Climate, Character, Connectivity and Community, the agreed format. Comments are not restricted to individuals and subjects, but cross refer to aspects of the design. In this instance, panel members did not benefit from either a connectivity or community focussed panel member, so the subjects were covered by the other members of the panel.

Climate

The panel were pleased to see that climate had been at the heart of the evolving design.

The retention and reuse of as many existing buildings as possible had been considered. Some of the buildings appeared to offer the opportunity for conversion but the proposed use as laboratory spaces had restricted their reuse for reasons of scale and internal clear space. Other employment uses would have allowed for retention of more existing structures.

There is significant embodied carbon on site included the existing concrete access road. Integrating the retained road with the desire to provide Sustainable Urban Drainage (SUDS) across the site will require careful balancing but the panel sees opportunity for retaining the concrete road without a meaningful impact on this. An audit of existing materials and proposals for their reuse would be valuable.

The decision to use Air Source Heat Pumps (ASHP) was welcomed. Consideration and detailing their location on elevations was also applauded. Roof mounted PVs across the extensive roof area will contribute to powering the estate. An estate wide system using a micro grid was recommended by the panel. This could be combined with battery back-up providing vehicle and cycle charging points as well as building power supply in a commercially attractive manner with a microgrid configuration that should be explored. Additionally, it would increase the environmental value of the Photovoltaic Panels (PVs) by increase the proportion of generated electricity used on site.

The proposed elevations are work in progress. They appeared to represent relatively high proportions of glazing of up to 50%. 30-40% was considered more appropriate, with specific attention given to reducing glazing at low level where it is of little value of daylight.

Access to individual suites would be through suitably sized doors on the rear sides of the suites. These will require careful detailing and airtight performance. External servicing access routes should be identified on plans.

Elevation drawings presented to date are small scale. The panel recommended that they be supplemented by large scale elevations and sections to communicate spatial qualities, the integration of services generally and details including the disposition of louvres, glazed fenestration and access. They will also show how detailing works within the overall fabric. Full height fenestration is both unnecessary and reveals the clutter that makes the interior appear unsightly.

Character (biodiversity, landscape and building design)

The overall disposition of external spaces evolving out of the retention of buildings is well handled.

The approach to the main entrance and the retention of trees on the main axis is welcome.

Providing 20% net biodiversity on site will be a challenge and to achieve as much as possible on site demands an approach to landscape that retains existing features. A manicured landscape design focussed on providing outdoor spaces for workers on site, whilst welcome in principle, will do little or nothing to encourage biodiversity, nor will it be appropriate everywhere on site. Retaining as much existing biodiversity on site, both to the east and west of the existing buildings, should be sought. Net gain will be calculated against a baseline position, which although this was not presented, is in hand.

Detailed landscape proposals are in development and so were not presented. The proposals will require further development to achieve the required standard for a planning application.

A number of points were made on the layout presented:

- Could the visitor parking area be enhanced and made more welcoming?
- Could more tree and hedge planting be added to the entry space?
- Could the 'mews' connect more directly to the west and east for pedestrian movement?
- Is a crossing over the stream undermining the wildness of that part of the site?
- Would 'places' along the 'mews' add to its qualities?
- Is the removal of the bund for large areas of car parking and hard standing appropriate?
- Are there opportunities to retain more trees on site?
- Can green corridors be retained and/or created on site?

- Is suite 8 located out on a limb and not part of the core of the estate?
- Is under-croft parking beneath a single storey of suite 8 an unnecessary cost for little benefit?

Whilst it was not intended to fence off the estate, a barrier for vehicles entering the private areas will be provided as part of the proposals. Controlling access for local residents using the community facilities to the rear of suites 1 and 2 and alongside the stream and west side of the site will need to be considered.

Developing new building character is work-in-progress. Differentiating the community accommodation in suite 1 offers an opportunity that should be further investigated. Discussing the community entrance led to a conversation around this part of the development. It is a valuable community aspect and deserves to have a distinctive character. Externally this could be achieved by expressing the internal functions. It is an area that requires further thought. As a general observation on the emerging building character, integrating servicing, access and the location of ASHPs will impact the developing elevations.

Landscape and visual impacts from agreed viewpoints is being prepared. They should be used as a design tool, and not only as a check for visual impact. Initial thoughts based on the site visit are that the development will not be different in scale and massing and so would not be problematic. The existing buildings on site have an impact established over time. Long views from the east of the new buildings on the existing footprint will not be markedly different. Strengthening boundary planting will mitigate their impact. In conclusion the panel were content that there was no adverse visual impact on the conservation area or nearby listed buildings.

In terms of re-use of existing structures, the Unity Campus was mentioned as a model that could be looked at as a precedent. Developing a character for the scheme in architectural terms would benefit from more than a science/business park aesthetic.

Connectivity

The quantum of surface car parking is a concern to the panel. An earlier option had included a single deck of car parking. Its removal following the first pre-app resulted in the extended area of surface car parking. Suite 8 emerged as a single-storey of accommodation above under-croft car parking. This compromised form is located somewhat remote from Suites 1-7 located along the 'mews'. The panel are concerned that this was driving the design towards overdevelopment. Other consequences included the complete removal of the bund which could be providing a contribution to site biodiversity.

Whilst the previously proposed decked car park had not been presented and so was not part of the review, it was included in the background information and was raised by the applicant as a critical element. There was a general sense amongst the panel that there might be benefit in revisiting this decision in the light of other comments on the extent of hard surfacing, visual impact and the climate impact and net biodiversity aspects. Accommodating parking at ground level is being driven by the area of accommodation proposed and a reduction in development quantum would reduce vehicle parking numbers.

In terms of viable alternative cycle routes to the site, there appears to be a direct connection from the eastern edge of the site along the track to Foxton station, which also happens to be the site of a proposed mobility hub and car parking. The distance of approximately 2 miles would make it eminently suitable as a cycling route. Whether there is any opportunity to deliver this should be taken up with the County Council. The panel were assured that covered, secure cycle parking and showers will be provided. The panel stressed that these should be readily accessible and not tucked away out of sight.

Community

The panel welcomed the proposed incorporation of community facilities. This will give added value to the landscaped space on the south facing side of the entrance

building. The design team and client have developed a fruitful engagement with the local parish council and residents. Retaining the employment use in the village, combined with a community facility, is welcomed by the community and will be an enhancement.

The mobility hub with cycle store and visitor parking will also be a valuable resource for the village. Combined with the potential cycle route to Foxton this development has the potential to be a major enhancement to Fowlmere Village.

The proposals require development and refinement and could be an exemplary scheme. The panel would be happy to review it again.



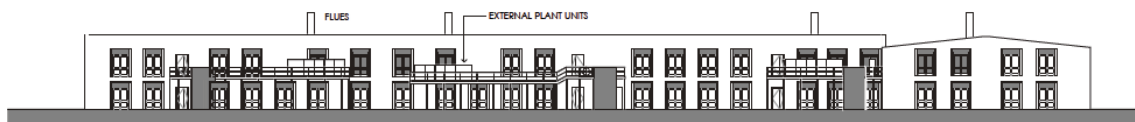
Proposed CGI showing front entrance area – extracted from the applicant’s DRP presentation document March 2023



Proposed CGI showing the Mews – extracted from the applicant’s DRP presentation document March 2023



Suites 1-4 - East Elevation (Down the Mews)



Suites 1-4 - West Elevation



Suite 8 - West Elevation



Suite 8 - Part Elevation- South



Front



Side

Bike/Sub Station Elevations

Proposed elevations – extracted from the applicant's DRP presentation document March 2023

4.1 Proposed Site Plan & Ground Floor Plan

- TREES EXISTING
 - TREES REMOVED
 - TREES & SOFT LANDSCAPING PROPOSED
- NOTES**
 SUBJECT TO DESIGN TEAM INPUT
 APPROXIMATELY 180 CARS INCLUDING DISABLED
- UPDATES MADE IN RESPONSE TO PRE APP 2**
- Mews soft landscaping increased and made non vehicular with shared access added to the north and suite 7 pulled back from the boundary.
 - Through road removed, soft landscaping added. Suite 8 moved closer to other suites.
 - Improved connectivity, cycle and footpath links
 - Cycle Store/Hub added
 - Stores removed
 - Informalised stores added and integrated



Design Review Panel Presentation_March, 2023

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Proposed site plan – extracted from the applicant's DRP presentation document March 2023

Disclaimer

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.