



Cambridgeshire Quality Panel

Wellcome Genome Campus Expansion, Hinxton

Session 2: Strategic Design Guide

Tuesday 25th April 2023

Pompeii Room - Wellcome Genome Campus

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

Local Authority: James Tipping (GCSP), Claire Shannon (GCSP), Annemarie de Boom (GCSP)

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

A draft of the Wellcome Genome Campus (WGC) Strategic Design Guide is currently being finalised (draft v12 – dated 17 April 2023).

The document provides a site wide framework for the delivery of the WGC expansion and focuses on the strategic design matters for establishing a framework for the development. Detailed guidance will be provided by Development Area Briefs (in conjunction with Reserved Matters submissions) as proposals for parcels and plots come forward.

The Guide prescribes, where necessary, and/or guides other aspects of the design. It deals only with the strategic matters which are of importance to deliver the broad character and quality of development articulated in the Vision, illustrated in the Master Plan, and prioritised through commitment to Strategic Design Principles.

Presenting team

The design guide is promoted by Urban & Civic and supported by David Lock Associates, Wilkinson Eyre, Stantec and Churchman Thornhill Finch. The presenting team was:

Nigel Hugill, (U&C) Stella Yip (U&C), Julia Foster (David Lock Associates), Helen Pearson-Flett (David Lock Associates), Tony Musson (Wilkinson Eyre) and Andrew Thornhill (Churchman Thornhill Finch)

Local authority's request

Greater Cambridge Shared Planning (GCSP) have asked the Panel to focus on the purpose of the Guide and how it controls/directs the quality of the document over its lifetime; structure, language, and presentation; The Design vision, Overarching Principles, Sustainability & Framework Plan; Structuring Elements landform, SuDS, land use and landscape; Built Form – Public Realm, Townscape and Built Development and Detailing of the place.

Cambridgeshire Quality Panel summary

The Panel welcomed the ambition and vision for the scheme and recognised the amount of work already undertaken in bringing forward what is a significant and important development of the WGC site. The one campus approach to the guide, supporting by a consistent landscape-led approach is supported.

These views are expanded upon below, and include comments made in closed session.

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

It is forecast that over 10,000 people could be living and working at the WGC, comprising of approximately 8,000 employees and 3,500 residents. Around 400 residents from Hinxton village may also be using the proposed facilities.

A £150M infrastructure upfront cost is needed due the construction of the bridges. Phase 1 will be formed by buildings surrounding The Green and some residential blocks (c.350 units). Residential dwellings will be to rent and managed by the WGC with staff from existing businesses amongst the first occupiers of these units.

The Panel considered that with a typical 7-year employee churn, it may be difficult to establish and create a mature community. Therefore, opportunities for socialisation and provision of community spaces will be crucial especially as there may be a high proportion of overseas workers that do not form part of an established community. There is a danger this place may lack a sense of identity. The Panel suggested a need for flexible spaces for hobbies and groups, sharing equipment etc. The applicant responded that the first phase will include shops and community facilities.

Chance encounters between buildings should be encouraged, especially on the green, central spine and bridges where movements are concentrated. Enabling serendipity is a key ambition of the applicant.

There is some uncertainty about the demographic of the emerging population, and how the expansion site will provide for groups, such as spaces for teenagers. Could space be provided along the eastern boundary by creating a place that is not too “manicured” as opposed to the rest of the WGC?

It is important to get the balance right between the scientific community and providing social amenity for all site users.

The Panel noted that event marquees and pop-up restaurants are proposed during the summer periods on The Green, as currently happens on the existing site. The Green Spine is an open space and there would be space there for a pop-up market and other events.

There will be important lessons to be learnt once the expansion is completed, therefore the Panel strongly supported the benefits of committing now to post occupancy evaluation surveys throughout the process.

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

The Panel asked about how expected car use will change over time and questioned whether there will be any limitation on car usage to encourage cycling and walking. Integrating the mobility package so people don't feel the need to own a personal car is important. How car clubs might work and whether they should form part of the civic space and transport hub and/or spread across the wider expansion site were raised. If cars are self-driving in the future, how will the development future proof itself for advancements in technology?

The Panel debated the demands of differing bus companies on the width of the road and were not convinced that they need to be 6.5m wide. They urged the team to follow LTN 1/20 standards making sure that 3.5m width shared paths are designed to avoid potential conflicts between pedestrians and cyclists. Should cyclists travel in the carriageway given the low volumes of traffic expected at most times?

Further consideration should be given to the pedestrian and cycle route to and from Hinxton village and how this route be enhanced to feel safe and the obvious choice of route. Other extended cycle routes should be shown.

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

The overall landscape strategy combining the existing and proposed new site should be strengthened.

The Panel encouraged the use of appropriate language within the guide; for instance, is “the Green” the right word to describe what the central space is trying to achieve? What’s the role of that space, what will it be used for? Use of ‘shared space’ should be avoided. There should be a “whole campus” language with consultation with current campus users.

The Panel asked for a landscape management plan as this will be an important document for the ecological management of the site that will influence the future character of the campus.

The place will change over the day and seasons and in response to the daily shift from a place of work to a place to live. Will it feel and be perceived as safe at night?

How can planners relate the parameter plan and framework plan? The applicant explained that the parameter plan forms part of the outline planning application, that has already been approved, but the framework plan allows for some flexibility to modify the parameter plans.

The Panel were not as concerned about maximum building heights if it constrains character. The applicant explained that heights are generally fixed due to the outcome of the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) and light and pollution impacts. If a company wants to build a higher building, then that could be considered and consult on with the LPA. Usually, 3 to 4 storeys are the maximum height for most campus research buildings.

The Panel recommended exploring a variety of heights to enhance legibility and strengthen the identity of the place. The changing levels across the site provide opportunities.

The spaces between buildings need to be defined within the guide. More sections are important to understand the site, for example a section across different parts of the former railway line including the bund would be helpful. The Panel supported the retention of the trees near the bund.

The Panel queried the principle of separating building form and landscape. While advising against 'overcoding', the guide needs to define the relationship between buildings.

Further consideration should be given to the bridges' landing points, the civic square and elevations to the green. Is the civic space a civic space or should it be called something else?

The Panel understood the need for flexibility for building form, because of the way in which the site will come forward, but the first building on site should set the standard and precedent for following buildings.

A set of rules and illustrations on the potential for what could go wrong would be helpful. There needs to be consistency on how orientation is managed; if each building form is different, it could be chaos and therefore coordination between the parcels is essential.

As the illustrations of building forms only show pictures of individual buildings, the Panel suggested pictures that show a collection of buildings that deal well with frontage are provided.

Further detail wording on entrances from the green or primary road is needed and how people using the bridges to enter buildings such as the health centre.

The Panel asked about how standards are guaranteed and whether the LPA will have confidence to refuse a planning application if the desired design standard is not achieved. The applicant responded that they remain as the landowner which gives them a strong position to ensure this.

A diagram showing the existing character zones and how the new and the old sites relate would be helpful, especially in relation to the existing woodland parkland and the new landscape areas.

There are concerns about how the quality of the public realm is guaranteed across all places and its cohesion; how is this managed and maintained over time? There is a threat to how legibility in new buildings is retained.

Fruit orchards and community vegetable gardens should be a must-have in the design guide and a wall garden should be considered. Timber arisings should be used on site. Allow for some less tidy parts in the landscape.

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

The Panel suggested describing within the design guide what is meant by zero carbon and how this is achieved. Target settings should be detailed in the development brief and explain how these will perform over time. Sustainability must be placed up front to make sure net zero targets are transparent and open. Embodied carbon calculations need to be included in the overall ambition for Net Zero.

It was welcomed that soil restoration is already part of the guide so that embodied carbon is kept within the soil. The Panel understood that topsoil will be retained.

The Panel highlighted the importance of using natural and traditional materials and asked if there was any access to clunch, which if protected from the worst elements, will last well. The applicant explained that they were looking for local clunch but had not found any yet.

The Panel supports the use of water in the landscape and wondered if on-site water might be recycled? It is preferable to use raingardens rather than concrete rills.

The biodiversity and habitat section set out the biodiversity targets and each parcel would need to make their own contribution for biodiversity gain.

The Panel was unclear about the energy strategy, although it was understood there is an intention to use an “ambient loop” for residential dwellings and potentially commercial buildings. It was recommended anticipated energy use calculations are prepared, bearing in mind the significant amount of power to be used in some of these buildings.

The Panel invited the consideration of maximising the energy production on the site, and the location of suitable battery storage.

The potential of overheating should be modelled for all buildings.

Specific recommendations

- Develop an integrated landscape across both sites.
- Consider a change of management of the landscape, for example removing knee rails.
- Consider the importance of language- for example is “the Green” appropriate in a campus language?
- Include the Net Zero vision upfront, be clear what is meant by Net Zero and include current targets and moving targets over time.
- Develop a NZ strategy including an ambient loop, maximising power generated on roofs and the use of battery storage.
- Consider orientation, overheating and the amount of glazing used.
- Be transparent on any carbon offsetting strategy.
- What type of places is this? Important to be able to do other things than work and research.
- Consider start-up units and good residential places.
- Serendipitous encounters need detailing in the landscape.
- Consider the provision of space for teenagers.
- The leading edge of the car park needs to be carefully detailed.
- Further consideration should be given to the bridges’ landing points, the civic square and elevations to the Green.
- Ensure the first buildings on site set a precedent for other buildings coming forward.
- What more can be done with cars in a changing world?
- Define the purpose of Green.
- The two-level entry and route to the Green and residential units needs to be readable.
- More consideration should be given to the route from the village and back.
- Supports the idea of sharing tools, cars, etc.
- Design ‘shared spaces’ to avoid conflict between cyclist, scooters and pedestrians.
- Support for agroforestry but include fruit orchards and community vegetables and consider a walled garden.

- The design guide should show diagrams of the roads to the stations.

During the closed discussion the Panel raised the following points:

- A development brief should be approved before any reserved matters application is submitted, noting that there is not a requirement for this happen as part of submissions.
- 'No single aspect residential units' should be a "must" in the design guide.

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

Author: Judit Carballo

Support: Stuart Clarke

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Appendix A – Background information list and plan

- Main presentation
- Local authority background note
- Applicant’s background note
- Wellcome Genome Campus – Strategic Design Guide (draft v12 – dated 17 April 2023)

Documents may be available on request, subject to restrictions/confidentiality.

Framework Plan

