

## South Cambridgeshire District Council

## Design Enabling Panel

**PANEL MEETING REPORT**

<b>Scheme:</b>	Construction of new R&D building and associated decked car park, landscaping and associated infrastructure
<b>Site address:</b>	Site 1, Granta Park, Great Abington, Cambridgeshire, CB21 6GP
<b>Status:</b>	Pre-planning Enquiry, planning reference: 21/50151/PREAPP
<b>Date:</b>	Thursday 15 July 2021
<b>Venue:</b>	The DEP meeting was conducted online via Microsoft TEAMS due to Covid-19
<b>Time:</b>	10:00 – 12:30
<b>Site visit:</b>	A site visit was conducted by DEP members on Monday 12 July 2021. A site visit video was also produced on the day were viewed by Panel Members prior to the day of the DEP meeting which took place on 15 July 2021.

**Panel Members**

Graham Whitehouse (Chair) – Director, GWP Architects Ltd  
 David Gibson – Architect, David Gibson Architects  
 David Grech - Independent retired Architect  
 Chris Jones – Director, BCR.Infinity Architects

**Local Authority attendees**

Dr. Bonnie Kwok – Principal Urban Designer / DEP manager  
 Tom Davies – Urban Designer / DEP Support Officer  
 Michael Sexton – Case Officer

**Applicant/Representatives**

Elias Niazi – Director, David Roden Architects  
 Martha Alker – Senior Associate, Townshend Landscape Consultant

**Relevant planning policies**

*'National Planning Policy Framework' (2019) (NPPF)*

Paragraph 124 - The creation of high-quality buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities. Being clear about design expectations, and how these will be

tested, is essential for achieving this. So too is effective engagement between applicants, communities, local planning authorities and other interests throughout the process.

Paragraph 127 - Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments:

- a) will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;
- b) are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;
- c) are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);
- d) establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit;
- e) optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development (including green and other public space) and support local facilities and transport networks; and
- f) create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users<sup>46</sup>; and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience.

Paragraph 128 - Design quality should be considered throughout the evolution and assessment of individual proposals. Early discussion between applicants, the local planning authority and local community about the design and style of emerging schemes is important for clarifying expectations and reconciling local and commercial interests. Applicants should work closely with those affected by their proposals to evolve designs that take account of the views of the community. Applications that can demonstrate early, proactive and effective engagement with the community should be looked on more favourably than those that cannot.

Paragraph 129 - Local planning authorities should ensure that they have access to, and make appropriate use of, tools and processes for assessing and improving the design of development. These include workshops to engage the local community, design advice and review arrangements, and assessment frameworks such as Building for Life. These are of most benefit if used as early as possible in the evolution of schemes, and are particularly important for significant projects such as large scale housing and mixed use developments. In assessing applications, local planning authorities should have regard to the outcome from these processes, including any recommendations made by design review panels.

Paragraph 130 - Permission should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions, taking into account any local design standards or style guides in plans or supplementary planning documents. Conversely, where the design of a development accords with clear expectations in plan policies, design should not be used by the decision-maker as a

valid reason to object to development. Local planning authorities should also seek to ensure that the quality of approved development is not materially diminished between permission and completion, as a result of changes being made to the permitted scheme (for example through changes to approved details such as the materials used).

Paragraph 131 - In determining applications, great weight should be given to outstanding or innovative designs which promote high levels of sustainability, or help raise the standard of design more generally in an area, so long as they fit in with the overall form and layout of their surroundings.

*'South Cambridgeshire Local Plan'* (2018)

#### Policy HQ/1 Design Principles

1. All new development must be of high-quality design, with a clear vision as to the positive contribution the development will make to its local and wider context. As appropriate to the scale and nature of the development, proposals must:
  - a) Preserve or enhance the character of the local urban and rural area and respond to its context in the wider landscape;
  - b) Conserve or enhance important natural and historic assets and their setting;
  - c) Include variety and interest within a coherent, place-responsive design, which is legible and creates a positive sense of place and identity whilst also responding to the local context and respecting local distinctiveness;
  - d) Be compatible with its location and appropriate in terms of scale, density, mass, form, siting, design, proportion, materials, texture and colour in relation to the surrounding area;
  - e) Deliver a strong visual relationship between buildings that comfortably define and enclose streets, squares and public places, creating interesting vistas, skylines, focal points and appropriately scaled landmarks along routes and around spaces;
  - f) Achieve a permeable development with ease of movement and access for all users and abilities, with user friendly and conveniently accessible streets and other routes both within the development and linking with its surroundings and existing and proposed facilities and services, focusing on delivering attractive and safe opportunities for walking, cycling, public transport and, where appropriate, horse riding;
  - g) Provide safe and convenient access for all users and abilities to public buildings and spaces, including those with limited mobility or those with other impairment such as of sight or hearing;
  - h) Ensure that car parking is integrated into the development in a convenient, accessible manner and does not dominate the development and its surroundings or cause safety issues;
  - i) Provide safe, secure, convenient and accessible provision for cycle parking and storage, facilities for waste management, recycling and collection in a manner that is appropriately integrated within the overall development;

- j) Provide a harmonious integrated mix of uses both within the site and with its surroundings that contributes to the creation of inclusive communities providing the facilities and services to meet the needs of the community;
  - k) Ensure developments deliver flexibility that allows for future changes in needs and lifestyles, and adaptation to climate change;
  - l) Mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change on development through location, form, orientation, materials and design of buildings and spaces;
  - m) Include high quality landscaping and public spaces that integrate the development with its surroundings, having a clear definition between public and private space which provide opportunities for recreation, social interaction as well as support healthy lifestyles, biodiversity, sustainable drainage and climate change mitigation;
  - n) Protect the health and amenity of occupiers and surrounding uses from development that is overlooking, overbearing or results in a loss of daylight or development which would create unacceptable impacts such as noise, vibration, odour, emissions and dust;
  - o) Design-out crime and create an environment that is created for people that is and feels safe, and has a strong community focus.
2. Larger and more complex developments will be required to submit Masterplans and Design Codes to agree an overall vision and strategy for a development as a whole that demonstrates a comprehensive and inclusive approach.

*'District Design Guide' (2010)*

This document sets out minimum residential amenity standards for new developments in the district, e.g. minimum private and communal amenity space, minimum back-to-back distances, minimum garage sizes, etc.

*'Cambridgeshire Quality Charter for Growth' (2010)*

This document sets out core principles of the level of quality to be expected in new developments in the district: the 4Cs, i.e. Community, Connectivity, Character and Climate. Collectively, they form the basic principles for achieving higher quality development that meets the needs our communities. New housing development should provide a great choice of housing along with the active participation of local communities. New developments should be located where people can benefit from high connectivity to jobs and services. Climate change should be tackled through imaginative landscaping and innovative approaches to transport, energy and waste. Places of character should be created, with distinctive neighbourhoods and a first-class public realm.

**Panel views**

*It should be noted that the comments below include items from the Panel's online in-camera discussion and amplify the brief opinion delivered at the end of the online session.*

## **Summary**

The Panel thanked the applicant for a well-structured clear presentation. The Panel considered the site is suitable for a large 'statement' building due to the gateway location. The detailed information contained in the presentation showed the potential for this final addition to the Granta Park campus to make a positive contribution and to signal its presence from.

The Panel would encourage the Architects to develop and submit views into the site from both the former A11 and the Granta Park entrance roundabout. It is important to assess this aspect of the scheme and demonstrate that the visual impact has been carefully considered.

## **Discussion**

### **Design and Layout**

The amendments included in the latest following pre-applications with SCDC Officers are considered a significant improvement since the initial design. The recessed tiering of the upper floors, in particular, is welcome.

It was acknowledged that this is a speculative proposal without an identified user. This inevitably leads to elements of compromise in order to provide the potential to adapt for flexible occupation by multiple tenants if necessary.

The design focussed upon an imposing and rigidly symmetrical front elevation.

Considering that the principal entrance to the building from the car park and cycle store (in other words to all staff and visitors) will be from the north east, and considering the importance of the oblique view from the main approach into Granta Park, the Panel would like to see the north and south elevations considered and developed with respect to these aspects.

Further information on how the elevation treatment can respond to the site and key approaches/views would be useful. This should be informed by how the staff and visitors will approach the building, and how this arrival experience could be improved, including the journey up to the possible shared roof terrace.

It would be useful for the DAS to include information articulating how the building's design and fenestration relates and compliments the other buildings on the Park.

Apart from the main R&D building, the proposal includes a multi-deck car park situated to the rear of the existing Franklin Building. The Panel considered it necessary that the Franklin Building work (proposed refurbishment with new cladding and an additional storey) should progress as provisionally scheduled in order to screen the new car park.

The ancillary stores building between the proposed car park and the proposed new building should be detailed as part of the planning submission. It is assumed that this will be a low

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key/low rise structure which will take its cue from the car park treatment (timber screening and green walls etc).

Regarding signage: it would be useful for the design team to illustrate how the building might be signed if it is taken by one single tenant, and how the signage might be handled if it is taken by a number of tenants. There probably needs to be some form of design code to cover the signage so that tenants know at the outset what will be permitted.

### Community

The immediate landscaping to be developed and the potential for some 'functional sculpture' and/or public realm art was discussed and would be warmly welcomed.

The general accessibility of the roof terrace and break out area was a positive addition which should be retained and enhanced as far as practicable.

The potential to work or relax in fresh air is a positive feature.

The tension between the Granta Park communal café facility – The Apiary – and separate in-house catering facilities was acknowledged, but the Panel considered that this should not prevent development of external spaces for refreshment.

### Climate

The sustainability aims, including BREAAAM Excellent and LETI standards are welcomed and strongly encouraged.

The Panel would encourage the submission of details showing how the south east/south west facades have been detailed and developed to manage solar gain (It should be noted that some preliminary figures for modelling have been presented. These should form part of the formal submission in due course).

### Materials

The materials proposed are considered appropriate with some distinction from existing buildings whilst maintaining a sympathetic relationship to the campus generally.

**Note:** *Please note that these comments are informal opinion of the Council's Design Enabling Panel and relate to the design aspects of the proposals. The comments are produced for discussion purposes only with the applicant. The views expressed will not bind the decision of Council members should a planning application be submitted, nor prejudice the formal decision-making process of the Council.*