



# Cambridgeshire Quality Panel

Wellcome Genome Campus

Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> April 2022

Virtual Meeting

Panel: Meredith Bowles (chair), John Dales, David Prichard, Fiona Heron, Amy Burbidge, and Ashley Bateson.

Local Authority: Fiona Bradley (GCSP), Bana Elzein (GCSP), Anne Marie de Boom (GCSP) Sarah Chenge (GCSP) Claire Shannon (GCSP) 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**

Outline Planning Permission (OPP) with all matters reserved was granted on 18 December 2020 for:

*A phased mixed use development comprised of up to 150,000 square metres of Gross External Area (GEA) of flexible employment uses including research and development office and workspace and associated uses falling within Use Classes B1 (office laboratories light industry) B2 (general industrial) and B8 (Storage) uses up to 1,500 residential dwellings (Use Class C3 and C4 (Houses in Multiple Occupation)) supporting community uses and social infrastructure including a nursery (Use Class D1) conference facility (Use Class D1) and associated hotel (Use Class C1) retail uses including shops (Use Class A1) restaurants and cafes (Use Class A3) and bars (Use Class A4) leisure uses (Use Class D2) landscape and public realm including areas for sustainable urban drainage and biodiversity enhancements energy centre and utilities site access (vehicular cyclist and pedestrian) car and cycle parking and highways improvements early landscape and enabling works and associated works.*

## **Presenting team**

The scheme is promoted by Urban & Civic supported by Churchman Thornhill Finch, David Lock and Wilkinson Eyre. The presenting team is:

Caroline Foster (Urban and Civic) Richard Hepworth (Urban and Civic ) Stafford Critchlow ( Wilkinson Eyre) Tony Musson (Wilkinson Eyre) Chris Arrowsmith ( Churchman Thornhill Finch) Julia Foster (David Lock) Helen Pearson-Flett (David Lock)

## **Local authority's request**

The local authority has asked the Panel to focus on access to the central car park; shape of the common; movement, including routing, legibility and bridges; A1301 design - set back and character.

## **Cambridgeshire Quality Panel summary**

The Panel welcomed the new team on board, and noted that there have been two previous reviews, which outline the issues that remain critical to the success of the scheme. The Panel appreciate that the applicant has brought the scheme forward to review at an early stage, and appreciate that some areas are better developed than others,

The most significant barrier to a well-integrated scheme remains the crossing of the A-road. Overall, the Panel considered that the current proposals have made a clear decision to bridge the road, rather than attempt to design a 'street' fronting the road to lower driving speeds. There remain some questions about the retained at-grade crossings.

The integration of the two sides of the campus into one masterplan and experience is an improvement, although the conceptual notion of a united landscape with an central axial relationship was considered less successful; the central crossing at grade with a traffic island being an impediment to the implied unity of the plan.

The character of the development as a whole would benefit from further thought on the integration of the housing and the 'campus'. At present the vision is dominated by the central common and the non-residential spaces, which lean heavily on 'science park' or 'tech campus' precedents. There is no sense of what kind of a place this would be to live, and what character the housing and surrounding landscape would have. A successful vision would describe and integrate these two sides of the development.

The presentation had no mention of sustainability, although we understand that the Welcome Institute have high ambitions. Given that the development will take place over many years, a carbon strategy surely should be a central guiding principle? This would encompass aspects such as building principles, orientation, form factor, integrated transport strategy, biodiversity, home delivery etc, which in turn would guide the masterplan.

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

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

The character of the proposed masterplan is strongly derived from the consideration of the development as an extension of the existing research campus, with the ‘identity’ of the development framed around the formal central space, as opposed to the more relaxed ‘common’ from the previous scheme. The formal presentation – beaux arts in planning- is uncertain in the way it is then applied to the whole site. The extensive area of housing to the west has some oval shapes superimposed onto the housing arranged around a linear park, which is lost within the stronger move. The ‘California tech park’ feeling of the main space is clear and strong, and the remainder (the majority) of the development feels it is awaiting a clear organising structure.

It is hoped that the development of the ‘lived experience’ in the future place will play a part in shaping the vision: pathways to the school, routes to the pub, cycle tracks and dog walking, amazon deliveries, future car clubs and bus pick-up points. The Panel also notes that the underground car park also forms the ‘gateway’ to the development- this is for many the arrival point to work or home- and care must be taken for this experience not to be a disappointing start to living in the countryside. The vegetation on the top of the car park is currently shown as grass, suggestions about incorporating some trees and making the apertures physically bigger were made. What the arrival sequence of this place feels like needs further work.

There is a danger that the scale of the spaces between the buildings as well as the scale of the oval central space could feel too open and potentially bleak spaces to walk through. Previous comments suggested covered routes or other forms of shelter. Is the view west to the other campus obscured by trees? To what extent is the ‘axial’ relationship key? How can the landscape ‘cross’ the road’; at the moment the route through at grade seems to reinforce the bisection by the A1301.

The Panel were not convinced by the character that the ‘public art’ within the enclosed spaces suggests, which suggest a larger scale of development or a more urban context. In comparison tree planting would provide longevity and have a more universal appeal.

Will the masterplan impose a 'style? The illustrations suggest a formal unity. Or will there be much more expression between the buildings, and a greater play of materials and shapes? What are the intended common rules - curved or faceted building lines, primary entrances off the arena frontage, fixed skyline heights, compatible materials, a colonnade (e.g., Paternoster Square)? 3D studies would help to understand the arena's ability to cope with variety rather than uniformity of its enclosure. In the closed session the Panel noted that nearly all illustrated buildings are curved in plan; is this intended?

In addition to the advanced planting planned as part of the scheme, the Panel suggested an onsite tree nursery for stock provision of other spaces being created within the site.

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

The experience of living on this site was questioned by the Panel. There are two different communities that will share the site, the community of people living on campus itself and the wider community that will need to access the site and will benefit from the new facilities.

The changes made following the last review were welcomed by the Panel: having the primary school on site is a positive move, if this is eventually needed by the County Council, and this should be the focal point for the community. The location of the primary school should discourage the use of cars and drop off points. Examples at Waterbeach Primary School, also by Urban & Civic, can be looked at.

Concerns about crossing the A1301 were raised by the Panel, how children attending the primary school will cross the road if not using the bridges? Or how people will get safely to the pub in Hinxton? How does this journey feel at night-time?

The idea of having travel hubs so different points can be created within the plan for the transfer of different type of movements is welcomed but it needs further work. The

Panel made the following questions, are the travel hub points in the right places? What do they offer? If the housing is car-free, what form does the housing take?

The Panel welcomed the connection of the main green infrastructure and the common. However, the masterplan has lost some of the implied intimacy of some of the spaces between houses. How will these spaces become a street? What will they feel like, and how will they be used?

The vision housing isn't as articulated as the remainder of the scheme. The character of the housing could be distinct from the main space, informed by topography, desire lines, vistas, and defined uses, rather than an extension of the formal expression of the centre.

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

The Panel noted that there are several studies that need to be done to meet the planning conditions such as for the circular economy, the approach to climate resilience and the approach to the carbon strategy. However, the Panel urged the applicant to consider these as early as possible so they can influence the building form and orientation of the buildings. A Carbon Strategy may produce a set of guidelines for all future development, driven by carbon targets, which could have far-reaching implications for building form and materials. For example, having basements have a high embodied carbon compared to building upper floor. Other things to consider how nature can mitigate carbon impact, ventilation strategy and daylight strategy approach to reducing carbon.

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

The principle of the bridges crossing the A1301 was supported by the Panel, but consideration should also be given to the road crossings, whether this is a 30mph or 40mph road. How people will be crossing the road and what the experience is like? Perhaps signalised crossing will be necessary. The character of this stretch of road is still uncertain; what would make it feel like a 30mph environment? Or should pedestrians be excluded from the central section? Diagrams showing journeys and desire lines would have been helpful, especially those at night-time visiting the pub.

Even if most of the journeys are done using the bridges there will be still people that will cross the road and that needs to be planned for. There is a need to take a holistic view of what a 30mph road will feel and look like. The quality of the crossing is essential for the success of the scheme.

Given that the pedestrian crossing of the road is unlikely to be a pleasant experience, would it not be better to put efforts into crossings at grade at each end, where cars have to slow to navigate the roundabouts? The decision to use the slope of the site to disguise and raise the landscape over the road prioritises the two connections at either side of the central space, making the formal central axis somewhat redundant, and the central crossing a minor event.

It would be sensible to consider future expansion to the north and ensure infrastructure and movement network could accommodate this.

The Panel urged the applicant to push for this to be a world class mobility hub, rather than an underground car park. How does it really work? Are people going to use cars? It could accommodate a club car, electric scooters, and electric bikes, that work 24/7. What is the mobility proposition and what can be done from day one?

Calling all primary and secondary roads 'streets' would be beneficial for better place-making, emphasising that these are for people, not travel corridors.

### **Specific recommendations**

- Expand the vision of a unified research campus to a vision for a new place to live, that includes the character and functionality of the residential areas
- Consider the arrival sequence, how you exactly arrive to the site and experience of arrival. How can the underground car park be improved upon? What are the routes on from here?
- Think about the scale of the housing and the spaces between the buildings, both in terms of scale and use (*my street, my place, my neighbourhood*).

- Consider the scale of the green spaces in addition to the central green spine: community gardens, spaces for kids, doorstep play etc.
- Is there a change needed to the conceptual diagram to reflect the reality of the experience of crossing to one site to another? The vision of the road needs to be thought through and how the sites are interconnected. How are the crossing points going to be dealt with?
- The spaces between building are very wide. Should there be more intimate spaces, and more shelter for colder and wetter days?
- Embodied carbon should be part of the strategic vision, which would influence the design the buildings.
- Roads within the site should be treated as streets to create a sense of place.

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](mailto:growthdevelopment@cambridgeshire.gov.uk)

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## **Appendix A – Background information list and plan**

- Local authority background note
- Applicant's briefing
- Presentation
- Drawing B - masterplan

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

### **Illustrative Masterplan**

