

# The Greater Cambridge Design Review Panel



**Pre-application PPA/22/0016 (PPA)**

**Melbourn Science Park, Cambridge Road, Melbourn SG8 6EE**

**Wednesday 16 November 2022, Hybrid 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

Nicholas Anderson (Character, Connectivity) – Chartered Civil Engineer and retired South East Development Lead at Aecom

Fiona Heron (Character, Landscape) – Founder of Fiona Heron Limited

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

Hero Bennett (Character, Climate) - Principal Sustainability Consultant, Partner, Max Fordham

### **Applicant & Design Team:**

Daron Williams, Head of Building Consultancy, Bruntwood SciTech

Sam Darby, Head of Development, Bruntwood SciTech

David Ardill, Partner, Sheppard Robson (Architect)

Josh Stokes, Associate, Sheppard Robson (Architect)

Paul Rowland, Director Planning, Savills

Ed Lister, Director, Planit Ie (Landscape Architect)

Sarah Harris, Planit Ie (Landscape Architect)

Roberta Ramaci, Ramboll Sustainability Consultants

Richard Whiting, Vectos Highways and Transport Consultants

### **LPA Officers:**

Bonnie Kwok – Principal Urban Designer / Design Review Panel Manager

Katie Roberts – Executive Assistant / Panel Support Officer

Michael Hammond – Principal Planner/Case Officer

Tom Davies – Senior Urban Designer/Youth Engagement

### **Observer(s):**

Charlotte Peet – Planning Officer

## **Declarations of Interest**

None

## **Previous Panel Reviews**

None.

## **Background, Site Context and Scheme Description**

The proposals are a major reconfiguration and modernisation of the Melbourn Science Park. This is the second phase of a two-stage development to create the Melbourn Science Village.

The first stage, Birchwood, is under construction and shares its access with the existing Science Park.

The current proposals include 36,000 sqm of workplace accommodation alongside a new village green, hotel / gastro pub, mobility hub and associated infrastructure.

The vision for the development chimes with the aspirations of the 'Cambridge Quality Charter for Growth': Innovation, Community, Carbon and Landscape all read across to the 4 C's of Community, Connectivity, Climate and Character set out in the Charter.

The Panel appreciated the guided tour of the site, in particular the quality and extent of existing mature tree planting and landscape generally. Negative factors included extensive areas of vehicle parking and its impact on the setting of the existing buildings on site. Whilst none of the buildings are great architecture, they are predominantly still relatively young, and so their qualities deserve careful assessment to justify demolitions.

## Greater Cambridge Design Review Panel Views

### Detailed Comments

#### Connectivity (Access, parking, pedestrian and cycle movement)

The proposal significantly increases the number of parking spaces on the site. Whilst the parking ratio is reduced, there will be 600-800 more people on site when the development is complete. Parking will be concentrated in a multi-storey car park (the mobility hub), which will also provide electric car charging points with the option to significantly increase provision if demand requires, space for rental bikes and accessible parking bays. Further areas of parking for specific functions are also provided for the Moat House pub/hotel, Building A the community facilities and the Da Vinci Building for shared workspace facilities. The first two are served by dedicated access from the public highway.

Four entrances/exits to the development are provided. Some are in or out only, and one exit will be left turn out only, potentially directing traffic away from its destination. The Panel have concerns that this may prove frustrating and could be prone to being ignored. Additional traffic in the village could be a concern, and so the number of entrances will require careful identification to avoid confusing visitors. The new entrances will need to be carefully designed to manage the additional conflicts between vehicles and the users of the proposed new Greenway. The Panel suggest that the movement options be given further consideration.

Internal streets are designed to serve particular destinations. Access to the proposed Hotel – Moat House, is one-way with parking and gated egress. Community building A, is two-way (in and out) to parking. The Panel is concerned that complication will reduce legibility and limit options if one takes a wrong turn.

General access to the majority of the site will also serve Birchwood. The route through the centre of the site is logical and although an alternative along the east boundary was considered, land ownership and an electric sub-station made this option less practical.

A traffic calmed street is proposed to mitigate the traffic impact. This is a significant route giving access to buildings along its length from the Cambridge Road entrance to the north edge of the site. The Panel wondered whether the full length of this street should be traffic calmed and that this could be achieved using a variety of devices.

On the eastern side of the site, Buildings C, D, E and F and the mobility hub are all served on a one-way vehicle route that branches off the primary street. This could be a relatively densely trafficked route passing break out spaces and entrances to Buildings D, E and F along the route. All vehicles will exit at the east edge of the site where the left turn out only is proposed. This route will also access service yards to the rear, south facing elevations of Buildings D, E and the energy hub. The Panel wondered whether at least two-way entry and egress from the east end access would reduce the amount of traffic through the site, particularly through the Science Square.

Providing maximum permeability and movement across the site for pedestrians without conflicting with vehicle movements is a challenge. The Design and Access Statement should consider and discuss other options considered. Diagrams showing movement did not appear consistent with the plans. Why, for example, is there a primary pedestrian route from the community Building A to the mobility hub?

Character (Landscape strategy, place making, building form and materiality, conservation area impact)

The Panel welcomed the linked spaces building on the mature tree plantings. The Panel believe the full potential of the site and its different areas could be more fully developed. The Moat House offers an opportunity to develop form and enclosure that would work well with the proposed hotel and gastropub. The south side of the new hotel building provides a backdrop and attractive setting for a terrace. The Panel consider that providing enclosure to the terrace should be developed. The potential to provide garden rooms and walled external spaces would provide a more subtle way of revealing the hotel. More could be made of the existing sunken water garden.

The concept of a village green as part of the community offer is compelling. But is it an accurate description of the space proposed? Is the openness implied by a village green a desirable outcome given the number of mature trees? The access to the hotel and pub with discrete parking is well located but the gated one way exit seems an unnecessary constraint requiring supervision and control. The retention of the parking behind the hotel bedrooms also seemed a wasted opportunity. Could the land be put to better use? Would the de Vinci parking provision not be better located in the mobility hub?

The idea of a wooded landscape through the site is welcome. The central wooded area that bridges the main north- south street has the potential to provide a landscape character aiding the traffic calming aim for this street. The Panel felt that the opportunity to link the landscape through to the east boundary would also be a potential option. The character of the science square and spill out spaces will offer a contrast to the more flowing wooded landscape in the centre of the site. The spaces will need to be carefully defined to encourage their use though some of the spill out spaces will be north facing. The Panel also commented on entrance projections from Buildings B, D E and F. Are they contributing to the overall landscape and external space concept?

Planting has been proposed to shade building façades from solar gains. Two locations, in particular, have been highlighted for the Panel's views. The south facing façade of the de Vinci Building suffers problems of overheating and the proposals include substantial roof mounted planters and trailing plants. The planting does not offer a solution and will be a significant maintenance cost. The double structural timber columns supporting the planters appear insubstantial. The Panel recommend that more traditional brise-soleil be considered possibly re-using materials set aside from demolitions. The column support proposal should be reconsidered.

Buildings D and E have significant areas of planting to their south facing facades. The same criticism of appropriateness and maintenance apply. Proximity to the site boundary and properties opposite requires careful consideration.

The site boundary treatment along Cambridge Road presents the face to the village, part of which is within the conservation area. There are different existing boundary conditions including hedges of variable scale and type, flint panels within brickwork, open access with dwarf walls and trees. The intention to open out the site as much as possible is working both with the desire to provide an accessible site but also provide some screening and greening. This is a complex issue with many solutions although the danger is that too many different approaches could undermine a coherent design solution.

The brick and flint walls attempt to pick up on similar walls in the village but the site boundary examples are modern and not of great quality. The proposed planted mound to screen the energy centre appears to be a response to a single issue and not part of an overall strategy.

The Panel mentioned in passing that opportunities for sensitive and appropriate play, fruit or produce growing and art in the landscape are aspects that would benefit the scheme. It is important that these elements be considered as part of an overall strategy.

The emerging architectural approach demonstrates the architects' experience with this typology. It is clear that there has been an attempt to work within a simple framework of logical and efficient planning with elevational treatments that work well together. There are however perhaps too many different approaches to materiality and the Panel wondered whether there should be less variety across the piece. Building C as an entrance marker has been identified as having a wow factor. Has this been taken too far? The Building is essentially three storeys high and yet the façade extends to a fourth storey to screen the roof plant. It is unlikely that the plant will be visible and a more modest termination might be appropriate.

Building A has been developed with a mix of materials including timber cladding and insulating render. The Panel reserves their position on the best approach to this building. It could be argued that the difference is consistent with its' use. Render reflects buildings opposite and may have relevance, but those buildings are of a different scale, period and hardly comparable. Similarly the scale of the hotel and its

relationship to the Moat House was questioned. It is not a subservient extension and yet it was questioned whether it had to be so tall. It makes an attractive backdrop to the Moat House / Hotel terrace and would not suffer from being reduced in scale.

Internal planning of the main employment / workspace buildings appear as relatively deep office plans with central facilities and circulation. Given the intention to provide for 'innovation and collaboration' the traditional layout is not rising to the challenge of making internal spaces for group working. Internal space planning flexibility was not demonstrated, these aspects should be developed.

The mobility hub was not discussed in detail but it was clear that the main entrance and circulation was in a state of development. Whilst a visible stair access would be consistent with encouraging active vertical travel the design lacked sophistication and the Panel questioned whether this was the best way to access the upper floors.

Climate (Embodied and operational carbon, energy generation, services and façade design, resilience)

The Panel welcome the approach taken by the consultant team addressing the issues of climate and carbon head on in their presentation. There was limited time available to interrogate the proposals in detail although questions and concerns were raised. The initial audit of buildings to be retained or demolished did not go into any detail. Audit of materials suitable for recycling, assessment of trees to be felled and more detailed consideration of existing Buildings and their suitability for re-use. Building F in particular was identified as one that appeared to have a longer potential life and could provide an alternative offering on the site with a naturally ventilated shallow plan. Discussions identified that there were proposals to extend the life of Building F with a light refit prior to the mobility hub construction within 5 approximately 5 years.

New buildings are predominantly located on plots either occupied by existing buildings or car parking. This was welcomed and so the impact of existing tree planting was minimised. But there seemed to be no assessment of how existing buildings apart from Building A could be reconfigured. Given the relatively simple



forms of new buildings proposed, the Panel would have appreciated an exercise in addressing the re-use of buildings infilling internal courtyard parking to accommodate the intended uses.

Solar shading of elevations did not appear to consistently reflect orientation. Options for different shading appeared extensive. It was not clear what was considered optimum and why. Diagrams showing façade constraints, building skin and plan form and the consideration of façade layers to Buildings D, E and F did not lead to a clear conclusion demonstrated by plan forms being proposed. How these work in relation to operational energy was not discussed. It was however noted that the Moat Hotel, Building A, and the de Vinci building will be powered at a building level.

The energy centre located on the edge of the site was noted. Feeding Buildings B, C, D, E and F remote from the energy centre at different phases of the development will need to be addressed. The Panel also encouraged the applicant to increase solar PV provision in line with the expected increased electricity demand associated with 600+ extra people on site over a ten year period. Locations should include the de Vinci building and the roof of the mobility hub.

The Panel also recommended detail consideration of the supply chain needed for the development as well as identifying materials for re-use or for distribution to other potential users nearby. A target related to procuring goods and services within a prescribed radius, e.g. 80 miles, would reduce Carbon emissions associated with the redevelopment and encourage greater local economic development.

A pre-demolition audit would have been expected by this stage to inform the current material design strategy. The current strategy to try to reuse a steel frame from one part of the site within a new build on site was welcomed. The Panel noted that the embodied Carbon targets set for the new builds were challenging and expected elemental budgets to have been presented by this stage. Work on the structure to date was welcomed but questions were raised over the ability to meet targets, highlighting potential impacts of blue roofs and complex facades with additional layers.

Extensive soft landscaped areas on site suggested rainfall attenuation would not be a significant issue. However there seemed to be an absence of consideration of water in the presentation. Suds and rain gardens should form part of the landscape strategy and drainage systems.

The Panel welcomed the client and design team's commitment to post occupancy evaluation.

### Community (Community engagement, village facilities, accessibility)

The client's approach to engaging with the community was welcomed. Providing an open and accessible employment site without barriers and with facilities specifically for village residents to enjoy is a significant asset. It is also significant that the first phases of the development are focussed on providing the public facilities which will be shared between workers on site and local residents.

As well as the extensive landscaping, the sport and gym facilities in Building A together with a café and bar will be significant community benefits and provide employment opportunities on site.

Full seven-day operation is proposed and so the opportunity for the local community to enjoy the site will not be restricted. Access should be guaranteed. Control should be light-touch, which the absence of barriers and secure enclosure implies.

Continuing public engagement is in progress. Future phases would also benefit from continuity as needs and experience of the development is established.



*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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