



CAMBRIDGESHIRE QUALITY PANEL

REPORT OF PANEL MEETING

Scheme: Cambridge North West (Lot 5 and Green Corridor)

Date: 30th July 2013

Venue: The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP

Time: 13.15-14:40

Quality Panel Members

Simon Carne (Chair)
David Birkbeck
David Pritchard
Lynne Sullivan
Canda Smith
Oliver Smith

Panel secretariat and support

Juliet Richardson (Cambridgeshire County Council)
Judith Carballo (Cambridgeshire County Council)

Local Authority Attendees

Mark Parsons (Cambridge City Council)
Michael Osbourn (South Cambridgeshire County Council)
Sophie Pain (Cambridge City Council)
Sinéad O'Donoghue (Cambridgeshire County Council)
Ian Dyer (Cambridgeshire County Council)
Nicholas Wyke (Cambridgeshire County Council)

Applicant and Representatives

David Emond, RH Partnership
Andrew Drummond, RH Partnership
Warren Osborne, AECOM Landscape
Jason Shinoda, AECOM Landscape
Sam Archer, AECOM Sustainability
David Smith, URS
Melissa Enderby, AECOM Planning
Heather Topel, AECOM Planning
Roger Taylor, University of Cambridge



1. Scheme description and presentation

Architect/Designer	RH Partnership, AECOM
Developer	Cambridge University
Planning status	Pre- application stage

2. Overview

The North West Cambridge site is located to the north west of Cambridge City and straddles land within the administrative areas of both South Cambridgeshire District Council and Cambridge City Council. The site sits at a strategic gateway location between key approaches into Cambridge City, Huntingdon Road and Madingley Road. The site is screened by existing development and does not have significant frontage, aside from the M11 which defines the western boundary of the site. The historic core of Cambridge is between 1.5 – 2 km from the site and within easy reach on both foot and bicycle. To the north of the site, approximately 4 kms from the city and the other side of Huntingdon Road is Girton, a village of 4,500 people. Adjacent sites which impact the development of North West Cambridge include Darwin Green (1, 2, & 3), and West Cambridge.

The development is the subject of a planning permission, dated February 2013.

1.5. The development proposals include:

- At least 3,000 new homes (of which 50% will be for University and college staff), including family, detached, semi detached and terraced housing and apartments;
- 100,000 sq.m. of academic and commercial research space, providing further research facilities for the University, along with specialist employment premises and local job opportunities.
- Accommodation for 2,000 University students;
- A local centre including a supermarket and unit shops, a new primary school, a nursery, public health care, police touchdown facilities and community facilities (two additional nurseries will be provided in other locations across the site);
- Sustainable Urban Drainage systems to manage flood risk, encourage wildlife and to provide an attractive landscaped environment; and
- New green spaces and improved access to the countryside.

The development will be delivered to Code for Sustainable Homes Level 5 for residential development and BREEAM Excellent for non-domestic buildings.

The community centre at Gravell Hill farm is expected to open in Autumn 2013. This gives an opportunity to Cambridge University for working closely with Local Authorities.

First completions on site by March 2015.

3. Cambridgeshire Quality Panel views

Introduction

The Panel welcomed the opportunity to review Plot 5 of Cambridge North West Development. This is a student accommodation proposal based on a house typology.



The Panel's advice below reflects the issues associated with each of the four 'C's' in the Cambridgeshire Quality Charter.

Community

The Panel acknowledged the interesting model of having houses that link together in a block shape. The overall impression was of a collegiate development whilst retaining the permeability and sense of public openness and access through the site.

The Panel welcomed the aspiration of creating spaces that can be left open for public access and permeability but also if necessary secured at night.

The proposal tries to minimise the number of rooms facing north and the Panel agrees with that principle. However, the Panel were concerned that the public face of the lot to the north along the primary street presented a less than attractive face. The location of the disabled car parking and delivery space, a large cycle parking store and plant room meant that this elevation was virtually lifeless.

The panel welcomed the Porters lodge building and communal facilities at the important south east corner of the development.

Connectivity

The proposal offered many ways in and out of the development, perhaps too much permeability which might lead to less activity on some of the routes. Once within the site the different public spaces were well connected though the changes in level were not adequately described on the drawings.

Character

The site is adjacent to the green corridor and the panel considered that the advantage of this had not been maximised. There was a shared sense that the house D1 overlooking the green corridor would be better located in a similar form to the north west corner, closing the open aspect and giving a better connected flow of space from semi-private courtyard to the public spaces of the green corridor. This would enhance the northern corner, the primary street activity and benefit the green corridor's qualities.

The Panel questioned whether the tree species in the green corridor are common to the rest of Cambridgeshire, and queried introducing fruit trees into the courtyard.

The Panel were pleased with the materials used in the development, especially the use of the brick. At a later review it was stated that there was a range of bricks being proposed across the developments, which the Panel supports as a principle.



The Panel also questioned the use of the “flower” garden and considered this as a display feature rather than a place that you go through.

The Panel suggested that more work was required in understanding levels across the site and using the level differential to define spaces. The opportunity to provide a hinge point on the east - west route across the courtyards should be investigated within the courtyard

The Panel were unconvinced about the bike shed adjoining house A2 as it gave a closed and unattractive elevation on a major public aspect.

Some of the entrances did not contribute to the quality of the street scene and needed further work

The panel welcomed the sophisticated elevational treatment to windows with screens and acoustic baffles. The external metal elements as surrounds would depend on the sophistication of detailing, weathering and material specification. The Panel had differing views as to their effectiveness and appropriateness across the whole site.

Climate

The use of roofs solely for PV was questioned, the use of roof areas, some of which would be easily accessed, for social use would be advantageous. Detailed discussion of climate was not possible within the time allowed.

4. Conclusion

The Panel acknowledged the importance of this site and welcomed the community aspect of the scheme as well as the articulation of the site. In general the overall layout was endorsed. The Porter Lodge for early engagement on the site was particularly welcomed.

However, there were major concerns about the location of the disabled car park. In discussion the designers referred to the future use of the disabled car parking site for a future building. This was not part of the submission and so the Panel were unable to comment on its appropriateness however, notwithstanding that suggestion the Panel believed that a better solution would be for the use of this site in the first phase of development.

Control of pedestrian site access was touched upon. All entrances could be locked down however the designers suggested this was not the intention on a daily basis. The panel were concerned that with so many access points closing the site would be a major operation.

There needed to be better description and detail to describe levels across the site.



Green Corridor

The Panel did not receive much detail about the green corridor during the presentation and so with that lack of information the Panel were unable to comment. The landscape needs a more strategic view and more explanation and clarification.

The Panel stressed the importance of the green corridor, streets and public spaces within the development. It was disappointing that this part of the development was not better described and available to be considered by the Panel.