



CAMBRIDGESHIRE QUALITY PANEL

REPORT OF PANEL MEETING

Scheme: Cambridge North West (Lot 3)

Date: 06th August 2013

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

Time: 12:45-14:15

Quality Panel Members

John Worthington (Chair)
Simon Carne
David Birkbeck
David Pritchard
Lynne Sullivan

Panel secretariat and support

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

Local Authority Attendees

Sophie Pain (Cambridge City Council)
Sarah Chubb (Cambridge City Council)
Ian Dyer (Cambridgeshire County Council)

Applicant and Representatives

Patrick Arends, Mecanoo
Francine Houben, Mecanoo
Emma Askew, University of Cambridge
Heather Topel, University of Cambridge
Sam Archer, AECOM Sustainability
Desmond Tan, URS
Melissa Enderby, AECOM Planning



1. Scheme description and presentation

Architect/Designer	Mecanoo
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. 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 Gravel 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 Lot 3 of Cambridge North West Development. This lot comprises key worker accommodation (234 units including 4 bed shared units) and is located within the perimeter block which addresses four key frontages, the residential square to the north, Tertiary Street to the east with Lot 1 on the eastern side and the Primary Street to the south and west.

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

Community

The Panel welcomed the ambition of the scheme and the opportunity for fresh thinking, considering this like a "big house" with a variety of communal spaces.

The Panel noted that the management of the internal courtyard would be provided by the central site management located in Market Square.

The expected demographics of the tenants will be short stay, one to two years, many from abroad, and from a diversity of cultures.

The housing needs are not typical of UK housing. For presentation to the JDCC the type of tenants and management regime proposed should be clearly described and related to the proposed housing typologies.

The panel welcomed the opportunity for innovative proposals, but urged that the reasoning for choice of plans is clearly documented and that, at an early stage, tenant feedback invited to influence the briefing of later developments.

Connectivity

The Panel questioned the lack of direct access to and from the street, with semi-public/private internal courts for access. There were a number of gates to the courts but it was unclear how they were going to be used or controlled. There is an aspiration of leaving the gates open all day, with the flexibility for the management and community to decide.

The panel were unsure of the legibility of the main route through the proposal, which could emerge as a useful pedestrian route.

The Panel noted that the parking provided below ground in this lot was shared with other blocks. There were concerns that the grouped cycle parking spaces in the corners and central locations were not attractive additions to the street scene.

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Character

The Panel welcomed the varied massing and courtyard configurations.

Concern was expressed at the impact of cycle storage on prominent corners, in particular the North side projecting wing. As that wing is being considered for a future common room at ground level, that use would be much preferred by the Panel.

Level changes need more detailed consideration to improve privacy for ground level bedrooms.

The Panel thought the 1.5m wide access balconies in front of fully glazed apartments would raise privacy issues for many residents.

The Panel liked the choice of brickwork and the use of different size windows with distinctive reveals, but were concerned that the proposed elevational treatment would challenge the budget.

The Panel was surprised that this Lot might be built in two phases with temporary landscape. It would far more desirable to complete the blocks, as otherwise economies of scale would be lost.

Climate

The Panel raised some concerns about the main living space facing north and queried how this relates to achieving code 5.

4. Conclusion

The panel were supportive of the ambition of this scheme

- The success of the scheme will depend on testing the hypothesis of co-living and refining the plans. The proposition should be tested with a mixed group of typical potential tenants and the University housing office.
- The panel were supportive of the raised ground level but concerned about north facing living spaces.
- Detailed level design was required to give sufficient privacy to street facing apartments
- The simple and generous unit plans with a minimum of circulation were commended, but further work is required on the design and functionality of access galleries as communal meeting points and space for unit thresholds.