



CAMBRIDGESHIRE QUALITY PANEL

REPORT OF PANEL MEETING

Scheme: Cambridge North West (Lot 4)

Date: 30th July 2013

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

Time: 14:55-16:20

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)
Bonnie Kwok (South Cambridgeshire County Council)

Applicant and Representatives

Emma Askew, University of Cambridge
Roger Taylor, University of Cambridge
Brian Vermeulen, Cottrell Vermeulen Architects
Tom Coward, AOC
Toby Carr, Sarah Wigglesworth Architects
Warren Osborne, AECOM Landscape
Jason Shinoda, AECOM Landscape
Sam Archer, AECOM Sustainability
David Smith, URS
Melissa Enderby, AECOM Planning
Heather Topel, AECOM Planning



1. Scheme description and presentation

Architect/Designer	Cottrell Vermeulen Architects, AOC
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 lot 4 of Cambridge North West Development This is a hybrid development lot combining market and key worker University housing.



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

Community

The Panel were pleased to see many dedicated spaces for people to enjoy. The inclusion of orchards and gardens were seen as a positive attribute and a good opportunity for community engagement. However, there were concerns about the amount of area giving to it. Therefore, the Panel stressed the importance of future management of these spaces. It was also noted that private areas to the houses were very small and open to the shared communal areas.

The Panel raised the issue of privacy and overlooking, particularly with regard to views across the central square, accepted that perpendicular screening and the ability to limit peripheral views were important.

The flat blocks overlooking the veteran oak also had relatively tight spaces between them and the panel was concerned that overlooking a short distances between blocks might prove problematic.

Connectivity

The streets and mews spaces that set up the structure of the lot was well considered. There were concerns at the number of parking spaces and the pressure on street space for casual visitors coming by car. There was a general observation that parking provision is low across the key worker homes.

Character

The Panel were attracted by the idea of the "twin" buildings, but questioned some details of the building. The height of the buildings could be problematic as there is a lot of overlooking into other areas.

The Panel commented that numerous activities were being planned for relatively small semi-public areas. The success of these areas would depend on proper and appropriate management of the spaces.

The Panel considered that care should be taken that the balconies did not overwhelm the facades.

The deck access balcony block to the north east corner was not an attractive feature.



The team of three architects have introduced a varied mix of elevations. Whilst they might be seen as a welcome deviation from the more restrained treatments elsewhere there were concerns that they might date, that they required a high degree of detail design control to be delivered and that they would probably be challenged by the budget.

Climate

The Panel queried if the photovoltaic will be shadowed by the shape of the twin buildings, but all photovoltaic have been tested. At the moment, all panels are distributed where they found it more useful. The question of how the mix of market sale and University owned key worker homes in relation to ownership of electricity generated was not answered.

4. Conclusion

The Panel welcomed the ambition but queried whether the current strategy and proposals for plot 4 could be delivered to a high standard. The idea of four character areas was welcomed although the character across each was varied in quality. The Panel considered that it was refreshing to have a different approach in the use of materials.

The Panel considered this scheme very challenging. There is a lot of careful management to deliver the aspirations of the site. The mix of units the constrained external spaces and the use of shared semi-public space was more akin to a co-housing scheme which depended on self selection of residents. The combination of shorter term key workers with longer term market owned homes was a particular challenge. There is a danger of being very optimistic and not delivering at the end of the process.

The Panel raised the issue of the importance of high quality materials being a key to determinate the quality of the place and that enough money is therefore allocated for achieving the aims and ambitions of the scheme. The budget and the use of design and build will be a challenge to the quality of development.

The Panel were concerned about the amount of space given to all the units. The challenge of this site probably lies most in the desired density, forms of tenure and mix or units

Veteran Oak and Play area

Discussion was relatively brief on each. The enclosure of the veteran Oak with a timber post and rail fence set some distance away to protect tree roots was considered completely unacceptable and required far greater consideration of options and solutions. This is a very significant feature that demands further consideration.

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The play area is a relatively large space. The Panel were only shown a plan with no colour, limited description of activity, spaces designed, form of enclosure and relationship to adjoining sites. The play area design requires more thorough development and review.

