



CAMBRIDGESHIRE QUALITY PANEL

REPORT OF PANEL MEETING

Scheme: Darwin Green One Square

Date: 5th August 2014

Venue: Shire Hall Room 128, Cambridgeshire County Council

Time: 13:00 – 16:00

Quality Panel Members

Robin Nicholson (Panel Chair)

Canda Smith

David Prichard

David Birkbeck

George Hazel

Nick James

Panel secretariat and support

Judit Carballo – Cambridgeshire County Council

Stuart Clarke- Cambridgeshire County Council

Local Authority Attendees

Elizabeth Rolph- Principal Planner, Cambridge City Council

Nelia Parmaklieva – Senior Urban Designer, Cambridge City Council

John Evans – Senior Planner, Cambridge City Council

Charlotte Witheford – Landscape Architect, Cambridge City Council

Jon Finney – Development Control Engineer, Cambridgeshire County Council

Applicant and Representatives

Mark Sperrin – Barratt Eastern Counties

Sean Martin – Barratt Eastern Counties

Matt Jarvis – The Landscape Agency

Ian Bishop – Woods Hardwick

Mark Reeves – Mark Reeves Architects

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Robin Base – Mark Reeves Architects

Sarah Collicott – ArtScape Management

Marcia Whitehead – Bidwells

Adam Halford – Bidwells



1. Scheme description and presentation

The provision of a square (approximately 40m x 70m in size) within the local centre of Darwin Green 1 to include a shared space for pedestrians, cyclists and vehicle users and to provide the setting for local centre uses. The square aims to provide a unique and distinctive focus to the development and will be a hub of activity and an important local destination for shopping, meeting and eating as the vibrant community heart. The square will promote activity and allow for a variety of different uses from informal seating to potentially hosting markets and community events.

Architect/Designer Mark Reeves Architects

Applicant Barratt Eastern Counties

Planning status Pre determination Stage

2. Overview

The outline application for 1,593 homes and related infrastructure, community facilities and open space was approved in December 2013. The Design Code has been approved and other strategic conditions discharged. An Infrastructure application has recently been approved for the details of all the main roads across the site, the central open space and green corridors and the first allotment. On request by City Council officers, all details for the square were excluded from this application as it was felt further detailed work was required on this.

Cambridge City Council states that pre-application discussions are ongoing for the Square. Pre-application work has also commenced on the surrounding local centre buildings. While the Council's preference would have been for these to be progressed together, Barratt's are keen to progress the square in advance as it is critical to the delivery of the infrastructure. Cambridge City Council officers advised that the current designs for the surrounding local centre buildings are unacceptable and will require a comprehensive review.

Early delivery of key infrastructure will ensure that the new residents have the facilities necessary to create a new community in north west Cambridge but also to integrate with the existing surrounding communities.

3. Cambridgeshire Quality Panel views



Introduction

The Panel welcomed the opportunity to review the proposals for 'The Square' at Darwin Green. The Panel had previously considered aspects of the wider Darwin Green 1 development, the primary school, the supermarket and emerging local centre designs.

The applicant commenced their presentation with an update on where they are at in the development process. An outline planning consent has already been granted for the development with a signed Section 106 Agreement in place. There is also a recently approved infrastructure application consented.

Context for the square is established through the consented Parameter Plans and Design Code.

The supermarket and primary school are not yet consented schemes. The local centre will come back to the Quality Panel, once designs have been refined further.

The Panel's advice reflects the issues associated with each of the four 'C's' in the Cambridgeshire Quality Charter. The comments below include both those raised in the open session of the meeting and those from the closed session discussions.

The Panel began by regretting that the insertion of the supermarket store and its accompanying car park had not led to a reconsideration of the location of The Square, which they felt could have been moved to be opposite the car park, linking to the school; however they accepted that the scheme was probably too far advanced for such a change at this stage. The Panel suggested that officers investigate whether the parameter plans fixes the 'Square' in this form and location.

The Panel expressed considerable doubt as to whether an application for the Square can be considered in isolation from the surrounding buildings (local centre).

Community

The Panel recognised that there are a good range of services in the local centre and square providing for a library, supermarket and secondary retail units, health and community rooms as well as the adjacent primary school. It was questioned whether the size of the square was sufficient to work as a community space with so many potential outdoor uses.

The Panel did question the secondary retail units viability, given the other provisions within the square, and suggested the units needed to be flexible in design to accommodate others uses if they failed to let. Could the retail units be located elsewhere? It was explained that the 5 retail units were a requirement for the scheme.

The Panel highlighted that although the session was to consider the square rather than the wider local centre the relationship between the wider local centre uses such as the primary school and the square was poor.

The revised entrance to the supermarket was considered an improvement on the previous design to integrate the supermarket better with the square, although views of the square

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from the supermarket entrance were small. The provision of a canopy feature on the supermarket was welcomed but over-all the relationship of the supermarket, square and local centre needs to be improved.

It was considered disappointing that housing provision over-looks the supermarket car park on the southern edge.

The potential uses for the space were welcomed; for example a farmers market was mentioned, however, comments were later made on the impact of these uses arising from vehicles and buses (see Climate section).

Connectivity

The applicant explained that four options were considered for the road passing through the square, with the preferred option being the diagonal route. The Panel commented that they would have liked to have seen actual examples of similar sized squares and how they worked as a comparison.

The Panel observed that the square is well connected to the rest of the development and the surrounding area through a regular bus service operating through the square itself and a network of cycle and pedestrian links.

It was stated that the square should have a feeling of 'a people place' and not just a road with extended pavements. The applicant responded that it was intended that the car should feel out of place – it is a shared space.

The Panel noted the complex movement patterns and expressed their concern that extensive signage might be needed; they wished to ensure it would be minimised to avoid clutter.

The Panel very much supported the 'plough line' concept (responding to the historic agricultural use of the site) and encouraged the applicant to continue to explore the idea of running 'plough lines' in different directions to the current proposed design; the applicant's final slide was a sketch of such an idea.

Clarification was sought by the Panel on how cycle routes from the orbital cycleway would permeate through the square to the central park and in particular negotiate the rill, planters and other features, without yellow lines. The applicant explained that there was a clear route that would be obvious to cyclists and pedestrians using the space.

The Panel raised concerns over managing cycle, pedestrian and vehicular space and gave an example of pedestrian spill from farmer's market events onto the road which large buses will be using. So, what impact will large buses, operating at regular intervals (every 15 minutes in each direction) have on the square?

The applicant was encouraged to think further about the bollard treatment proposed to delineate the route for the bus to/from the bus gate and for cars accessing the sports pavilion car park. Could public art be used here? Concern was expressed for cyclists not being sufficiently warned about the road at this point and potential conflict.

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Clarification was also sought by the Panel on how the drop off provision will work in the square for all users including disabled users, delivery/servicing and drop off. Likewise, the same clarification was sought on the bus stop locations. It was explained that most car users would park in the supermarket car park, which will be a shared facility with disabled provision within the square itself. The design of the bus stops needs to allow for disabled users which requires a raised kerb, so better locations to the periphery of the square would be more appropriate rather than within the Square itself.

The Panel reiterated it is better to integrate features together such as cycle stands, seating, rills, signage and public art where possible to avoid unnecessary clutter.

Character

The Panel agreed that the designs felt like lots of 'small ideas', many of good merit, but there was no over-arching 'big idea'. The design seemed fussy in places.

The Panel supported the idea of plough lines, which should be explored further as a key element of the design but wondered whether residents would understand this design feature as currently proposed. They also supported the concept of tree patterns through the square, which should use native species but be mindful of maintenance requirements if they are to be adopted by the local authority (same issue with the raised planters). Not all the Panel members were convinced by the feature tree proposed and the self-watering if the planters were semi-raised. The applicant advised that they were talking to the City Council Parks Team.

The applicant explained their hedge line reference in the scheme. The Panel suggested they either use as a key feature it or lose it – it is maybe one idea too far.

There was a real lack of detail design which will be needed for the reserved matters application; for example clarity on the design of the rills is needed.

The Panel supported the appointment of a public artist commission and would be interested to see how that work feeds into the final designs.

The inclusion of a lighting strategy was welcomed by the Panel to enhance the design and character of the square. The materials used, banding, raised planters, bollards and cycle stands will all inform the sense of place and character of the development.

Climate

The Panel acknowledged the shade analysis and micro-climate work that had been undertaken and the recognition to utilise the sunniest parts of the square. However, places of shade would be important in summer sun, especially as a result of climate change and there would also be a need for shelter in sudden or heavy storm events.

The Panel asked how buses would impact on the square environment in terms of air quality from the diesel vehicles as well as noise.

There was support for the use of recycled materials by the applicant.

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The Panel stated there was a need for an irrigation strategy for the green elements of the scheme and clarification was provided by the applicant on tree planting provisions to not use constraining tree pits where possible. Planting would reflect the seasons and be used to encourage bio-diversity.

The Panel noted it was difficult to comment without the detail of buildings surrounding the square.

4. Conclusion

Over-all, the Panel felt that the square was constrained by previous decisions (supermarket inclusion for example) and had not reached its full potential.

The Panel questioned the need for a review of the masterplan for the uses and connectivity around the square and local centre and whether the square and local centre applications can be brought forward separately. The Panel suggested that splaying the southern flank of the square could have some real benefit in linking the supermarket entrance better to the Square.

The lack of a big idea is constraining the design, although there is a good range of facilities being provided. Council members will benefit from getting more detailed design proposals and will need to see, as a minimum, proper sections through the buildings that define the Square.

The Panel made the following recommendations (further details can be found above):

- Consider relocating secondary retail units or provide better links from the supermarket with the design of the local centre and square. The design of the square must reflect its context with the local centre and supermarket.
- Ideally, the square would be moved to incorporate the school and supermarket but it was recognised that this is not possible (but the Panel wanted this to be noted).
- To continue to explore how the banding (plough lines) and other features raised can best serve the square designs.
- Minimise clutter by combined street furniture where possible.
- Provide clarity on the management of pedestrian, cyclist and vehicle movements in and around the square.
- Welcome the changes to the supermarket entrance and canopy and encourage the final designs to interact with the square as much as possible.
- Develop bollard design to provide clarity on delineation of space and perhaps incorporate a public art element.
- Provide a diagram /picture that show examples of other well-known squares with exact dimensions.

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The Panel asked for it to be noted too that future presentations should not rely as heavily on PowerPoint, rather presentation boards, models and hand outs are better for engaging with the Panel.

