

## **APPENDIX C: QUALITY PANEL REPORT**

### **CAMBRIDGESHIRE QUALITY PANEL**

#### REPORT OF PANEL MEETING



#### **Scheme: Darwin Green One Local Centre**

**Date:** 4<sup>th</sup> March 2015

**Venue:** Shire Hall Room 128, Cambridgeshire County Council, CB3 0AP

**Time:** 9:30 -12:30

#### **Quality Panel Members**

John Worthington (Chair)

Simon Carne

David Prichard

Steve Platt

#### **Panel secretariat and support**

Stuart Clarke – Cambridgeshire County Council

Judit Carballo – Cambridgeshire County Council

#### **Local Authority Attendees**

Janine Richardson – Principal Planner, Cambridge City Council

Jonathan Brookes – Principal Urban Designer, Cambridge City Council

#### **Applicant and Representatives**

Mark Sperrin – Barratt Eastern Counties

Marcia Whitehead – Bidwells

Sean Marten – Barratt Eastern Counties

Tim Makower – Makower Architects

Paulo Sosa – Makower Architects

Ian Bishop – Woods Hardwick

## **1. Scheme description and presentation**

Architect/Designer Makower Architects  
Applicant Barratt Eastern Counties  
Planning status Pre application stage

## **2. Overview**

Following the issue of planning permission for various infrastructure provisions and the Square at Darwin Green, attention is now focusing on the local centre.

The Local Centre for Darwin Green will act as an important focal point for the development providing a range of buildings and spaces to serve the planned community. It comprises of 14 buildings and public spaces including the following:

- retail parade;
- residential units – 121 one, two and three bedroom residential units (73 market and 48 affordable);
- Health centre (700 sq m over two floors);
- Public library (350 sq m at ground floor level);
- Community Rooms;
- The Square; and
- School Square.

The Local Centre will be surrounded by a supermarket, other residential phases of development, a primary school and nearby pocket park and central park.

The Local Centre is a specific character area within the Design Code.

Public Artists have been appointed to develop the Art Strategy at Darwin Green and emerging ideas include a potential glazed façade for the Library building with the theme of Darwin's Green Tree of Life Diagram. Any public art element will need to consider maintenance and decommission arrangements.

### **3. Cambridgeshire Quality Panel views**

#### Introduction

The Panel noted the recent planning permissions granted in Darwin Green and that Makower Architects have been appointed since August 2014 to develop the Local Centre.

The Panel stressed the importance the role of Barratt as both master planners and master developers for the wider development site and the role they have in delivering a vibrant and successful community.

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.

#### Community

Affordable housing (40% provision) is distributed across the residential blocks but primarily within one block facing Darwin Street (primary route) and School Lane (tertiary street). The Panel questioned the anticipated demography of the site and highlighted the importance of taking this into account when planning the affordable housing distribution within the blocks.

The Local Centre will be a strong focus for community interaction with the Library, community rooms, retail, neighbouring school and supermarket. These functions with their associated car parking and the two squares, will form a "campus" setting for a variety of community services serving both Darwin Green 1&2 and the surrounding neighbourhoods with a wide demographic of users over different times of the day. The direct and indirect routes between and through this variety of public and semi-public spaces should be reviewed and planned as a rich collection of community settings to stimulate formal and informal activities.

The Square should be a vibrant and special place. The Panel urged the applicant to ensure that the retail units are utilised from the outset and should consider pop-up shops and sensible terms for potential users to avoid empty units that detract from the local centre rather than early on establishing the centre as a destination and place to be. The use of public and semi-public outdoor/indoor spaces should be encouraged.

#### Connectivity

The Panel recognised that the scheme is well connected with the bus route passing through the Local Centre, served by two bus stops. The Local Centre is situated on a 'cross road' of cycle routes connecting to the wider site and surrounding areas via the orbital and local cycle routes. Further improvements are being made to cycle provision on Huntingdon Road.

There will be 3 car club spaces within the Local Centre.

Parking spaces will be provided off-road in parking courts for the residential dwellings at a ratio of 1:1 with car parks serving the school (for staff) and wider local centre. Disabled bays will be provided near the Square.

The Panel challenged to need for these parking levels given the highly accessible location and whether the entrance to the parking court behind the Library (albeit serving the residential flats above) and the school car park could be shared. This space could work better.

The Panel proposed that on street parking should be considered with parking under tree cover in the School Square. On street parking would allow for flexibility of use and ease of reduction of provision in the future.

### Character

The applicant explained the character of the Local Centre as being local in feel, whilst urban in character providing a distinctive new neighbourhood for Cambridge. The architect stressed that this aimed to be more than another suburban development. Distinguished by its relationship between spaces and the surrounding areas, and the choice of simple building typologies provided with identity through "carved blocks" with marker corners, modulated heights and balconies and terraces. The vitality was expected by the variety of routes, surprise views, and the dialogue between people and spaces.

40% of the residential will be affordable provision and all of the dwellings will have private space (balconies) which is to be welcomed. The scale, rhythm and linearity learns from Cambridge and seeks a balance between diversity and unity.

Buildings will be ground +2 or +3 (floors) in height. The Panel suggested that as the design had a European flavour, the roof spaces could be utilised better than just as spaces for PVC units or air conditioning. The applicant agreed to give this more thought.

The buildings have a carved formation with recessed and projecting balconies – in / out design – to maximise sunlight and to bring facades to life.

The design of the civic buildings (the health, community and Library buildings) was discussed and challenged. Will they be legible enough and have the presence that they need?

The library is a separate block of 350 sq m with floor to ceiling glazed windows facing north, a roof light, and reading terrace to maximise light.

The applicant indicated that they are also exploring possibilities of changing the community rooms to ground floor only with opening doors onto the Square in order to have an indoor/outdoor feeling. The Panel welcomed this approach.

The Panel questioned the largest of the residential blocks facing Darwin Street. The typology chosen is a typical continental block, which aims to create a living street at its front with a semi-public space within and routes through to the street behind. The

Panel liked this typology but felt this had not been achieved with the compartmented parking courts within the block, though the internal courts were not gated and allowed a through way, the planning and design gave no feeling that such permeability might be allowed.

The Panel were keen to ensure that the groundscape worked. Bins and cycle storage need to work in their spaces in conjunction with pedestrian, road and shared surfaces. It was noted that provision for a 1.8m pavement width had been agreed with County Highways as appropriate and that has been achieved.

The applicant highlighted the importance of the landscape. The Panel suggested that drawings need to show the architecture and landscaping together and also that the parking courts should perhaps consider more mature trees, but fewer than proposed.

The Panel noted that no balconies have been positioned in those units facing north-west, but this is where the late evening summer sun would be. The Applicant explained that this was a purposeful decision made in order to maximise sunlight in the flats by facing all balconies south east. They also differentiate the character of Darwin Street and School Lane and have taken into account any potential noise issues. The Panel also suggested thought should be given to having all balconies facing into the courtyard – again as a European flavour to the design – however the applicant stated that the courtyard was not a main communal area it is mainly for parking, and although it would act as a semi-public space residents should be drawn to the surrounding spaces and parks for amenity use. The parking courts act as 5 ‘rooms’, but the panel felt they could be more permeable.

Materials – The Panel noted the proposed single treatment with a strip approach using Kenilworth Antique and Cambridge Cream types. Perhaps there could be 2 different treatments for the library and civic uses and for the retail and school Square frontages?

Copper cladding will be used to mark opposing corners of the buildings in the Square.

The Panel raised concerns about the natural desire lines between the school, supermarket and Library and that a route through the residential blocks would be natural and logical. This could be achieved by moving the residential blocks apart. The applicant rebutted this approach but acknowledged that as a short-cut it might be used by some. The intention is that people should use the streets and spaces around the Local Centre, that is how it is meant to work and the applicant felt strongly that it does work as proposed.

### Climate

The applicant explained that their intention is to create the best places to live, optimising the sun’s light and orientation. The scheme will be built to BREAAAM ‘Very Good’ and sunlight analysis studies have been undertaken.

The Panel applauded the provision of photovoltaic panels, but questioned how better use might be made of the flat roofs for terraces to the top floor nits so increasing the value of the “penthouse units”.

#### 4. Conclusion

The Panel welcomed the passion that the architects have brought to this scheme and highlighted the simplicity and quality of this proposal which have so many different elements. The Panel reiterated the importance of Barratt as the Darwin Green Master developer and their role of bringing all spaces together. The Panel were delighted to see the new architect taking a holistic view of the site and recognising the relationship of the Local centre site to the surrounding sites.

The Panel made the following recommendations. Further details can be found above:

- Provide a drawing showing the landscape and buildings together, defining how the different spaces work together to provide a diversity of alternate routes between a rich variety of indoor and outdoor settings, for a variety of community uses.
- Utilise building roofs as useable spaces for gardens for example rather than just for accommodating kit (e.g. PVC or air conditioning units).
- Consider the walking flows generated from the supermarket car park through the courtyard block to the school. Rethink the typology of the Darwin Street block and the routes through.
- Make the most of the groundscape and reinforce the sense of a distinctive 'campus' of spaces and settings to support the community.
- Continue to work together with other providers such as the County Council (school and library) or Supermarket.
- Give further thought to the area outside the school and see how this relates to the Supermarket. Is the relationship to the surrounding building right?
- Provide pictures/diagrams regarding similar places to act as exemplars.
- Express civic functions at street level. The calm design works very well but it disappoints in the lack of legible civic design.
- Review and reinforce the aspirations for Darwin Green local centre in the context of the type of user expected and lifestyles to be supported. Well designed, distinctive, well used places, will meet the desires of the design team to provide a distinctive and desirable neighbourhood for Cambridge.