



## **CAMBRIDGESHIRE QUALITY PANEL**

### REPORT OF PANEL MEETING

#### **Scheme: The Shared Facilities Hub & JJ Thompson Garden**

**Date:** Friday 7<sup>th</sup> July, 2017

**Venue:** Maxwell Centre, Cambridge West Site

**Time:** 11:30pm – 13:30pm

#### **Quality Panel Members**

Robin Nicholson – Chair

David Prichard

Oliver Smith

Lynne Sullivan

Simon Carne

Nick James

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

Alokiir Ajang – Cambridgeshire County Council

Stuart Clarke – Cambridgeshire County Council

#### **Local Authority Attendees**

John Evans - Principal Planner (New Neighbourhoods) - Cambridge City Council

Jonathan Brookes – Principal Urban Designer – Cambridge City Council

#### **Applicant and Representatives**

Luigi Scalera – University of Cambridge

Mark Parsons – University of Cambridge

Julian Dickens – Jestico and Whiles

Heinz Richardson – Jestico and Whiles

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

Consultants	Jestico and Whiles
Applicant	University of Cambridge
Planning status	Detailed application



## 2. Overview

The site is located on the west side of JJ Thompson Avenue. The land is currently used as paddocks for the Veterinary School.

The pre-application proposal is for a shared facilities building which will serve the university and it will include the following:

- Lecture space and study areas
- Library
- Pastoral and contemplation space
- Café and restaurant facilities
- A small shop

The proposed building falls within The Green and East Forum and adjoins Central Green Link within the March 2016 version of the draft Design Guide which accompanies the West Cambridge Campus masterplan.

The building will come forward as a full planning application.

Pre-application discussions have included Cambridge City Council, Community Forums and Disability Panel. This is the first time the scheme has been presented to the Quality Panel. The applicant anticipates submitting the planning application in mid-September 2017.

## 3. Cambridgeshire Quality Panel views

### Introduction

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 Chair stated that David Prichard and Oliver Smith had previously been involved with the development of the West Cambridge masterplan, however, they have had no recent involvement. It was agreed that their full engagement in the Quality Panel discussions would not be a conflict of interest.

The Shared Facilities Hub is a new venture for the University of Cambridge offering collaboration and a new flexible way of learning because each college usually delivers these facilities in-house. This is the first of the three proposed hubs on the West Cambridge Campus to encourage interaction, sharing of resources and learning between different departments.

JJ Thompson Gardens/The Green is about 3 hectares in size and the concept of the design is organised around 3 key parameters. 1. Biological; 2. Hydrological and 3. Social. The principle elements have not yet been established as this is dependent on the



development of the masterplan. The first phase of The Green will be delivered to integrate the Shared Facilities Hub with the Cavendish III building.

## Community

The Panel welcomed this landmark Shared Facilities Hub as the first of the proposed 3 hubs on the West Cambridge campus and considered it would become an important part of the West Cambridge social infrastructure.

The building will include a range of facilities which are focused around 3 main elements: 1. Nourish (Cafeteria, Café/Bar space); 2. Study (Library); 3. Collaborate (Teaching, Seminar, Meeting rooms). On the ground floor there will be a series of break-out areas for staff and students to use and they will have close access to the public realm spaces.

The ground floor entrance plaza will provide for people from the south east quarter and there will be a small retail unit, e.g. commercial and coffee bar zone. The Panel thought there was an opportunity to make the shop space more open and welcoming, which would encourage more social interactions between people from different departments.

The Panel were pleased to hear there is a public art and cultural strategy for the West Cambridge campus site which could be integrated into the Shared Facilities Hub and other buildings.

There is an opportunity to develop a 'productive landscape' in the gardens and around the building. This would reinforce the design ethos of wellbeing and community through providing allotments and the produce could also be used or sold in the café/shop.

The Panel enjoyed the early interior perspective with a great stair rising up along the edge of an atrium. While this has proved unworkable, there is an opportunity to further develop the social activity within the building with places where interactions can happen.

The application submission should demonstrate how the building can be flexible over time.

## Connectivity

The Panel supported the cycling and provision for storage but were concerned about security and thought the bikes should be overlooked.

The Panel questioned the closed off nature of the service yard and felt that, given its occasional use, it could be designed as a layby and made less prominent.

Removal of the internal running stair in the Shared Facilities hub was disappointing.

The Panel commented that the east to west flow of the proposed JJ Thomson Gardens is interrupted by the triangular 'book-end' rain gardens which they thought were unnecessary. Greater consideration should be given to integration with further phases of the Green.

## Character

The Shared Facilities Hub is a prototype with the ability to adapt to future needs; it aspires to be an accessible, open public building with a light and welcoming atmosphere. The Panel felt the Hub would be well-used and highlighted that as this is the first hub it is important for it to develop its own unique character.

The entrance and ground floor design aims to bring the Green (landscape) right into the building with indoor planting. This approach was supported.

The ground floor will be predominantly used for catering and the first and second floor will be mainly teaching and study space. As you rise up through the building, the spaces become more enclosed and intimate, similar to a traditional study space.

The ground floor façade is glazed and transparent and the applicant explained how it responds to its uses and to the environment, for example sunlight. The first floor is for the study space and it will act as an extension of the café, this space will offer a more relaxed layout. The second floor will include the seminar space and libraries.

The Panel supported the design of the elevations and discussed the quality of the materials and how the building will relate to the surrounding site and in particular the Cavendish III building. The applicant commented they were exploring metallic finishes, such as bronze.

The Panel considered there was an opportunity to provide carefully designed signage well integrated into the architecture.

The Panel liked the idea of a timber library wall weaving its way through the centre of the building but felt it had been weakened by the changes to the plan and needed to be integrated through the length of the building.

The Panel thought that the design was an elegant pavilion, a concept that could be pushed further, by making the western service yard end dual aspect.

Panel felt the roof with its raking plant enclosure was a disappointment. They thought the plant could be enclosed within small elegant enclosures on a green/brown roof. The Panel would like to see the roof more actively used, for example as a communal bar/ social space with views across the campus. The addition of roof lights should be considered.

The Panel felt there was lots of detail on the lower level façade which should also be developed on the upper levels.

There is an opportunity to make more use of the green spaces to the north and south if it were possible to narrow the kitchen elevation to allow additional social spaces and to open up the shop. However, the Panel recognised the challenges in relation to how this may affect the positioning of the services.

The applicant explained how the tree species will be native to the area and mainly planted along the principle circulation route. However the Panel commented that further thought



could be given to the design of the hard landscape (benches and other seating areas) to help make the café space work better.

The Panel were very concerned at the extent of the hard paving with 60% soft and 40% hard landscape and felt that it would be more valuable to have a higher ratio of green space for landscaping and socialising.

Greater consideration should be given to the relief of the landscape across the space and further opportunities for bunds to provide seating areas.

The Panel questioned whether there was a need for a contingency landscape plan in case the Vet School either does not move or delays its move.

### Climate

The Shared Facilities Hub is designed to be a passive building with solar panels and a ground source heat pump which will also serve the Cavendish III building. The building will include internal planting which is used to enhance the internal air conditions and the health of its users.

The Panel would have liked to have seen the sunlight and shadow impact study of the inside and outside of the building. This analysis must inform the layout of JJ Thomson to the north.

The Panel welcomed the inclusive approach to wellbeing and how this had been carefully built into the structure of the detailed design.

The water strategy includes rain gardens, permeable paving and the use of sustainable urban drainage systems (SuDS). The design is intended to collect water onsite and function as a part of the West Cambridge masterplan and wider landscape approach to water management.

The applicant explained how the garden space will include hydrological features such as rain gardens and how they intend to use water to create interactive, seasonal spaces for learning, contemplation and socialising.

The green is expected to seat around 300 people in the banked area and the applicant explained how they intend the green to attract people to sit outside but the Panel had concerns about the usability of the space.

The applicant described the ecology of the roof and how it will include photovoltaics and a green roof.

#### 4. Conclusion

The Panel felt the building showed strong character potential. The design is soon to become a planning application and the Panel were pleased to have the opportunity to comment on the application before submission.

The Panel were concerned about the quality of the landscape and felt that this needs to be carefully considered as it is fundamental to the integration of the two buildings and its relationship to the wider site. In particular, the relationship of the landscape with potential future phases to the west.

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

- The landscape needs further consideration; the Shared Facilities Hub and JJ Thompson Gardens are the first to be delivered and the quality is important as it will act as precedent.
- Further consideration should be given to sunlight and shadow impacts and their relationship to design of the landscape.
- There is an opportunity to make the roof more actively used, for example as a social space. This north facing space could provide interesting views which could be celebrated and creatively illuminated.
- Develop the productive landscape further to reinforce the approach to wellbeing and encourage social interactions between different groups (for example, the public and students).
- There is an opportunity to design high quality, integrated signage for legibility throughout the site, think about an alternative, special name other than the Shared Facilities Hub.
- Provide more green landscaping to address the 60% to 40% soft to hard landscape ratio.
- Provide a section drawing through the graduate housing, the Shared Facilities Hub, JJT Gardens and the Cavendish III Building to better understand the spaces.

As this is a landmark building and the first of its kind, the Panel encouraged the applicant to be more ambitious.

## APPENDIX 1 – The Shared Facilities Hub

