



Cambridgeshire Quality Panel

AstraZeneca – South Plot (Second Review)

Thursday 24th September 2020

Virtual Meeting

The Cambridgeshire Quality Charter for Growth sets out the core principles for the level of quality to be expected in new development across Cambridgeshire. The [Cambridgeshire Quality Panel](#) provides independent, expert advice to developers and local planning authorities against the four core principles of the Charter: connectivity, character, climate, and community.

Scheme Description

Architect/Designer: Withheld

Applicant: AstraZeneca

Planning status: Pre-application proposals for reserved matters application

Issue date: 5th October 2020

Declarations of Interest

Panel members are required to declare any interests they may have in relation to the development before the Panel and any such interests are recorded here.

None raised.

Previous Panel Reviews

This scheme was previously reviewed by the Panel on Tuesday 1st October 2019. Panel members welcomed the commitment and aspiration of the applicant for this significant site within the Cambridge Bio-medical Campus (CBC) raising several considerations which are set out in the Panel report of that date and which focused on movement in and around the site (and to the proposed railway station), consideration of how temporary spaces will be planned and thoughts on landscaping use and strategy.

Development Overview

Outline planning permission was approved in 2009 for the development of 29 hectares of land for research or treatment works at CBC. Subsequent Reserved Matters approval was achieved by the applicant for a north plot and part of the south plot, for their global research and headquarters building energy centre and 'enabling building', and now approval is being sought for phase 1 of their south plot for various enabling and amenity buildings.

A Reserved Matters approval was achieved in January 2020, however, the applicant is now seeking to change the development in the form of an improved scheme with enhanced sustainability and environmental performance, to achieve BREEAM Outstanding, with a related refresh of building treatments, all in line with its adopted zero carbon emissions from operation strategy (by 2025). The applicant has held pre-application meetings with council officers and the revised scheme will come forward as a new reserved matters application.

Cambridgeshire Quality Panel views

The Panel has been issued with background reference information from the applicant and local planning authority ahead of the review session. This information is listed at Appendix A.

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

Community – *“places where people live out of choice and not necessity, creating healthy communities with a good quality of life”*

The Panel applauded the applicant's approach to enhanced sustainability, net zero carbon and drive for creating a high quality place. They asked how the South Office building will deliver key components for a successful workplace such as productivity, wellbeing and idea exchange and were keen to understand the floor layouts and how they work for ad hoc meetings, informal discussions, briefings and formal presentations. The applicant responded by showing the different types of meeting spaces, from the informal places around the stair core, to more formal rooms in quieter parts of the building. The applicant has an objective for their company and buildings to be a great place to work and enshrines its values in its I-Work strategy and standards; they noted also a covid-centred review of workstyle is underway.

The Panel supported the opening up of space at ground floor level within The Hive and the more tactile timber exterior treatment, considering that it added distinctive character to the building. They thought that this building and the linkages through the

outdoor spaces North to South are important elements in developing the community interactions not just the main buildings and therefore it is important to consider how their functions interact.

The applicant was asked how easy the Travel Hub will be to use. Can users easily cycle there, park and be confident in its security. How does the E-bike section differ from the core cycle area and are the spaces flexible for future changes in provision. It was responded that the E-bike area includes chargers and that the spaces are flexible to extend charging provision in the future. The arrival point for cyclists has been changed to the side of the building to reduce conflict with pedestrians leaving or arriving from the promenade. The café will likely be a grab and go type facility.

The Panel highlighted that wider links to and from the site are important for people working at the site too, such as the local pub in Shelford for example, or the city centre. The applicant acknowledged this but envisaged the widened provision of on-site facilities such as the cafes, gym and informal spaces, as well as the adjacent country park, offered an attractive range of amenities.

The Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) is a welcome feature for the site, but it was questioned what will happen to it in future phases. The applicant confirmed that it is a temporary facility to be withdrawn as and when the plot is needed for future development.

Connectivity – “places that are well-connected enable easy access for all to jobs and services using sustainable modes”

Plans for the adjacent Cambridge South Rail Station (due for completion 2025) are now emerging and a first concept drawing of the layout has been shared with the applicant. The Panel was interested to explore how the two facilities will relate to each other and what the arrival experience will be for users of the AstraZeneca site(s).

The junction arrangement for the station, entrance to the South Office building, and changes to Francis Crick Avenue and guided bus, suggest this will be a complex interaction which will need careful consideration, and the intensity of potential pedestrian movement needs to be acknowledged in the masterplan and South Office layout. This was recognised by the applicant and they are working with all third parties

to ensure this will be delivered to perform well, including integrating flexibility of arrival and departure times.

The station will over-look the service yard for the south site from the elevated crossing. Together with boundary treatments between the two sites, these spaces will need to be re-appraised to reflect the high aspirations for design quality and not just be a 'back yard' space.

The Panel noted that whilst there is dedicated cycle parking near the main building, most of the cycle parking and associated infrastructure is situated at the Travel Hub at the south of the site. The applicant acknowledged that whilst the balance of cycle parking is to the south, the company travel 'app' can be used to book cycle (and car parking) spaces across the whole site and so employees will book whichever space is most convenient for them. The Panel welcomed the car parking restrictions as part of the Travel Plan.

The main improvements to the Travel Hub were welcomed in bringing together not only the key transport infrastructure but also the proposed support features such as bike repair, showers and a café. Questions around the embodied energy and future re-use were made later in the discussion.

The Panel questioned why surface level car parking across the centre of the site was justifiable in phase 1 in addition to the Travel Hub, when this space could be better used to establish the landscape and biodiversity schemes and less parking would be needed at this stage of the development. The applicant responded that surface level parking is already in place and parking provision would be controlled. The development phasing strategy would not allow for early planting of the promenade central space due to the way buildings are planned to be constructed. The Panel were disappointed about this approach and emphasised the importance to the emerging community of early establishment of planting features, and of a pleasurable route through the central space linking the Travel Hub and workplaces.

Character – “*Places with distinctive neighbourhoods and where people create ‘pride of place’*”

The Panel explored the arrival experience, unity and place making, and material changes since the last review. The colonnade improvements were welcomed for the variety of experiences it can offer, but it was questioned whether the office building had a strong enough identity. Perhaps the entrance to the main building could be re-oriented to better acknowledge arrivals from the station. The unity of buildings through structural expression was generally supported as well as material changes to The Hive but the South Office building still appeared somewhat bland, and perhaps even balconies could be added as features to enliven its façade, articulate shading, and respond to the green centre. The arrival experience and detailing concepts need developing further and the pedestrian routes – the arteries of the development – need to be delightful in all weather conditions.

The Panel recognised the constraints of the site associated with services and underground infrastructure but also highlighted we are experiencing a climate and biodiversity crisis and therefore questioned whether campaigns such as Natural Cambridge’s ‘Doubling Nature’ could explicitly be adopted here. Detailed consideration of how the courtyard is experienced at different times of the year and time of day should be considered, seasonally and morning or afternoon in relation to daylight penetration and planting. Wind effects and shading from the buildings and tree canopy as well as the heat effect of courtyard design need to be carefully managed for optimum impact and successful underplanting. The central focus on the landscape was welcomed, however, the panel felt there were many questions for successful resolution. It was asked if on-site water will be used for irrigation and developed as an attractive feature for light, joy and biodiversity. The applicant responded that the strategy plans for drought and flood conditions but the drainage system has largely only been changed to accommodate the building redesigns on this highly constrained site.

The Panel suggested that the approach to wildlife should be developed further to create better inter-connected habitats. Whilst bird and bat boxes are welcomed, will they actually be inhabited due to noise impacts arising from people and vehicles (e.g.

trains stopping and starting) and had bees, butterflies and other species been considered.

As raised at a previous review, the Panel questioned the sustainability of a multi-storey carpark with low floor to ceiling heights - and had then been told the (now) Travel Hub would be demountable - they now noted that there was a noticeable mis-alignment between colonnade/canopy height compared with other buildings and would like to see this satisfactorily resolved, along with more detail on the materiality.

Post meeting, it was noted that the South Office roof top plant was not discussed but the panel had concerns that it was now more prominent on the skyline and not integrated into the materiality of the block.

Climate – “Places that anticipate climate change in ways that enhance the desirability of development and minimise environmental impact”

The applicant highlighted that they have made a commitment as part of their net zero carbon strategy to include operations and eventually the supply chain.

The Panel, whilst welcoming the 2025 zero carbon commitment, were unclear around the detail of the energy and carbon strategy. Questions around the precise energy use targets, the precise technologies whether CHP, bore hole array or heat pumps were asked and whether there was any consideration of embodied and whole life carbon for the development. The applicant advised that they would have to respond post meeting, as some colleagues had had to leave the meeting who would have answered those points.

The Panel mentioned the UK Green Building Council’s recent publication on energy performance targets for offices as a useful reference.

The approach to energy demand reduction by reducing the extent of the glass facade to less than fifty per cent was supported.

Panel Conclusions and Recommendations

In summary, the Panel were positive about the commitment and aspirations from the applicant, however, concepts and detail need further development and the main recommendations of the Panel were:

- 1) Net zero carbon and BREEAM Outstanding supported but further detail around these targets were required.
- 2) Consider prioritising provision of central promenade space for landscape biodiversity and shelter over surface parking.
- 3) External building treatments broadly welcomed but emerging main building layout could be developed further to ensure it reflects workstyle aspirations and the attributes of its location.
- 4) Welcome Travel Hub improvements and travel app. The emerging railway station is an exciting opportunity but the junction is complex and relationships between all the sites need resolution, as well as the service yard treatment.
- 5) Climate emergency is here and landscape and biodiversity plans should be enhanced to maximise potential.

References

None

Next Steps

The Panel welcomes the opportunity for ongoing engagement with the developer and design team should proposals for this site change or be re-evaluated.

Attendees

Chair: Name withheld
Panel Members: Names withheld
Panel Support: Cambridgeshire County Council
Local Authority: Cambridge City Council
Applicant Team: Names withheld

Appendix A – Background Information List and Plan

- Planning officer background note
- Applicant background note
- Presentation slides