

## Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Design & Conservation Panel

### Notes of the meeting Wednesday 10th February 2021

#### Participants:

Di Haigh	RIBA (Chair)
David Grech	formerly Historic England, co-opted member
Zoe Skelding	RIBA
Jo Morrison	Landscape Institute
Michael Goodhart	Cambridge PPF
Ian Steen	Retired architect, co-opted member
Chris Davis	IHBC
Russell Davies	RTPI

#### Presenters:

Matt Yeoman	Buckley Gray Yeoman (BGY) - item 1
Justin Holland	Buckley Gray Yeoman (BGY) - item 1
Ronan Leyden	Bioregional - item 1
Dawn Purves	LDA - item 1
Douglas Higgins	First Base - item 1
Mike Derbyshire	Bidwells- item 1
Jay Gort	Gort Scott Architects - item 2
Joe Mac Mahon	Gort Scott Architects - item 2

#### Officers:

Susan Smith	City Council (items 1&2)
Phil McIntosh	City Council (item 2)

#### Observers:

Cllr Richard Robertson	City Council
Cllr Katie Thornburrow	City Council
Declan O'Halloran	City Council
Chris Surfleet	Bidwells
Martina Sechi	Bidwells
Alison Wright	Bidwells
Lawrence Chung	BGY
Russell Brown	Hawkins Brown
Simon Carne	Simon Carne Consultants

**Apologies** - Robert Myers and Tony Nix

#### 1. Presentation - Devonshire Gardens, Devonshire Road, Cambridge.

The pre-application proposal for a residential-led, mixed use development comprising circa 134 dwellings, commercial/office floorspace, community uses and amenity, all centred around a public park.

The Panel's comments were as follows:

The Panel were supportive of the aspirations of the developers for this site as a mixture of residential units for rent and co-working office space placed around a new public

green space. The development of this long established open site adjacent to the railway lines is welcomed as it will establish a new section in the urban fabric of Cambridge.

### **Views of new area**

The view of the development from the railway lines is significant as one of the key introductory images of the city of Cambridge on arrival or departure by rail.

For pedestrians in particular, the view of the new buildings from the Mill Road bridge will be very prominent. Coordination of the building blocks to achieve a harmonious assembly of forms will be a key factor in achieving a successful urban arrangement for the site.

### **Built form of overall development.**

Larger warehouse scale blocks are aligned on the east edge of the site alongside the rail lines, Residential terraces define the street frontages to N,W and S edges around a new green space. Questions were raised about the disparate scale of the two forms of development across the site; in particular the shading caused by the taller buildings was questioned.

### **Frontage on Devonshire Road**

The original single sided terrace of houses along Devonshire Road, although modest have a complex layering of detail in the rhythm of their front gardens, doorway, windows, chimneys etc. The proposed new terraces opposite lack the clarity of those levels of definition. Some elements as shown were thought to appear lumpen, such as the end of terrace units and the dormer windows.

The Panel welcomes the intention to enhance the streetscape as part of a longer-term plan. All existing trees may not be retained, but will be replaced where necessary.

### **Housing provision.**

The percentages of single aspect dwellings were questioned for new housing. This greatly reduces the possibility of cross ventilation, which is increasingly important in a scenario of rising temperatures. Further design development of the housing units is still expected.

For the town houses in particular, it was felt that the Accordia scheme could offer precedents for how private external spaces e.g. roof terraces can be used to reduce the pressure on the central open space.

### **Commercial buildings.**

It was felt that the abrupt change of scale between the commercial buildings and the housing units could appear incongruous from within the scheme.

The arrival and delivery routes for the proposed scale of office accommodation will be heavily used. Achieving an access road along the eastern boundary of the site is important, whether or not this is part of the "Chisholm Trail". It was felt to be unfortunate that the paved parking area to serve the offices, as currently shown, is in the sunniest part of the centre of the site, whereas the different amenity elements of the site need to work together for the benefit of all users.

The Panel were not convinced by the references to a traditional industrial vernacular for the office buildings. In appearance, they don't yet have an architectural language that responds to their new environmental or workspace agendas. It was felt that the

enjoyable loft spaces found in reused warehouses could be reinvented within a fresh vocabulary of low energy design and the exploitation of natural light, solar collection etc.

### **Central park area.**

Questions were raised regarding the allocation of uses in the park, which includes a lot of routes and fragmented green spaces. It was not clear what space had been focussed towards families resident around the park, office users in their lunch hour or casual users from the neighbourhood, which is short of green spaces. Traffic on the roads could be heavy with people cycling to work etc. The Panel would expect to see clearer landscape proposals for this important element of the scheme.

**Sustainability/Renewables.** Panel applauded the aim to meet the challenges set by the 2030 RIBA Climate Challenge intended to help architects meet net zero (or better) whole life carbon for new and retrofitted buildings by 2030. Further detail on how this will be achieved is expected in the design development.

The current strategy on water consumption allows for 110litres/person/day, whereas at Eddington it is set at 80 litres per person per day. This aspect should be taken further and the integration of grey water recovery considered more seriously.

### **Vision for a new community**

There is a great opportunity here to build a new community within the already vibrant Mill Road area of Cambridge. There could be an even more aspirational outlook for this project, which seeks to support the people that live and work on the site. The example of the Marmalade Lane scheme was cited - Cambridge's first co-housing development, which includes communal indoor and outdoor spaces. There is the potential for a lively community to develop here, with shared activities that spill out into the park.

### **Conclusion.**

**How this scheme appears from the railway and from Mill Road bridge are key to its integration in the area. The proposed scale and massing of the proposed buildings, particularly those along the railway edge, is large compared with much of the existing development in the surrounding area.**

**The Panel supports moves to achieve the maximum potential in all aspects from this inner-city brownfield site. However it is left wondering whether the current scheme is over ambitious in the scale of buildings proposed for its redevelopment. Proposals for better community facilities, including use of the outdoor spaces, would also be welcome.**

**It was suggested that the scheme should be brought back to the Panel when further detailed design work has been progressed.**

### **VERDICT - AMBER (unanimous)**

## **2. Presentation - Updated design proposals for the new Silver Street Public Toilets**

The City Council's Streets & Open Spaces team have progressed a difficult project involving the inclusion of different stakeholder aspirations since concept submissions were received in Autumn 2016. The Design & Conservation Panel met twice (7 Dec 2016, 8 Mar 2017) to collaborate with the City Council in defining the design process. Gort Scott Architects were appointed as architects in December 2017.

Concerns were expressed at the Planning Committee in March 2020 regarding the scale and massing of the above-ground building which included a Tourist Information kiosk. Along with the postponement in the budgeted spend due to expected delays in project delivery because of COVID-19, the project was deferred for one year.

This latest presentation is an opportunity for the Panel to review the revised proposals and to decide whether the changes made to date are positive. As the Planning process is expected to re-start in the Spring, the Panel were reminded that significant changes cannot be made while the application is deferred.

The Panel's comments were as follows:

### **The relationship with the river.**

The question of achieving some daylight in the underground toilets was raised again. It is the Panel's view that options should continue to be explored. Some glazing to allow natural light in and views out would add considerably to the quality of the space.

One solution would be to make a window through the abutment of the bridge to give a view of the river. Historic England have to date refused to entertain the prospect of an intervention into Edwin Lutyens' Grade II listed bridge. This is largely on the grounds of its 'intactness', it having remained unaltered since it was built in the 1958, some fourteen years after Lutyens' death. It was felt that there might be possible grounds for further discussion on whether a discrete window, if designed with care, would undermine the significance of the bridge as a whole.

An alternative solution might be to insert pavement lights that would allow natural light into the underground spaces from above. This could be explored as a second option.

### **Height of pavilion.**

The revised proposals reveal a significant drop in height from the original 4.4metres to the currently proposed 4.1metres. The Panel feel that this building should hold its own seen against the Darwin College library. It needs to act as its own signpost and stand out when seen amongst the busy vehicular traffic on the bridge, particularly the larger scale vehicles, such as the frequent buses on Silver Street.

### **Maintenance and materials.**

The building will need to be easily cleaned and maintained. Materials should be sufficiently durable to withstand being hosed down. Elements like the drum of the roof light should be easy to keep clear of any build up of rubbish and leaves from the willow.

### **Signage.**

As this will be integrated into the building fabric almost at ground level, it was questioned whether it will be sufficiently visible. The use of symbols, not words, was supported.

### **Access controls.**

The designers are reminded that the door controls to the accessible unit will need to be available for disabled visitors as well as local residents. The solution will need to be easily understood. This issue is to be addressed at the detailed design stage.

### **Conclusion.**

**The Panel appreciate the careful design development of the scheme. The reduction in footprint of the pavilion was welcomed as this allows for more**

generous pavement area. Current changes are largely endorsed, provided the structure does not reduce in height as it could appear too small and stumpy. A source of daylight and possible views out from the below ground toilets would improve the quality of those spaces. The team are advised to update their images of Silver Street to include the pollarded willow tree and the new Bradfield Room in Darwin College.

**VERDICT - GREEN (unanimous)**

### **3. Any Other Business.**

Zoe Skelding is stepping down from the Panel after three years. The Panel would like to extend their thanks to Zoe for her contribution. Andrew Drummond of RH Partnership has been nominated as the new RIBA representative.

### **4. Date of next meeting - Wednesday March 10th 2021**

#### **Reminder**

#### **CABE 'traffic light' definitions:**

**GREEN:** a good scheme, or one that is acceptable subject to minor improvements

**AMBER:** in need of *significant* improvements to make it acceptable, but not a matter of starting from scratch

**RED:** the scheme is fundamentally flawed and a fresh start is needed.