

**Greater Cambridge Shared Planning
Design & Conservation Panel
Notes of the meeting Wednesday 14th April 2021**

Participants:

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

Presenters:

Matt Yeoman	Buckley Gray Yeoman (BGY)
Justin Holland	Buckley Gray Yeoman (BGY)
Dawn Purves	LDA
James Sheldon	Bioregional
Mike Derbyshire	Bidwells
Douglas Higgins	First Base

Officers:

Lewis Tomlinson	GCSPS
Dinah Foley-Norman	GCSPS

Observers:

Cllr Richard Robertson	City Council
Cllr Martin Smart	City Council
Susan Smith	GCSPS
Joanne Preston	GCSPS
Bonnie Kwok	GCSPS
Katie Roberts	GCSPS
Martina Sechi	Bidwells
Alison Wright	Bidwells
Lawrence Chung	BGY

Apologies - Robert Myers and Cllr Katie Thornburrow.

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

The revised proposal for a residential-led, mixed use development last seen by the Panel on 10th February 2021 (verdict AMBER). The amendments include a reduction in the number of units from 134 to 106. The percentage of dual aspect homes has also increased from 59% to 95%.

The Panel's comments were as follows:

- **Scale and massing.**

The Panel expressed concern at the last presentation about the SE blocks and their overshadowing of the central green space. While the reduction of the height of Block B from 4/5 storeys to 3/4 storeys is welcomed, concerns remain about the impact particularly of Block C on the scale and enjoyment of the green space. The contrast in

scale between the buildings along the East and West boundaries will give an uncomfortable sense of dominance over the park squeezed between the two.

The view of the East elevation of the site both from the railway lines and from Mill Road bridge was raised again. The long N-S section showing the series of parapet heights across the station area described blocks around the centre of CB1 as 23.5 metres, with a maximum height south of the station as 31 metres. This scheme measures a maximum of 27 metres at the apex line of the saw tooth roof on Block C, which suggests that the scale of this scheme will be very comparable to the massing of CB1 station epicentre. It was questioned again whether this is appropriate, or whether it should be reduced in height further from the station.

- **Overshadowing.**

The work on sun shading is welcomed. Concern still persists regarding the overshadowing of the Devonshire Road properties as well as the park land by the taller blocks B & C.

The outdoor seating shown at the shaded entrance of the site to the north of Block H would be in a very shady location.

- **Built form of development**

- **Blocks A and B**

The redesign of the Yard area which creates a mews street with the existing Mill Road properties seems to have created a more convincing residential street. The reduction in scale of both blocks in this area was appreciated and should improve shading issues.

- **Block C (commercial offices).**

The form of this block has been subdivided into three sections and has become more highly articulated. The Panel were not sure this represented a step forward from the previous scheme and felt that further work is needed to achieve a clear and worthwhile design. The elevations and sections are yet to be resolved and require simplicity and clarity. Further work is needed on the emerging flat roof section as well as the relationship with Block D, in terms of the rhythm of fenestration, height of roofs and character.

- Futureproofing - The lasting impact of the pandemic on the demand for office space could be significant, both in terms of the type and scale of offices required. The design team should ensure this block is designed with sufficient adaptability to allow new forms of office environment to emerge. Conversion to residential units may even be required in the longer term,

- **Block D.**

Although the reduction in height is welcomed, this block still seems crude and needs further design work to define the form and develop the fenestration.

- **Central park area - The Gardens.**

This area of the city is not well served by public parks. Every open space is highly valued in this neighbourhood. This is not a huge space (approx. 79m long x 30m–18m wide), yet

it is being required to work incredibly hard, which is a real concern in the context of the overwhelming scale and height of the surrounding buildings.

Given that this area is intended to be used both as spill-out space by potentially hundreds of office workers, as garden space for the residents and it will be accessible to the wider community, the Panel questioned how much could realistically be accommodated on a space of this size.

The recent inclusion of three separate areas of play provision for different age groups, with associated safety surfacing, takes up a considerable proportion of the open space. The SuDs areas will also need to be accommodated. In addition, the elaborate 'honeycomb' pattern of paths and undulating ground seems to dissect the park with cross routes.

The two large drop-off points, located on the turning heads at either end of the site, take considerable space and should be integrated with the green landscape to reduce their dominance.

This elaborate scheme seems to leave very little area of enjoyable and habitable green space. The Panel felt that The Gardens landscape area at the heart of the new development needs to be radically rethought to simplify the design and achieve a practical and less contrived proposal.

- **Frontage onto Devonshire Road.**

The Panel questioned the rationale behind the recent redesign of the terrace housing, (Blocks F, G, and H), roof design with a shallow 15-degree pitch. The question of whether there might be any potential for green roof terraces was raised. The resolution of the design of these units is understood to still be a work in progress. It was suggested that the streetscape might be more vibrant by mirroring the rhythm of chimneys of the existing houses opposite.

- **Devonshire Road - trees and level changes.**

The level difference of at least 600mm between the existing pavement and the site, including the line of existing trees along the street boundary, is yet to be resolved.

- **Dual aspect homes.**

The issue of through-ventilation had been raised and in the first scheme only 59% of the units had this capacity. It was claimed that now 95% of the units are dual aspect. The Panel questioned whether this dual aspect was actually able to generate through-ventilation in the flats. The plans seem to indicate that many of these windows relate to small bays, which would not be effective in establishing cooling air movement.

- **Link with the Chisholm Trail.**

The Panel support the proposal to safeguard the future potential route along the eastern edge and hope that the ongoing discussions with Greater Anglia and Network Rail bear fruit. It had been expected at the first presentation that this would be a delivery route to the offices, but this seems to have now disappeared.

- **Grey water recycling.**

With the more densely occupied Blocks A, B, C and D the use of straightforward grey water recycling for toilet flushing etc. may be justifiable. The Panel would encourage further exploration of this and other measures to reduce water consumption.

Conclusion

All are aware that this post-industrial site is in need of redevelopment. It is a significant opportunity for the city and should be expected to achieve a high standard of urban design. The Panel feel that several important aspects are not yet working well and would encourage the design team to refine the proposals.

The scale and quantum of development proposed remains a concern, particularly the volume of Block C. If that were reduced, it would help to make the whole site feel more spacious and workable. If the landscaping of The Gardens took a more straightforward approach, it could achieve a more enjoyable green space. All the proposed blocks need further real design engagement to resolve inherent issues of form and detail.

The Panel look forward to seeing further progress at the next presentation.

VERDICT - AMBER (unanimous)

2. Date of next meeting - Wednesday 19th May 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.