



Cambridgeshire Quality Panel

Former NIAB headquarters building

Thursday 17th December 2020

Microsoft Teams 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: JTP Architects

Applicant: Vertex Living

Planning status: Pre planning application stage

Issue date: 6th January 2021

Declarations of Interest

David Prichard declared that has worked with Hannah Murton

Previous Panel Reviews

The Panel previously reviewed the scheme on 29th October 2020.

Development Overview

The current proposal is for:

- Residential conversion of frontage Building of Local Interest (BLI) under prior approval (68 units).
- Demolition of 1960s extension and other buildings at rear.
- Mixed use development of apart-hotel (194 units) and build to rent residential dwellings (290 units including affordable housing provision), a microbrewery (190 sqm), health & fitness suite (400 sqm), gym (130 sqm), cycle workshop café (120 sqm), co-working space (325 sqm) and resident event space (115 sqm).
- Basement car parking, cycle parking, servicing provision, open space and landscaping.

Cambridgeshire Quality Panel views

The Panel had 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 welcomed the progress made since they had last reviewed the scheme two months before and in particular noted the attention given to building community capacity. The level of detail was noted. The Panel welcomed the provision of outdoor furniture including picnic tables and benches and the roof garden designs, which will be ideal for encouraging residents to mix and establish new relationships. The idea of potting tables was praised too.

As this will be a high density scheme, it is important to maintain focus on the quality of the public spaces. Additionally, consideration should be given to how the design of space influences people’s behaviour amongst the different users such as residents or visitors and other heavy management required. The Panel questioned how this will be managed when, for example, delivery vans park outside someone’s window and cause potential nuisance. Also, how is the arrival experience into and through the site managed, especially when it is people’s first visit and they are not sure where to go? How obvious is way-finding on the site?

The applicant responded that this will be the first larger scale Build To Rent (BTR) project in Cambridge and acknowledged that good management is key to its success. There will be a significant number of staff employed on site who will manage these issues.

The Panel noted that many of the planned growing areas are relatively small and will therefore not yield much produce, so asked how these will work. The applicant explained that they plan to form a garden club as part of the community development

programme. The residents could manage these areas in the overall context of the site management plan. There will be a promotion event for BTR residents, the aparthotel and local people to enable them to participate.

The Panel considered this could be a fun place to live and liked the innovative design approach of the wetlands.

It was suggested further thinking on some of the movements around the site is needed, given the wide range of users. For example, pushing a double buggy may be challenging in some places, especially at some entrances as they appeared rather tight. They noted that the unprotected slatted bridge should be moved to the edge of the pond.

Overall, the level of detail on functionality needs to be finalised but the scheme was progressing well.

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

The Panel questioned whether parking controls form part of the proposals especially on Lawrence Weaver Road or any of the other surrounding areas. The applicant explained that BTR residents are not allowed to park outside the basement car park but the Panel queried how this will be enforced and whether controls should be considered. The Panel highlighted that if there is no direct vehicular access to homes, how will people get heavy or bulky goods to their houses or even regular items like shopping. In some cases they might have to carry items a long way. The applicant explained that any planned or heavy deliveries would be managed by arrangement with the concierge as would nuisance parking.

In relation to the rear blocks, the Panel questioned if people can walk through the communal gardens or are these exclusively for residents? The applicant explained that there is no decision yet and they need to explore this level of detail and access.

Accessibility at the northern section of the site was questioned by the Panel. Could traffic flow work differently and make better use of the available space. The applicant stated they had looked at other options and noted the comments, but existing cycle routes on Lawrence Weaver Road were the constraining factor.

The one way street as currently planned looks tight, albeit with low traffic levels. It was suggested a loop around could be considered with perhaps a rising bollard system that allowed exit only to the north? Alternatively with entry from the north?

The applicant responded that the traffic and parking suggestions made by the Panel had been tested and that there is a highway visibility issue associated with the adoption of an exit road which would be restricted by a building as well as a land ownership issue.

Questions about a travel plan and buddy scheme were raised. The travel plan should encourage behavioural change and would need to be documented and carefully implemented.

The Panel welcomed the additional northwest-southeast pedestrian route.

The Panel noted that the car park layout was diagrammatic and did not reflect the structure of the buildings above; they cautioned about the impact that would have and whether the car park would be economical. The Panel questioned whether the size of the apartment cycling parking was too large as users of the apartment may only be resident for short periods of time and may not buy in to the local cycling culture.

The applicant explained that car-club spaces will be provided as part of the development and there will be electric charging points in the basement for bikes and cars. The café may offer rental bikes, which may appeal to apartment residents.

Visitor car parking spaces are quite a long way from northern blocks.

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

The Panel noted that the energy strategy will be based on heat pumps but details of whether it is a communal heat pump or individual heat pumps are still unresolved. The Panel urged the applicant to agree the energy strategy as soon as possible. If a heat network is used, lack of space could be an issue and if a large communal system is used, consideration should be given to a roof location, ideally as close as possible to the plant room. It was queried if the system would connect all the buildings or if the apartment would be separate. If buildings are treated differently, how will the apartment be cooled, would a reversible or traditional air conditioning system be used?

If there isn't a communal system in place and electric heat pumps are used, where are the heat pumps going to be situated and how will this affect the elevations?

The amount of PVs shown do not appear to achieve 2030 zero carbon policy standards. Consider using local battery storage with the PVs to optimise its use rather than spillage to the grid.

The Panel welcomed the inclusion of a ventilation and heat recovery strategy but questioned if the overheating analysis had demonstrated that there isn't a need to cool any of the units.

The Panel does not support the use of single aspect units so they would need to be carefully designed, especially those at ground floor level, overlooking the internal courtyards. These units may not be achieving sufficient sunlight levels.

The Panel were pleased with the inclusion of overhangs at top floor level, although some of the fascias were deep.

The significant improvement on the handling of rainwater from the previous review especially with attenuation on site was commended.

The Panel had previously noted that the architecture had got ahead of the engineering and noted that this was being addressed.

On reflection during the closed session, the Panel commented on the affordability to residents of the energy strategy for heating and hot water. The proposed strategy is predicated on achieving the u-values (as proposed in the October presentation) and these must not be compromised during tender and construction.

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

The plans for raingardens and rooftop gardens was welcomed and new elevational changes have improved the scheme. The Panel liked the stepped forms around Lawrence Weaver Road entrances.

The Panel considered the C shape courtyards could have been oriented differently so that the communal gardens were more contained and the overshadowing reduced. As presented, there is not enough contrast between the public and private courtyards.

The Panel noted the high density of the scheme and highlighted the importance of its management and affordability. Additionally, questions about children were raised, for example could the 4-person 3-bedroom homes be located at ground floor level and benefit from direct access to the outdoor space.

The Panel expressed some concern about the back-of-house feel of the main delivery and entry court on the main public road, which still looks unappetising and hard. The retention of the existing ‘in-out-access’ should be reconsidered and other options explored, as it appears to be the ‘tail wagging the dog’. The level of surveillance in this area by the concierge is not likely to be good and should be reviewed.

Questions about how future changes of use for the apartment with its long corridors were raised. How might these changes be anticipated without having to make serious upgrades to the building and future adaptions.

The Panel appreciated the progress made on corner treatment of buildings with the provision of recessed balconies being a more solid design approach rather than often awkward or uncared for spaces.

The richness of the glazed brickwork and other materials was enjoyed by the Panel.

This is a very ambitious scheme, so it is very important it stays on budget and does not lose its quality when built. The Panel recommended the retention of the design team throughout.

The Panel welcomed that the landscape has been better integrated into the scheme. However, some questions were raised as a result of the presentation on health, resilience and climate change. Persistent noise is more than an irritation and can affect people’s health. Consideration should be given to noise coming from plant and hard surfaces, especially in a high-density scheme like this with hard surfaces; vertical vegetation could help mitigate noise and vibrations while helping with heat gain and climate change.

The play areas in residential courtyards may be too close to residents' windows, so there needs to be a careful balance between close provision to homes and managing the potential nuisance.

The Panel considered that more information about tree species would have been useful and should be given further thought.

Concerns about the mechanical ventilation of the underground car park were raised as the Panel were unsure if it was emitting at street level which could lead to localised poor air quality.

The Panel were supportive of the sophisticated water management approach. They suggested there could be more surface rills, some of which could incorporate deeper channels to deal with increasing heavy rainfall events. Rainwater can be recirculated.

The water features and their wetland ecology won't work well in shade and need some sunlight and perhaps a more considered edge treatment to work better. There is a need for a bigger body of water to keep it cool. The raingarden planters need to be deeper.

Consider different types of substrate in the living green roofs which would benefit from greater biodiversity and hold more water.

Panel Conclusions and Recommendations

Generally, the Panel was impressed with the ambition of the scheme and the quality of the applicant team, while noting that its density means the quality must be retained when built and requires heavy management. There had been real progress since the last review in October.

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

1. Great sense of community but consideration should be given to people's behaviour and how this would be managed, particularly for first time visitors and residents that don't know their way around the site.
2. Consider the spaces around ground floor balconies out into the landscape.
3. Evolve the travel plan and recognise behaviour is changing and that will need to be documented and implemented.

4. Design of the car park. Some anxiety about the lack of structure as planned in relation to the layout and cost and the impact of mechanical ventilation
5. Concerns about distances for grocery and goods deliveries and how that would be managed.
6. Suggestions about a loop road instead of the turning head for vans and the possibility of access from the north.
7. Keep working on the vehicle access court design.
8. Develop the basement carpark layout with the building structure
9. Is there too much cycle parking provided for the apartment?
10. Concerns about the location of heat pumps whether individual or shared.
11. Need to address longer term climate ambition and how to make best use of PV-generated energy.
12. Concerns about the number of north facing flats and the need to measure daylight.
13. Consider reversing the courtyards and linking blocks to reduce overshadowing. Roof gardens and colonnade should work well.
14. Consider the impact of noise from heat pumps.
15. More details on tree species would need to be provided.
16. Keep the design team in place through construction.

References

n/a

Next Steps

The Panel would welcome the opportunity for ongoing engagement with the developer and design team as proposals for this site progress.

Attendees

Chair: Robin Nicholson

Panel Members: Amy Burbidge
Kirk Archibald
Luke Engleback
David Prichard
Phil Jones

Panel Support: Judit Carballo and Stuart Clarke

Local Authority: Charlotte Burton, Greater Cambridge Shared Planning
Jonathan Hurst, Greater Cambridge Shared Planning
Sarah Chubb, Greater Cambridge Shared Planning
Bana Elzein, Greater Cambridge Shared Planning

Applicant Team: Eric Holding – JTP architects
Emmet O'Sullivan- JTP architects
Alec Borrill- JTP architects
Colin Brown – Carter Jonas
Hannah Murton- Landscape, planitIE
Judith Sykes – Expedition UK

Appendix A – Background Information List and Plan

- Main presentation
- Local authority background note

Documents may be available on request, subject to restrictions/confidentiality.

Masterplan

