



# Cambridgeshire Quality Panel

Land North of Cherry Hinton – approach to Design Code

Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> December 2021

Virtual Meeting

Panel: Robin Nicholson (Chair), Lindsey Wilkinson, David Taylor, Joel Gustafsson, David Birkbeck, June Barnes.

Local Authority: Rebecca Ward (GCSP), Sarah Chubb (GCSP), Leonie Walker (GCSP), Bana Elzein (GCSP), James Truett (GCSP), Cllr Timi Hawkins – observing, Louise Lord (SCDC) – observing.

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.

## **Development overview**

Marshalls of Cambridge and Endurance Estates jointly promoted this site for up to 1200 homes which includes a new primary school, a new secondary school and other facilities and infrastructure. Part of the wider Cambridge East allocation, outline planning permission was granted in December 2020, and the site is now being taken forward by Bellway Latimer (a joint venture company). The Panel reviewed the outline scheme in January and June of 2018. This review is to consider the approach to the design code which is required to be submitted along with the first reserved matters planning application.

## **Presenting team**

Bellway Latimer is supported by Pollard Thomas Edwards, Woods Hardwick, Strutt and Parker, and Matt Lee Landscape Architecture. The presenting team was:

- Ulrich van Eck - Bellway Homes
- Robin Saha-Choudhury – Pollard Thomas Edward
- Alexis Butterfield – Pollard Thomas Edward
- John Freeman – Woods Hardwick
- David Fletcher – Strutt and Parker
- Matt Lee – Matt Lee Landscape Architecture

## **Local authority's request**

Greater Cambridge Shared Planning asked the Panel for feedback on the evolving strategic elements of the scheme, in particular the key design moves where the code is seeking to enhance the outline application, some of which will require S73 approval as they fall outside the flexibility of the parameter plans. Other more detailed requests were set out in their briefing note, based on the Panel's 4C's, and picked up in the discussion.

## **Declarations of Interest**

Robin Nicholson declared his practice is working on a scheme for one of the applicants, but the link is remote and not thought to be in conflict.

## **Cambridgeshire Quality Panel summary**

The Panel were encouraged by the thoroughness of the presentation and the steps taken to tweak the masterplan and generally improve the consented outline scheme. The proposed approach to the design code is sound, provided these improvements can be well articulated and captured.

The Panel sought clarification on several issues, including on the phasing and construction build out, and whether a separate haul road will be used? On this point the applicant advised that a haul road to the north of the site is proposed and that each neighbourhood will be built out in turn to minimise the feeling of living on a building site.

Timing and early delivery of the primary school was asked about and whether the community hub building will be linked to the school as at Northstowe. The applicant advised on the timescales for the school. It was not thought the hub building would be linked to the school; it will be a separate facility. The Panel supports the earliest delivery of the school.

Who will own and maintain the public spaces, and whether there will be a service charge was asked? This is expanded upon below.

Parking is always an issue – how will residents and visitors park where they want to?

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

There is an opportunity for linking the community hub with the school, perhaps with sharing reception services, similarly there is an opportunity for the GP surgery to also be co-located with the primary school. An example of Northstowe Phase 1 School and Community centre was given. Panel recommended bringing forward early delivery of the primary school and consideration of a phased build.

There are several public spaces in and around the site. How will these spaces be managed and maintained, and will there be a service charge to cover this? Comparing service charges with other developments in Cambridge was thought a good idea and it was recommended that a Community Land Trust, or something similar, would be a

suitable vehicle for managing the landscape, public spaces and potentially the community hub, for the benefit of all.

The tweak in design to the area outside the primary school to include the green and community hub works much better and will be a nicer space for people to meet and greet. Reference to Upton in Northamptonshire was made as a similar design which may be worth reviewing.

The Panel mentioned that the design code should be clear on avoiding long, dark corridors for the flats and recommended the use of deck access to maximise opportunities for natural light, which make them a better place to pass through and perhaps pause with neighbours. Flats should not be single aspect.

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

Historically, there has been debate about the primary route becoming a by-pass for Cherry Hinton – is the applicant aware of this? In response they stated they were and outlined an approach to incorporating the roads into 1, 5 and 15-minute neighbourhoods. This was supported as it places people at the heart of how facilities and places are accessed. The Panel called for greater clarity in the road hierarchy about which roads put cars first and which treat them as visitors. An amended plan will help in making this clearer.

Panel liked the arrangement of the primary route with parking on street and that it was not too straight or linear. Visitor parking and electric vehicle charging points is an on-going discussion with the Highway Authority. Whilst it was thought visitor parking on the primary route would be accepted, EV charging at this stage is not. This was received with disappointment as the Panel would support innovation in new development. Such provision should be provided where people want and need it. Highway issues can be some of the most challenging aspects for a Design Code, yet critical to delivering a successful community.

The proposed change to a single, wide, bi-directional cycle route on the primary route was supported as well as the enhanced cycle network generally. Will improvements outside of the site to key destinations also be made?

The realignment of the primary route works well, however, will this allow for drop-off of school children? Whilst this might not be encouraged, in reality it will happen and should be planned for.

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

The Design Code should develop the local landscape and create diverse open spaces for natural and social places. A concern was expressed that the landscape could become too functional and that landscape should not be pushed to the edge – a legacy of the older masterplan perhaps. The code needs to ensure that nature should be used to build identity and embed biodiversity and that landscape is not seen as separate to character and climate issues

The panel considered that there was a strong landscape framework when it was explained, but considered that it didn't come through clearly enough on the drawings. How can you translate the qualities of the precedent images into design code rules and how do you assess compliance to make sure it happens?

Serious consideration should be given to planting trees early as a meanwhile use, or at the outset of development so that they get established before early residents move in. Similarly, the allotments should be set up to mature the develop flora and fauna.

The language used in the Design Code is critical to delivering the aspirations of the design team and the ‘must’ elements must be clearly detailed.

Car free streets are supported; the design code needs to have a “must” beside them.

Think about using PIR sensors on garages for mews streets and include them in the design code as a “must”. Although there is a cost implication, automatic garage doors can be important in delivering a successful mews that works without cars clogging up the roads.

Reducing the character areas from the previous six to three – village, parkside and gateway – works better and going forward the Panel would expect to see cross sections of these areas as the code develops.

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

The change from providing a small number of homes to Passivhaus standard and the rest to regulatory compliance, to one of enhancing all homes to a higher standard was broadly supported. However, the extent to which this is quantified and the ability to accommodate future changes (to Part L Regs.) will be important to the success of this objective and this must be firmly embedded in the Design Code. The Panel urged that the construction is kept as simple as possible to facilitate continuing high performance.

A gas free site, using air source heat pumps for heat and hot water is welcomed. However, consideration as to how these external units are placed to avoid clutter and noise is important. They can also project cold air if placed near doorways which is not welcoming either. The applicant stated they are thinking about this and recognise it as an issue. Cambridge developments generally place many demands on external treatments for items such as these as well as bin and bike storage. The panel recommended a design study demonstrating how to tackle the appearance of the kit as well as bike and bin storage issues especially for terrace houses. Coding for clutter is important and there is no excuse for not designing it in. The Berkeley homes scheme in Greenwich was cited as an example of where roof space is used for amenity provision, although it was acknowledged that this relies on flat roof designs which is not likely to be widely used in this development.

Has there been thought as to whether a simple electric system in houses is more cost effective, especially with rising fuel poverty? The applicant advised they had considered this and stated that water heating is more of an issue than heating, which informed their proposal.

Think carefully about process and outcomes as SAP is 'a clunky tool'; further thought is needed on this and how it will be captured in the design code. Look at what other Cambridge developments have used. A fabric first approach is fine, but it can be a nebulous term, so this really needs defining in the code.

Rainwater harvesting systems can work well, such as at Knights Park in Cambridge, but they can also be expensive if they fail. The applicant said they are still looking at this and may move towards a more conventional SuDs approach if more cost effective.

Will there be a space for residents to repair or upcycle things, so that residents can re-purpose unwanted items?

### **Specific recommendations**

- 100 pages is welcome for a code but less would be even better.
- Continue to develop landscape as integral to the character of the development and not just something functional or pushed to the edges.
- Be clear on who will own and maintain public parts and consider a CLT or other community model.
- Will there be a service charge, and will it be comparable to other developments in Cambridge?
- 1, 5, and 15 minute neighbourhood approach is supported.
- Continue to liaise with Highways to discuss on-street parking and EV solutions in places that people will want to use them.
- Develop single two-way cycle route on primary route.
- Welcome revised road alignment to enhance public space around primary school and community hub.
- Consider the relationship with the airport site and how that will change over time.
- Be clear on language and what must or should be provided.
- Continue to develop better performance standards across all housing, but ensure it is meaningful and adaptable to any forthcoming changes to Part L Regulations.
- Think hard about heat pumps in terms of noise, clutter, and impact of how they work.

The opportunity for ongoing engagement with the developer and design team would be welcomed as the scheme progresses and the Panel would especially support the attendance of Latimer (Clarion) too as joint developer.

### **Contact details**

For any queries in relation to this report, please contact the panel secretariat via [growthdevelopment@cambridgeshire.gov.uk](mailto:growthdevelopment@cambridgeshire.gov.uk)

Author: SC

Support: JC

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## **Appendix A – Background information list and plan**

- Main presentation
- Local authority background note
- Applicant note

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



Issue to LPA