



Cambridgeshire Quality Panel

Land North of Cherry Hinton: Design Code (and Infrastructure application)

Tuesday 4th May 2022

Virtual Meeting

Panel: Robin Nicholson (chair), Kirk Archibald, June Barnes, Simon Carnes, John Dales, and Lindsey Wilkinson.

Local Authority: Rebecca Ward (GCSP), Sarah Chubb (GCSP), Bana Elzein (GCSP), and Helen Sayers (GCSP)

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

Part of the wider Cambridge East development area, Land North of Cherry is the second site to come forward, providing up to 1200 dwellings, a primary school, secondary school, community hub and other supporting infrastructure. It is located East of Cambridge Airport and contiguous with the suburban edge of Cherry Hinton.

Outline Planning Permission was granted in 2020. Planning Condition 9 of that permission requires approval of a Design Code, which is presented to the Panel at this review.

Presenting team

The scheme is jointly promoted by Bellway/Latimer and designed by Pollard Thomas Edwards (PTE) architects. The presenting team was:

Alexis Butterfield (PTE), Una Breathnach-Hifearnain (McGregor Coxall), David Fletcher (Strutt Parker), and Ulrich Van Eck (Bellway).

Potential Conflicts of Interest

Robin Nicholson declared that his former practice has just seconded two members of staff from PTE, however he is not directly working with either person. Also, June Barnes stated that she is working with PTE on a research project, but not with Alexis Butterfield.

Local authority's request

Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service (GCSP) asked the Panel to focus on several areas in the Design Code, broadly summarised as: -

- Ease of use, navigation, and accessibility of the document
- Logical order and succinctness
- Clarity of key principles both in terms of key strategic site wide elements, character areas and more detailed elements.
- Getting the balance right between rules and flexibility – ensuring the mandatory 'musts' and the recommended 'shoulds' cover the right topics and themes.

Cambridgeshire Quality Panel summary

The Panel had reviewed this scheme previously and commented, amongst other issues, on the need to improve landscape design and integration. This appears to have been taken on board and reflected in the emerging Design Code which was generally well received by the Panel.

These views are expanded upon below, and include comments made in the closed session too.

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

The site will include two schools, a primary school, and a secondary school, yet the code is light on expectations around the bulk and design of these buildings. It would be helpful to set out how these buildings relate to roads and spaces. The Panel had previously indicated that the community hub and primary school should be integrated yet they still appear as separate facilities. No drop off places have been provided either, for which there will be a demand however undesirable, and which could provide part of a combined parking strategy for the market square, for the community hub and school too.

The applicant recognised that there is no graphic for the schools but there will be an expectation in the code that parking and servicing for the schools will be behind the building line and that entrance(s) align with the village green. Drop off points have deliberately not been provided, as with the design at ‘Marleigh’ and in agreement with the Highway Authority, to encourage active travel to the schools. Informal parking will be available on-street for those who do drop off.

No details on phasing are provided, so it is hard to envisage what ‘meanwhile’ provision might be provided. Early delivery of the primary school may reduce this need.

5 per cent of the market dwellings must be custom build, and these are proposed to be provided within Market Square. Will these houses be appropriate to this location or are they of a more relevant flexible typology?

The applicant advised that the phasing programme is still to be fixed and that the custom build requirements will be clarified.

Details on retirement living were unclear, as well as who will manage the public spaces and facilities such as the community hub. The tenure mix was unclear, so it was hard to understand where the affordable units are even if the scheme is tenure blind.

Will parking requirements be met? It was hard to understand allocations, especially for the apartments. Insufficient parking spaces could result in cars parking wherever they can which results in nuisance and, in a worse case, blocking roads for emergency vehicles.

The applicant advised they are still consulting on the community hub, so it is not yet clear who will use, operate and/or manage this facility.

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

It was not clear how the basic movement and access framework was arrived at and whether the hierarchy will represent natural movements, however without the background data it is hard to comment further.

The Panel suggested consideration be given to various scenarios such as what if there were no through route, or how different would the scheme be if every internal journey were on foot or bike? What if there was a bus gate on the primary route? The proposed horizontal and vertical deflections could be replaced with better design. 4.2m (2.1 x 2) seems too much area for the envisaged cyclists who may feel safe on the road.

Think about future travel patterns and what that will mean for access and movement. Maybe residents will have fewer cars, or electric cars, or make greater use of e-bikes in the future so how well can the scheme adapt. Can cycle lane space be repurposed to green space; will there be sufficient e-charging points?

On schools, whilst the encouragement of active travel to the primary school is supported, the secondary school may well have different travel patterns with students travelling from wider afield and greater use of the school for community use and public events.

6.2m roads doesn't feel very residential. Could this be reduced to 6m through good design?

In response, the applicant suggested that the road hierarchy was appropriate, but the cycle lane requirements were fixed by the Highway Authority, who require separate lanes on each side of the road on primary routes. All dwellings will have 2 car parking spaces, generally on plot and apartments 1 space each within squares or at the rear of buildings.

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

Previous reviews had raised concerns about lack of an integrated approach to landscape and this has been addressed, significantly improving the quality of the scheme. The Living Infrastructure concept is supported as a ‘green grid’, and the innovative Ridgeway welcomed. The challenge is to ensure it is developed and secured the final delivered scheme.

At the testing event, it was a missed opportunity that the landscape wasn't included, but a mini test could resolve this.

Has consideration been given to quiet spaces?

Have the levels and gradients on-site been considered for accessibility issue. There are level changes on site, and these should be celebrated, but inclusively.

Will the code apply to the main Airport site too? if it doesn't, it should heavily influence anything produced for that site for parity across the wider area.

The Award Drain was mentioned as a feature, yet little reference made to it as a feature in the code. Could this be further explored?

It was queried whether the church spires in the surrounding landscape can really be seen from within the site, but if so, exploit these views too.

There was a suggestion as to whether so many character areas are needed at all, especially if good architects are appointed to the scheme.

The allotments are a critical space and should be properly recognised.

The housing typologies need to be inclusive to meet the diverse range of potential residents. The typologies suggested are the more obvious development forms, but other options can satisfy the code too. Maybe the typologies are unnecessary?

There should be clear approaches to trees, landscape, and lighting and surveillance of key spaces should be integrated.

Roofscapes are important and there seems to be a lot of Velux windows and Valley gutters which need maintenance and be able to cope with heavy rain events. The applicant explained that the drawings are illustrative, and the code will only seek a varied roofscape. Flexibility of construction and structure that allows roof extensions could be included.

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

The living infrastructure approach was supported and could be developed further.

Consider what the scheme will look like in five and ten years, especially as the airport moves away and the context of the wider Cambridge East is developed.

Set and commit to performance targets, perhaps on heat loss improvements, over time. minimum performance standards for the homes/non-residential buildings could be set a number of ways to provide flexibility in design. The Code should commit to these being checked with Post Occupancy Evaluation for at least 3 years such as max form factor; max kWh/m² for heating/ventilation; minimum self-consumption rates - make home battery storage a condition of having PV (if having to retrofit later...); and minimum levels of solar input from PV & solar thermal (or using PVT).

Heating homes is relatively easy with modern design, it is always the hot water that is more challenging.

The prohibition of PVs because of the proximity to the airport and potential for glare was challenged. Products exist that address this issue as well as the orientation of roofs.

Can embedded carbon be measured, not just for buildings but also for spaces between buildings. Could targets be set for the construction?

How will electric vehicles be charged if not available on-plot? Well situated charging points can serve many dwellings with not that many points. E-bikes are gaining in popularity and so the ability to safely store and charge should be considered.

Passivhaus targets should be allayed, as the approach to provide high quality across the whole site is supported rather than a few houses meeting the standard.

Think about carbon zero requirements through all seasons.

Air source heat pumps can create cold pockets, especially by front doors and are noisy, so those on balconies may need to be re-sited. Could communal pumps be used?

The applicant advised that EV chargers will generally be on-plot. The Highway Authority does not currently permit charges on the highway, but there will also be provision in some of the squares.

Specific recommendations

- Ensure shared expectations can be delivered.
- Ordering of the code needs to be agreed
- Musts, wills and shoulds must be clarified
- Ensure the site is future proofed for the long build-out period and beyond
- Ensure the linkages from the primary school to the community hub and open space are easy to use
- Anticipate secondary school impacts and have a strategy to mitigate
- Include phasing and any 'meanwhile' uses
- Custom build should not be self-build
- Community hub – finalise what it will be and how it will be managed
- Ensure the parking strategy is fit for purpose
- Retirement living and tenure is unclear
- Consider pinch points in road network and adapt
- Provide adaptable cycle lanes for other future uses
- Consider future car travel patterns and adaptations
- Non-vehicle Ridgeway is great, so develop further
- Think about quiet zones and spaces
- Celebrate what you have on-site

- Identify climate commitments and verify through POE

Ongoing engagement with the developer and design team would be welcomed as the scheme develops if the opportunity arises. Given the imminent departure of the Airport and the rapidly changing climate policy, the panel felt that it was important to review the Code after 5 years.

The Panel was also asked to consider the infrastructure application. However, the applicant was only able to offer a snapshot of the various zones, which the Panel found difficult to provide a comprehensive view on. Appendix One sets out the initial thoughts of the Panel on the information they did review. The Panel would be keen to see a full presentation when ready.

Contact details

For any queries in relation to this report, please contact the panel secretariat via growthdevelopment@cambridgeshire.gov.uk

Author: Stuart Clarke

Support: Judit Carballo

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Appendix A – Infrastructure application

Key comments were: -

- Too early to make comment as only a sample area of the site. There is a lot of detail design to be done and should not be rushed
- Is there an excess of accessibility between the parcels along the eastern edge that could be rationalised?
- Define the terms used in a glossary
- Linkages to adjacent communities need more thought as they turn their backs on the development so potential issues around lack of surveillance
- Consider all rainwater movements and heavy rainfall events. Swale-based approach is supported but ensure any underground piping is minimised
- Embedded carbon calculations for the spaces between buildings are important too
- Net biodiversity gain targets need clarifying including soil quality. Is it policy compliant or aspirational?
- Are the allotments sufficiently integrated – could they be more like a walled garden?
- Ensure all dwellings are dual aspect
- Phasing and relationship to future development on the airport is important

Appendix B – Background information list and plan

- Main presentation
- Local authority background note
- Applicant background note

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