



Cambridgeshire Quality Panel

Cambridge North

Thursday 19th August 2021

Virtual Meeting

Panel: Meredith Bowles (chair), John Dales, Lynne Sullivan, June Barnes, Lindsey Wilkinson and David Prichard

Local Authority: Fiona Bradley (GCSP), Annmarie de Boom (GCSP), Bana Elzein (GCSP), Ryan Coetsee (SCDC)

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

The proposed development will comprise three blocks to include 443 residential units (C3), three buildings comprising Class E(g) i/E(g)ii floorspace, multi-storey car park (MSCP) with associated access, landscaping and all associated works.

150 of the residential units will be market housing and the remainder will be Build to Rent.

Presenting team

The scheme is promoted by the Chesterton Partnership supported by Acme. The presenting team is:

Alison Wright (Bidwells) Friedrich Ludewig (Acme) Thomas Soo (Acme), Robert Myers (Robert Myers Associates), Kevin Couling (Hoare Lea), Fiona Batha (Hilson Moran), Mike Salter (Phil Jones Associates), David Long (Brookgate), Ivan Bennett (Brookgate)

Local authority's request

The Cambridge Shared Planning team asked the Panel to consider matters of height and massing, the swale street, the trip budget, ground floor activation and open space at the review.

Cambridgeshire Quality Panel summary

The context of the North East Cambridge Area Action Plan (NEC APP) is important, especially in terms of building heights, density, connections through the AAP and the relationship with existing community facilities but it is crucial that the site can work on its own before the NEC APP area is developed 5 to 10 years later. Connections and access to existing facilities need to be in place to avoid the site being isolated.

The aspiration to make the scheme climate change resilient needs to be much more ambitious to be in line with future policy requirements; the duration of the development means that targets are needed that are in line with carbon reduction targets rather than current regulations.

These views are expanded upon below, and include further comments made during the closed session of the review.

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

The Panel urged the applicant to consider much more ambitious climate change targets to be in line with the targets of the Greater Cambridge Local Plan and the Cambridge Climate Commission recommendations, and future national policy. These targets need to be future proofing beyond 2025 and it was recommended to adopt specific sustainable targets based on the London Energy Transformation Initiative (LETI) 2030 targets for net zero carbon buildings. The current proposal is for a 19% reduction over PartL 2013, which is simply compliant with current regulations. The London Plan already requires a 35% improvement over PartL 2013 and is set to become more stringent.

The provision of shading to the commercial uses along the Triangle with a west facing façade to avoid potential overheating was recommended.

The Panel were concerned about health and wellbeing with single aspect flats facing north east with limited sunlight, and west facing flats with overheating issues. The percentage of single aspect flats is relatively high (about 30 flats), and a consideration of deck access flats could address this.

The use of sustainable materials to reduce embodied carbon was welcomed. It would be of benefit to incorporate specific metrics for the embodied energy as well as other sustainable measures, so that the targets were both understood and could be used to attract investors, tenants etc.

Questions about what the biodiversity targets are for the scheme were raised.

The MSCP would benefit from PV panels on the roof.

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

Given this is a car free development the Panel questioned how connections to existing facilities function and how easy is to walk and cycle to schools, supermarkets, and the centre of Cambridge. There is a specific concern over the affordable housing and the

lack of car spaces- for family units how feasible is it to have no access to parking whilst the rest of the AAP has yet to be delivered? Routes and distances to schools and GP surgeries should be included in the analysis of the site.

The Panel noted the analysis carried out about the proposed community facilities but questioned if there were any plans to improve facilities in the neighbouring communities.

The consultation with existing neighbouring residents was unclear and their input would be crucial to understand the retail offer potential for ground floor activation. It is vital the site is easily accessed from visitors and people working in the area by creating a natural desire line to shops and cafes. Meanwhile uses may be viable if they can attract people into the area in the short term.

It is important to understand the environment for the next 5 to 10 years and what existing facilities are currently available as new residents in the area will be living without those when moving into the development. Therefore, further work would be necessary to understand what goes in and when in terms of community uses and retail and what happens in the meantime in terms of people accessing services. For example, questions about accessibility to GP surgery or health facilities were raised.

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

The Panel was keen to understand the motor vehicular circulation of the development. As shown, all traffic feeding the car park does go through a future phase of the development to the north Cowley Road, but the Panel thought that Cowley Road is the most direct route to feed the car park and asked the rationale behind the decision of not making this a primary route.

The travel budget is a critical issue, the Panel supported the ambition of car use reduction and promotion of sustainable travel, but consideration should be given to what happens to the phasing strategy and road layout until the site is developed.

The Panel questioned the number of the car spaces planned for the MSCP; does it need to be that many? As presented, there is nothing about car clubs or shared

mobility which is fundamental. The MSCP ground floor could become a mobility hub but this should not be restricted to car club, consider cycling hire including electric bikes and scooters among other transport modes. These should inform the transport assessment which should also include the software platform for its management.

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

The Panel questioned what analysis has been done in terms of plot configuration. In relation to heights and massing within the AAP context the Panel thought the scheme could be denser, but not necessarily higher, to create a busy community with an active ground floor level.

The Panel thought that Milton Avenue is extremely wide and wondered if it needs to be and asked the applicant whether features such as colonnades that could provide shelter, cycling parking and social engagement at street level. The urban precedents shown in the presentation are of existing cities that are bigger and denser than this area of Cambridge, and therefore the Panel struggled to see how the anticipated activity in the area will be achieved.

There were questions about the Central Park movements which can be very isolated in the short term and how much the park will be used initially. In terms of the quality of the outdoor space, consider the provision of a MUGA for teenagers in the Central Park. As presented parks and gardens are too manicured and these areas can result in abuse.

From the landscape perspective, the scheme is constrained by physical accessibility barriers which influence the connectivity of the site, so the scale of the development will be experienced from a distance. The scheme is potentially visible from a lot of sensitive and open space sites; the Panel recommended to use a ‘green space settings study’ as a design tool, rather than using landscape as mitigation following a LVIA

The Panel supported the interconnected series of green courtyards and considered important to get the balance right between the private and public niches to avoid possible conflicts from people doing different activities.

To enhance the ecological character and biodiversity of the place, the Panel recommended providing starter plot allotments and edible spaces which would help people appreciate and look after the open space.

The Panel encouraged the applicant to hold onto the idea of the railway being overtaken by nature and favoured open spaces that are less urban and are not too sanitised. This could provide a unique anchor to the character of the scheme as well as providing biodiversity and a connection the site history and was strongly supported. They suggested the provision of different character spaces with the ecological character leading through the scheme.

The open space management is key and the balance between landscape design and landscape management models need to be fully aligned.

To make the Swale Street work there needs to be enough space on the street and be aware of what is being delivered around the street, for example, how much overshadowing the street gets from buildings or how tree planting would work.

A shading study is required.

Housing block design

There were concerns about the massing and the internal open space and how the noise moves around in such dense development. This could generate conflicts between children playing, teenagers hanging out and people using balconies because the noise can revibrate around the blocks. Consider an alternative massing by providing different heights, including more private spaces for family housing- there is a concern regarding larger 3b units in upper floors with little outdoor space.

Despite that ground floor levels apartments are expected to have private areas, the Panel suggested looking at deck access as opposed to having internal corridors because these overheat.

Think about the type of tenure when planning the blocks massing and how these will be managed. Consider separating the build-to-rent units, which could be denser, from the affordable housing. Study carefully the long-term costs of service charge and be realistic about what proposals will incur service charge costs and how this will be distributed.

The efficiency of the layout with two lifts for only 20 flats was questioned. The Panel suggested that different massing options and street patterns could help making this development more desirable and profitable, asked the applicant to consider alternatives.

In relation to the north west boundary edge, the Panel suggested the retention of the tree belt which would help dressing the site and will avoid overlooking the car park.

The Panel was unsure what the vision for the office buildings is, are the offices natural ventilated, does it have an atrium? And wondered what happens if the land use values and market needs change over time.

Specific recommendations

- Consider much more ambitious climate change targets.
- Provide shading to both the commercial and residential uses with a west facing façade.
- Reduce the number of single aspect flats facing north east
- Consult with existing neighbouring residents to understand future retail needs.
- Understand what schools and services are available for new residents in the short and long term and how people access them.
- Analyse the phasing strategy and road layout during the early phases, prior to the AAP site being built.
- Explore options to use the MSCP as a mobility hub and do not limit to car club only.
- The scheme could be denser, but not necessarily higher, to create a busy community with an active ground floor level.
- Consider the width of Milton Avenue.
- Think about providing a MUGA for teenagers in the Central Park

- Use a 'green space settings study' as a design tool.
- Consider starter plot allotments and edible spaces.
- Consider an alternative block massing by providing different heights to avoid noise and potential conflicts between residents.
- Look at deck access as opposed to having internal corridors to mitigate overheating.
- Consider separating the build to rent units, which could be denser, from the affordable housing.
- Think about the long-term costs of service charges.
- The retention of the tree belt on the north west boundary edge would help dressing the site and will avoid overlooking the car park.
- A shading study in the residential courtyards would be helpful

The opportunity for ongoing engagement with the developer and design team would be welcomed as the scheme develops.

Contact details

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

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Appendix A – Background information list and plan

- Applicant's background note
- Local authority background note
- Main presentation
- Overall Plan

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

Overall Plan

