



Cambridgeshire Quality Panel

Merlin Place

Monday 11th April 2022

Virtual Meeting

Panel: Robin Nicholson (chair), Oliver Smith, John Dales, Lindsey Wilkinson, Steve Platt, and Kirk Archibald.

Local Authority: Chenge Taruvinga (GCSP), Bonnie Kwok (GCSP), Bana Elzein (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

Presenting team

This scheme is promoted by Kadans Science Partner and supported by HOK, PSK, Hoare Lea and LandShape. The presenting team is:

Kimberley Brown – Carter Jonas, Colin Brown – Carter Jonas, Matthew Fox – PSK
Edward Joslin – Kadans Science Partner, Ian Fleetwood – HOK, Alan Addison –
HOK, Nilesh Patel – HOK, Gary Clark – HOK, Helen Palmer – LandShape, Jack
Tinsley- Hoare Lea

Local authority's request

Planning officers have asked the Panel to focus on car and cycling parking provision, Milton Road frontage, Cowley Road traffic movement, scale and massing, landscape environment, sustainability, drainage, and biodiversity.

Cambridgeshire Quality Panel summary

The Panel welcomed the ambition of the scheme and were encouraged by the great team put together to bring the scheme forward but questioned how the building will meet the aspirational performance targets. The development is in a prominent location and is expected to set the standard for other developments coming forward in the strategic Cambridge North-East development area.

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

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

The Panel regretted the inability for any party to resolve the serious issues arising from the 5-way junction with Milton Road. The Panel was unable to comment in any detail on the sustainable transport plan, as no modal share data was presented. The transport assessment will include this data, but it would have been useful to understand travel patterns at the review.

The Panel queried the quality of cycle and walking routes to and from the site and how easy, convenient, and safe it is to cross Cowley Road. What facilities for crossing and

gaining access to the south of the site are there, where is the exact bus stop, where are the crossing points and how do they relate to the building's entrances? Perhaps off-site works to these junctions would be necessary to facilitate these routes and encourage more people to walk and cycle.

Consideration should be given to the potential conflict of people cycling and walking within the site, especially at peak times. Within the site, the Panel queried how people access the bike lift. The capacity of the lift was queried, and it was suggested that two lifts, instead of one, should be installed in case one should break down. Has consideration been given to accommodating non-standard bike types, such as cargo bikes or adapted cycles? The physical size of the lifts is important to avoid queues at peak times. Alternatively, the Panel questioned if a cycle ramp would be more convenient than a lift and referenced the Cambridge Station bike park.

On public transport, the Panel questioned what links to bus stops there are and how these look. What can be done to improve these facilities, for example, how comfortable will it be to wait at the bus stop, will there be real time passenger information?

The Panel questioned the need for a car park at all as the site is very well connected with the Cambridgeshire Guided Bus and the nearby North Cambridge railway station. If some parking is required, is 60 car parking spaces too many?

The need for two vehicular accesses was challenged as this could create conflicts with pedestrians and cyclists and the additional space could be better used to enhance the landscape.

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

The climate ambition was supported by the Panel, and they were pleased to see the emphasis on passive design and initial embodied carbon calculations. They suggested whole life carbon performance is measured on an ongoing basis, aiming higher than national standards.

Operationally, the heat pump and PV strategy looks sound and was supported but further consideration should be given to where these units will be located and their life span. How valuable are the PVs for such a building with such a small footprint?

Overheating must be considered in relation to the ventilation strategy. As presented, calculations were very general, so the Panel recommended making a distinction between east and west and north and south facades. Is there is an opportunity to bring more light into the north-facing façade, which will be less prone to overheating.

The embodied carbon targets set are exemplary, however, the terracotta material proposed for the cladding is very high in carbon, therefore alternatives should be considered.

The Panel supported the vertical green walls to the car park but, referencing Singapore, queried whether there was scope for more.

The Panel was very concerned about the fully glazed top floor prow which is likely to have serious overheating issues and similarly for the fully glazed atrium on the east side. The Panel urged the applicant to model this to design out potential overheating.

In relation to the energy performance gap, UCL is reporting performance gaps ranging from 7% to 50% on completed buildings, with an average of 28%, so this scheme should aim higher than the desired target because the British construction industry struggles to deliver high performance buildings.

The applicant explained that their glazing strategy is working towards a 40% benchmark but it is still work in progress. Panel comments will be taken on board and further modelling is necessary with the aim to produce a high performance façade.

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

The elevations are wrapped rounded the corners to avoid trees but the building misses having a front and a back. For example, the west elevation faces Milton Road, a busy and noisy road that might require sound attenuation and would benefit from further shading than is currently proposed. This has science room displays, which the Panel considered to be on the wrong side of the building as people in traffic are not likely to

look across at the building. The southeast elevation could be better articulated and open up the building, with trees helping shade the atrium. The Milton Road façade would benefit from having a calm urban expression as the back of the building.

The landscape is not integrated as an integral part of this scheme; it is a very basic proposal and despite its boundary constraints, the landscape is only seen on the 'leftover' spaces instead of being fully integrated. The starting point should be what the landscape can do for the scheme, and not be an afterthought.

There are positive elements, such as the reduction of hardstanding elements of the scheme, but more thought is needed on the functionality of the open spaces. Such an interrogation of external spaces is key to understanding what planting is needed and whether the pedestrian and social interactions are in the right places.

How the building elevations work in the context of the mature trees as well as the proposed tree planting should be considered. Retained trees should be kept in good condition and a management plan for them should be put in place.

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

The Panel were concerned about what mixed use facilities there will be in northeast Cambridge in the absence of a current plan for the entire site to create a vibrant community. If the place is too sterile, it would be difficult to attract and retain staff.

Social interactions around informal meetings are crucial and suggestions about how the internal layout is configured were made. This could help inform the design of the façade.

Specific recommendations

- Modal share details will need to be provided as part of the next panel review.
- Review the quality of journey experiences, and the detail of routes and junctions.
- Consider providing an additional lift or a ramp for the cycle parking.
- Consider improvements to the Milton Road bus stop

- Is the dual vehicle access point really needed?
- How will the design facilitate the climate targets being met? There is anxiety about performance gap and how this will be avoided.
- A recognition of the orientation should lead to a better building allowing a front and a back.
- High embodied carbon cladding materials needs to be reconsidered.
- Greening up the building is encouraged.
- Explore the possibility of a mature garden that is easy to maintain.
- Review the amount of glazing on the southern corner and the eastern atrium.
- Are the science displays in the right place?
- The landscape should be integrated with the building and not just placed around the building.
- What is the purpose of the external spaces; what is the 'visual amenity' space in terms of operation?
- Consider how trees can help with acoustics and shading.
- Trees need a maintenance plan to assist net biodiversity gain, considering life in the soil as well as what is growing out of the soil.
- Might provision for informal meeting places be reflected in the façade design.

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

Contact details

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

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Issue date: 21st April 2022

Appendix A – Background information list and plan

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

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

Massing Model as AAP

