



Cambridgeshire Quality Panel

Merlin Place

Monday 27th June 2022

Virtual Meeting

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

Local Authority: Chenge Taruvinga (GCSP), Bonnie Kwok (GCSP), Tom Davies (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

Redevelopment of Merlin Place for a proposed commercial development consisting of labs, office and seminar space, café, plant, car parking and soft landscaping (approx. 20,000 sqm).

Presenting team

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

Kimberley Brown – Carter Jonas, Colin Brown – Carter Jonas, Matthew Fox – PSK, Ian Fleetwood – HOK, Alan Addison – HOK, Nilesh Patel – HOK, Gary Clark – HOK, Neil Bancroft – HarrisonStevens, 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 thanked the applicant for bringing the scheme back and for the work and progress made since the previous review of 11th April 2022, especially in relation to landscape and sustainability matters. However, there were concerns about the size of the building footprint, and the precedent it sets for other sites coming forward in the strategic Cambridge North development area. There needs to be a 3D modelling of this building in relation to the wider masterplan to understand its impact in this part of Cambridge.

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

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

The Panel questioned if there are any long views of the massing and height for context with the wider masterplanning. The applicant explained that a study is currently underway, and these views will form part of the landscape assessment. Deciduous

trees will be planted along Milton Road and Cowley Road, and the northern section of the building will experience better lighting and transparency levels in winter as a result, whilst some existing pine trees are to be retained in southern part of the site.

The North-East Cambridge development area will see enormous transformation, from a current business park environment to one of a more urban feel, which will be addressed by the emerging masterplan, but what contribution will the Kadans scheme make to this new urban area, especially in relation to comfortable pedestrian and cycling movements.

The Panel was very concerned with the massing of the building and highlighted the lack of space around the building, the buildable area of the plot has been maximised and therefore the quality of the space around its perimeter is too restricted and lacks civic generosity.

The Panel appreciated the elevations responding to orientation and enjoyed the idea of solid elevations when travelling north up Milton Road transitioning to more transparent elevations when travelling south.

The landscape design approach is sound and significantly better than the previous scheme through protecting existing trees and providing new ones in a more sustainable manner. A landscape management strategy must be embedded in the planning application.

As a result of the large footprint of the building, which is too big for the plot in the opinion of the Panel, the public realm has been relegated in its importance and good external social spaces are lacking. However, the pocket garden on the southern corner will not work as intended. The Panel suggests this area be dedicated to supporting biodiversity.

Hedgerow havens were supported, and they should be planted alongside trees to enhance the biodiversity provision.

Consideration should be given to how the building can adapt in future years, projecting forward to 20 years' time for example. The applicant explained that this is a concrete framed building, because of the requirements for the laboratory science and noise and vibration impacts. Studies have been completed on office versus laboratory space adaptation, and the car park could be reduced and used as an office space in the

future, if parking no longer needed, so ceiling heights have been increased to plan for this.

The building presents many rounded corners and the Panel asked if the idea of asymmetry versus symmetry had been considered at the southern end which might resolve the transition from one elevation to the other and make a more distinctive building.

In relation to the ground floor, the Panel asked whether moving the café to the south of building would have provided more comfort for users, whilst moving the access to the northeast corner would make it better connected. The applicant explained that the advice received from their consultant's WSP is that a south entrance would be an unsafe environment because it could create conflicts between pedestrian and vehicles. Additionally, the masterplan is showing an open space and possibly a sport/public building diagonally opposite to the north-east corner, hence the café is located to the north.

The top floor glass balustrade would benefit from some refinement and could have a planted edge. The seminar room could usefully be an accessible to all social space with a roof garden on the prow.

Consider how staff get from the cycle store into the building. Are the offices, showers, and locker rooms easily accessible for all?

The Panel recommended the involvement of a local artist early in the design process that could help with the use of colours and conveying the image of what is going on inside the building in a more most dynamic way. The red terracotta colour and general 'redness' of the building could be too 'cosy' and the exploration of other parts of the colour spectrum could create something more sophisticated.

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

The Panel were pleased to see that the cycle store has been moved to the ground floor level to provide better accessibility to the building.

Plans do not show any off-site works for access and therefore questions of what Cowley Road would look like, where crossing points will be located and what provision for cycling and walking were raised. There is no information on what the provision for walking and cycling might be and therefore, without any improvements, how the site will achieve a 43% cycle mode share?

Improvements to the Cowley Road junction were suggested. It is important to understand where people and staff are coming from and how the scheme can help with the last 100m of the cycling and walking journey and how these will work in the future. Consider what walking and cycling journeys from the station will be like from day one, before the rest of Cambridge North is developed, and other connections are made.

The double vehicular access and its two cross overs are not ideal for pedestrians arriving on public transport. The idea of the Copenhagen crossing is supported but this is normally used for much narrower spaces; the access roads are very wide, so consideration should be given to the detail design and attractiveness for those walking and cycling.

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

The Panel congratulated the applicant on the amount of work and measurement done on all sustainable aspects of the scheme, especially on the embodied carbon for the materials. They were surprised by terracotta being a lower embodied carbon material compared to some other more traditional façade materials, so welcomed its inclusion. (Following the meeting there has been discussion about the need to include the stainless steel or other support structure in this assessment).

The inclusion of PVs and the larger array was welcomed. Consider hard wiring them into the plant which could possibly improve the carbon and heat generation of the system.

The Panel was pleased that the elevations recognise their orientation and change as the building goes round. The Panel were pleased to see the science behind treating

the different orientation of the building but were unsure whether the southern glazed prow, has sufficient overhang to provide adequate shading.

The WELL Building Standard could further demonstrate the building's performance.

If the building doesn't perform well in the future, as intended, is there any mechanism in place to address that? The applicant said that they would be carrying out soft landings.

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

For the café to work on the northeast corner, there should be a pedestrian and cycle crossing, and it should be visible and clear how this is accessed. There is a danger the entrance will be lost behind trees when viewed from further away. How wind will impact at ground floor level will also be essential for the success of the café as it should not be exposed to winds or feel a windy place. Will the surrounding buildings impact on the wind when they are eventually built?

In relation to internal arrangements, how will disabled and non-disabled drivers access from the car park into the office and how will disabled people visit the building in general; will there be disabled bays for visitors, or do they have to use the staff car park? If the intention is to attract the general public into the café, for example people with buggies, the route must be safe, accessible, and pleasant.

Is there potential for the café to have some exhibition space, or for school visits for example, to communicate the message of the work going on in the laboratory building? The involvement of a local artist who could involve the community with an art installation that maybe is visible at night-time and changes colour.

The lighting of the walking routes to the railway station is not very pleasant at the moment. It's very important in attracting tenants into the building to make them feel safe by providing clear signposting to bus stops and better lighting solutions along the route to the railway station.

If there is going to be a creche facility, really think about where you put that and how parents and staff arriving with babies, small children and their associated kit such as buggies.

Specific recommendations

- In the absence of civic space consider what the development is giving to the wider community?
- Offsite crossing points for walking and cycling beyond the red line needs to be resolved to ensure it is safe for pedestrians and cyclists.
- The pedestrian and cycling route to Cambridge North Station is not great, how will this be managed until further improvements are made needs to be thought through.
- The detail of the double vehicle access needs to be designed to be pedestrian friendly; although it is a Copenhagen crossing style, it needs more detail.
- Make sure entrances are visible for pedestrians and cyclists.
- Consider a WELL Building Standard assessment certification.
- Think about wind impact on the ground floor when you enter the building and how this will impact on the café.
- Landscape approach is sound but needs a tree and landscape management plan.
- Given the restriction of potential social spaces, prioritisation should be given to biodiversity net gain.
- Think about the tension between symmetry versus asymmetry at the southern prow to make a distinctive building.
- The elevation rhythms were appreciated, but is the red just cosy? Could an artist help make it more dynamic?
- The parapet around the top floor edge has the potential to make the top of the building better designed and could be planted.
- Consider a dynamic night-time signature in discussion with a local artist and the local community.
- What is the access for disabled staff and other visitors and where do they park their buggies, etc.

- On reflection the Panel asked if the roof space could be accessible for outdoor seminars and also be accessed by staff and the public.

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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Appendix A – Background information list and plan

- Main presentation
- Applicant's background note
- Local authority background note
- Cambridgeshire Quality Panel Report, Merlin Place - 11th April 2022

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

East Elevation

