

# **The Greater Cambridge Design Review Panel**



**Pre-application ref: PPA/22/0028, 22/50531/PREAPP**

**Babbage House, Castle Park, Cambridge**

**Thursday 25 May 2023, Hybrid meeting**

**Meeting venue: Meeting Room 1, Mandela House, Cambridge, 4 Regent Street,  
Cambridge, CB2 1BY**

**Confidential**

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 [Greater Cambridge Design Review Panel](#) provides independent, expert advice to developers and local planning authorities against the four core principles of the Charter: connectivity, character, climate, and community.

## **Attendees**

### **Panel Members:**

Russell Brown (Chair) – Founding Partner of Hawkins\Brown Architects  
Ian Bramwell (Character, Architecture) – Director, Mole Architects  
David Knight (Character, Connectivity) - Director at Cake Engineering  
Parthena (Nopi) Exizidou (Character, Climate) - Net Zero Transition Lead for the British Antarctic Survey  
Vanessa Ross (Character, Landscape) – Chartered Landscape Architect, Director, arc Landscape Design and Planning Ltd  
June Barnes (Character, Community) – Housing specialist  
Nicki Whetstone (Character, Conservation) – Associate at Donald Insall Associates

### **Applicant & Design Team:**

Jenny Page, Director Planning, Turley  
Max Kettenacker - Director, Allies & Morrison.  
Paul Eaton – Partner, Allies & Morrison  
Vernon Phillips - Development Director, Brydell  
Yasmin Khan-Osbourne - Analyst, Brydell

### **LPA Officers:**

Bonnie Kwok – Principal Urban Designer/Panel Manager  
Katie Roberts – Panel Support Officer  
Katie Christodoulides – Principal Planner  
Leonie Walker – Urban Designer  
Sarah Cheng - Senior Conservation Officer

### **Observer(s):**

None

### **Declarations of Interest**

None

### **Previous Panel Reviews**

None

## **Scheme Description**

Proposed refurbishment of the existing three storey office building, roof top extension to create a fourth storey and four storey rear extension.

## **Site context**

The site lies within the Castle and Victoria Conservation Area. A number of trees are covered by Tree Preservation Orders. The eastern boundary of the site adjoins a Scheduled Ancient Monument (Castle Mound & Civil War Earthworks). The site lies within Flood Zone 1 (low risk) and is within the controlled parking zone and Air Quality Management Area. The neighbouring properties at Allways House and row of terraced properties along Victoria Road are designated as important to the character in the Conservation Area.

The site has been identified as an Opportunity Area in the Greater Cambridge Local Plan- First Proposals under Policy S/OA: Opportunity Areas in Cambridge site CH Shire Hall and Castle Park.

## **Planning history**

None relevant to note.

## **Summary**

The panel welcomes the site visit and detailed presentation by the consultant team, including sustainability targets. The panel broadly supported the proposals; and the strategy to retain a good part of the structural frame, so their comments were limited to matters of detail. The proposed massing is reasonable and could be increased, given that the existing mass is sufficiently tall to have 'disengaged' with the height of Allways House and the terrace houses to the north. The corner mass presently has no particular relationship with Chesnut House, across Victoria Road, and this 'corner relationship' should be considered within the proposals.

The panel welcomes how the current proposals that reduce in scale and mass towards the neighbours to the north, along Victoria Road and Allways House.

The panel supported the use of flat roofs, to offer the potential for renewal generation, green roofs, accessible roof terraces and plant area sufficient for air forced pumps. It did suggest that the north facing roof terraces might be less successful and could be a source of nuisance to the neighbours so that a larger roof terrace facing south, over Allways House, might be more successful.

All the panel felt that creating as much permeability as possible into a 'landlocked' part of the site was important, and that a new, highly glazed entrance partly addressed this issue.

The panel had a range of views as to whether a walkable gap between Allways House and the redeveloped Babbage House was necessary. The panel felt that it was important that the programmed improvements to lighting, signage, cycle storage, building canopies were part of a comprehensive planning application, alongside the transformation of Babbage House.

They also welcomed the preparation of a masterplan, and would like to have sight of this. They suggested that consideration of how Triton House might be redeveloped (even in the long run) is an important design consideration for the form of Babbage House. The panel would also urge the planning authority to encourage the City Council, as owners and operators of the car park, to take a more active part in developing a masterplan for the wider site.

On climate change, the panel would like to see standards and target figures set out the earliest stages. The external space between the pavement and the buildings needs to be designed alongside the ground floor elevations to create a memorable corner.

Finally, the future of the scheme. Could it be brought into the scheme, with a more public use, like a café? This would provide a more 'civic' face for the whole site on to the main road but also to the courtyard areas of the business park.

## Detailed comments

### Character: Landscape

The panel asked if there were proposals for external lighting to the redeveloped building and wider estate. The client reported that there were proposals to upgrade and rationalise the existing lighting across the site, including new external lighting to the building. They also are developing a programme, with A&M, for new signage/branding/wayfinding around the wider site and the upgrade of existing canopies etc.

The panel also asked if there were any proposals for harvesting rainwater. The client explained that it was difficult to find a space for storage tanks between the existing trees on the constrained ownership (outside Cambridge City Council's carpark) but they were looking to other forms of attenuating the rainfall, using green roofs etc and to obtain as many credits for water conservation as possible.

The panel suggested that Allways House could have more of an accessible (public) function and the open space to the rear (facing the carpark) could be improved. The current proposals result in a blank façade or louvered doors from the proposed servicing facing Allways House, could this arrangement be improved? Increasing the roof terrace and planting could assist? The architects need to be careful that the substation does not necessitate a run of louvre doors next to the proposed entrance.

The retention, protection and care of the significant trees is welcomed but needs to be managed carefully during the site works and should therefore be condition of the planning consent.

Currently the roof terraces are north facing and overlooking the neighbours' gardens, could these simply be green roofs and a wider roof terrace provided adjacent to Allways House where there is a better aspect.

The headline message on landscape is to carefully consider the valuable space between the pavement and the building line. It is a really prominent site for

pedestrians and car drivers so it should not be left as proposed which removes all planting, nor should it simply filled with low maintenance shrubs. The design/functions inside the ground floor, the cill height, the hard surfaces and/or planting should be carefully considered to be memorable with designed planting and an appropriate management regime in place.

The panel asked if the prominent tree would still be visible, looking up Mount Pleasant. This view of the tree should be improved. If there is a wider gap beside Always House this view will be further improved.

### **Character: Architecture**

The panel agreed that the additional massing of the building could be taller; provided the massing still steps down and away from its neighbours (as currently proposed). The current treatment of the corner limits the pavement to the minimum, and an alternative treatment of a corner building (some options were presented) could 'mark' the corner while still creating meaningful space in front of the building.

The current CGIs show the building clad exclusively in brick; the panel suggested that colour or pattern or other materials (e.g. glazed brick) could be introduced to provide a more memorable building, as suggested on the precedents presented.

The panel also suggested that the two elements of the building could be different heights, or have different elevational treatments, to address the different contexts and aspects.

### **Connectivity**

The client confirmed that the cycle hub is to be delivered at the same time as the redevelopment proposals for Babbage House. The requirement for cycle provision for the development will be provided in the hub, so the planning applications will be linked. There remains the concern that the cycle hub is in a basement and is a fair distance from Babbage House. Can cycle provision closer to the application site be increased.

From a connectivity point of view a publicly accessible link from the corner of Huntington Road and Victoria Road would be beneficial. Could it be provided down the side of Allways House? (The panel's views were divided on the provision of a wider gap here although they all agreed that the current proposals was not working well. The consultant team explained how the tree roots made it difficult to site the substation anywhere else, but could the gap either be removed or made large enough for pedestrian access.

From a wider masterplan perspective, the lack of permeability of the site is an issue. The panel urge the applicants to talk to the City Council to bring the future of the carpark, and its highway engineering, into the long term masterplanning of the site.

As with the other topics, the connectivity needs to be considered as part of a wider masterplan so that the future redevelopments and improvements (albeit long term) can be taken into account.

## **Community**

The panel welcomed the presentation at this early stage and supported the clients efforts to engage with the local community (a public consultation event is planned for 1st June) and individually with the neighbours.

It will be important to carry out a noise study to check that the air source heat pumps are not a nuisance to the residential neighbours. The aim of the project should be to enhance the pedestrian experience as they walk around this (currently) blank façade. Opening up the windows, planting to the back of pavement, lighting, colour and interesting materials can all add to improve this experience.

The infilling the corner, and replacing the current unsightly building element, would increase and rationalise the floorplates but will squeeze the pavement to the minimum requirement. The architects might look at alternative forms of massing at the corner that might maintain some external space on the corner.

## **Climate**

The panel welcomes the proposal to re-use the building and the thoughtful assessment of what can be reused, and what needs to be removed. It is good to see that the client has engaged a specialist sustainability adviser, and that the carbon cost has informed the decision making from the earliest stages.

The panel welcomes the targeting of BREEAM excellent as a standard but would like to see a broader range of other sustainability targets e.g. the re-use of materials from the demolition, a bio-diversity net gain, balancing the potential for natural ventilation on a busy road and controlling solar gain with large windows etc.

## **Conservation**

The panel support the idea of re-using the building, but it is important to consider the proposal in its wider heritage (as well as future masterplan) context. For instance, is it possible to re-introduce some of the historic routes and views across the site. It is important to consider the relationship with the neighbouring properties e.g. the new substation could be a lower building to create a larger, visual break with Allways House. Consideration of the wider masterplan, and particularly the treatment of Triton House should also inform how the relationship with Allways House is addressed; it currently sits uncomfortably against both of its neighbours.

Any way of improving permeability into the site on this corner, either through or around Allways House would always be welcomed.

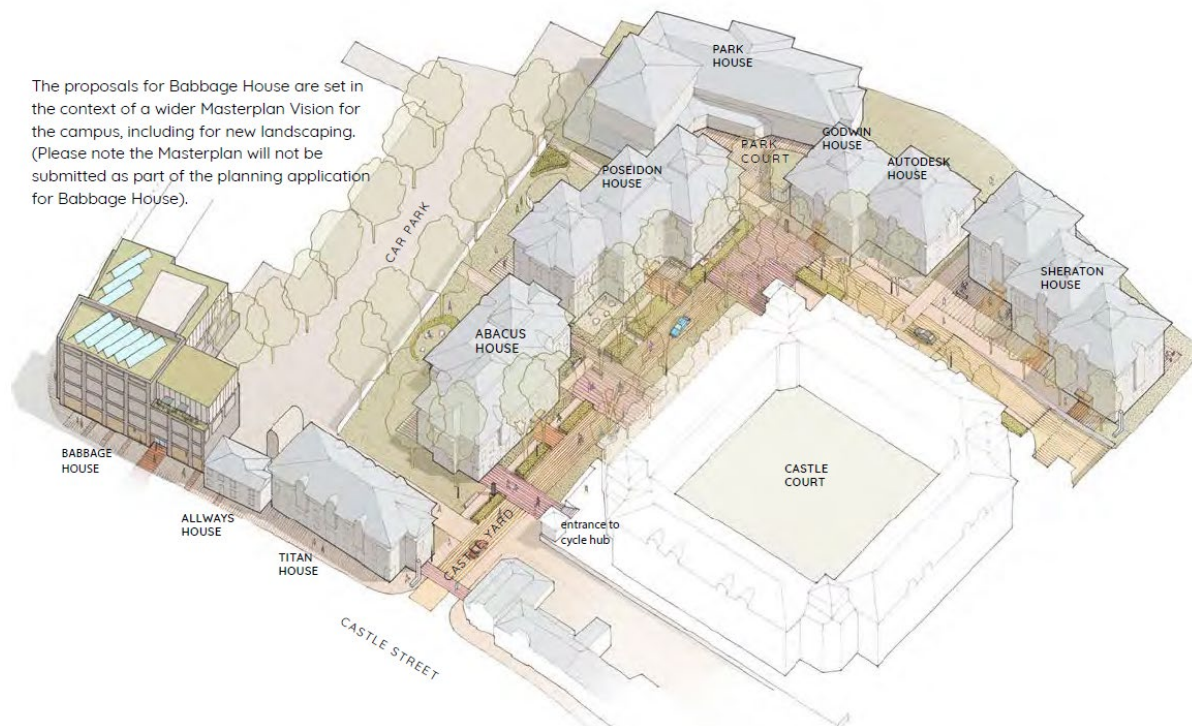
The massing of the proposed extended building should be subject to a good quality visual impact assessment (including proposals for Triton House).



## Masterplan context



The proposals for Babbage House are set in the context of a wider Masterplan Vision for the campus, including for new landscaping. (Please note the Masterplan will not be submitted as part of the planning application for Babbage House).



*Proposed masterplan – extracted from the applicant's DRP presentation document 19.05.2023*

## Ground floor



DRAFT 17.05.23

BABBAGE HOUSE PRE-APP MARCH 2023

*Proposed Ground Floor Plan – extracted from the applicant's DRP presentation document 19.05.2023*

## Disclaimer

*The above comments represent the views of the Greater Cambridge Design Review Panel and are made without prejudice to the determination of any planning application should one be submitted. Furthermore, the views expressed will not bind the decision of Elected Members, should a planning application be submitted, nor prejudice the formal decision-making process of the council.*