



# Cambridgeshire Quality Panel

Land adjacent to Netherhall Farm, Worts'  
Causeway, Cambridge

Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> July 2023

Mandela House, Cambridge

Panel: Robin Nicholson (chair), David Birkbeck, Elanor Warwick, Phil Jones, Lindsey Wilkinson, and Simon Carne.

Local authority: Kate Poyser.

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**

This development site (identified as Site GB1 in the Cambridge Local Plan 2018, under Policy 27) is situated along Wort's Causeway, on the south-east edge of Cambridge and has outline planning permission for up to 200 dwellings (Planning Ref: 20/01972/OUT). To the south of the site lies Site GB2 (known as Eddeva Park), which is proposed for 230 dwellings. Together, these two developments will provide around 430 new dwellings.

Currently agricultural fields, the development site wraps around a small group of buildings, which make up Netherhall Farm. Some of these buildings are classified as Buildings of Local Interest. Green Belt land lies to the east and Netherhall Farm Meadow Country Wildlife Site lies to the west, where there is also an Area Tree Preservation Order. Worts' Causeway is a known bat commuting route.

Cambridge City Centre is just under three miles away, and Cambridge Station and the Biomedical Campus/Addenbrooke's Hospital even closer.

The Panel previously reviewed the development proposals in November 2019, and looked forward to hearing how their previous recommendations had been considered in the latest iteration of the scheme.

## **Presenting team**

The scheme is promoted by Cala Homes, supported by JTP (Architects), LDA (Landscape Architects), and Carter Jones (Town Planning). The presenting team was:

- Neil Farnsworth – Head of Planning, Cala Homes
- Alexandra Deol – Land Director, Cala Homes
- Simon Hoskin – Senior Planning Manager, Cala Homes
- Joshua Cherry – Associate Architect, JTP
- Dan Tassell – Associate Landscape Architect, LDA
- Justin Bainton – Partner (Planning), Carter Jones

## **Local authority's request**

Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service asked the Panel to focus on several issues during the review summarised as: -

- Transition of the eastern boundary from urban edge to rural landscape.
- Connectivity with the adjacent GB2 site and wider urban areas, especially by cycle and foot.
- The need to promote walking and cycling above motor transport.
- Landscape buffer between the site and existing properties on Beaumont Road.
- Appearance of side-on dwellings on west side of principal street.
- Response to the existing setting and designations; and
- Amount of hardscape versus soft landscape.

## **Cambridgeshire Quality Panel summary**

The development benefits from being close to the urban facilities of Cambridge City whilst also enjoying the rural edge and views of an undulating landscape.

The Panel were generally encouraged by the progress made since they last reviewed the scheme but re-iterated and offered several further views and recommendations for the applicant to consider, which could help make this an even better place to live.

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

Several points of clarification were sought by the Panel on the following issues: -

- On the eastern edge, can you walk directly in front of the houses, or should you walk along the landscaped edge? The applicant advised that whilst you could walk in front of the houses, this would mainly be for their access and the intention would be that people would be guided towards the path along the landscaped edge.
- What materials would be used for the adopted, unadopted roads and informal paths? The applicant advised that this specification is unresolved currently as discussions with the Local Flood Authority and the Highway Authority had

resulting in differing expectations for permeable and non-permeable surfacing. The applicant's preferred approach is to keep as much of the highway, pathways, and landscaped areas as possible as unadopted space so that the specifications and quality of these places can be controlled and maintained by them and their appointed maintenance/management company. It was acknowledged that waste service vehicles would only drive on roads built to adoptable standards, which are likely to be Tarmac, whilst the unadopted spaces could use other materials to add to and help define their character.

- Would there be cycle storage that also provides space for cargo bikes and e-bike charging? The applicant advised that the housing would have larger garages or dedicated garden space to accommodate bikes (and bins), and the apartments would have cycle stores. It was hoped that electricity points would be in place to allow for e-charging in the bike stores. Post review, it was advised that Cambridge Local Plan 2018, Appendix L requires cycle parking to be located at the front of the house or within a garage and should be at least as convenient as the car parking provided.
- Would there be integrated bin stores? The applicant responded that yes there would be. There is no intention to have stand-alone bin stores within public spaces.
- What is the hardstanding in the south-east corner? It was advised that this relates to the water main infrastructure and will be incorporated into the design to reduce its impact. Initially it will be used as the site sales area.
- It is not clear how upper floor apartments are accessed and some appear single to be aspect which is not ideal.

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

The development seems to have a good tenure mix and feels manageable with the affordable housing element being interesting and not too different from the market housing. Questions were raised around how the spaces come together, who stewards them, what do people see and who owns and manages the semi-public spaces.

Further articulation of how the east-west strip works would be helpful as well as door step play. What opportunities are there for people to meet and gather?

The parking courtyards seem to just be car parks, which is a wasted opportunity to provide a better quality space and encourage other interactions.

Short streets or paths with housing were supported as a design feature as residents often get to know each other more easily and form a micro-community within the wider development.

Think about placement of doors and windows and what people can see and hear from them not only for informal surveillance but also to help them feel part of the wider community. Some of the apartments appear to just look at cars or car parking – can this outlook be improved?

Could links to external community infrastructure be improved (see Connectivity section below).

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

The north-west corner offers an opportunity for better connectivity to the urban area and its infrastructure, such as schools. Although it is understood that there is a ransom strip currently preventing a footpath through, future use of compulsory purchase powers (CPO) could facilitate a link and therefore consideration should be given to future proofing the development by designing the area with a footpath within to the site to the pond and potential future external link. An example of Ireland was given where there have been recent successes in using CPO powers to improve accessibility in older developments.

Improving accessibility to the pond could also have amenity value and potentially act as an attractive feature for both the existing and new communities if a footpath link is established later).

The Panel supported the use of passing points on the causeway rather than the widening of it, as it is a more appropriate response. Speed limits should be appropriate to the setting – 20 MPH to match the Causeway- and for the people who use these streets.

It was highlighted that the 400m walk to the nearest bus stop had been calculated from the front of the development site to the bus stop, but residents living at the rear of the

development could have to walk up to 1km to the bus stop. Cycling should be a primary form of transport and not only be an easy choice within the site but also across to the neighbouring GB2 development and link with the good cycle network in Cambridge. It was not clear if the applicant is making any financial contributions towards off-site cycle infrastructure to support this.

Active Travel England have published a checklist which the applicant is encouraged to use.

The 'spine road' should be called and thought of as a primary street and a place. It was questioned whether gable ends are animated enough, and perhaps whether there should be more character areas?

The traffic flows on the primary street, and across the development, will be low, so it was challenged whether there is a need for a segregated foot and cycle path. Cyclists will probably be comfortable cycling on the road, so this space could be better used for other purposes such as green infrastructure and widening the 2.5m eastern cycle/pedestrian route. Any cycle routes should be hard surfaced.

Does the whole of the loop on the primary street need to be adopted? Provided there is sufficient adopted highway to turn a refuse vehicle, the remaining highway could be unadopted, which allows greater scope to make more interesting spaces through use of informal planting and other layouts.

The wiggle on the cycle path seems unnecessary as it approaches the Causeway. While acknowledging this is a Highway Authority requirement, it is envisaged that cyclists will straight line the route, closer to the tree, which would be self-defeating.

There should be a consistent application of walk and cycle routes having priority over side roads, known as a Copenhagen Crossing.

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

It was reiterated that removal of the segregated cycle path could create more space for planting and rain gardens which would have climate benefits, especially as the landscaping looks too pinched within the development.

It was not clear what the extent of PV use will be? Will they only be on the apartment flat roof building, which seems a standalone odd roof design amongst the pitched roofs of the rest of the development.

The loss of hedgerow to facilitate access points shouldn't be underestimated and be thought about carefully.

17% biodiversity gain is policy compliant with the extant Local Plan, but it is noted that this will increase to 20% in the emerging Local Plan, albeit ahead of the common standard of 10%.

It was acknowledged that the development will be gas free. However, where will the external units for the heat pumps be placed and what the impact of their operation will be, was not stated. Anecdotally, it was suggested that many of these external units are bigger than they need to be.

It was asked about what capacity the applicant has for timber frame production and whether they intend to use modular units? The applicant responded that whilst they had had issues with their recently acquired supplier, they have resilience through other suppliers they use. They do not plan to produce off-site modular units.

The use of water within the site can add greatly to character and amenity, as well as having good environmental benefits. Attention to careful management of site soil during construction was encouraged.

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

It was recognised that green infrastructure and landscape had been given serious consideration and that targets were suitably ambitious. The landscaped places should be cherished and not seen as a constraint.

The applicant was encouraged to think about the pond again and whether it could have greater amenity value, recognising the need for balance between reserved and accessible spaces.

The grassland strategy was welcomed.

Green infrastructure is a series of multifunctional, integrated spaces, but too much of it has been pushed to the edge of the development, because of the approved

parameter plans. It is a basic, rigid layout and the idea of a landscape 'buffer' is an outdated approach and should be considered as a rural edge space instead. The green link is too formal and has a lot to do; it is too forced.

The applicant should better align the landscape strategy to the built strategy and develop more sections though the site. The building, landscape and setting needs unlocking to create more incidental and interaction spaces.

Could the 30m "buffer" be negotiated down to free up space within the development to link the edge to the inner areas better, noting that 30 metres green eastern edge is within the Green Belt where inappropriate development is not acceptable. There can be no dwellings here. Maybe the "rural edge" could be reduced to 20m in place and be more permeable and perhaps include edible and community spaces or facilitate space elsewhere for these uses. The primary street should be greener.

The rationalised character areas were noted as an improvement from the earlier iteration of the development. Could there be a potential fourth character area for the terraces on the northern edge? As currently designed, the gardens are quite mean and north facing; could these be re-thought and perhaps be given bigger front gardens that are used by residents as their main outdoor space, especially as they would be south facing. An example of a Barratt development in Bristol – Hanham Hall – was cited, which has been successful in encouraging residents to use their front gardens in this way.

Most of the housing should open doors onto the primary street.

Boundary treatments need careful consideration. Where gardens present boundaries to the street they should be of high quality, and it was recognised that these will probably be brick walls and not wooden fencing. Could there be greenery within these boundaries, so they are not 'too hard'.

Garages facing parking plots are not nice and reminiscent of 1970's parking plots. It was stated that this is being looked at.

The Farmstead area should consider access and parking arrangements again. There are too many links from the one access road, and the parking route for the maisonettes is unattractive and undesirable. More access streetside is required. It is possible that



the parking courts could look poor and dated and potentially act as an attractor for unsocial behaviour.

### **Specific recommendations**

- Elevations and site sections would be helpful.
- The impact of the Parameter Plans is constraining and perhaps could be challenged to be more flexible, especially on the treatment of the 30m buffer.
- Think about where social interactions could happen, and the role of the east-west strip.
- Consider how to avoid encouraging anti-social behaviours and where teenagers might hang out.
- Can the north-west corner have greater amenity value and be future proofed for a connection to the neighbouring streets.
- Speed limits should be consistent within the site.
- 'Streets' not 'roads' and the walk to the bus stop will be longer than 400m for most residents.
- Apply the Active Travel England checklist.
- Consider the south-east corner and treatment of the hardstanding area.
- Question the need for a segregated cycle/footpath and the Causeway 'wiggle'.
- More planting and greenery needed generally.
- Is there a need for as much adopted road as planned?
- Prioritise walk/cycle routes over cars at side junctions.
- Celebrate water more within the development; and
- How extensive is the use of PVs and consider impacts of heat pumps.

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](mailto:growthdevelopment@cambridgeshire.gov.uk)

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Issue date: 1st August 2023

## Appendix A – Background information list and plan

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

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

### Current Masterplan (source: applicant's presentation)



#Nota: L'andamento del sito è illustrativo.