

The Greater Cambridge Design Review Panel



East Barnwell Redevelopment, Cambridge, CB5 8WL

27th April 2023

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
Anne Cooper (Character, Architecture/Conservation), Director at AC Architects
Parthena (Nopi) Exizidou (Character, Climate), Net Zero Transition Lead for the British Antarctic Survey
Angela Koch (Character, Community), Founder, Imagine Places
Dave Murphy (Character, Connectivity), Transport Consultant, Associate at Momentum
Fiona Heron (Character, Landscape), Founder of Fiona Heron Limited

Applicant Team:

Simone Marsberg, Development Manager, (CIP) Hill Partnership
Jim Pollard, Senior Housing Development Manager, (CIP) Cambridge City Council
Molly Savino, Development Officer, (CIP) Cambridge City Council
Mark Bentley, Landscape Architect, TEP
Paul Belton, Planning Consultant, Carter Jonas
Jennifer McIntosh, Architect, BPTW
Neill Campbell, Architect, BPTW

LPA Officers:

Joanne Preston, Principal Urban Designer/Panel Manager
Katie Roberts, Panel Support Officer
Aaron Coe, Principal Planner (CIP and SCIP Projects)
Bana Elzein, Principal Landscape Architect
Anne-Marie de Boom, Consultant urban designer (CIP sites)

Scheme Description and Background

The proposal is for the relocation of the existing bowls club, MUGA, tennis court, and the demolition of all buildings (across three sites) including the Local Centre, and the provision of a new Local Centre, library, nursery, public open spaces, and residential dwellings.

Site

The development site consists of 3 parcels of land within Cambridge city centre in the Abbey Ward. The sites are currently occupied by a mix of uses. The sites are located on the southeast and southwest corners of the Newmarket Road and Barnwell Road junction.

Site 1 is occupied by an inaccessible lawn area, a bowling green and a publicly accessible tennis court. It is surrounded by a high hedge and to the west a linear strip of grassed land with dense mature tree planting. The entire parcel is designated as Protected Open Space.

Site 2 is occupied by housing to the east, a 1960's run of shops, a separate library and associated servicing for all of the uses. The retail and library form part of the designated local centre and the northeast corner of site 2 falls within the R6 site allocation.

Site 3 is occupied by the East Barnwell community centre and includes a MUGA and a community hall as well as associated servicing. This site also has established planting on three sides on and off site. This site also forms part of the R6 allocation.

Site 2 and Site 3 are separated by the Christ the Redeemer church site. This also forms part of the R6 allocation, but the Church are not currently pursuing the redevelopment of their land, but the applicant has been asked to be mindful of how the proposals would impact on the development potential of this site. The R6 allocation also includes an existing block of affordable homes. This will also remain.

The East Barnwell – Newmarket Road junction is subject to proposals by the Greater Cambridge Partnership (GCP). The public consultation period ended on 20th March 2023 and the GCP are currently reviewing the responses.

Site 1 is designated as Protected Open Space. All the sites are within Flood Zone 1 (low risk) and low risk from surface water flooding.

There are a number of trees within the sites, none of the trees within the site or surrounding the sites are subject to tree protection orders.

Policy context and considerations

In respect of the principle of development the key issues to address are:

Protected Open Space

Site 1 forms an area of protected open space (SPO 01- 0.56 hectares), which is designated within the Open Space and Recreation Strategy (2011) as an area of environmental and recreational importance with a quality rating of 55%. The emerging proposals will need to satisfy the requirements of policy 67. The amount of protected open space should not be reduced, and the quality/ accessibility of the open space must be enhanced. If protected open space is proposed to be lost across the three sites, then it should be re-provided within a 400m distance of the original site. The existing site consists of 5615m² of protected open space. The proposals must demonstrate that the existing protected open spaces are being satisfactorily replaced in terms of quality, quantity, and access. The emerging pre-application proposals involve relocating the bowls green to the car park area which currently serves Abbey Leisure centre. The hard surfaced car park area was incorrectly included within the Elfeda Road allotments protected open space designation (A05- 4.29 hectares). Pre-application discussions have commenced in relation to the proposed relocation of the existing facilities and the applicant is engaging positively with the relevant stakeholders.

The Proposal

The Site 1 proposal includes the community building, library and residential uses at ground floor. Subject to resolving the issue of re-locating the existing facilities and re-providing the protected open space, the principle of the proposed uses are acceptable.

The majority of Site 2 is a local centre and is required to provide appropriate uses in accordance with the requirements set out within Cambridge City Local Plan Policy 72. At ground floor the proposal consists of a pre-school facility and commercial uses within the area defined as a local centre, the uses proposed at ground floor are all local centre uses and are in accordance with policy 72. Residential uses are proposed on the upper floors which again meet the requirements of policy 72. The northeast corner of site 2 is outside of the area designated as a local centre and falls within the R6 site allocation. The wider R6 site was allocated as part of the Local Plan for approximately 75 dwellings. Therefore, the principle of residential development on this part of the application site is considered acceptable.

The entirety of site 3 is within the R6 allocation where residential development is supported. Therefore, the principle of residential development on this site is supported.

Early pre-application discussions have taken place between officers and the developer team on the emerging proposals. There have been four meetings since the middle of last year that considered the emerging design for the three sites. There was a further meeting on relocating existing facilities.

Declarations of Interest

Russell Brown's architectural practice, Hawkins Brown is working on projects with Hills Construction in London.

Previous Panel Reviews

This is the first time the scheme has been reviewed by the Panel.

Greater Cambridge Design Review Panel Views

Summary

This is an important project for the local area. It can help solve a number of existing problems with the area and has the potential to create a really exciting community centred development. The landscape and architectural designs are at an early stage, but the panel had a series of concerns as well as possible solutions, based on the discussion of the emerging proposals.

It is difficult to easily unify the two new public spaces across such a busy road. The proposed road improvements by the GCP will provide a second controlled crossing at the junction of Barnwell Road and Newmarket Road (NMR). This will improve connectivity, but this will still be a major issue for uniting the regeneration sites. A second issue is the short distance between the shop frontages and the back of pavement on Site 2, so that most of the public space will be on Site 1, and a “town square” will be difficult to achieve on the second site. However, visual links can be made across the road by matching cladding materials, building forms, street furniture and planting across the road.

The obvious change in scale of the buildings will help unify the sites; forming a “gateway” across the road. The panel supports the introduction of taller buildings here, which will be mark this at as a local landmark but also because this is also a sustainable use of the scarce resource of developable land, in a highly accessible location.

The panel had a number of suggestions as to the detailed competing needs, of people’s homes and a busy public realm and how the definition of public and private space can be clarified, without being too “defensive”. For instance, ground floor flats should be avoided where they are fronting directly onto public spaces, and the servicing, refuse collection and parking management on all three sites will be critical to their success as places.

Finally, the panel would urge the client to quickly set ambitious sustainability targets for the scheme, so that they can influence the designs from the outset. The certified Passivhaus standards are a very good way of minimising energy demand that can be tested and measured. The panel recommends that they be used by any provider of social housing to tackle fuel poverty.

Detailed Comments

Climate

The panel asked what sustainability targets has been set up for the project to accompany the significant social benefits.

The current status is that the client is looking at the implications of using the Passivhaus system and has pilot projects where they are trying to apply Passivhaus principles without the construction being certified. The panel is concerned that fully certified Passivhaus is being offered by other applicants in the city and is being implemented by other local authority housing providers, to address problems of fuel poverty in social housing. The applicant's concern is that the certification process adds cost and delay to the design and construction process. It is the view of the panel that the certification process is needed to monitor and ensure achievement of the standards of air tightness, insulation, construction detailing and that this should be implemented as a priority for any projects involving Cambridge City Council, and particularly social housing.

The current thinking is that each dwelling will have air source heat pumps, that all the commercial/leisure accommodation will achieve BREEAM Excellent standard, and renewables are being investigated.

The open spaces will be noisy, so it is important that any semi-private or private open space is protected from the road noise and pollution. 25% of the dwellings are single aspect with limitations on natural ventilation and natural light that can impact health and wellbeing, particularly if these are planned for long term occupancy.

Overall, the scheme is impactful in terms of embodied carbon for construction and operation. The client should consider looking at PAS 2080 around the management of embodied carbon during construction.

It is critical to set a strong sustainability agenda from the outset, with clear targets for embodied carbon, renewable returns, building form, fabric performance, provision of sunlight/daylight and natural ventilation etc. It is important to build this thinking in to the earliest design stages where they can influence building form, scale, aspect, and orientation.

Architectural Character

Bramwell Road is busy with traffic for most of the day, and the junction with Newmarket Road causes significant queuing. It currently forms a major disconnection between the two parts of the proposed public realm that will be difficult to unite. The bowls club and tennis court are really inaccessible, so that they do not operate as public open space, and the attendant parking is a further issue.

The row of shops on Site 2 function well but the open space between the shop fronts and the pavement edge is too narrow, and too dominated by the busy road to really become a civic space or a new “town square”. Similarly, the car park at the rear of these shops (on Site 2) is quite chaotic, with the backs of the shops and the restaurant/café downgrading the view from the flats opposite (which are to be retained).

The regeneration of Site 1, by relocating the bowls club to a more appropriate site, and then linking this with the redevelopment of Sites 2 and 3, is clearly an appropriate and highly beneficial use of this site. Also, the proposals have clearly been developed with a wider view of the community facilities and connections.

The allocation of different sizes of flats and their proposed tenancies (private sale, private rental, social rental, assisted living etc.) is an important generator of the architecture and the design of the urban realm. The appropriate siting of different

types of homes will be critical their success: this needs to be carefully considered from the outset.

The panel were still concerned as to how the two public spaces can be effectively (and safely) linked across the busy Barnwell Road. The new pedestrian crossing proposed as part of the GCP plans will help by adding a new crossing and better managing the junction, but unless the link could be more central or becomes as shared surface, then making the two sites feel like a single linked space will be difficult.

There are also issues with how you enter the two car parks (Sites 1 and 2). It is important to be rigorous in the definition of fronts and backs of the shops, community facilities and flats; so that service areas are not in front of residents living rooms or bedrooms (particularly at ground floor). This is already an issue to the rear of the shops on Site 2.

In the same way the separation of public, private, semi-private and semi-public space needs to be very clear and easy for everyone to understand. It also needs to take careful account of the needs of pedestrians, cyclists, wheelchairs, pushchairs and new forms of electric bikes, scooters etc. This level of discipline should inform the next stages of design. There are opportunities to use the frontages to Newmarket Road to introduce commercial space at ground floor that may help resolve some of these issues.

The proposed massing seems quite reasonable, and could be taller or more intensive, if this releases ground floor space. For instance, the break in the new blocks facing Barnwell Road on Site 2 could be reduced to a double-height public route.

There should not be ground floor residential accommodation (particularly bedrooms) facing open public areas (like the back of the pre-school block or to the west of the block facing NMR on Site 1). Including additional height could help resolve these current conflicts.

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On Site 2, the conflict between the rear of the shops; with servicing, deliveries, refuse storage, facing on to the residential front doors could be improved by the introduction of two storey maisonettes, with limited accommodation at ground floor and bedrooms on the first floor.

Landscape Character

There are a number of issues with the vision of linking across the busy road and opening up the green landscape (on the west) to face the hard landscaped (town square) to the east, across this physical barrier.

The external spaces need to be carefully analyzed in terms of the value of the existing trees and planting, sunlight penetration, wind, traffic noise and pollution to make sure they will be popular and well used. If new or existing planting is used to screen noise and the visual impact of vehicles, then this will interrupt the visual link between the two spaces.

There needs to be more consideration of how the buildings, and the public realm immediately surrounding them, interact. The suggestion that winter gardens might provide private external space facing the busy roads needs to be developed further, as part of the consideration of the architectural forms.

The location of the car parking spaces, whether they are empty or busy during the day, and how they are controlled is a crucial part of the design of the public realm.

Given the scale of the buildings (which could increase), the tree planting needs to include larger specimens (fewer trees in the right places). The scheme needs to be considered as part of the wider green infrastructure, as it has been considered in the distribution of public space and leisure activities.

The space in front of the shops is too narrow to easily create a town square but the café could have a more extensive external seating area (more like a plaza).

Links could be made across the 2 sites with matching hard landscape materials, lighting, seating, artwork, similar plant species etc. When driving through this space you should be conscious of passing through a “green space” with planting on both sides rather than 2 distinct spaces.

There is concern that the space behind the shops is not actively linked to the plaza around the café, and that the car parking and rear servicing will continue to blight this space.

There remain concerns over the pedestrian path along the eastern boundary which is neither safe nor attractive, and needs to be brought into a comprehensive scheme.

Community

This project has significant social benefits, in that it is looking to create a local centre in a low-density regeneration area, combined with the provision of much needed housing. The client team explained how the choice of facilities and their location of had been arrived at through extensive consultation. How the community facilities are funded and managed was also an important consideration. So, for instance, the community is keen to see a better grocery shop, the dispensing chemist is popular, as is the café. The County will operate the library.

The busy road is a problem in trying to link Sites 1 and 2 to create a viable local centre, attract commercial uses and create accessible and popular community facilities. It will be helpful to look at how the facilities and the public realm is used throughout the day and night, and at weekends. If the community centre is operated by volunteers, for instance, it will not always be open. Keeping the commercial uses close to their current location will help their viability.

The frontage to Newmarket Road is as important (or more visible) than the frontage to Barnwell Road and will get more footfall. Could the lower floors facing Newmarket Road be better exploited?

It is a less successful location for ground floor flats, against a busy road and pavement (including bus stops). There is a need to clearly identify the lobbies and entrances to the residential buildings, and how they relate to the public spaces.

Connectivity

The wider Greater Cambridge Partnership (GCP) scheme proposes a signalisation of the junction of Newmarket Road and Barnwell Road with significant cycle provision and better pedestrian crossing facilities at the junction itself and improves the wider east/west corridor provision for active travel and public transport, however Barnwell Road will still be major barrier to linking Sites 1 and 2.

Incorporation or amendments to the existing pedestrian crossing (upgrading to a Toucan crossing to accommodate cyclists, enhanced surfacing etc) would be beneficial in addressing this – incorporating how and why people will travel between the two sites. Similarly, there may be scope to narrow the kerb-to-kerb carriageway which may reduce the extent of severance through removal of the central hatching in part. These elements would be worth discussing with GPC.

The ambitions are for permeability and connectivity to the wider community. Whilst there are links from Site 1 to the southwest, and potential access from Newmarket Road, these links lend themselves to access to the parking area or junction access. Desire lines from Rawlyn Close and Newmarket Road that provide visibility and support direct pedestrian access to the 'centre' may be more beneficial in creating a connected site.

The plans would benefit from being presented against the proposed GPC layout for different modes of transport; in terms of access routing to the wider network indicating the proximity of cycle parking and pedestrian links to bus connections. This will help ensure these modes are integrated as part of an overall highways strategy. It is understood that residential cycle parking will be provided at the relevant frontages, with close and easy access to the new cycle improvements which is welcomed.

Delivery and servicing

The refuse collection for residents is to be facilitated through underground bins. The location of these should be within a suitable distance and the spatial requirements for collecting confirmed with the highway authority.

The delivery bays are located via the main vehicular access points and will serve the retail / community uses. Consideration should be given to the visibility and use of these in practice in respect of Site 2 and appropriate management / detail in respect of dual usage of pedestrian space. It will be important that these are easily accessed, including by residential users.

Car parking and sustainable travel

A low level of parking is welcomed to reduce car dominance and support active travel, however this should be carefully considered against the limited parking controls in the area to avoid parking overspilling into the surrounding area. Clear and appropriate demarcation of parking provision for the intended user (community/ retail/ resident) will be important which can be supported by the layout itself and the materials and detail implemented.

The GPC improvements provide an excellent opportunity to improve connectivity for public transport and active modes, however there is further opportunity for the site itself to support these modes as a catalyst from the outset. Provision of mobility hub space that promotes access to the regular bus service and integrates with cycle parking / e-scooter spaces / hire to provide a range of options as an alternative to the private car would be useful for access by residents and users of the community space, recognising that such journeys to the site are intended for the local area.

Site 3

Site 3 proposes residential use only and includes a north-south pedestrian link. This link may be in danger of creating a narrow and enclosed link with some areas of little overlooking and be unattractive, particularly at night. This may be best addressed by 'flipping' the location of the vehicular access to the western boundary to widen the

boundary edges and reducing the length of any narrow section and make the parking area less secluded. This link could be of suitable width to accommodate cycling and provide permeability to Peverel Road.



Ground floor plan taken from the applicant's presentation

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.

Contact Details

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