



Westbrook Centre, Westbrook Drive, Cambridge, CB4 1YG (22/50543/PREAPP)

14th September 2023

Confidential

The <u>Cambridgeshire Quality Charter for Growth</u> sets out the core principles for the level of quality to be expected in new development across Cambridgeshire. The <u>Greater Cambridge Design Review Panel</u> 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:

Maggie Baddeley (Chair) – Planner and Chartered Surveyor

Angela Koch (Character, Community) – Founder, ImaginePlaces

Sarah Hare (Character, Architecture) – Formerly Design Director at Haworth

Tompkins

Hero Bennett (Character, Climate) – Director, Sustainability Consultant, Partner, Max Fordham

Lindsey Wilkinson (Character, Landscape) – Landscape Architect

Applicant Team:

Lisa Liu, Architect, Reef Group
Sam Potter, Architect, Reef Group
Olivia Frew, Development Manager, Reef Group
Tim Price, Director of Planning Savills
Amelia Robson, Senior Planner, Savills
Paul Shirley Smith, Landscape, Camlins
Belinda Blasdale, Transport, Velocity
Holly Wheeler, Sustainability, Chapmanbdsp

LPA Officers:

Joanne Preston – Principal Urban Designer / Design Review Panel Manager Katie Roberts – Executive Assistant / Panel Support Officer Alice Young – Senior Planning Officer Elizabeth Moon – Principal Urban Design Consultant

Scheme Description and Background

Brief Description of the Proposal:

The proposal seeks the partial demolition and redevelopment to create new employment floorspace (Class E(g)) and associated physical works to the layout of the Site to deliver revised access arrangements, hard and soft landscaping and associated infrastructure.

Site Context:

The site is a brownfield employment site, comprising four three-storey 1980s office blocks arranged to create internal courtyards, together with under-croft parking. The existing buildings are encircled by Westbrook Drive which serves as the sole access to the Lilywhite Drive residential development to the north-west. Along the southern and northern and part of the western and north-eastern boundaries are mature trees. These are within the application site; they are not protected.

The site falls within the Mitchams Corner Opportunity Area (LP policy 22) and adjacent to the Mitchams Corner District Centre. Directly east of the site along Westbrook Drive, there are four two-and-a-half storey dwellings. To the east of the site fronting Milton Road within the District Centre, there are two storey semi-detached properties which are in a mix of residential and commercial uses, six of which are Buildings of Local Interest (nos. 9-19 (odd) Milton Road). In contrast to these domestically scaled buildings, to the north-east and adjacent is the Cambridge Manor Care Home and Fellows House Hotel, both of which are four storeys in height and span a larger footprint.

To the north, along Gilbert Road, the form reverts back to a domestic scale comprising two-storey detached and semi-detached dwellings set back from Gilbert Road that have a well vegetated character. To the east, there is the Lilywhite Drive residential development which is comparatively higher density, with two five-storey blocks of apartments sited directly adjacent to the site, and otherwise, three-storey townhouses.

To the south-west are the Victoria Homes Almshouses which are single storey in scale and noted as important to the character and appearance of the Castle and Victoria Conservation Area. The Victoria Homes Almshouses site is designated as protected open space (LP policy 67) and is categorised as private amenity green space. Corona Road's three storey Victorian terraces are located to the south of the site, all of which are in residential use. The Student Castle student accommodation scheme also abuts the site boundary to the south.

The Castle and Victoria Conservation Area boundary skirts the southern site boundary; the site can be seen from within and forms the setting of the Conservation Area; the most notable views are from Corona Road to the south and from Victoria Road/ the Victoria Homes site to the south-west.

The key site constraints are:

- Mitchams Corner Opportunity Area
- Site abuts the Castle and Victoria Conservation Area
- Buildings of Local Interest along Milton Road
- Surrounding residential terraces and buildings

Proposal Description:

The applicant is seeking to redevelop the existing employment site to create a life sciences' campus with office/ lab space (40-60% split), co-working spaces, life science public exhibition space and a publicly accessible café while retaining the existing under-croft. The proposal comprises three buildings connected via a single storey podium housing the café and reception. The proposal would incorporate cycle storage and car parking in the under-croft area beneath the building. The proposal would lead to a significant redevelopment of the site, including new public realm and landscaping works.

The applicant has entered into a Planning Performance Agreement with the Local Planning Authority for Pre-Application advice on the redevelopment of Westbrook Centre for Life Sciences.

Officers have attended four meetings with the applicant to date which have focused on the key principles of the development - its scale, massing and layout with a focused session on landscaping and sustainability.

In each iteration of the scheme, the scale and massing have been marginally reduced at the upper levels, to attempt to alleviate officer concerns and reduce the prominence of the development and better integrate it within the surrounding context.

Three options have been tested using whole life carbon assessment: retention of the building with retrofit; retention of the building with infill of the centre and an additional floor; and new build with reuse of the basement, substructure and highways (the preferred option). This has influenced the layout of the proposed development. Work on the whole life carbon assessment is ongoing.

Planning History:

- 23/02142/SCRE EIA Screening Opinion under the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2017 for Partial demolition of existing buildings and erection of new floorspace (Class E) above retained basement level and alterations to the site layout including revised access arrangements, hard and soft landscaping and associated infrastructure works. – EIA required.
- 22/50543/PREAPP Demolition and redevelopment of existing buildings.

Declarations of Interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

Previous Panel Reviews

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

Greater Cambridge Design Review Panel Views

Summary

In a high quality, well-informed presentation, the design team has demonstrated that this project - termed 'The Platform' - is a well-considered 'Factory for Science' that has sought to integrate landscape and buildings.

As a commercial developer, Reef has sought to display a clear understanding of the (as yet unknown) future occupiers' needs of the development, and respond to the intense competition in the life sciences' marketplace. The project seeks to reflect that market's potential in its vision for this project: as an exemplar in the community, its function is very worthy.

However, while recognising that planning policy protects employment and in the context of the expressed vision, the Panel concludes that the scheme ought not only to be flexibly designed but that is should better recognise the site's unique location and lean into its predominantly residential, mixed use surrounding context. The overriding impression of the proposal is that all of the buildings are in the centre of the site and the community has to move around it. An analysis and balance of public and private spaces, alongside the creation of pedestrian connections would help the building to integrate into its context. Fundamentally, it is unclear how connected all of the buildings need to be. With the café being the only built element that serves the community, adding other commercial uses such as a creche and/ or a gym - that also create employment - should be considered.

There has been some strong thinking around sustainability, retrofit and hybrid solutions although as yet, the Panel is not convinced that in sustainability terms, it really would be better to demolish the existing buildings. In sustainability terms too, the transport strategy presented is not progressive; there is too much car parking and not enough cycle parking proposed. The development deserves to be car-free.

In conclusion, the Panel questions several fundamental issues arising from the proposal:

- Why the three buildings are joined together by a central podium;
- The use of the under-croft for car and cycle parking;
- Plant being placed on the roof of each building, when the rooftops could have a range of uses, including extensive on-site renewable energy generation with more PVs, workspace, and open space for employees to enjoy views; and
- The scale, height and massing remain unresolved for building 3 more work is required in terms of its proportions, and the extensive setbacks/ terraces that are currently difficult to read.
- The lack of on-site co-located / shared community uses serving employees and the resident population in the local area.

These matters are all connected e.g. the extent of setbacks will be influenced by moving plant to the under-croft, which in turn is dependent on reducing car parking. All of them need to be looked at again, and in series; each decision made will inform another.

Therefore, despite the expressed intention to submit a full planning application in October 2023, the Panel recommends responding to the comments and recommendations made in the review, as set out in this report, and reviewing the emerging project accordingly.

Climate

Environmental Sustainability

Reef have explained that UBS will hold the asset; they have 'ESG' (environmental, social and governance) targets at their heart; leases will be monitored against those targets. But turning to first principles regarding the environmental performances' impacts and the design team having stated that they always start with asking the questions, 'can we use the existing buildings, can we retrofit?', the Panel is not convinced that in environmental sustainability terms, it really would be better to demolish the existing buildings. The best outcome in carbon terms would be likely to

be a deep retrofit. There could also be alternative uses in carbon terms that could change the picture underlying the analysis for the current scheme. Assuming a fully 'greened / zero carbon' grid in the presented Whole Life Cycle Carbon Assessment from day one is considered unrealistic.

The Panel understands the explanation in the review that there is a quantum issue in this project for re-use: according to Reef, the existing buildings do not provide a viable solution. On considering possible extension, the existing frame could potentially be re-used although the envelope needs renewing, as well as the MEP. The internal finishes to the building are not appropriate either, according to the design team. Floorspace would have to be cut and carved for an extension; this would have worked physically but a second-class development unsuited to the Cambridge market would be created. Also as regards a hybrid solution, the design team have stated that they did look at townscape but the resulting buildings would have been significantly taller and bulkier than the review proposal - passing reference has been made to how one or two additional floors of labs could be added onto the existing buildings, or two office floors.

But the Panel notes that in terms of hybrid analysis - e.g. deep replacement of one building and level changes to accommodate offices in an existing building – results have not been documented in any great detail. The reason given is that Reef had started from a commercial position, asking how options could deliver the same quantum as redevelopment, as a life sciences' building needs a certain floorplate. Looking at a hybrid option too, and its adaptability, the applicant team had concluded that it could not work because of the current floor to ceiling heights and the grid spacing does not work for life sciences' floorspace. The Reef team considers that if retained, the existing buildings would be likely to have to be rebuilt in 30 years' time; until then, they could be used as offices, and/ or provide space for life science start-ups with desk-based research. The current proposal apparently does allow a major element of the building to be retained; Arup (who built the existing development and who have provided data to the design team) have concluded that it should be possible to re-use the foundations and under-croft floor level but not the slab above.

In accepting that these are carbon-intensive buildings, the Panel is of the view that the presented analysis around whole life cycle carbon assessment is misleading for making the argument for the proposal in carbon terms. While the Reef team wants to create a scheme that will be adaptable for 100 to 150 years or more, the Panel's view is that even if looking at the position 20 years' ahead, it is not possible to know what the situation will be. Currently shown are higher levels at the start for new build but over 100 years, the differential would decrease. All options would be very similar in terms of embodied carbon at the end of 120 years. For whole life cycle carbon, the new development would be 40% less than retaining the existing buildings. But in comparing operational carbon for the existing buildings, a hybrid scheme and the new development – and looking at emissions – the Panel questions the value of the conclusions presented, particularly in light of how no sensitivity analysis has been undertaken to date in relation to when / if the ambitious targets are missed.

The Panel notes that a pre-demolition audit has been conducted and an analysis of waste undertaken; the wish to re-use as much as possible e.g. ceiling tiles, and bricks from the facades in hard landscaping is supported. Before demolition, the Panel recommends looking into plant refurbishment/ recycling because there are many demolition contractors who can re-use existing equipment/ materials.

Turning to the project's wider environmental strategy, Arup and the design team are looking at reducing water usage to below standards and have generated a sustainable drainage and rainwater strategy that is developing well in the Panel's view. This is particularly with regard to the proposed water strategy that is observed as being more progressive than other similar schemes. The Panel does however warn that achieving five water credits is likely to prove to be very difficult; more detail on 'how' would be welcomed.

In terms of the contextual approach to the detailed design of the proposed buildings, the Panel endorses the principle of wanting to relate to the surrounding domestic scale. The Panel supports the proposed design incorporating punched windows in the façades but at the same time, is concerned that the carbon impacts associated with the façade are difficult to reduce; this should be investigated in more detail. The

Panel also supports the design team's proposal to explore the scope for disassembly and would welcome more information on this as again, this is difficult to achieve.

With regard to the roof top positioning of MEP and on-site energy generation, the Panel is disappointed that the design team has only referred to trying to maximise PV, with the numbers and extent of panels to be quantified in the planning application. There has been no clear justification given for why plant is on the rooftops. The Panel is strongly of the view that if the extent of parking beneath the buildings were reduced or preferably entirely removed, rooftop plant could be moved to the huge under-croft and more PVs could be added – a significant number, assuming their careful arrangement. There would be many options for placing plant in the under-croft that would fit well with the 120-year longevity that is being aimed for, in terms of it being 'on the floor' and far more easily accessible for maintenance. The current siting of plant also raises the concern of the Panel in terms of managing noise from e.g. mechanical ventilation; it is reassuring that the design team is looking at this matter already.

In assessing the overall sustainability of the new development in terms of BREEAM categories, the Panel accepts that 'excellent' is an appropriate certification for the proposal as a life sciences' project. The Panel notes too that best endeavours will be used for achieving 'outstanding', despite the design team stating that this is difficult to do, due to the energy demand being huge, compared to offices. Nonetheless, it is disappointing that more information has not been provided around BREEAM-related embodied carbon optioneering that should have been undertaken by now i.e. to know that embodied carbon has been central to the proposals.

Landscape

The Panel considers that the basic concept of the landscape proposed is right in terms of seeking to retain the site's currently informal character; other life sciences' developments coming forward in the combined authority area by way of comparison often only have a fringe of landscaping. The concept of a neighbourhood 'doughnut', wrapping around the proposed buildings, needs more work in terms of boundary treatments and what parts of the site are shared/ private/ community spaces, with consideration being given to the interfaces between them. Presumingly, there will

have to be spaces that are only for employees, with everything else in the landscape being as visible and accessible as possible. The design team should therefore consider what is visible/ physically accessible across the entire site.

The whole of the proposed landscape needs to be thought about more comprehensively – including for example, the edges to the service road, and how to design that road to be fully accessible. Not only the road but also all of the shared surfaces should become places that allow connectivity, particularly with different options being designed for different stretches of Westbrook Drive (including the design team already wanting to green the approach from Milton Road). Westbrook Drive needs to be looked at not as a road - due to the constraints that then imposes – but as part of the landscape. In short, blurring its boundaries - 'bleeding' them – is sophisticated work that in the Panel's view, needs to be undertaken.

The Panel finds the current approach to the safety of proposed open space to need reconsideration; it is not agreed that passive lighting and surveillance will be provided by an active frontage in building 3 on Westbrook Drive and as a result, residents walking home to Lillywhite Drive after dark will not feel safe, as it will simply be a vehicular route. Working on a proposed lighting strategy may not be enough.

There is also a contradiction in terms of whether the whole of the landscape around the buildings would always be open and accessible, or whether the landscaping on the south western side would be closed with rollable bollards and fencing outside of working hours. There must be clarity, in terms of defining public/ private access from the outset, as the stated design intention is one of activating the 'ground floor' and creating a landscape that is open to everyone.

In terms of planting, the Panel notes that brown, not green roofs are shown; they will not be accessible to employees or visitors. There will also be 'greenery terraces' that are not accessible. Elsewhere, a selection of species is being proposed that can survive drought with no irrigation. Edible elements would be a very positive addition, likewise a community garden, i.e. the Panel recommends a move away from a commercial landscape design, more towards one for community.

In terms of the material presented that shows the proposed landscape in some of the views around Westbrook Drive, the Panel suggests that they do not accurately represent the site – drawings and visualisations need to show a site that is more inhabited and active, with well-overlooked spaces.

Character

Context

Landscape and visual impact assessment (LVIA) material has been provided to the Panel but nothing presented on the verified view from Castle Mound. The Panel therefore is not in a position to comment on the applicant team advising that the proposed development cannot be seen from Castle Mound in summer; the conservation officer wants to be able understand the view when trees are not in leaf. From the LVIA material that has been provided, the Panel concludes that the proposal is not overly dominant in other more distant views. Additional work ought to be undertaken on sectional analysis, and considering the buildings' height and massing in relation to the site's boundaries.

Buildings

The design team has advised the Panel that with regard to the proposed massing of the replacement development, a great deal has been done to understand the domestic scale of its surroundings. But the Panel's response is that in the replacement buildings, there is 'too much of this particular function in this particular location'; a huge amount of workspace is proposed in what is a tight community in the surrounding, predominantly residential streets. The original buildings caused a problem in this regard and this proposal in its single use does not alleviate that problem in urban design terms. The proposal is not a good solution in terms of the proposed massing - the Panel is not convinced that the architecture fits in - and its isolation that is caused by the infrastructure running around much of the site's perimeter. A large mass of new building, with a road running around much of it, also now creates a very different problem around access to homes in Lillywhite Drive.

If the proposal had been considered by the Panel at masterplanning level in relation to how to organise the site, it is likely that different combinations of buildings would have been considered. For example, it may be that there should be two buildings not three, perhaps created by merging buildings 1 and 2, with building 3 (deliberately the tallest, adjacent to the Fellows House Hotel) potentially remaining separate. While buildings 1 and 2 as currently orientated and designed sit well on the site, there is a particular issue with building 3's scale and massing (it is some 65m x 40m). Its proportions are unconventional and not classical; it is top-heavy and has chipped-away setbacks, and does not look well-composed.

The Panel is unclear as to how and why the idea of the podium 'courtyard' has come about, when separate building entrances may be preferable for security - each will have a secure line defining where private space starts. The Panel therefore suggests exploring pulling the buildings apart, with scope then created for introducing community functions and social activity, and bringing life into the heart of the site. If the three buildings were to be provided with a ground level route through them, this would also help to break down the identified issues of lack of site permeability. At present, the Panel sees the proposal as being very much one building on an island, in an island. From any perspective, opening up the central space is recommended by the Panel. Community amenity and a mix of uses would then address this (and other) spaces; the central area could also become a more accessible landscaped space. In the Panel's view, achieving this outcome would take the project closer to the community vision that Reef is seeking to create.

Materials and detailing

The Panel fully understands that the proposed architecture is still evolving. It is noted that the buildings will be steel frame structures (SFS); the reverberation criteria of floors means that the design team cannot use CLT in this scheme, it being a building providing lab-enabled floorspace. Nonetheless, the Panel notes that the single storey timber podium will be of CLT construction, with a brown roof.

On matters of more detailed materiality and appearance, the design team wants to fully contextualise the project and has analysed the local area to devise several character areas. While off-site construction (MMC) may be used for the proposed

facades, the Panel notes that there have not been any discussions with façade consultants to date. Reef are however understood to be working direct with two main contractors and their sub-contractors; pre-cast brick panels and either load-bearing brick or stone facades have all been looked at, with the latter dismissed for investment funding reasons. The design team has acknowledged that studies need to be undertaken, for how the proposed longevity of the proposed development can be delivered and assured. As a general principle, the Panel advises that if building 3 stood apart, then it would be possible to understand the three separate languages but in the current scheme, it is essentially one building with one front door. Variation can be brought into the project but this does not mean that the language has to change. The Panel suggests that an alternative, more cohesive approach would be for the various facades to respond differently to different boundaries.

Community

Reef have carefully explained to the Panel that 'to be socially successful, the development has to be commercially successful', recognising how in their view, it is best to locate lab-enabled, biomedical research space in town centres, to help workers have access to the available facilities. Their approach is to have urbancentred life sciences, incorporating enough meeting spaces (including for rent to the local community), cafes and co-working areas, with informal working arrangements in collaboration spaces.

The outcomes of community engagement – including a listening event – have also been summarised for the Panel, e.g. in relation to neighbouring occupiers wanting access to the site's green space. The wishes of neighbouring care home residents, Chesterton College's questions around use of the proposed meeting rooms, exhibition space and off-site teaching, and children at Milton Road School being involved in designing the communal landscape have all been considered. But as stated above, the Panel has an overriding concern that the current design for the site and the podium spaces will not be 'inviting' for these members of the community to access. With 1700 employees being based here when the development is fully let, the Panel suggests looking at incorporating a creche and a gym in addition to the café - and potentially catering for other needs of both the working and residential

communities, in effect so that the ground plane can become a community space and one that connects movements across the site.

The Panel has clear concerns around not only the physical massing of the proposed buildings but also their occupation. Yet the roof space is not proposed as an accessible area for employees to enjoy the views, or work from. While there is clearly a balance to be had with resident amenity and overlooking, and also the need to consider longer views - perhaps more could be done in this regard. Looking to conceal rooftop plant and machinery from views, with plant rooms dispositioned away from sensitive views, is not an appropriate solution. While residents may not want more rooftop activity, the Panel urges the design team to find places where it can be catered for, where there is no overlooking.

Connectivity

Active mobility choices and provision should be central to the scheme, including strong linkages to nearby bus stops. In the proposal, Westbrook Drive will only to be trafficked in its north eastern part and the rest of existing road will be very green. However, the lack of permeability around the site creates wider connectivity issues for the local community, who are being encouraged to use the site. Where possible, the Panel agrees that there should be managed gated access points in the existing site boundary. The applicant has expressly stated the wish to connect with Lillywhite Drive, as there are many residents passing through on foot – an intention that is strongly supported by the Panel. The most important and clearly essential boundary gate would therefore be to the south west of the apartment building in Lillywhite Drive opposite building 2. Also desirable would be another gated access point on the north eastern boundary, adjacent to the Fellows House Hotel. If there is no scope to improve connectivity in this way at the outset, the Panel recommends that the landscape design should not preclude future incorporation, effectively building connectivity in as part of a phased masterplan. New connections from the site's boundaries will also influence how together with the design of the buildings and landscape, people will be pulled around the site.

Noting the volume of car parking proposed in the under-croft, and despite the intended removal of most of the ground level spaces currently positioned around the site, the Panel is very concerned as to how the vehicle movements associated with 1700 workers - who will be arriving and leaving at the start and end of the working day - will not create a bottleneck (and this concern does not take into account deliveries). Despite the acceptance of proposed trip generation by the County Council as highway authority, the need for all of the vehicular parking proposed is challenged by the Panel. Although the design team refers to car parking numbers being reduced and there being 100 fewer spaces than existing (1 space per 130sqm is proposed), the Panel is firmly of the view that the development should be car-free (other than access for blue badge holders). Any car parking on-site that is provided should be sensitively managed, to ensure that there is as much permeability as possible; the numbers of spaces could gradually be reduced via leases and/ or s106 obligations, as modal shift occurs. Unless and until the development is car-free, cars arriving at the site should be decanted as soon as possible. The Panel suggests providing two access ramp points that could allow the under-croft to be split, and then it could be possible to bring the centre of the site down to grade. The access ramps should be inside the new buildings i.e. underneath them, so that they interfere less with the public realm.

On the site's north western boundary and with reference to the retained and potentially shared car parking spaces adjacent to the apartment building in Lillywhite Drive - where EV charging points may be installed - the Panel asks the design team to look again at that interface. This location for a shared asset needs to be tested in terms of amenity, and whether it is the most suitable, given its proximity to people's homes.

Turning to cycle parking, the Panel has been given to understand that the highway authority accepts the number of spaces as meeting LTN standards. Short and long stay cycle parking is provided, plus space for cargo bikes. The number of cycle spaces is not however in line with the local plan standard of 2 spaces for every 5 staff, or 1 space per 30sqm gfa, whichever is the greater. Any shortfall in spaces should be addressed in the Panel's view because cycling is the key sustainable transport mode for the city and accessing the site for some 1700 employees; clarity

is also required on how all needs will be met. Placing cycle parking in the under-croft is not the optimal solution as it complicates routes for cyclists. The Panel suggests having most cycle parking provision at ground level across the site, activating and making Westbrook Drive and the landscape safer.

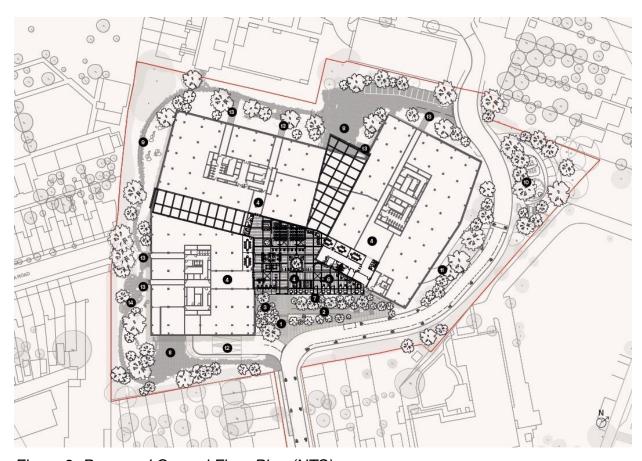


Figure 2: Proposed Ground Floor Plan (NTS)

For information: in determining an application for planning permission, the decision must be taken in accordance with the development plan unless there are material considerations that indicate otherwise (see section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 – these provisions also apply to appeals). A material planning consideration is one which is relevant to making the planning decision in question (eg whether to grant or refuse an application for planning permission). It is for the decision maker to decide what weight is to be given to the material considerations in each case. This design review panel report will be a material consideration in the determination of a future planning application for the project presented, or a similar scheme, with the Council as decision maker deciding the weight to be attached to the report.

Contact Details

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