

The Greater Cambridge Design Review Panel



Pre-application

Clarendon House, Clarendon Road, Cambridge, CB2 8BH

Thursday 28 September 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
Aram Mooradian – Director, Mooradian Studio
Joel Gustafsson – Director, JG Consulting
June Barnes – Housing specialist
David Knight – Director, Cake Engineering
Sarah Morrison - Conservation Architect, Historic England

Applicant & Design Team:

Paul Eaton, Allies and Morrison Architects
Jo Minto, Allies and Morrison Architects
Max Kettenacker, Allies and Morrison Architects
Jai Warya, Allies and Morrison Architects
Luke Jordan, CPWP
Jenni Mason, JB Heritage
Edward Jones, Stantec Planning Agent
Andrew Winter, Stantec Planning Agent
Lyndon Gill, Stantec Planning Agent

LPA Officers:

Bonnie Kwok – Principal Urban Designer / Design Review Panel Manager
Katie Roberts – Executive Assistant / Panel Support Officer
Maxine Ross – Panel Support Officer
Alice Young – Case Officer
Helen Sayers – Principal Landscape Architect
Sarah Chubb – Principal Urban Designer

Observer(s):

Shaheeda Montgomery – Planning Apprentice

Declarations of Interest

None

Previous Panel Reviews

None

Scheme Description

The site is located within the Hills Road Corridor to the City Centre Opportunity Area, as well as the Glisson Road Conservation Area. The development proposal is for a 3,900 sq.m mixed-use development scheme at the back of Cintra House on George IV St, and overlooked by the new Cambridge Investment Group Development at Hanover Court, CB2 1JH.

Site context

The site is a brownfield employment site, comprising a three-storey 1970s office block with parking at ground level, with a T shaped configuration stretching west – east adjacent to the site vehicular access and north – south along Clarendon Road. A single-storey extension was added to the north-western corner to allow disabled access to the building. Pedestrian and cycle access is via a footpath to the south of the building which leads to the ground level car parking spanning all of the site to the east aside from vegetation along the southern and eastern boundaries. The car park provides 56 spaces, cycle parking and plant.

The Brooklands Avenue Conservation Area boundary was extended in 2013 to transect the site and includes the entrance glazed extension and mature trees along the frontage to Clarendon Road. These trees together contribute significantly to the character and appearance of the conservation area.

The site lies at a point of transition: to the east, the buildings are larger and a mix of office and residential flats ranging from 4 to 5 storey in height, while to the west are two storey domestically scaled detached Victorian villa dwellings which are typical features of the historic character and appearance of the Brooklands Avenue Conservation Area. To the north is the Lockton House site, which is in the process of being redeveloped and comprises two storey domestic form fronting Clarendon Road with a five storey saw tooth block behind. The applicant and agent team for the Lockton House scheme is the same as this Clarendon House scheme.

The site is located within close proximity to the Cambridge Railway Station (500m north-east), guided busway cycle route (130m south-east) and bus stops along Brooklands Avenue (130m north-west). The site lies within a Controlled Parking Zone and within Cambridge Airport Consultation Zone.

The key site constraints are: a) Partially within and within the setting of Brooklands Avenue Conservation Area; b) Mature trees protected by virtue of falling within the conservation area; c) Surrounding residential units.

Planning history

- 23/50110/PRELV3 - Enlargement/redevelopment of existing office development. - Pre-app amber.

Lockton House (directly north)

- 22/02618/S73 - S73 to vary condition 2 of ref: 20/04826/FUL (Demolition of Lockton House and 1&2 Brooklands Avenue and replacement with two new buildings comprising offices (Use Class E), flexible commercial space (Use Class E) to include a cafe, underground parking and utilities, erection of covered walkways, electricity substation, bin stores, access, cycle parking and associated hard and soft landscaping) for the retention of the gable wall of 1-2 Brooklands Avenue and associated alterations to form and appearance of Building A, installation of PV panels on Building A and B, air handling plant decks on Building A and ventilation screen to ramped vehicle entrance to Building B to meet net zero carbon aspirations, fenestration changes, and other minor material amendments – Permitted.
- 20/04826/FUL - Demolition of Lockton House and 1&2 Brooklands Avenue and replacement with two new buildings comprising offices [Use Class E], flexible commercial space [Use Class E] to include a cafe, underground parking and utilities, erection of covered walkways, electricity substation, bin stores, access, cycle parking and associated hard and soft landscaping - Permitted.

Summary

Overall, the Panel supported the proposed massing and the stylistic relationship to the Lockton House development. The architects explained that the design was aimed at being a close 'cousin' but not a 'twin'. The Panel understand the concerns that matching the materials (the grey brick) or the forms (Saw-tooth roof) could cause the two buildings to coalesce when viewed from Brooklands Avenue and along Clarendon Road.

Given that the structural frame is to be retained, and a great deal less carbon used in the development the Panel accepted the loss of the trees, and noted the efforts introducing mature trees (and the consideration for their proper development) where possible. The Panel strongly supported the re-use of as much material from the building as possible either on-site or off-site (describing the building as a material store) and particularly the structural frame. They see this as having significant sustainability benefits but also potentially reducing the extent of disruption to neighbours (who have already suffered the construction of Lockton House).

There were some concerns that the lower entrance building (the "Mill owners house" or the Gatehouse) may be a little out of scale with the street, but the Panel agree that the strategy of a lower building, of a more domestic scale is successful.

There remains a concern that the space remaining to the rear of the building, against Kaleidoscope has become too constricted by the extension and that its form in plan, may be over complicated when compared to the much simpler elevations facing Lockton House and Clarendon House. The Panel suggested that if the plan form could be simplified, so that more space was available for the biodiversity garden running up to the boundary, so that this could be used by the tenants.

The Panel did feel that the analysis and referencing to the Conservation Area was limited by focusing so directly on the houses across Clarendon Road and that there might be more interesting precedents/reference/sources of local inspiration found by looking more widely, including Accordia. It was also suggested that the involvement of an artist, at as early a stage as possible, might pick upon the local narrative.

Overall, the Panel urged the architects to be "bolder", and perhaps introduce colour, artwork, different materials, graphics etc to perhaps make the entrance more significant with more external space around it or more internal communal space.

The detailed comments on sustainability and the proper functioning of the heat exchangers, has already been set out in detail. From the point of view of connectivity, the separation of the cycle and car entrances is to be welcomed, as are the comments from CAM Cycle about being able to cycle down to the cycle store.

The final comment from the Panel was that their support was in response to a scheme that retained the structural frame, with the benefits and compromises this entailed. They were convinced that the improvements to movement around and inside the site, the improvements to the street scene (including taking the substation to the site), the benefits to the Conservation Area given the new entrance of the north-west corner, the replanting of new trees outweighed the loss of the trees adjacent to kaleidoscope. If it is not viable to retain the frame then the Panel, and the Planning Authority, would want to look afresh at the design of an entirely new build development on this site.

Detailed comments

Background

This scheme has not been to the GCDRP before; however, the architects Allies and Morrison have obtained detailed consent and are retained as delivery architects for the Lockton House development on the adjoining site.

The full Panel attended a site visit prior to the review guided by the Planning Consultant for the scheme. The landscaping proposals and removal of the trees were explained in detail during this visit.

Allies and Morrison then presented a detailed explanation of the proposal, touching on the extensive discussions with the Planning Officers, and the holistic assessment of the four options for the development.

- Retrofitting the existing buildings

- Total demolition
- Partial retention of the frame and extension
- Complete retention of the frame and extension

The planning officers had reported that these options were analysed through an extensive 'SWOT' analysis which balanced sustainability with the impact on the street scene, buildability and the future operation and maintenance of the building.

The scheme presented is based on the retention of the structural frame, the viability of which is currently being investigated. The comments of the Panel were, based on the assumption that the structural frame is retained; with the attendant carbon benefits and the response to the site constraints that are a direct consequence of this strategy.

Character: Architecture

The Panel understood that this site is at a transition between the office buildings spreading from the Station, and the Brooklands Conservation Area, which is distinctly domestic in scale and materiality. They agreed that the Kaleidoscope residential development was an inappropriate break in this transition and could see the logic of seeking domestic forms within a building with larger floor plates. As the elevations for Clarendon House had developed the workshop/warehouse or 'mill' qualities (with chimney) of the emerging elevations are more successful characterisation. To the Panel this seemed a more appropriate source of imagery than using the forms of domestic architecture or a large-scale building.

The Panel understood that while the architects and the clients were content to continue the broad concept that had been developed for Lockton House; some variety was appropriate. Currently this is in the form of regular parapets (rather than the skylights/sawtooth profile) layout on the top floor, facing onto Clarendon Road and the change in brick colour. They were interested in whether there could be more variety in the elevations, including the use of colour, artwork, or local references in detailing etc. (This could include public art and/or specific references to the wider conservation area).

The panel asked the applicant team to explain their process of evaluating the 4 options and the rationale for moving the vehicle (and the emergency vehicle) access to the south of the site, so that proper access is available under the building. The potential, in the long term, to create a new route between Lockton House and Clarendon House through to Hills Road is a major benefit, although this requires the co-operation of the adjoining landowner who already faces onto Hills Road.

There was a suggestion that the north elevation (facing this new public space) might respond to it as a pedestrian route i.e. the ground floor windows might be larger or come to ground.

The layout of the building to the rear does restrict the planting adjacent to Kaleidoscope. Could this 'strip' be expanded by simplifying the plan form to the rear of the building; to strike a line that averaged 18m, rather than stepping to achieve this offset. The 'wildlife' space to the rear is very constrained (becoming almost a

trench surrounded by walls on both side) as currently laid out. If it is increased in size it could form a more 'immersive' and useable landscape. This change would also simplify the rear elevation to bringing it into line with the north and west elevations and help the space planning internally against the angle of the boundary.

The Panel were slightly 'suspicious' of the idea of seeking residential characteristics in a large, commercial building but felt that the current proposals spoke more to the former warehouse buildings on the site. The current sense of a vertical emphasis was successful and the stepping back a simplification of the rear elevation, will add to this sense of verticality. The inclusion of a 'chimney' to continue the warehouse/mill feel of the elevations, could be taken further.

The entrance could be bolder and have more prominence, it could have more space around it or without expanding its apparent mass. Again, the contextual link made by the use of brick could be taken further to use local colours or be locally sourced, and could the materiality include other facing materials that refer directly to the local built context?

Character: Landscape

There was no designated expert on the Panel for their presentation. However, the Principal Landscape Officer from the Planning Authority briefed the panel before the Review, and the applicants Landscape Architect explained the proposals in detail on site (pointing out the affected trees) and in the presentation.

He explained the thinking behind the planting proposed for each specific area, in addition to trees; covering maintenance, orientation, access to sun and rain, choices of species, biodiversity, and views in and out of the site.

The existing trees are an important part of the street scene, particularly when viewed from the north, looking down Clarendon Road. The proposals carefully address these views, cutting back the overgrown trees and inserting new and appropriate under planting semi-nature trees.

The hard landscaping has been kept 'lowkey', using exposed concrete on the ramp and bricks in different bonds. Where planters are required, they will be in neutral and timber that match the elevations and maintain the built quality.

The Panel accepts the loss of trees towards the southern end of the landscape strip (inside the Conservation Area), between the existing building and Clarendon Road. This view was taken on balance, given the many benefits resulting from introducing the new vehicle access to the south. The Panel also appreciated the extensive efforts by the applicant's team to introduce new trees where viable and the care taken with the choice of species, the consideration of the planting conditions and the overall gain in the Urban Greening.

The one comment is that the space for planting between the retaining wall and the boundary to Kaleidoscope to the rear, should be extended (see elsewhere). This could provide more space for sitting out/working outside the building. (The applicant team is to meet the Environmental Health officer in the next weeks).

Character: Conservation

The question was asked as to how much analysis had been made of the nature of the wider Conservation Area. If this investigation is taken beyond the immediate neighbouring buildings, then this could add to the palette of materials, forms, colours, features etc and maybe suggest further elevational details, beyond the introduction brick courses. It is assumed that when local people are consulted (in the next few weeks) they will be an interest in what characteristics from the architecture that is seen in the Conservation Area are used to enhance the building profile and elevations. Are the nature of the two storey residential properties in Clarendon Road really relatable to a building of this scale, and could the larger scale buildings at Arcadia provide a wider range of references.

The Panel felt that the gatehouse that was part of Lockton House, was more successful than the entrance proposed for Clarendon House, and that the design in this element could be stronger. There remained some concerns as to how the buildings of the scale of a warehouse stepdown to the domestic scale of the neighbours across Clarendon Road and the elevations 'have some way to go' to address this issue. There is a great deal of craftsmanship, polychromatic brickwork, terracotta, stone etc that appear locally that could help bring down the scale of the proposed building. There was also a concern about the maintenance issues around the upkeep of valley gutters and a question about whether the connection between the lower reception block and the rest of the building could be amended to remove this risk.

Connectivity

The Panel asked if the relocation of the substation, away from the street frontage, had been accepted by the energy suppliers. The applicant team confirmed that this had been thoroughly documented. They also asked if the various service vehicles requiring access off site had been 'tracked'. Yes, this was confirmed.

The Panel asked why the extensions (both in plan and section) did not follow the dimensions of the existing structural grid, and suggested there might be savings in carbon and material, avoiding some 'transfer of structures' if the structural grid was more rigorous. The applicants are looking to retain the cores and insert new lifts to reduce the quantity of demolition.

The Panel asked if there could be provision for electric bikes, scooters, cargo bikes etc in addition to the site i.e. to the guided bus routes. So far, the focus has been on cycle routes, in liaison with Camcycle. The number of car parking spaces has been reduced from 52-20; the Panel asked if this could be lowered to, an essentially car-free development. This had been the Panels response to developments in surrounding streets, marginally closer to the station.

Community

The panel asked if there had been any public consultation for this scheme yet? The applicant was planning the consultation in the next month or so, following this discussion. The neighbours will be concerned about a further 120/140 weeks of

construction disruption in their street. The Panel asked if there could be a reduction in the length of the construction programme due to retention of the frame, avoiding some demolition and civil engineering work. If offsite manufacture was introduced, this could further reduce the disruption during the construction process, have quality control and sustainability benefits.

The Panel asked if there had been any agreement as to the CIL payment, and its allocation. This had not yet been discussed, and no allocation had been made. The Panel had suggested that the provision of public art could be an important technique for adding interest to the public realm/elevations/signage and make references to the local cultural or built context. They explained that an artist or arts consultant should be appointed at this early stage to help suggest locations, forms of art and how a range of artists could become more involved.

The Panel asked if the future maintenance of the building, pathways and boundaries had been considered and whether service runs etc were accessible. They also asked if the perimeter of the building had been tracked with a maintenance vehicle, and if the hard landscaping was designed to support the necessary loads. The applicant confirmed that the use of brick pavers was chosen with this in mind.

If there are around 600 people working in the building should there be more communal space for people to meet outside their offices, like the café next door? Could the extension to the planting strip between Clarendon House and Kaleidoscope provide more useable external space? It was suggested that the upper terrace could be partially covered to make it more usable in extremes of weather. Could the space outside and inside the new entrance be more generous, and include seating or informal meeting areas?

All the proposed trees need to be planted as semi-mature (or mature) specimens and this should be included in the Section 106 documentation.

Climate

The panel strongly supported the re-use of the structural frame and urged the applicants to see the building as a 'material bank' and to look in detail at what material could be retained, what, if demolished, could be re-used on site, and what could be recycled offsite. For instance, could the existing cladding materials be re-used in the hard landscaping.

The Panel asked what the floor-to-floor dimensions were within the existing frame and whether the servicing would reduce head heights, on relatively deep plan office floor plates. The architects explained that all servicing at ceiling level was to be exposed, to maximise the perceived ceiling height. The services engineer added that they were looking at localised venting to avoid ceiling ducts, using vertical risers where possible, and drilling through the beams for smaller pipework.

The panel supported the efforts being made to ensure that the internal environment remained amenable, with particular reference to the openable windows throughout and the expectation that the glass specification will not lead to high reductions in visible light transmission in order to reduce solar gain.

The Panel felt that some of the figures for the energy uses in the SWOT analysis could bear further examination. For instance, why was the LETI score as bad as 99.42, it should be possible to reduce this to below 75. There could be room for improvement in each of the areas identified in the SWOT analysis.

The Panel were concerned that the location of the heat pumps at the lower ground floor could lead to issues where the cold air connected in the semi-basement. The applicants agreed that this would need to be checked and it may be necessary to supplement the air movement in this area.

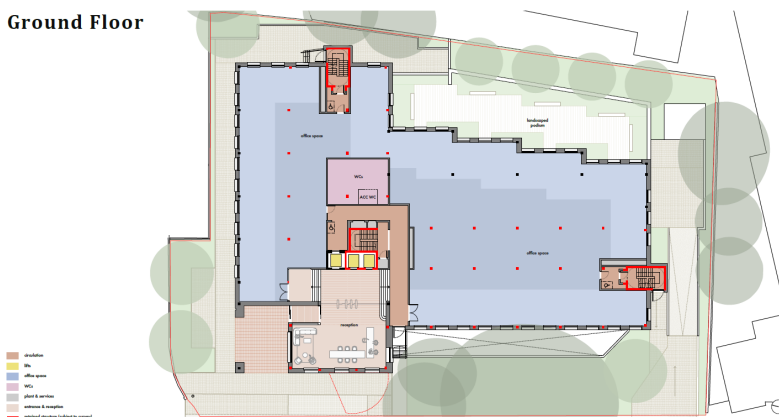
The applicants need to check that the noise dispersion from the air vents does not cause a nuisance to the adjoining residents, particularly at night; and that the electricity generated from the photovoltaic panels are available to the tenants and are not simply exported by the Grid.

Basement



Proposed Basement Plan – extracted from the applicant’s DRP presentation document 28.09.2023

Ground Floor



Proposed Ground Floor Plan – extracted from the applicant’s DRP presentation document 28.09.2023

Emerging West Elevation



Proposed west elevation – extracted from the applicant’s DRP presentation document 28.09.2023

Emerging North Elevation



Proposed north elevation – extracted from the applicant’s DRP presentation document 28.09.2023

Emerging East Elevation



Proposed east elevation – extracted from the applicant’s DRP presentation document 28.09.2023

Emerging South Elevation



Proposed south elevation – extracted from the applicant’s DRP presentation document 28.09.2023

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.