



## The Greater Cambridge Design Review Panel

The Paddocks, 347 Cherry Hinton Road, Cambridge

Pre-application ref: PPA/23/00031

Design Review 25 July 2024, hybrid meeting

**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:**

Simon Carne (Chair) - Architect and Urban Designer, Director at Simon Carne Architect  
Chris Jones – Director at BCR Infinity Architects - Character  
Fiona Heron – Founder at Fiona Heron Limited - Landscape  
Paul Bourgeois - Industrial Lead at Anglia Ruskin University - Character, Climate  
Helen Goodwin – Head of Programmes at Design South-East - Community  
Dave Murphy - Transport Consultant, Associate at Momentum Transport Consultancy - Connectivity

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

Howard Redhouse – Berwick Hill Properties (client)  
Raj Deb – Perkins Will (Architect)  
Kate Edmondson – Perkins & Will (Architect)  
Nana Ewusi – Perkins & Will (Architectural Assistant)  
Randy Forson Perkins & Will (Architectural Assistant)  
Matthew Sharpe – Quod (Planning Consultant)  
Jessica Leane - Quod (Planning Consultant)  
Pollyanna Wilkinson – Studio Pollyanna (Landscape Architect)  
Kirsten Elder – Scotch Partners (sustainability)  
Wesley Ankrah – Savills (social value)  
Richard Dawes – Hollis (Project Manager)

### **LPA Officers:**

Tom Davies –Design Review Panel Manager / Senior Urban Designer  
Karen Pell Coggins - Senior Planner / case officer  
Emma Lilley – Senior Landscape Officer  
Emma Davies – Principal Sustainability Officer  
Mark Taylor – Access Officer  
Maxine Ross – Design Review Panel Support Officer  
Brooke Moore – Design Review Panel Support Officer

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

Bonnie Kwok – Design Review Panel Manager / Principal Urban Designer  
Michele Eidevik-Skinner - Northstowe Community Development Officer  
Anna Pamphilon - Pamphilon Architects (new DRP panel member)  
Steve Dering – Direct Access (new DRP panel member)

Jo Williams – Motion spot (new DRP panel member)  
Karen Ross – Access Auditor (new DRP panel member)  
Leo Wade (work experience student)  
Alex Winn (work experience student)

### **Declarations of Interest**

None

### **Previous Panel Reviews**

None

### **Scheme Description**

Redevelopment of the Site for Research and Development (R&D) / offices uses in Use Class E(g)

### **Site context**

The site is currently occupied by a number of low-rise, functional buildings of 2 and 3 storeys. Some are vacant, others occupied by SME's and local organisations.

Outstanding lease periods limit the delivery of all parts of the site until 2038.

The proposals will be the subject of a hybrid planning application (phase 1 detailed and future phases in outline) with the final phase for occupation around 2040. Shell and core, exemplar model, Med tech life science buildings with inherent flexibility, responding to a growing and changing market are proposed. The proposal has been subject to a number of pre-app meetings over the last year. Surveys and studies are in hand to inform the design although many are still in progress. Given the nature of the proposal the inherent flexibility being promoted, definitive metrics and targets are evolving to inform the design as it develops.

The panel are asked to look at the overall proposals for the whole site in the context of its status as work in progress. The panel visited the site prior to the meeting. The developer intends to make a planning application in the next two to three months.

## **Detailed comments**

### **Community**

The Panel considers that the neighbourhood character, community involvement and wider area context have not been explained, documented and used to inform the design proposals. A wider area plan showing facilities, connections and opportunities should be provided to understand the site within its local/neighbourhood context. The proposals have been designed and presented within the context of the physical boundaries of the site but constrained by the red line. A wider understanding of the site and its surroundings should inform the design.

Connections to and through adjoining sites – in particular the adjoining allotments - might offer opportunities for enhanced permeability, and these should be investigated and tested. The site is a cul-de-sac, and so place-making as part of a route or connection is limited unless new connections can be found to knit this community into the wider neighbourhood.

There may be opportunities to reprovide some of the existing facilities and to offer existing occupants continuity of activity as part of the redevelopment of the site, but this does not seem to have been investigated. Opportunities may be available and should be explored as part of the design narrative in the design and access statement. The proposed Life Sciences uses over the longer term should not be at the expense of bringing local people into the site by providing community-focused amenity space that offers something back to the community in response to identification of community needs. The Panel welcomes the engagement with the local community but questioned whether this work has been left late in the process rather than being used to inform the design of the new buildings.

### **Landscape character**

There are challenges to locating the proposals within the relatively low-density suburban neighbourhood. Whilst the Panel accepts that the proposed land use and specific design approach has the endorsement in principle of the planning authority,

the layout, detail, edge treatments, public spaces and landscape character would benefit from a holistic integration with the neighbouring sites. This is not a science park and yet the imagery and formality suggest that the aesthetic is more akin to an out-of-town site. Opportunities to frame space should be investigated which may mean moving away from the rigid grid layout. Viewpoints and enclosure could offer enhancements and should be investigated.

At a detail level the Panel is concerned that the internal pedestrian/cycle streets should be seen as places. Different character areas might be provided focusing on entrances where activities can be combined. Internal/external spaces offer opportunities for detail development of identity. For example, bicycle parking, flexible areas for the food truck, a number of hard rectangular spaces to the west and the end points or gateways could be integrated more seamlessly into the design to develop place making more fully. The Panel accept that below ground services are a major constraint and whilst appreciating the number of new trees proposed, stressed the value of large trees throughout and considered the spaces between proposed buildings would benefit from the planting of large trees.

A landscape design approach to the edges of the site should be developed as part of a suite of codes to inform the development as the proposals progress through the phases. The largest trees are invariably located outside the site boundary and their loss would adversely affect the character of the site.

Internal street planting is heavily reliant on planting in containers through the limitations of the underground services. The Panel acknowledges this constraint but over-provision of such items could be detrimental to the 'immersive' place making intentions if they conflict with movement requirements.

## **Connectivity**

The separation of pedestrian and cycle movements along the central spine is welcomed and 18 metres across the spine could be a starting point for design options. The potential for movement conflict across the main trafficked entrance should be tested against other options. The Panel appreciated that an alternative

pedestrian/cycle access had been investigated but in the absence of that option it was essential that testing options with swept paths for the most challenging vehicles be demonstrated.

Car parking appears to be a reduction on current numbers and is welcomed. It is important to consider the long-term phasing, layouts showing the emerging phases being accommodated would help to explain the scheme and the release of public realm. Flexible spaces for other uses in the long term should be considered. More precise numbers must be derived from an assessment of building occupancy. The site is in a relatively well-connected sustainable neighbourhood and car parking should not dominate. Consolidation of parking provision might provide benefits to the site coverage overall.

Cycle and disabled parking spaces are well located close to entrances. The opportunity to provide more secure bike parking within buildings should be considered, which could also ease space within the public realm. Charging for electric bikes as well as cars should be incorporated. Space for cargo bikes should also be provided.

The one-way vehicle route around the perimeter of the site is a potential annoyance and constraint. The possibility of two-way movements achieved through separate spurs serving each side supported by passing spaces was suggested as a way of reducing on travel distances and delivering a better circulation system.

## Climate

The proposals are quoting targets that should be part of a sustainable development, but the Panel is concerned that saying the right things does not guarantee delivery against the metrics and standards chosen. Guidance for life science buildings especially with no identified end user is a challenge. More needs to be done in identifying performance targets that are equivalent to or preferably better than BREEAM Excellent so that details of M&E plant and electric supply and demand requirements can be checked against on site provision. Given the unknown mix of

occupants/tenants and their full energy and water demand requirements, it is essential that a range of scenarios are considered so that peak demand does not push the overall performance of the proposed development into a position whereby the proposed energy and water measures do not satisfy need.

The design team needs to address the wider impact on the community from the climate point of view. The high level of the water table is a major factor limiting options for mitigation on site. Waste and reuse of existing materials will inform the design. The audit of materials is welcomed and should be used to inform the design development. The assessment of local supply chains for materials should be considered so that transport miles are minimised. In relation to the decision to demolish and rebuild, the online LETI guides that offer guidance on embodied carbon, alternative material use, etc. should be reviewed. Materials that cannot be repurposed or incorporated into alternative uses on-site should be offered via local material re-use organisations and charities to further the circular economy principles offered by the applicant.

Given the current lack of on-site biodiversity, opportunities for exceeding 10% BNG would appear to be available. How these are used to impact other aspects of climate change should be integrated and the Panel were not aware from the presentation that this was being done yet. Heat island effect of hard surfaces, both buildings and surroundings, needs careful consideration and mitigation. Tree planting and the introduction of soft surfaces and use of cool materials should be part of that mitigation. The replacement of 9 trees with 62 would benefit from a robust quantification methodology, e.g. <https://www.uboc.co.uk/tree-replacement-for-carbon-sequestration-parity/> Elevational shading has not been indicated yet but should be part of the elevational design development. This would assist with building cooling and help to mitigate the demand on the proposed air source heat pump heating and cooling strategy offered.

Air Source Heat Pumps and Solar Photovoltaic panels will be incorporated and must be shown on design drawings so that they are attractively integrated. Site wide and/or building based communal battery storage should be considered as an active

means to manage peaks and troughs associated with varying daily, weekly and seasonal use against the on-site generation proposed.

### **Character – built form**

The design would benefit from referencing local character and colour, and exploration of the previous use of the site, and in particular the granaries, could inform the architectural language to create a more site-specific response. At the moment the elevations and materials appear metallic and grey. There are opportunities to express the buildings' uses as educational and knowledge resources. Signage and detail should also be part of the evolving elevational treatments to enhance way-finding, accessibility and inclusivity.

The Panel questioned whether scale and massing opportunities had been thoroughly investigated and tested. From the many valuable sections and reference images this appeared to be a missed opportunity. It was appreciated that the proximity of houses on the south, east and north boundaries were limiting factors, but the opportunity to express the buildings with more height in certain areas - and in the process free up ground floor space for more generous public realm - should be investigated and tested in views and in 3D modelling.

As a general comment the Panel considered the design was perhaps a little too constrained by the grid both internally and within the site layout. Whilst the logic of the site planning was clear, the Panel considered there might be opportunities to create a more fluid sense of arrival, movement through the site and more generous space at the heart of the development created by relaxing the alignment of buildings. Similarly, the creation of a vista that terminates with a building or feature at the northern end of the 'boulevard' would enhance the sense of arrival. The desire for a future-proofed flexibility as a starting point is a valuable discipline but the developing nature of the need and how it is accommodated may offer opportunities in the future to flex the planning within illustrative layouts that express the parameters of the design in plan and section, with the careful integration of any external storage structures/buildings, ideally within the envelopes of the proposed buildings. The Panel particularly noted the cut-off corners on the North end of the site which



seemed to be generated by the car parking layout with no apparent benefit for the whole.

## Summary

The design was very well received, and the presentation was clear and well structured. The Panel applauded the use of the site model. It will be invaluable as part of the communication of the scheme and could be further developed with larger scale representation of parts of the scheme as designs are firmed up.

It is important to describe the process, options and resolution of the overall concept which is best described in the Design and Access statement. This should be a priority and be a live document. The initial phase is in development and was not addressed in any detail by the Panel review. How this will look, function and all be accessed from a visitor's arrival, and throughout their journey through the development, prior to and during the construction of all the later phases, currently planned to be spread over many years, should be demonstrated. A further Panel review of future phase design guidelines and parameters would seem valuable. With more local consultation, character assessment, development of design guidelines and metrics and a well documented Design and Access Statement, the outline proposals must set a standard for future phases.

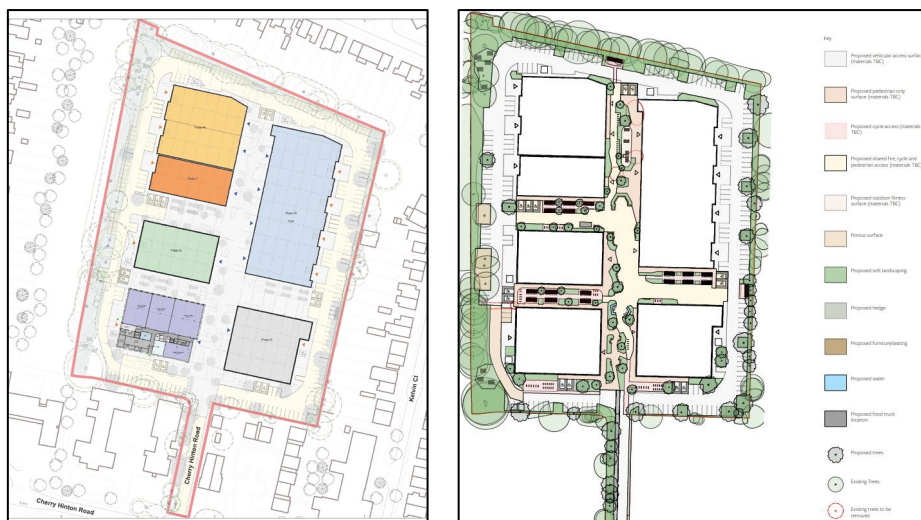
The attendance of the full team was most welcome, and all made valuable contributions to the presentation. There is much still to be done within a very challenging timescale.



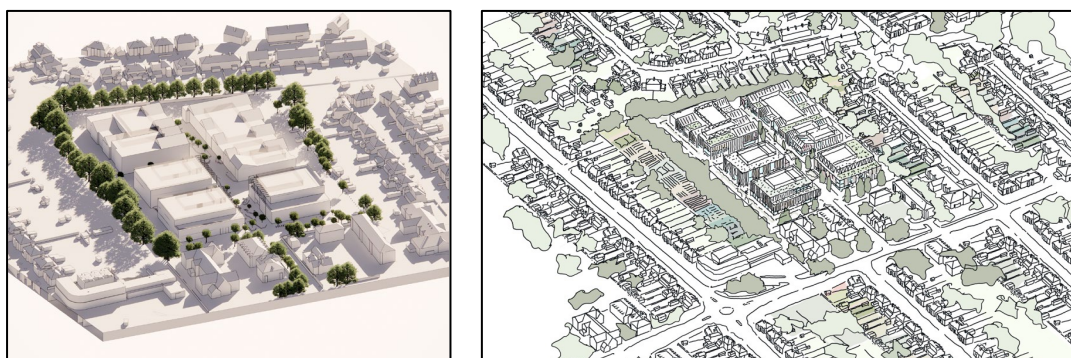
*Site location and boundary – extracted from the applicant's DRP presentation document (July 2024)*



*Site photos – extracted from the applicant's DRP presentation document (July 2024)*



*Proposed layout – extracted from the applicant's DRP presentation document (July 2024)*



*Proposed massing aerial view – extracted from the applicant's DRP presentation document (July 2024)*

## 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.*