Cambridgeshire Quality Panel

Cambridge Science Park Plots 210-240

5 December 2023

Venue: The Trinity Centre Cambridge Science Park

Panel: Robin Nicholson (chair)
Meredith Bowles
Joel Gustafsson
June Barnes
David Taylor
Lindsey Wilkinson

LPA: Mike Huntingdon, Emma Lilley, and Bonnie Kwok (GCSP)

The Cambridgeshire Quality Charter for Growth sets out the core principles for the level of quality to be expected in new development across Cambridgeshire. The Cambridgeshire Quality Panel provides independent, expert advice to developers and local planning authorities against the four core principles of the Charter: connectivity, character, climate, and community.

Development Overview

The proposal builds upon the existing parkland character of the site, retaining a substantial number of trees and activating the relationship between the site and the waterfront. While the existing site is insular and unwelcoming, public access and permeability are at the heart of the new proposal. An inclusive and accessible ground plane integrates the existing parkland with a new public realm providing legible entrances and direct pedestrian routes across the site.

The proposal is for four new lab / office buildings and the retention of the existing 216 building. Each building has a unique character based on the specifics of the site and of the brief. At ground generous reception spaces are provided alongside public amenity. Above ground the buildings have flexible floorplates which will support a wide range of lab and office uses.

To open up the site for landscape and pedestrians, the proposal relocates the 697 existing surface parking spaces to a basement beneath buildings A, B & C. As occupants move towards more sustainable means of transport, over time the basement will be re-purposed to provide additional amenity, cycle storage and lab support functions.

Building form has been articulated in response to a series of key approach views. Buildings step up from G+2 at the SE and NE corners of the site to G+5+plant in the centre. Building C is a marker building, increasing it by 1 story to G+6+plant. The building massing is based on a Ground Floor Story Height of 4.5m and a typical story height of 4.35m with a 4.5m plant screen at roof level. The proposed development of the site is within height parameters set out in the NECAAP Landscape and Character Visual Impact Appraisal:- 27-36m high

Presenting Team

The scheme is promoted by Brockton Everlast with the design team lead by Sheppard Robson. The presenting team comprised:

- Richard Selby and Vesna Bostandzic (Brockton Everlast)
- James Grainger and David Ardill (Sheppard Robson)
- Oliver Milton and Tom Noonan (Hawkins-Brown)
- Guy Kaddish and Jake Gandy (Bidwells)

- Simon Wyatt (Cundalls)
- JJ Watters (LDA Design)

Local Authority's Request

The site lies within the area which is covered by the emerging North East Cambridge Area Action Plan (NEC AAP). The NEC AAP has been prepared by both SCDC and Cambridge City Council and published in its proposed submission form which is effectively a final draft which both Councils propose to adopt. Prior to formal public consultation on the Proposed Submission AAP, the Councils have paused the AAP process until a decision has been made on the separate Development Consent Order process for the relocation of the Waste Water Treatment Centre (WWTC). Although the NEC AAP has not been adopted and does not carry weight in decision making, the evidence base which support the AAP are a material consideration in the assessment of planning applications.

Key issues

There have been several workshops to develop the scheme to its current state. The Quality Panel considered an earlier proposal in January 2023. The next stage involves an informal developer presentation to the Joint Development Control Committee. Overall, officers consider that the scheme is progressing positively. The Local Planning Authority sought the contribution of the Panel on the following elements.

Character

- The development of a family of buildings.
- The development of the ground plane and routes to and through the site.
- The development of the key landscape areas, that is the waterfront, central space, ecology corridor and green edge.

Climate

- The scheme aspires to net zero carbon and an all-electric approach. The approach to analysing the whole carbon life cycle of the development is important in light of the demolition of the original buildings on site.

Connectivity

- The application will need to be accompanied by a TA to demonstrate that the development will reduce or, at worst, equal current peak hour vehicle trip generation.
- A large proportion of the trip budget will need to be made up of cycle trips to achieve this. Also consideration needs to be made on how the site will connect with the wider cycle and footpath network.

Community

- It is proposed that the public realm between the buildings will be accessible and open to the public, and also that the public will be able to use facilities in some of the buildings, particularly the building facing onto the lake to the south.
- The development should also provide benefits to the wider community. Access to the Science Park from the guided bus way / stop and the local area to the SW is poor compared to the access from the SE guided bus way / stop.

Character – "Places with distinctive neighbourhoods and where people create 'pride of place'

Architecture

The Panel thanked the applicant for a great presentation and remarked that the proposal had improved significantly since they last saw it in January 2023. The level of detail shown on the public realm and landscape was supported by the Panel.

The ground level context is good and seeks to avoid a sterile environment typically associated with parks such as this.

The external gantry spaces on the north facing elevation appear to be the same size as the southern elevations. Whilst they worked architecturally the Panel queried whether these in are the right location for people to work outside and take advantage of sunlight given the north facing aspect.

The building elevations appear to be good in the images, however, there needs to be a commitment to follow this level of quality through into delivery and the finished product.

Some of the planting on the facades needs to be incorporated into the water management strategy to consider future maintenance and management of the challenges that will arise from this type of landscape. The Panel also queried generally whether trees inset on balconies is the best way to address landscape on buildings.

The Panel considered the marker building to be the least good and suggested that it needs to be more subtle with its articulation and with greater divergence from the other buildings.

Landscape

Achieving control in design terms of the waterfront is a game changer as it will set the vision and ambition, not only for this development, but also subsequent projects that will come forward in the Science Park.

The Panel sought more clarity on how the management model for the waterfront space would operate.

It was noted that the pedestrian priority route is open to the landscape and event spaces and was supported by the Panel.

The proposal to retain so many of the existing trees and to incorporate them as key structural features is critical to the creation of a quality landscape.

The Panel applauded the ambition to achieve 43% biodiversity net gain.

The separation of cycle traffic internal to the development and giving priority to pedestrians is a good point given the high levels of activity that are anticipated especially at peak times. However, the Panel would have liked to see how the separation of the cycle traffic will be managed and enforced once operational.

The diversity of landscape treatments reflecting each of the character areas was supported; however they should also work together as a single setting for the buildings.

A plea went out not to refer to the woodland edge as a “landscape buffer.” It is a key landscape and biodiversity element which should be integral to the wider Science Park.

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

The development proposes a very ambitious strategy for the collection and reusing of non-potable water.

There needs to be robust building management systems in place to ensure when systems break, they are fixed and restored to operations without delay and do not become redundant.

It was noted that there is approximately 40% glazing across all facades. However, the Panel queried whether there would be adequate daylight in Building B because of the deeper floorplate.

The high level of glazing on the south eastern façade of Building C will most probably cause overheating and it was suggested that installing internal blinds would not reduce the penetration of heat through the glazing. It was recommended that external retractable blinds are considered to reduce solar gain.

There was a good level of rigour with challenging targets set for operational and embodied carbon; the Panel called for commitment on the heating targets and effective tenant management.

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

The visuals in the presentation should great levels of vibrancy and activity in the public spaces. However they needed to describe better how those spaces will work when the site is operational as it might be quite quiet for much of the time. It needs to show the pattern of movement around the site to understand and resolve any potential conflicts between users.

The Panel would have liked to have seen the wider vision for the Science Park although it recognised this was largely outside the applicant's control. It was noted that this project should be seen as a catalyst and benchmark for the change needed for the Science Park.

The Panel was supportive of the measures taken to significantly reduce the car parking ratio and by putting the parking underground it has created space for landscape and

nature to feature heavily in the design concept. The consideration given to the longer-term adaptation of the parking to alternative uses when car usage declines was noted.

Where will the arisings from the carpark excavation go?

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

A great response to our last review and future community involvement positive.

It would be helpful to understand construction/occupation phasing more clearly. For example, how will building materials will arrive and debris be taken away. What is the impact on occupants of Building 216 and on rest of park during redevelopment process and how this will be minimised.

At what point during the phased redevelopment would are the community facilities, including retail space and the well-being space, coming on stream as active rather than just the spaces being built?

The final images should be reviewed to be more inclusive and representative of people likely to be using the development, such as women, people from ethnic minorities and children/families.

Summary

The Panel thanked the design team for a thorough presentation of the proposals and particularly for making such substantial progress since the earlier session in January 2023.

The Panel made the comment, directed more to St Johns College, that a masterplan for the wider Science Park is necessary. More generally, the Panel would greatly benefit from the inclusion of detailed sections.

<u>Character</u>

- The ground level activation is good but this needs to be delivered early.
- Concerns over the gantries on the north elevation needs to be addressed.
- The quality of the buildings needs to be retained through the procurement and construction phases.

- The management and maintenance issues associated with the façade planting will need to be addressed.
- Greater divergence between the buildings, especially the marker building should be considered.
- A rendered image showing the view from the A14 across to the site would be helpful to show the wider context.
- The Panel were encouraged by the landscape and sustainability lead vison for the site, especially the retention of existing trees and the introduction of diverse landscape characters. But it will need a sophisticated management plan.
- The separation of cycles and pedestrian within the site makes sense but needs further consideration of how this will be enforced.

Climate

- The ambitious water strategy was supported.
- The images appear to show more glazing than there is and these should be checked.
- Building B needs to be reviewed to ensure that sufficient daylight levels can be achieved considering the deep floorplate.
- The 100% glazing on Building C will require external treatment to avoid overheating.

Connectivity

- The Panel was concerned about how vibrant the public spaces will really be other than at peak times.
- The movement patterns across the site need to be considered.
- The complete masterplan for the whole Science Park is becoming critical, however the Panel acknowledged that this scheme will be seen as a benchmark for future schemes.
- The Panel applauded the reduction in the parking ratio and the ambition to future proof and repurpose parking areas when car usage decreases.
- The Panel, in the closed session also raised the issue of how the soil arising from the excavation of the basement and car parks will be dealt with.

Contact details

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Ground Floor Plan