



The Greater Cambridge Design Review Panel

Pre-application ref: PPA/24/0044

Kett House, Cambridge

Thursday 14 August 2025, In-person 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:

Russell Brown (Chair) – Architect and Founding Partner at Hawkins Brown Architects - Character

Fiona Heron – Founder at Fiona Heron Limited - Character – Landscape

Angela Koch – Founder at Imagine Places – Community Consultancy – Joining online – Connectivity

Nicholas Anderson - Chartered Civil Engineer (retired) – Connectivity

Nopi Exizidou – Head of Net Zero Transition at the British Antarctic Survey, Cambridge & Antarctica – Climate

Teri Okoro – Director and chartered architect – Inclusive Design Access

Nicki Whetstone – Associate Director at Donald Insall Associates - Conservation

Applicant and Design Team

In-Person Attendance

Ron German, Stanhope (Development Manager)

Peter Fisher, Bennetts Associates (Architect)

Rob Bearyman, Bennetts Associates (Architect)

David Dawson, Bennetts Associates (Architect)

Isabel Czech, Bennetts Associates (Architect)

Robert Myers, Robert Myers Associates (Landscape Architect)

Jack Smith, KMC (Transport)

Kate Hannelly-Brown, Bidwells (Heritage)

Mike Derbyshire, Bidwells (Planning)

Jennie Hainsworth, Bidwells (Planning)

Virtual Attendance via MS Teams

Isabel Czech, Bennetts Associates (Architect)

Gus Nicholds, Bennetts Associates (Architect)

Karla Duncan, Bennetts Associates (Architect)

Jodie Welch, KMC (Transport)

Alfie Hood, Bidwells (Planning)

Sarah Wearing, Bidwells (Heritage)

James Bird, RPS Tetratech (Ecology)

Amedeo Scofone, Hilson Moran (Sustainability)
Nick Vose (Marengo Communications)

LPA Officers:

Tom Gray – Principal Planner and Case Officer
Tom Davies – Senior Urban Designer and DRP Manager
Trovine Monteiro – Built Environment Team Leader
Bana Elzein – Principal Landscape Architect - online
Brooke Moore – DRP/Business Support Officer
Mark Taylor – Access officer

Observers

Cllr Dr Tumi Hawkins, Lead Cabinet Member for Planning
Chris Jones, Director, BCR Architects.

Declarations of Interest

The DRP manager asked if there were any Declarations of Interest for DRP members. There were none.

Previous Panel Reviews

There had been previous Design Review Panel Meeting (DRP) reviews about the scheme on 25th May 2023 and 8th May 2025.

Panel Comments

Climate

The panel member specialist welcomed the change of materials and height reduction. Going down to 30% in embodied carbon overall, and 15kg per square metre is a great improvement. She is pleased with the choice of materials, and with the proposed use of a materials passport to plan for end of life re-use. She welcomes the landscape improvements and the gestures to the Botanic Gardens.

The panel member specialist supports the reduction in carparking spaces, bike parking provision for different types of bikes, and the cycle parking being on the ground floor with two entrances. She understands the response to the orientation of the building and solar thermal gain for the design glazing, and the consideration of future proofing under BREAM. In terms of the circular economy and the studies on materials re-use, this should continue to a detailed plan.

Community

The panel member specialist said she hopes the Local Planning Authority and the Highways Agency officers can collaborate on the public realm and can agree to the proposed external materials for the ground floor surfaces. She is pleased with the team's research engagement with local businesses, neighbours and cafes. She advised that the applicant should safeguard/enable the building design and infrastructure so for hot food production by future commercial or otherwise tenants on the ground floor. The team did not speak about whether there will be just one tenant or whether different tenants on each floor. She is pleased with the roof terrace and encouraged by the planting strategy. She suggested having solar shading/weather protected on the terrace upstairs and making them accessible in all seasons and all weathers. This should be possible on this scale of commercial building and part of the buildings USP in Cambridge.

Inclusive Design / Accessibility

The panel member specialist welcomed the changes to the scheme and felt that the entrance is becoming more legible. She would like to see textual differences in the paving here. She welcomed the more accessible parking but is not clear where the drop off will be for the entrance area. How will cyclists coming from Station Road be kept separate from pedestrians going to the cycle park entrance at the rear? She does not know if there are any cycle lanes on the roads next to the site. If there are none, the applicant should take this into account, especially where they want to use the outside parking space.

For nighttime visibility, she could see there is more lighting but advised avoiding clutter that will adversely affect the sight lines. It is important to consider visually impaired people where there is cycle parking at the rear of the building. It will be active during day but at night it will be less busy so there is a need to make it a safe area without clutter.

For external furniture, provide arm rests and back rests on seats. For wayfinding, sign areas beyond just the entrance, like the cycle storage area. Between the existing terraces and your building, the planting has been taken right into the corner. How will this planting be maintained, will it receive sufficient sun and rain, is it viable?

Connectivity

The panel member specialist welcomed the ground floor cycle parking and dual access, which will reduce the need for cyclists to negotiate the junction. Cycle routes from the south need to be considered. There is quite a lot of commuting traffic that comes up Hills Road that will use the crossing south of the site and then manoeuvre through the landscaping area (Pocket Park) to get to the cycle parking. There will be a fair amount of cycle movement on that route and the applicant need to make sure there is space through this part of the pavement for cyclists not to conflict with pedestrians.

If movement numbers change significantly when the development starts on the west side of Hills Road, more people will be trying to head through this area. This will need to be considered carefully.

Character – Landscape

The panel member specialist was pleased with the public art proposals. In terms of views, she advised the team to consider the scale of the art and how it will appear close up, at eye level, as well as in long distance views. The external lighting will help with navigating the site but be careful as it can adversely affect or conflict with the planting or affect biodiversity. Having an active frontage on Station Road reinforces the wayfinding.

In general, having three landscape spaces works well, and there is a clear strategy for how they will work. On the west façade, having a large tree is a strong gesture and important for the street scape.

In terms of materials, the approach from Station Road looks good. The applicant needs to consider whether the materials reflect the building or the surrounding hard landscape, how they differ in the pocket park area and whether you want to establish different identities for different areas or to have a more uniform approach.

The panel member specialist is concerned that the planting on the colonnade seems bolt on, superficial, out of character and scale with what's happening elsewhere on the building. She suggested omitting this planting and explore other forms of decoration of the colonnade. Could the applicant consider bringing in some texture and detail on the columns, whether it is something very simple or sculptural signage. The CGIs showed planters put up against the colonnade in a different material.

For this space in Station Road, is it read as a single space that is totally open or do you recognize that actually most people walk either side of the columns so that planters could extend between the columns and help define these two routes. It could be worthwhile doing something different with the linear route in the covered space. The applicant needs to be strong and definite in their landscape provision. At the moment, this area does not have the strength and clarity of the other landscaped areas.

The approach of bringing the lime trees in the rest of Station Road in front of the new building works well. There may be a couple of other spaces to put a big tree and she raised the question of canopy size of the Ginko and whether it was fastigiate in the southern area, rather than smaller trees. (The local authority has encouraged the team to place a large tree opposite Botanic Place).

The panel member specialist was not sure if seating is needed in the Hill Road planting area. Do you want to encourage people to sit on this busy route? Maybe you want to encourage people to carry on their walk, so you would not need seating? It

seems like a gateway space and so she recommends keeping it simple and uncomplicated.

Character – Conservation

Referring to her previous comments, the panel member specialist spoke about the relationship to the smaller buildings on the opposite side of Station Road. The larger park on the nose of the building is a successful break between the taller and smaller buildings. It is quite a difficult challenge to distinguish between these separate buildings. It might be helpful to provide some images of when the trees are first planted and in 15 years' time to show how their growth will change these views.

The proposed street level is a successful choice for the placement of the sculpture, (where there will be greater interaction). She encourages the designers to take this further and include more references to the craft of Rattee and Kett, and like other specialists, she suggests exploring opportunities for this around the columns to the colonnade in lieu of the climbers, or to the soffit/internal surface of the colonnade. The lusher elements of landscape, at the corners of the scheme, are successful and draw your eye.

The panel member specialist is pleased with the building dropping in height by one storey. In terms of long-range views, it is now hardly visible. She understands the argument that a lower building looks “stumpy” and dropping the massing further would destroy the verticality of the end elevation, which is quite successful. The use of material will be critical. She likes the Limestone brick, with its shells, but is less convinced about the smoother Sandstone, which is rather pinker in colour than Cambridge stock brick.

Character - Architecture

The panel member specialist agrees that overall, the massing strategy is really successful and the proposed height building are fine in the context of the buildings across Hills Road.

Referring to the drawings on page 29 of the presentation (planar facades vs interlocking masses), the interlocking masses arrangement is well resolved, in terms of the overall townscape impact, and the varying building heights successfully address the three different settings of the elevations. If the building was further reduced in height, it would lose the sense of verticality of the elevation facing across the road to Botanic House.

However, it is a shame that there is the potential to have both forms of expression within the elevations. Trying to do everything with the brick frame is limiting the different qualities for the Station Road, Hill Road and Botanic Garden elevations. If the expression of the windows, inside the frame, had more variety then this might help the stone frame from having to work so hard. The change in the choice of stone helps separate the two masses, and holds the whole scheme together, but he thinks you could get a greater variety in the elevations by bringing the glazing into play. Colour could be added inside the frame or a heritage-based pattern or further subdivision or fritting.

The panel member specialist knows that officers are talking about developing a hierarchy of the façades, being vertical on the corners and then signing the route to the station, with less emphasis going along Hills Road. Whereas the current design has less differentiation and is dominated by the stone grid. He believes that it is possible to use the openings inside the frame achieve both qualities.

For the CGI of colonnades on Station Road, (on page 27 of the presentation), the appearance is not convincing. The planting on the columns seems weak. The use of art or colour or more texture on the columns could help the colonnade become more “civic” or more “massive” In the same image, there is not much stone left in-between the windows and so it might not be experienced as the “base” material for the building. If the windows get narrower in response to overheating, it will have the merit of presenting more of the stone material. Overall, he is pleased with the massing but there could be further improvements to the detailing to create more variety in the facades.

The stepping down in the massing that creates the roof terrace is successful but there is a concern about its use by people on a rainy winters evening and beside a busy road. It might be possible to introduce openings or setbacks in higher part of the west elevation, addressing Hills Road, to help step down to the lower mass and to further gesture to the existing terrace to the south.

The panel member specialist for landscape added that the Images on pages 31 and 32 of the presentation show it is important to consider the planting 'poking' out over the façade from the roof terrace this could look incongruous and out of character from the ground. She advised them to think about what is seen from the ground. It can change the effect of the lines of the building.

The panel member specialist for Character (Architecture) felt that in reviewing the ground floor plan (on page 42 of the presentation), entering the cycle store from both sides is positive but he still wonders if changes could be made to enter the main lobby from both sides of the building by adding a 2nd pedestrian entrance on the Hills Road side. The floor plan currently shows a fire corridor that could offer this connection and there is a small area of cycle parking that occupies active frontage. On this subject, Ron German, the Development Manager from Stanhope replied that there are difficulties with this option in that it is not a large enough building to justify having 2 entrances. Ron German mentioned that they propose an estate management office room on the ground floor that is accessible and visible in this area (rather than being in the basement), so they prefer not to have another entrance space.

The panel member specialist for Character (Architecture) continued that provision of a 2nd entrance would make that side of the building safer and accessible, particularly in the evening. Regarding entrances, The panel member specialist for Community commented that a lot of future employees would be using the cycle entrance to enter the building and so this entrance area will need to be of scale, welcoming, well-lit and highly visible, with a direct access into the main lobby.

Chair's Summary

Climate

The panel member specialist had felt that there had been an improvement to sustainability aspects of the proposal. She picked up the point about the BNG target forecast which needs correcting. She is pleased that you have begun to address circular economy issues with the information provided in your presentation.

Community

The panel member specialist is delighted with the revised proposals and understands that there needs to be agreement between LPA/HA about bringing the proposed high-quality materials to the public realm. She is impressed by the proposal to build social value; not every developer has a charitable foundation! It is good that you these benefits are being researched now but accepts that any delivery will be four years in the future. It might be a challenge for the community service to be located on this busy corner. Sometimes they are quite fragile, but it is great that this is being addressed at this early stage.

The panel member specialist for Character (Architecture) referred to how the Community specialist Panel had earlier asked about how the offices will be occupied. Ron German responded that their market research suggests that there could be several tenants or a single tenant interested in occupying the building, as with the neighbours. The floor plates have been designed to be sub-divided, and Stanhopes current assumption is that this will be a multi-let building.

Accessible design

The panel member specialist had welcomed the steps taken in design development. The applicant needs to continue to consider the detail: how you would get to the front entrance, lighting and surface materials that would enhance the visitor experience. If the ground floor is highly glazed, how do you tell the difference between the cafes

and offices? For nighttime and winter afternoons, when it gets darker, safety and accessibility for cyclists and pedestrians needs to be carefully considered.

Connectivity

It is the classic thing in Cambridge of pedestrians versus cyclists, so achieving safety on what is likely to be a busy site will need careful thought. The panel are applauding all the trees but in a couple of years, they could present obstacles for people. Ron German commented that their space syntax modelling work has taken into account the future population and so this is accounted for in the designs. The Chair added that the scheme will benefit from all parties including the Highway Authority providing suitable pedestrian crossings and access arrangements to the site.

Character - Landscape

The chair summarised that the panel member specialist for Character (Landscape) was supportive of the three different areas of landscape but not supportive of the seemingly superficial planting on the columns which were compared with hanging baskets. There was a tree discussion, and she was pleased with the choice of large trees. It is recommended that the team substitute what is on the columns and take care about the landscape on the roof decking, they need to think how it will look from the ground and how it works throughout the year. She reiterated that in replacing the planting on the colonnade, she would like to see something high quality that puts it in a positive light and could refer to the history of the building or the art of carving or form of signage etc.

Character - Conservation

The panel member specialist was generally supportive of the massing and the team's CGI videos of the proposals had worked well in describing the dynamic experience of the proposed massing. The long view drawings, that the team shared did not show any significant visual impacts, although they were very small-scale images. The panel agreed that the heights of the building are appropriate in this

context, and the main facade should not be any lower because the massing in this view starts to get “stumpy”. The team have worked hard to make the building sit well in highly specific site and have succeeded in doing this.

Character – Architecture

See detailed comments above

In a brief session of follow up discussion with all meeting attendees, officers asked about the chair's view of the elevation on Hills Road (the drawing on page 32 in the presentation pack). The Chair replied that all the way around the building, the stone framing works at a city scale but architecturally there might be more variety in the elevations, and the Hills Road elevation might step down or open up at high level to address its lower neighbour. The Chair suggested the team focus on the inset within the frames, to differentiate the Hills Road elevations from Station Road. This might be a setback or the use of a different material. The transition in heights is still quite abrupt and so that could be improved. The Botanic House elevation has verticality and that sets the height, then the Station Road elevation has the colonnade that points towards the Station and Hills Road elevation can step down to the adjoining terrace.

On this subject, the panel member specialist for Character (Conservation) spoke about how the panel had discussed this response to context before the meeting, and the preference for the building to direct people down Station Road rather than down Hills Road. The panel discussed whether this is best done via a massing change or an alternative method with the architecture e.g. at pedestrian height level or street level and reiterating the panel's earlier references to craft or the Botanic Gardens on the colonnade or the soffit.

The Chair concluded that if more shadow was added or the windows changed inside the stone frame, it would make a lot of difference to the variety of the elevations. If the modelling was relatively modest down the Hills Road side but quite striking on

the Station Road, then this is going to contribute to making clear that is the more important façade and help people find the entrance and its link with the station. The panel member specialist for Character (Conservation) agreed, that historically, more decorative/embellished façade would have signalled the more important side of the building.



Updated Proposal - Viewed from the Botanic Garden entrance, extracted from Kett building DRP presentation (August 2025)



Landscape strategy – updated proposal – extracted from Kett building DRP presentation (August 2025)



Landscape strategy – Level 6 roof terrace – extracted from Kett building DRP presentation (August 2025)



CGI – extracted from Kett building DRP presentation (August 2025)



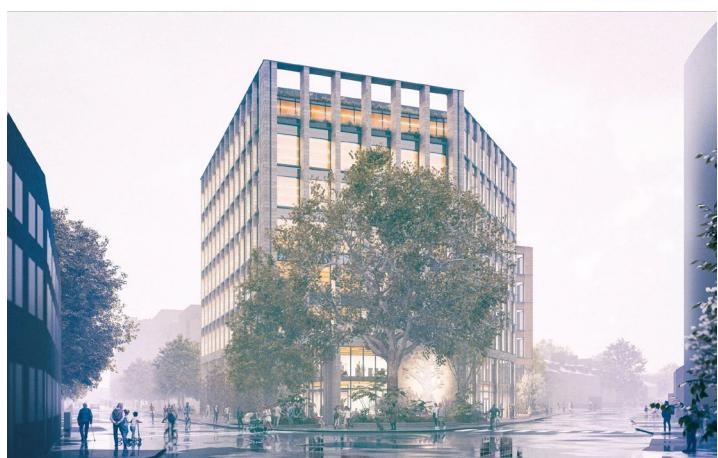
CGI - Station Road looking west – extracted from Kett building DRP presentation (August 2025)



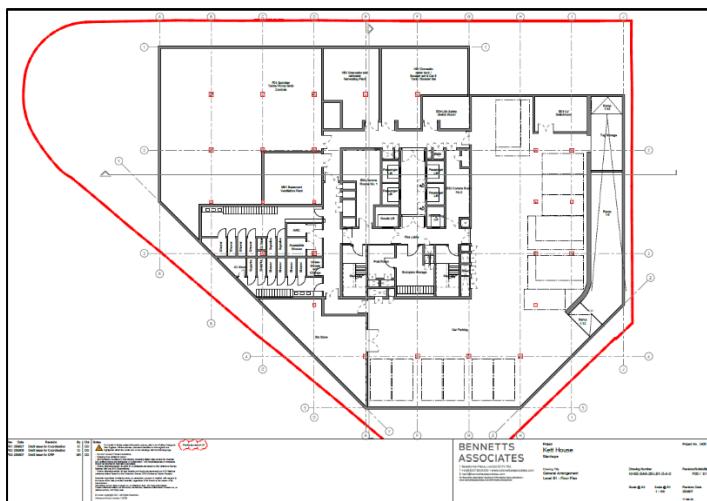
CGI - Hills Road looking north – extracted from Kett building DRP presentation (August 2025)



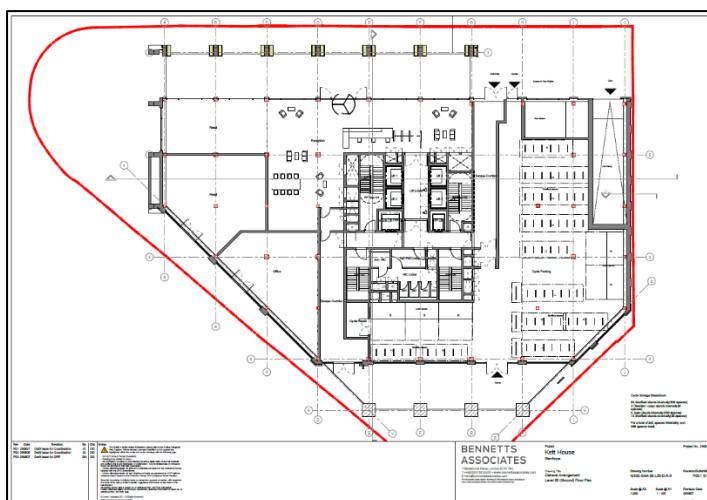
CGI – Station Road extracted from Kett building DRP presentation (August 2025)



CGI – looking south east - extracted from Kett building DRP presentation (August 2025)



Basement floorplan - extracted from Kett building DRP presentation (August 2025)



Ground floorplan - extracted from Kett building DRP presentation (August 2025)

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.