



The Greater Cambridge Design Review Panel

Pre-application ref: PPA/24/0044

Kett House, Cambridge

Thursday 8 May 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

Dave Murphy – Transport Consultant, Associate at Momentum Transport Consultancy – Joining online – 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

Laura Collins, Stanhope (Development Manager)

Ron German, Stanhope (Development Manager)

Peter Fisher, Bennetts Associates (Architect)

Rob Bearyman, Bennetts Associates (Architect)

David Dawson, Bennetts Associates (Architect)

Robert Myers, Robert Myers Associates (Landscape Architect)

Amedeo Scofone, Hilson Moran (Sustainability)

Kate Hannelly-Brown, Bidwells (Heritage)

Mike Derbyshire, Bidwells (Planning)

Jennie Hainsworth, Bidwells (Planning)

Virtual Attendance via MS Teams

Jack Smith, KMC (Transport)

Jodie Welch, KMC (Transport)

Martina Sechi, Bidwells (Townscape)

Sarah Wearing, Bidwells (Heritage)

Alfie Hood, Bidwells (Planning)

Isabel Czech, Bennetts Associates (Architect)

Mary-Joe Daccache, Hilson Moran (Sustainability)

LPA Officers:

Tom Gray – Principal Planner and case officer

Tom Davies – Senior Urban Designer and DRP Manager

Henri Comrie – Principal Urban Designer

Bana Elzein – Principal Landscape Architect - online

Charlotte Howe-McCartin- Principal Conservation Officer - online

Brooke Moore – DRP/Business Support Officer

Declarations of Interest

The DRP manager asked if there were any Declarations of Interest for DRP members. Dave Murphy informed members that Stanhope have been a client of his company in the past, for different schemes, and this included Laura Collins as the Development Manager. The bulk of that work was completed in 2022/23. The panel agreed that this was not a conflict of interest.

Previous Panel Reviews

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

Community

Considering the number of additional workers accommodated in this building (about 500+ perhaps) and the new buildings opposite (Botanic Place, about 2500+ perhaps) once occupied, the applicant is well advised to reconsider the functional and social aspects the space between the two new buildings on Hills Road. This is important work with the highways authority. A successful resolution will helping the positive positioning of all tenants in the building, employee/street user enjoyment and safety and help especially amenities including retail fronting on Hills Road to be successful. A second pedestrian crossing over Hills Road and considering the spaces between the two new buildings and the junction as one piece of rather very busy public realm is recommended.

The panel member specialist considers zooming out and in developing an understanding a more contextualised identity of this corner 3 destinations that attract large number of people to and through this area. They are a) the busy Station with Station Road and its rather ridged formality of commercial buildings, b) centuries of layered richness City Centre heritage and the huge and extraordinary, interesting Botanic Gardens. That botanic beauty, the wilderness and its living heritage is not well represented in the entrance area and junction to the Botanic Gardens and the Visitor Centre at the moment. With the Kett heritage in exquisite stone masonry and wood carving craftsmanship, the panel member specialist suggests exploring how new building and its spaces at ground level, could connect and celebrate this 'botanic' context and heritage. A USP that could help the building stand out in what looks like a busy and highly competitive local office market. The new building with the proposed colonnade along Station Road and spaces along Hills Road could perhaps do the job the current entrance and junction design does so poorly, creating a vibrant, seasonally changing and welcoming environment. Reusing existing materials for the new building could shape and root the building and its community in the existing place.

The panel member specialist suggests exploring local partnership working with the Botanic Garden to open up the Botanic Garden to future employees so they can use it for instance for lunch breaks, runs or any other physical or social activity before, during and after work.

The panel member specialist recommend more than one main entrance to the building for employee to allow for a more balanced flow of movement through the building. The applicant could explore a second entrance to the office uses above from the busy Hills Road side and in addition to the one onto Station Road.

The panel member specialist recommends the Thermal comfort of users' needs to be considered including for pedestrians and cyclists, as there will be several taller buildings framing this junction once the works are completed. She recommends the 'Thermal Comfort Guidelines for development in the City of London' as a methodology bringing the various aspects of user comfort into one coherent and pragmatic approach.

Inclusive Design / Accessibility

The panel member specialist thought that the location for access and servicing for the new building need to consider everyone's diverse needs, including distance to the nearest bus stop and pedestrian crossings. She recommends having a second pedestrian entrance otherwise it will be a long walk around the building from the Hills Road side to the single entrance on Station Road. The applicant needs to consider the location of a drop off zone for disabled people and how people will transition safely around and through the building. The applicant needs to consider nighttime use, in terms of lighting for the landscape and public realm and to maintain passive surveillance in and out of the building.

Character – Conservation

The panel member specialist was less concerned about the adverse impacts on the immediate designated (Listed) heritage assets in the area (e.g. The Church of Our Lady of the Assumption and the English Martyrs on Hills Road), having seen the videos of the dynamic views. She supports the way that the building elevation, on Station Road, has a relationship to the neighbouring commercial buildings running back to the Station as opposed to the Botanic Place development. The proposed massing and height responds less well to the smaller neighbouring buildings and buildings of local interest. A reduction in height would improve this relationship.

The panel member specialist is concerned about the proposed height in terms of the impact on the long views from the City Centre. She would recommend that the building is lowered by 2 or 3 storeys. This would be a highly visible tall building when viewed across Cambridge. She supports the simplified design and massing and considers it a significant improvement on the scheme proposed at the previous DRP meeting review in 2023.

The panel member specialist recommends celebrating the historic significance of the former Rattee & Kett site as a “workshop for master masons and carvers” in some way, and integrating the large, well known, mural on the corner of Kett House.

Perhaps the design could add craft based or carved features as a gesture towards the heritage of the site as a builder's yard.

Character – Landscape

The panel member specialist felt that the new proposals were a simple and sensitive approach. She was pleased with the break-up of the massing with 6 and 9 storey blocks. She supports the building line along Station Road being continued. She liked the proposed greening on Station Road but has some concerns about the detail design of the colonnade. Colonnades can look good in large public spaces, but they can seem dark in the English climate, and they can be awkward for accommodating trees and landscaping. The existing arrangement with the set back to buildings, and the landscaping along Station Road is successful, and people use the spaces created.

The panel member specialist queried who would use the proposed planting areas in the southwest corner of the site of Hills Road? She was pleased with the large trees and paving proposed for the public realm on the junction. There are a lot of empty offices on Station Road and so landscape can help bring vitality to the area. The applicant needs to carefully consider the relationship between the proposed trees and the vision line to the building, and how the roof terrace area links to the ground. The existing mural is well loved – it is worth exploring ways of incorporating it into the new building rather than introducing new public art.

The panel member specialist suggested trying to emphasise that there are two linked buildings, rather than a single building, through different materiality. The colonnade needs to define a simple, open space to ensure lots of people use it and it functions as truly part of the public realm.

Climate

The panel member specialist emphasised the merits of retrofitting rather than the proposed option of demolition and new build; so strong evidence in support of the preferred option would need to be provided at any future council planning committee.

The panel member specialist was pleased with the sustainability targets proposed. The applicant needs to aim high in terms of the carbon emissions produced by the creation of a basement carpark. She queried the necessity of providing a carparking considering the short distance to the railway station and the city centre. She commented on how there is already a lot of traffic congestion in this area which may put people off driving to the site. She was pleased with the location of the bike parking at ground floor. The applicant should consider the digital carbon footprint, as well as energy and water use, in terms of the future operation of the building.

The panel member specialist emphasised that, if the applicant is going to pursue a complete rebuild option for the site, then they need to explore the reuse of materials in detail and set string targets at the outset of the design, to support their case.

Character - Architecture

The panel member specialist supported the massing and entrance on Station Road and the way the way the building form refers to the neighbouring commercial buildings along Station Road, rather than curved buildings on Hills Road. He supported breaking the building form into 2 parts with different heights, but 9 and 6 storeys might be a storey too tall. The new building probably should not be taller than the Botanic House sited on the opposite side of Hills Road, so that this remains the landmark on the junction and in long views. He does not consider there to be significant adverse impacts on long views from the City Centre of a new tall building. The panel member specialist advised that the proposed “linear park” and colonnade on Station Road will not work as public realm if the colonnade is too low and not generous in scale. It will be challenging to make the new public realm continuous with the neighbouring buildings (like the Workspace building). He advises against large American-style colonnades such as at Liverpool Street. It will need to have a special treatment with e.g. distinctive lighting, colour, landscaping (gesturing to the Botanic Gardens), some building crafts, retention of historic material etc.

The panel member specialist advises deferring, to some extent, to the neighbouring terrace of little ‘Buildings of Local Interest’ on Hills Road (Eastbourne Terrace and

College Terrace) so that these are not dwarfed or overlooked by the roof terrace. He commented that Station Road and Hills Road are very busy and noisy in terms of traffic and pollution, so that the roof terrace may not be a popular place to work or relax, although it is south facing.

Connectivity

The panel member specialist commented on the context, and how the under construction and approved schemes on the other side of Hills Road will mean increased footfall for this area, and more use of the Southside of Station Road as a result of the potential crossing arrangement/improvements. He highlighted how the Greater Cambridge Partnership's Cycling Plus scheme proposals (page 16 in the presentation pack) will alter the junction layout and crossing point. This will affect the public realm on the southwest side of the proposal's site.

Care will need to be taken around the northwest, "nose", of the building to divert people to walk down the colonnade to the Station and the western frontage – with a particular benefit for footfall for retail frontages. The small landscapes/areas on Hills Road should not be dark or secluded. This could be avoided by having dual cycle/pedestrian access to the building for better connectivity. Considering the site's location within the city, the site's proximity to the station and its large carpark, the minimal number of carparking spaces (to meet policy requirements) should be provided. The applicant should try to enhance the non-car travel options for coming to the site.

Chair's Summary

As part of the ambition to deliver an attractive and successful building and place of work and from the community perspective; the applicant should start to fully consider the social aspects and opportunities of this site, its changing context and design proposition. The number of pedestrians and cyclists in the area (3000+) can be expected to significantly increase because of the arrival of two new development projects. Safe, attractive and welcoming, perhaps even seasonally changing street

level experiences and connecting with local destinations should be considered. Especially the Botanic Garden and the site's Kett Heritage could provide some fertile ground for inspiration and detailing of the proposals while staying true to the Applicants clear commitment to elegance, craftsmanship and beautiful landscape. Further, the flow through the building and needed amenities for tenants, employees and visitors need to be considered in the forthcoming design development.

Ensure good, clear access for all users, in terms of pedestrians and cyclists of all abilities, for entering and navigating the building safely and avoid unnecessary obstacles. Appropriate lighting should be provided after dark.

In terms of the building's location in a conservation area; panel members do have concerns about its height, in terms of its visual impacts in long views. Is it a landmark building or not? And should it be lower than Botanic House and Botanic Place?

For the architecture, the form of the building, the stone and timber materials and the way it talks to its neighbours on Station Road is supported, but the way the building relates to the low terrace of neighbouring buildings on Hills Road needs to be carefully treated to ensure that these Buildings of Local Interest are not dwarfed.

For the landscape, creating a botanic "wildness" could have exciting possibilities. The large trees planted at the perimeter and the designs encouraging movement of people along the Southside of Station Road, is welcomed. There needs to be very careful, special treatment of the colonnade to enhance this experience and achieve the wider urban aims of the scheme.

For climate, the applicant needs to aim high for the sustainability targets. Strong evidence will need to be provided that new build, rather than retrofitting, this large building is the most sustainable option.

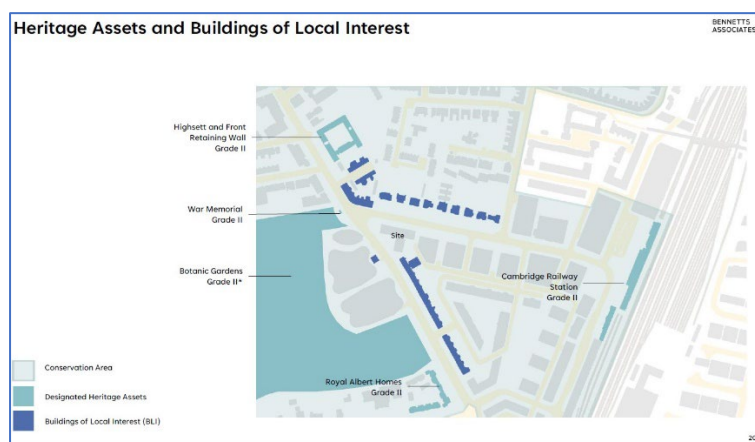
For connectivity, minimise the car parking provision where possible. It is a very sustainable location and try to enhance the non-car travel options for coming to the site.



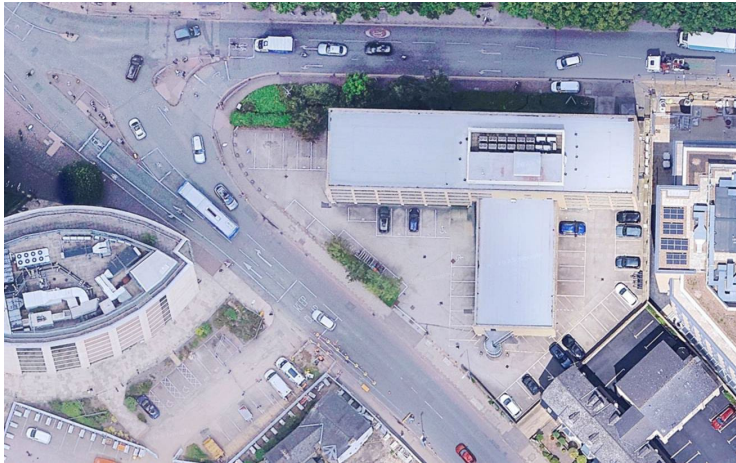
Existing building – extracted from Kett building DRP presentation (May 2025)



Existing location – extracted from Kett building DRP presentation (May 2025)



Heritage assets and buildings of local interest – extracted from Kett building DRP presentation (May 2025)



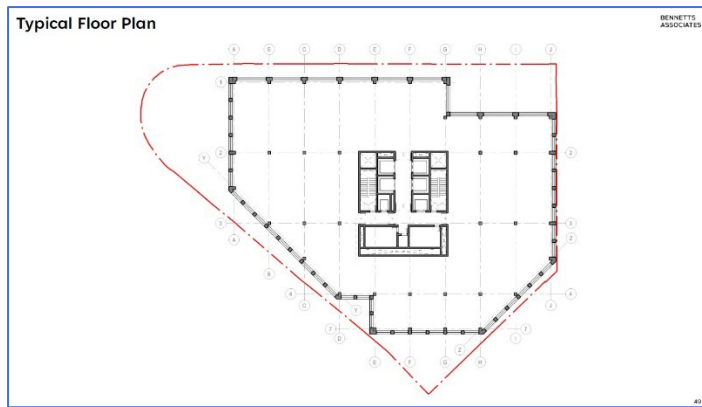
Existing Public Realm – extracted from Kett building DRP presentation (May 2025)



Proposed Public Realm – extracted from Kett building DRP presentation (May 2025)



Proposed Ground floor plan – extracted from Kett building DRP presentation (May 2025)



Proposed typical floor plan – extracted from Kett building DRP presentation (May 2025)



Proposed massing views looking east – extracted from Kett building DRP presentation (May 2025)



Proposed massing views looking west – extracted from Kett building DRP presentation (May 2025)



Proposed massing views - From Botanic Garden Entrance Looking East – extracted from Kett building DRP presentation (May 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.