



The Greater Cambridge Design Review Panel

Pre-application ref: 23/50499/PREPPA

Hanover Court and Princess Court, Union Road, Cambridge

Thursday 28 November 2024, 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:

Maggie Baddeley (Chair) – Planner and Chartered Surveyor

Shikha Bhardwaj – Lead Sustainability Designer - Climate

Helen Goodwin – Head of Programmes at Design Southeast - Community

Tahmina Begum – Support and Advice Worker - Access

Nicholas Tye – Director at Tye Architects - Architecture

Edward Leigh – Senior Transport Policy Officer – Connectivity

Vanessa Ross – Director at Arc Landscape Design and Planning - Landscape

Ian Johnson – Manager for Heritage and Planning Compliance - Conservation

Applicant & Design Team:

Paul Belton – Planner - Carter Jonas

John Mason – Associate - Carter Jonas

Dominique Oliver – PTE Architects

Rebecca Lee – PTE Architects

Gemma Houlton – McGregor Coxall - Landscape

Alex Bunn – Qoda – Sustainability

Henry Charlton - Applicant

Ross Jones - Applicant

Janine Dykes – RPS Heritage

LPA Officers:

Tom Davies – Senior Urban Designer/Design Review Panel Manager

Aaron Coe - Principal Planner/case officer

Annemarie De Boom – Urban Designer

Gail Broom – Principal Conservation Officer

Mark Taylor – Access Officer

Maxine Ross – DRP/Policy and BNE Support Officer

Brooke Moore – DRP/Business Support Officer

Bonnie Kwok – DRP Panel Manager

Joanna Davies – Trees officer

Observer(s):

None

Declarations of Interest

None

Previous Panel Reviews

None

Summary

The very visual and informative presentation - together with the models brought to the review - are much appreciated and have been extremely helpful in fully understanding the proposal, and in formulating panel members' comments in response.

The Panel can clearly see that a great deal of work has been undertaken to date, in progressing this all-important residential-led regeneration project, given the context of the existing buildings' apparent unsuitability for retention. Noting that there have been six pre-app meetings and two public consultations, the intention for there to be one more pre-app meeting (in December, 2024) and for the proposal to be considered by the Housing Scrutiny Committee in February, 2025 followed by submission, the Panel has fundamental concerns around issues that are not currently addressed successfully by the review proposals. These concerns relate to:

- the unacceptable loss of three Category A plane trees;
- the bulk, scale, form and massing of the development being excessive in their heritage context, and
- the negative and harmful impact of the four freestanding buildings on the Newtown and Glisson Road Conservation Area ('the CA').

Appreciating the balance that has to be achieved of retaining the Category A trees, providing a viable number of dwellings and preserving CA character, there are other Panel concerns that should be addressed, relating to:

- elements of the landscape plan and strategy for the site, including the lack of a clear differentiation between public/ private realm;
- addressing issues created by the provision of perimeter car parking that interrupts and curtails the use and enjoyment of an important green infrastructure route;
- under-provision of cycle parking;
- the siting and use of the replacement community room;
- the impact of demolition and new construction on the overall embodied carbon footprint of the proposal;
- the absence of a clear strategy for reusing materials either on-, or off-site,
- the design of individual building entrances; and
- the detailing and materiality of elevations.

The Panel considers that these particular concerns could potentially be resolved in future iterations. But to address the three fundamental issues identified by the Panel, it may prove necessary to reduce the total number of dwellings on-site, in spite of viability concerns and trying to achieve the greatest number of new homes to meet City needs.

Character

Landscape

The applicant team has referred to their initial studies having looked at retaining all, two or just one of the existing Category A plane trees on-site; mention has been made in the review to there being 'not much comparable difference' between each option, with the design team confirming that none of these options is possible (the scope for 'bending' development around the trees having been explored too). The extent of the trees' root protection areas - and their 2m additional canopy protection areas – underlie this conclusion, the starting position being that the trees would become unsafe due to British demolition standards, the recommended 'development

zone' methodology (one of separating mechanical plant from personnel) and the nature of (automated) demolition of the garage building and the existing dwellings on-site. In short, if the three trees were to be protected, the preferred robot-controlled demolition methodology could not be used. From a new build perspective too, the applicant team states that the trees must be felled, so that a tower crane can be installed in the centre of the site; their loss is thus for lessening the cost of demolition and construction i.e. for viability reasons. The Panel cannot accept these justifications and remains very concerned that no information has been presented on investigating options that demonstrate how these trees could potentially be retained; the clear focus of the applicant team has been on a demolition-based decision that they could not be saved. The Panel's clear view is that the loss of three mature Category A trees of a species that could potentially have 200+ years' life ahead is fundamentally wrong; it would be negligent for this not to be stated. These trees may not be native species but they contribute positively to the CA and to views of the site from some considerable distance. They obviously contribute to the site's biodiversity and they are a fundamental part of city greening. The removal of the three Category A plane trees will clearly impact detrimentally on biodiversity net gain. Referencing the plane trees that have been retained and incorporated in public realm at other regeneration projects such as at Elephant Park (Southwark), the Panel suggests that retaining all of the plane trees be reconsidered, then two and then one. It may mean that if ultimately only keeping one, the community room would have to be repositioned; the Panel then suggests doing so within one of the new blocks, or in a way that retains and utilises at least part of the existing car park semi-basement.

The existing green space between the main buildings has been described by the design team as 'a barren green space, with not much planting'. The design team refers to limited pockets of green space in the wider area but the central green space here is 'one of few'. Parker's Piece and the Botanical Gardens are not referred to in the presented analysis on the basis of them being 'a bit of a walk' away; this stance is however questioned by the Panel.

The design team has referred to the project's wider landscape design development over the last year or so as having 'a community and play focus', and it being 'green, very sensory and biodiverse', looking then at how water feeds into a 'responsive

planting and materiality strategy'. The design team has referred to how there are two broad typologies for the site – one being a public area around its perimeter and the other being 'a secret garden, a tapestry with sensory planting' between the proposed blocks. Also referred to is the, 'a real opportunity to green the edge' as a landscape principle. The Panel has however identified interrelated issues that have arisen from these approaches to the current plan – they relate to the extent of open space and its public/ private access, and permeability. A 'biodiverse green buffer' is said to be proposed, running around the edges of the site; there may be 'play-along-the-way' on the eastern side of the development. But in reality, the north eastern boundary of the site fronting George IV Street – the most attractive of the site's frontages - is largely proposed for car parking, creating a clear barrier to pedestrian movement to/ from the primary school on the northern side of Union Road and interfering with the proposed pedestrian routes within the development (including to and from the buildings' entrances). The provision of a parking area here makes this street frontage seem like the 'back' of the development, when it should be perceived as a 'front'. Due to the project's harm to the CA that is referred to elsewhere in this report, the Panel's suggestion to remove the private parking area proposed is underlined as being a priority that would help to bring public benefits i.e. by creating better public space.

The Panel is concerned that there is a lack of clarity around what parts of the site are public and private. No railings are proposed, to differentiate spaces; instead, it is proposed that vegetation would be used to 'close spaces' and to provide buffers for private amenity. Where the 'backs' and 'fronts' of each of the four freestanding blocks are located is currently confusing as a consequence; there is a need of people to be able to differentiate between them. It is not clear to the Panel how this will be achieved, by using vegetation to define boundaries. Between the buildings, there is intended to be 'more of a community focus'; play areas would be provided in the northern part of the main open space and a central 'multi-generational community space' is proposed at the heart of the open area between the four new buildings. A large mature tree would be located here, with seating for relaxing. Elsewhere there would be 'nestled seating areas and play-on-the-way'. It is acknowledged that there is insufficient space to provide an expansive area for ball games. The Panel's response to this overall approach is that there is a need for the

central space to feel like the garden for the development's residents, as it will be an important facility for bringing people together, where residents' children can play safely. The Panel references Kings Crescent (Hackney) in this regard, where individual blocks have private, shared residents' gardens, each with a different character and function. In addition, the Panel requests the design team give greater consideration to accessibility in respect of clearly legible routes through the development.

The Panel notes how 'smart delivery' management and maintenance of the landscape is proposed using an external management company; the planting palette would nonetheless be 'self-managing as far as possible'.

Context, the Newtown and Glisson Road Conservation Area and listed buildings

The design team has made mention of how retaining the existing buildings as they are was found to be unfeasible. The Panel's view is likely to accord with that of many, that the existing Courts contribute negatively to the CA, by way of their layout, forms and heights – and their design having moved away from its historic architecture. In this regard, reference has been made to the design team undertaking an early analysis of context, finding it to be one principally of two storeys, with taller buildings such as the University's chemistry building on Union Road. The history and grain of the local area (since the 14th century) has been explored, with particular reference to the site being within the CA. Photographs have been taken of almost every CA building, as part of gaining an understanding of character. The former street layout that included a partial east/ west route (Queen Street) and another running north/ south (Princes Street) has been noted. Regard has also been had to the presence of listed buildings nearby; a townscape and visual impact assessment has been carried out by the applicant team that has focused particularly on the listed Wanstead House, on the north western corner of the junction of Union Road and Hills Road.

Despite all of this extensive research, it is disappointing to the Panel that heritage consultants have only been added to the applicant team recently. Although they have confirmed that they are 'comfortable' with the extensive work undertaken to date by the design team, the Panel's key concern is that the review scheme would

increase harm to the CA. Noting the mix of higher (6-storey) and lower (5-storey) blocks currently proposed (the two affordable housing blocks on the south western part of the site fronting Bentinck Street are proposed to be lower i.e. 5-storey, while the two residential market buildings on George IV Street would each be six storeys), this harm would particularly be in terms of bulk and height when seen from Union Road and Bentinck Street viewpoints, There is also a degree of harm to Wanstead House, although lesser. The most harmful elements of the project relate to the new blocks sited where the existing car park fronts onto the junction of Bentinck Street and Union Road, and at the junction of George IV Street and Union Road. It is at these two points that the design team should try to lessen the scheme's impact on the historic environment.

It is difficult otherwise for the Panel to comment further on heritage matters, given the advanced stage of the emerging proposal and their overriding conclusion that its four freestanding blocks do not address or improve on the negative aspects of the existing buildings in their historic context. It is a requirement in law that development proposals should preserve or enhance CA. Here, the outcome of the extensive research and design development that has been undertaken to date unfortunately is a proposal that is harmful to the CA; in short, its heights should be lower than the existing buildings.

Architecture

Very early on in the pre-app process, perimeter block layouts were considered; a 'doughnut' form was also one of many different massing iterations. The Panel is disappointed that these options have not been presented as background to the review discussions; it has been difficult without them to understand why four freestanding blocks are being proposed now, despite the explanation that this option is felt to open up the space in the centre of the site, having regard to how it is 'very tricky' to develop. According to the design team, the identified constraints are not only root protection areas, the existing semi-basement car parking and the proximity of two primary schools, but also the existing sub-station close to the south eastern corner of the site at the junction of George IV Street with Coronation Street that has to be retained at least in the shorter term. As regards providing services, buildability is also limited by the root protection areas across the site.

For each replacement residential building, the design team has explained how their volumes have been hinged on a central circulation piece, creating 'quite a dynamic form'; to avoid creating 'pinched' entrances, angled approach areas have been created. The existing deck access buildings have a slenderness that the Panel acknowledges cannot be replicated in the redevelopment's bulk and massing, as currently designed. But the Panel's view is that the proposed siting, bulk and massing (width, depth and height) of each of the four residential blocks all present a big challenge, given the site's CA location. Despite the proposal having a smaller footprint than the existing buildings, and noting how it has not proved possible for the design team to reduce the buildings' floorplans as part of the 'balancing act' that has been undertaken, the Panel references Marmalade Lane in Cambridge, where co-housing with communal facilities (e.g. shared dining room and kitchen) has been provided as an efficient use of land.

Turning to the simplicity of the current design approach, it may not be as good as employing differentiation and individuality i.e. creating interest in some way. For example, how people perceive - and interact - on the ground floors of the buildings will be very important. Individuality could help quality in this regard, rather than the proposed simplicity of the elevations looking foreboding and being confusing about what they are. At an early stage, the design team looked at how the entrances to the new residential buildings could be celebrated. The Panel considers that stronger entrance points are still needed; there are clear precedents locally e.g. at the listed Wanstead House. The balance of the centralised lobbies and cores may need to be different, as they are currently constrained; it is important that they are designed in a way that generates a welcoming feeling and one of safety and security, not a concern that someone may be hiding. The entrances should be clear, with public realm leading to them, at ground and eye levels. Defining public and private space will assist in this regard (further comments on the proposed elevations and 'fronts and backs' are provided below).

Despite the design team considering that it is very important to have extensive active frontages, with entrances to the site itself giving views of the garden space beyond, each new block only has one entrance. The Panel therefore suggests that providing more 'front doors' to homes at ground level and on the street frontages could be

beneficial not only for the activation of Union Road and Corporation Street (they currently have no entrances onto them), but also to relieve pressure on ground floor circulation space.

Materials and detailing

The Panel notes that the site's location within the CA has been a starting point for the design team; its 'rhythm and uniformity' have led to the design team wanting the proposed buildings to form a 'calm backdrop' to the 'beautiful landscape' that the project will create. The very varied palette around the site has led to the choice of a muted 'backdrop' of grey brick, plus a grey brick with white flecks. The Panel recommends the use of high-quality materials for the elevations, given the site's CA location but looking at the articulation of the proposed blocks and the presented elevations - as well as how the design team has started to show materiality – it is considered that a combination of changes to show interesting differentials could enhance the buildings. Specifically, the Panel endorses how varying types of projecting balconies have been played with and notes the intention for their railings to be higher density lower down in each block. The Panel suggests that the sizes of balconies could also be adjusted, in response to solar light and shading, as well as to reduce the appearance of bulk.

With further reference to the facades and sustainability aspects of the project, the necessary vents, ducts and rainwater detailing will be all-important to the detailed design of elevations; the Panel would not want to see awkward cluttering of the new buildings' exteriors.

Climate

Demolition and the circular economy

The Panel would have expected a pre-demolition audit to have been undertaken already. Noting too that information arising from an embodied carbon assessment is still awaited, it is disappointing that neither can be used in the narrative for how either have informed the emerging proposal. It would also have been helpful to have an understanding of if/ how demolition materials will be reused in both the buildings

and the proposed landscape. Although the landscape design team is considering using materials with a high percentage of recycled materials, the Panel's view is that the application submission should be specific about the extent of recycled material that will be sourced on-site, as there are many creative ways that demolition materials can be reused, including the use of crushed materials to avoid the need to import topsoil.

The Panel does not endorse the intention to infill the half-basement, whether or not it potentially reuses on-site demolition waste. Despite the applicant team referring to its potential for retention and reuse being limited, due to its restricted floor level to ceiling height, the Panel suggests that this is not the best approach as its embodied carbon is already 'spent'. Consideration should be given to how the space could be reused.

Embodied and in-use carbon

The Panel would have been pleased at this relatively late design stage to see a range of targets for embodied carbon for the proposed development. The emphasis has been placed on how the proposed buildings will be low carbon in use, which is welcomed. However, embodied carbon is equally important to address at this stage as it is the carbon that will be spent first.

It is noted by the Panel that a natural ventilation strategy has been devised. As for another Hill development that is under construction, each apartment would have its own 'Nilan' unit, which is similar to an air source heat pump and which would be located within a cupboard. An electric radiator to 'top up' on the coldest days would also be provided. There would be no active cooling, although Nilan units can be switched to reverse, to temper the strongest heatwaves. The Panel considers that this level of detail indicates that operational carbon is being dealt with well in the design process.

Indoor environment, overheating and microclimate

85% of the total number of proposed apartments would be dual aspect, with all their living rooms in corner positions. There is no direct overlooking between bedrooms and living spaces. The few (6 no.) single aspect homes proposed tend to be 1-bed dwellings, positioned where the buildings do not 'crank'. At the suggestion of the Panel, artificial lighting of these 1-bed homes will be specifically looked at, to ensure that the furthest recesses are adequately lit; in any event, they are all already achieving required daylighting standards. Consideration also needs to be given to their potential for overheating therefore an analysis should be provided, to ensure their living spaces are of the best quality. The Panel recommends that future weather files should be used for the assessment too, so as to design in readiness for the worst climate scenarios. All single-aspect dwellings be included in the analysis, to ensure they provide good internal conditions for the occupants.

The 'golden ratio' has been picked up on, with reference being made to changing window proportions rising up each building. The Panel considers that the design team also ought to look at window openings and the buildings' elevations in relation to the solar path, i.e. to differentiate between the directions faced by each one. The designs of the elevations in terms of e.g. glass to solid ratio also need to be informed by shadow studies. If this has been done already, it has not come across clearly in the review. The design team agrees with the Panel that visual representation of daylight analysis ought to be provided.

Although shadow studies - based on the solstices - have been undertaken for analysing the microclimate of external spaces to assess outdoor comfort, findings have not been presented. The Panel questions whether the east/ west 'corridor' crossing the site would receive much sunlight and if that were to be the case, people would not want to dwell there. It is suggested that from a landscape perspective, it undertaking 'a day each season' scenario testing would be worthwhile, to understand how the landscape will change in relation to the seasons - including when vegetation sheds its leaves - and its impact on external comfort.

Water supply and use

The design team has referred to consideration being given to sustainable drainage, with integrating rain gardens throughout being 'pushed for'. Water capacities generally are also being discussed within the applicant team; the aspiration is not to have underground tanks for storage. Consideration is being given to the provision of green roofs; details have not yet been finalised but blue roofs (for rainwater collecting/ holding, or potentially harvesting) have not been looked at to date. It is expected that slowing i.e. managing rainwater run-off would be via the proposed rain gardens. Low-capacity fittings would be provided in all of the proposed dwellings. From the limited extent of information that has been provided on review, it is clear to the Panel that more work is needed on the project's sustainable drainage strategy (SuDS). Providing a clear diagram showing thinking around blue infrastructure would be very beneficial; the water strategy should include collection from rooftops as part of proposed supply, or water falling on the roofs being subsequently directed into the rain gardens. In addition, the Panel referenced the need to choose species for such conditions. In summary, the same level of detail in the approach to drainage should be provided as for the sustainability and energy strategies.

Biodiversity net gain

The Panel understands that an ecological baseline survey has been undertaken but that a biodiversity net gain (BNG) baseline assessment has yet to take place. The design team aspires to achieve 20% BNG, although it has not been specified how this can be achieved. No assessment to date has been undertaken relating to the proposed development - including the impact on BNG resulting from the proposed felling of the plane trees. The Panel considers that the current scheme would struggle to achieve even the 10% legal requirement on-site. If the required BNG is not met on-site, the cost of purchasing off-site credits is likely to be high therefore the Panel recommends reviewing the BNG requirements for the site as a priority. There should be an aim to provide as much of the net gain as possible on-site, whilst bearing in mind the implications that proposing natural habitats on-site will have on intended uses and management.

Connectivity

Referring to the likely routes to be taken by pedestrians and cyclists moving through the site, the Panel notes that these are more likely to be diagonal, as all approaches lead to the corners of the site. The north eastern end of Union Road has very narrow footways, therefore it is likely that more people will use Coronation Street to access Hills Road. The corners of the site are therefore the most important, in terms of indicating an inviting space that can be moved through. Diagonal routes therefore need to be given consideration, more than north–south and east–west cross-routes.

The Panel is in full agreement with the applicant team, that the site is very well-connected, being close to bus stops, on low-traffic cycle routes, and within easy walking distance of Cambridge railway station and the city centre. Yet 17 car parking spaces are proposed (it being understood by the Panel that the original intention was not to provide any general spaces), with the principal parking area sited on the George IV Street boundary (a location described as having been influenced by root protection areas on-site). The Panel is strongly of the view that in this highly sustainable location, that is also within a CA where harm has been identified, the scheme should be a car-free development – with parking provided only for disabled residents, club cars and delivery, loading and service vehicles. Unfortunately, these spaces are distributed across the George IV Street, Union Road and Bentinck Street frontages, with some being at a distance from the affordable (M4(3) and accessible) homes they will serve. There is no breakdown otherwise as yet of parking provision (it may include a single car club parking bay); the applicant team has stated that it expects parking provision to make a ‘sizeable addition’ to the value of the market housing. The Panel questions whether there are alternative ways to add value to the market homes, other than providing private parking on highly valuable land in such a central location with easy cycle access, where the need for owning a car does not exist. The Panel’s understanding is that potential purchasers of car-free market apartments would pay a premium to live in the city centre. If ultimately it is decided however that the only viable way to develop the site is to provide parking, it should be designed in such a way that the land could be converted to green space or some other amenity in the future. Parking spaces would need to be owned communally and leased, not sold, to allow such repurposing in future.

The scheme ought to include at least one loading bay for delivery vans and service vehicles, as the Panel notes that if it does not, on-street and on-pavement parking will proliferate.

The cycle parking currently proposed to be provided internally would only have external access, in direct response to fire safety considerations. Accepting this design approach and endorsing how residents' cycle stores are located close to building entrances, the Panel is concerned that the number of spaces (230+ for residents and visitors) will be inadequate for an almost car-free/ to be car-free development. More than 248 spaces would be required for residents simply to meet policy standards (Local Plan Appendix L - '1 space per bedroom up to 3-bed dwellings': 88 for 1-beds + 136 for 2-beds + 24 for 3-beds would be required). But the policy standard is for all housing, not specifically car-free. Many 1-bed apartments will have two occupants, each with their own cycle, therefore the Panel would recommend more than the policy minimum here. The upper end of the range for residential use may be calculated as 1 space per dwelling plus 1 space per bedroom, which would equate to 412 spaces. The number of off-gauge spaces for cargo and other larger cycles should be increased proportionately, or as agreed with the LPA. Visitor cycle parking is not currently shown; it should be located close to the entrances to the proposed blocks.

A 10m 'gap' between the affordable housing blocks on Bentinck Street is proposed; the Panel notes however that this has been incorporated on the basis of a misinterpretation of the historic street network on the site. There is a need to understand how routes through the site will work with the landscape, and lead to the buildings' entrances. If the entire site is to be public or semi-public, there needs to be route legibility on the ground and at eye level. The landscape plan includes a permeably-paved network of accessible, meandering paths that are proposed 'for all to enjoy'. The design team is proposing level access and currently looking at wayfinding techniques. It goes without saying that all of these design features should be incorporated in the proposal as a matter of principle, but walking routes to the building entrances and through the site should be direct and linear, principally for inclusive accessibility reasons, but also for general legibility and convenience.

Referring to the likely routes to be taken by pedestrians and cyclists moving through the site, the Panel notes that these are more likely to be east/ west, not north/ south. The north eastern end of Union Road is very narrow therefore fewer people will use it; Coronation Street is used much more. The corners of the site are therefore the most important, in terms of indicating an inviting space that can be moved through, leading to another corner. Diagonal routes therefore need to be given consideration, more than north/ south and east/ west routes.

The Panel is in full agreement with the applicant team, that the site is very well-connected, being close to bus stops, cycle routes (e.g. on Union Road), Cambridge railway station and the city centre. A cycle route is also proposed through the site itself. Yet 17 car parking spaces are now proposed (it being understood by the Panel that the original intention was not to provide any general spaces), with the principal parking area sited on the George IV Street boundary (a location described as having been influenced by root protection areas on-site). The Panel is strongly of the view that in this highly sustainable location, that is also within a CA where harm has been identified, the scheme should be a car-free development - except for providing the required number of accessible spaces. Unfortunately, these spaces are distributed across the George IV Street, Union Road and Bentinck Street frontages, with some being at a distance from the affordable homes they will serve. There is no breakdown otherwise as yet of parking provision (it may include a single car club parking bay); the applicant team has stated that it is looking to parking to make a 'sizeable addition' to the value of the market housing. The Panel questions whether there are other ways to add value to market homes, than providing private parking on highly valuable land in such a central location with easy cycle access, where the need for owning a car does not exist. Their understanding is that potential purchasers of car-free market apartments would pay a premium to live in the city centre. If ultimately it is decided however that the only viable way to develop the site is to provide parking, it should be designed in such a way that it can be reduced in size, or removed – spaces would have to be communal and not sold, to allow such repurposing.

The scheme ought to include a loading bay for deliveries, as the Panel notes that if it does not, on-street and on-pavement parking will proliferate.

The cycle parking currently proposed to be provided internally would only have external access, in direct response to fire safety considerations. Accepting this design approach and endorsing how residents' cycle stores are located close to building entrances, the Panel is concerned that the number of spaces (and the lack of spaces for cargo and other large bikes) will be inadequate for an almost car-free/ to be car-free development. It should be assumed that more than 248 spaces (to meet standards) would be required; 1-bed apartments are likely to have two occupants therefore as many as 412 spaces (an upper limit) could be necessitated. Parking cargo and other larger cycles should be catered for. Visitor cycle parking should relate to the perimeters of the proposed blocks.

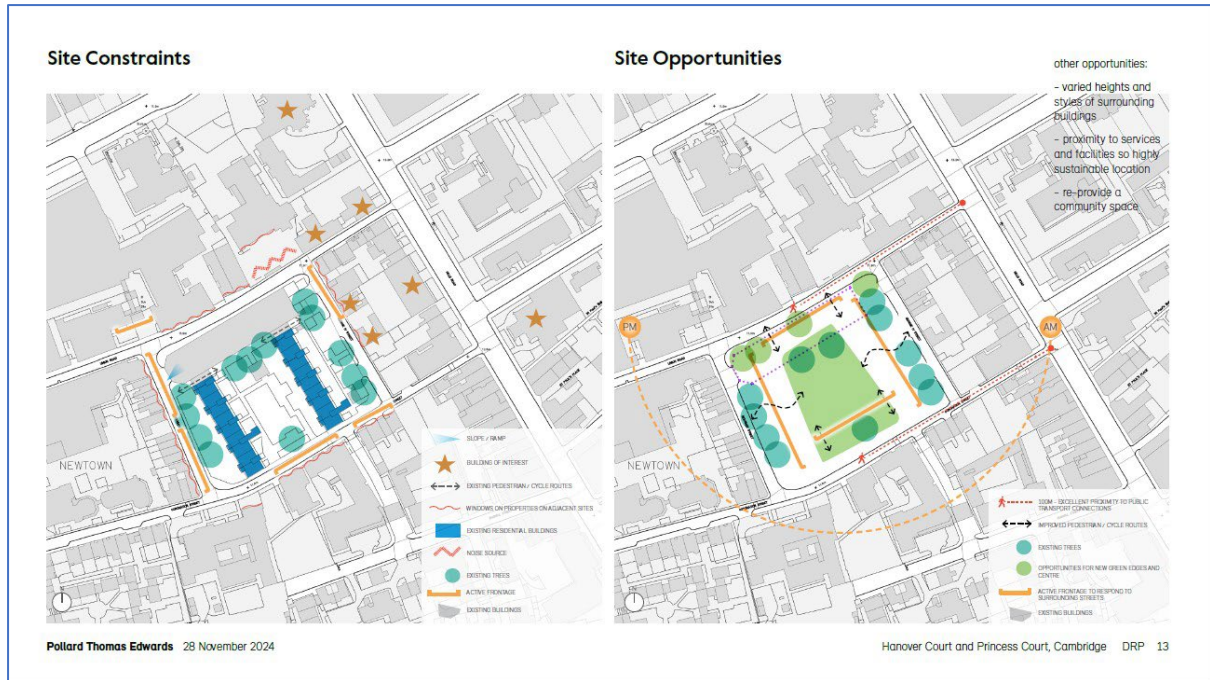
A 10m 'gap' between the affordable housing blocks on Bentinck Street is proposed; the Panel notes however that this has been incorporated on the basis of a misinterpretation of the historic street network on the site. There is a need to understand how routes through the site will work with the landscape, and lead to the buildings' entrances. If the entire site is to be public or semi-public, there needs to be route legibility on the ground and at eye level. The landscape plan includes a permeably-paved network of accessible, meandering paths that are proposed 'for all to enjoy'. The design team is proposing level access and currently looking at wayfinding techniques. It goes without saying that all of these design features should be incorporated in the proposal as a matter of principle but routes for walking and playing should be direct and linear, principally for inclusive accessibility reasons, but also for wider benefit.

Community

By way of comment on community considerations, the Panel suggests that there are three levels that the applicant team should take into account: the wider community; the residential community of the proposal; and those living in each new block.

Understanding the background history to the 1960's development of the Courts and their replacement of the historic grain of streets is critical to all three levels. Even if an orthogonal arrangement is to replace the existing blocks and it does not reinstate the former grain, the Panel is of the view that the new development will need somehow to be stitched back into its surroundings, reinstating a layout with elements

that are more street-like. The design team’s ‘Site Opportunities’ diagram begins to show how this could be achieved, yet its key features have somehow been lost in the landscape plan and site layout principles.



Site constraints and opportunities – extracted from the applicant’s DRP presentation document (November 2024)

The applicant team has explained how two public consultations have been undertaken by the applicant team, with the latest being in November 2024. School children have been/ will continue to be involved directly too, in giving their opinions on/ designing seating and play provision. Community concerns have related to car parking and how the planned landscape will be developed. Local residents are reportedly very excited to have a community room on the site; they have referred to the number of existing facilities having declined and finding such spaces that are not already oversubscribed is very difficult. The Panel supports the inclusion of the community room in the proposal as a matter of principle, noting however that no plan has been presented that identifies the types and locations of such community spaces in the local area.

The Panel notes that with reference to the rationale for the location of the community room, the design team originally looked at a similar location to the existing provision

(a building that formerly housed a shared laundry). To reflect root protection areas, and in response to pre-app discussions, its siting was moved so as not to 'block' the open space. The proposed community room has then been designed to have a courtyard garden on its north western side (behind a 'garden wall' that includes a gated entrance onto Union Road), as well as a terrace immediately to the south east of the building. The Panel is strongly of the view, however, that the provision of a community space in this location should be celebrated by having windows and direct access from Union Road, rather than through a private courtyard, and should be clearly visible on the Union Road frontage, to welcome people in. A wall should not hide the building, but if it has to be retained, the gates should be playful and very attractive, particularly given the elevational detailing of the Department of Chemistry building opposite. The proposed community room's courtyard should be relocated from the north of the building to its southern side, for more sunlight and greater year-round useability, giving direct access onto the gardens.

The community space (79 sq. m GIA, replacing a building of 69 sq. m GFA) has been designed to include small storage and kitchen areas, as well as an accessible WC. The design team has started to look at programming e.g. to include parties, group meals, yoga and art classes and will refine the design in terms of capacity and for flexibility in-use accordingly. The Panel endorses these emerging ideas, although suggests in response that the community room's ancillary spaces be large enough e.g. to store table tennis tables, and cooking equipment. Sands End Arts and Community Centre, in South Park (Hammersmith and Fulham), could be a useful community room reference; although it is a larger building sited behind an historic wall, it successfully addresses the public park in its main elevations, provides a café and has extensive storage spaces for a wide range of community uses.

Relevant to the new residential community on the site, and although only a handful of residents still remain, they have said how they loved their views over Cambridge, and enjoyed their pre-Covid use of the community room. They have told too of how efforts were made to community garden a small area of land on the periphery of the existing development, although upkeep was not maintained as residents were decanted. The Panel endorses how a gardening element has been included in the emerging project – with opportunities to involve residents being looked to - and how

consideration is being given to food growing areas in the southern part of the central open space.

The residents of each new block will want a welcoming, spacious entrance, with a splayed covered area that can provide outdoor shelter, where people can stop and rest e.g. on a built-in bench that also extends from outside to inside. Such generosity in each entrance and lobby area will help to build the new community here. The Panel recommends undertaking a 'Day in the Life' exercise for gaining an understanding of how different residents may meet and congregate. There are elements of the current landscape plan which do not work well from a community perspective, according the Panel. For example, new residents will not want to return home via meandering paths; it should be recognised that this site is urban, rather than rural.



Site location plan – extracted from the applicant's DRP presentation document (November 2024)



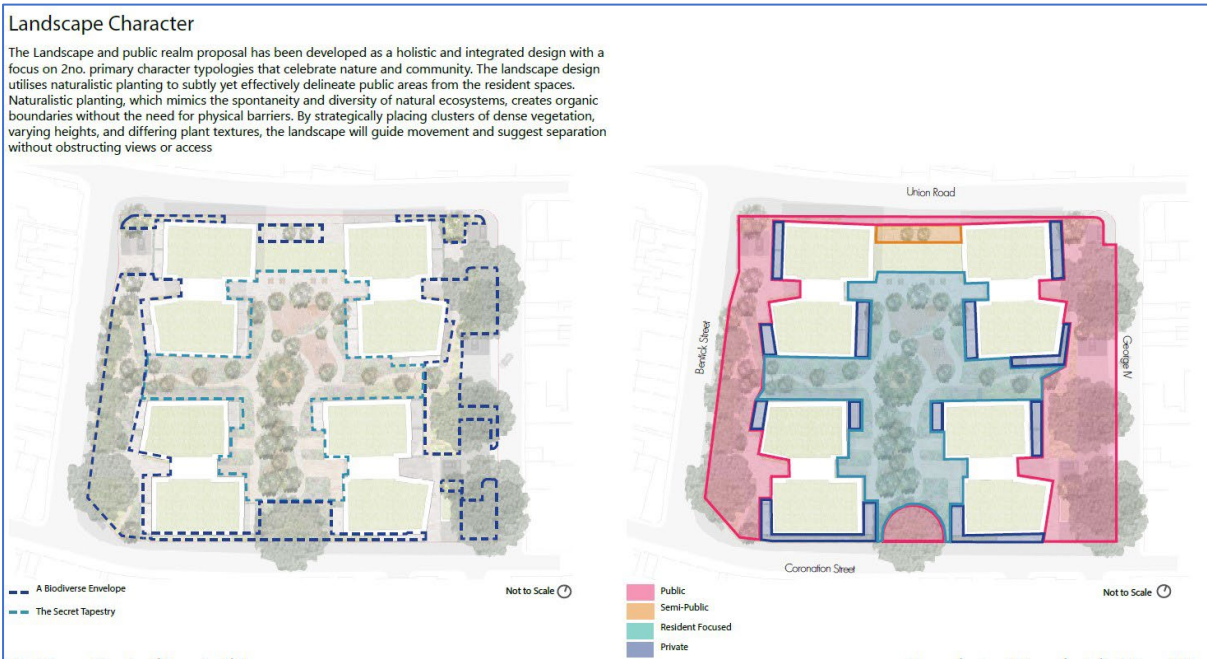
Site boundary plan



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



Site plan – extracted from the applicant’s DRP presentation document (November 2024)



Landscape character plan – extracted from the applicant’s DRP presentation document (November 2024)



*Proposed views – extracted from the applicant's DRP presentation document
(November 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.