



The Greater Cambridge Design Review Panel

Pre-application 22/50099/PREAPP (PPA)

1-99 Ekin Road and 1-8 Ekin Walk, Cambridge

14 July 2022, Virtual 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; Character, Architecture) – Founding Partner of
Hawkins\Brown Architects

Parthena (Nopi) Exizidou (Character, Climate) - Senior Carbon Manager, British
Antarctic Survey

David Knight (Character, Connectivity) - Director at Cake Engineering

Steve Platt (Character, Community) - Director at Cambridge Architectural Research

Lindsey Wilkinson (Character, Landscape) – Landscape Architect

Applicant & Design Team:

Nicola Hancock, Landscape Architect, TEP

Neill Campbell, Architect, BPTW

Dido Graham, Architect, BPTW

Jennifer McIntosh, Architect, BPTW

Paul Belton, Planning Consultant – Carter Jonas

Claire Flowers, Cambridge Investment Partnership, Cambridge City Council

Molly Savino, Cambridge Investment Partnership, Cambridge City Council

LPA Officers:

Bonnie Kwok – Principal Urban Designer / Design Review Panel Manager

Katie Roberts – Executive Assistant / Design Review Panel Support Officer

Ganesh Gnanamoorthy – Principal Planner CIP

Observers:

N/A

Scheme Description and Background

122 existing homes to be redeveloped and circa 200 new homes to be provided with associated open space and amenities.

There is no relevant planning history on this site. Most historic applications relate to works to individual dwellings, rather than any site-wide developments.

In terms of pre-application engagement, early conversations were held between officers and the developer about whether partial redevelopment (just the flatted accommodation) or comprehensive redevelopment (the entire site) would be the better option. Officers considered that just redeveloping the flats would provide minimal scope for developable areas, and given modern flat sizes, floor to ceiling heights, and requirements for all dwellings to be M4(2) compliant, it would be difficult to achieve as many flats as what are currently there now – largely because of how the new built form would respond to the remaining houses.

There have been four pre-application meetings on this site in recent months. The first and second largely follow the layout presented to the Panel on the day, whilst the third was an alternative layout which caused concerns for officers – in particular around relationships between flats and houses, and the amenity impacts this presented.

Declarations of Interest

Russell Brown, Chair of the DRP meeting, declared following the design review meeting that his practice Hawkins\Brown Architects are working with the one of the development partners in this scheme, the Hills Group in London, as contractors. Russell confirmed that none of the presenters from Hills team, who are involved in this project, have any direct dealings with him. It was considered that this does not constitute any conflict of interest.

It is acknowledged that the developers of this housing scheme are Cambridge City Council and Hills Residential. This housing scheme will be determined in the same way as any other planning applications, and that the Council will ensure an open and transparent approach is adopted throughout the planning process to ensure impartiality.

Previous Panel Reviews

None

Greater Cambridge Design Review Panel Views

Introduction

The Panel welcomed the opportunity to review the proposals for the re-development of a council owned housing estate through the Cambridge City Investment Partnership. The Planning Officer, Ganesh Gnanamoorthy, had explained that there had been four pre-application meetings and the current layout had addressed the concern that the terraced houses should face onto (back-to-back), to neighbouring gardens outside the site. There had also been a decision by the Partnership to propose the wholesale re-development of the site rather than retain any of the flats or houses, due to the poor quality of the flats and the reduced opportunity to offer new homes, if any of the existing homes were retained.

The comments using the 'four C's' should be read across one to another.

Character led by Russell Brown and Graham Whitehouse

The Panel do find the servicing and vehicle access running around the whole site unconvincing. This seems to be to locate parking up against the boundary wall with the light industrial user to the South. This meant that significant pedestrian routes have to cross the single service road. There is also a housing block (Block C) with car parking on both sides (East and West) and the service road to the North. Although it is important to provide as much new housing as possible, the density is reflected in the amount of car parking (even at a relatively low provision of 0.5 per dwelling), on the extensive system of service roads and the massing up to 6 storeys. (It is assumed that parking under buildings would not be viable). The Applicant did advise that views had been modelled of the development but that the proposed massing had little impact on local views.

The Panel was concerned that the forms of the flats (only developed in outline) were over complicated that could be simpler (or bolder?) and would be difficult to detail as Passivhaus in their current form.

There was also a concern that the layout of the building forms to achieve the pedestrian link to the South-East needed more refinement to create a distinctive (perhaps hard landscaped) space, with a clear sense of enclosure and place.

At present the enclosure of Ekin Common is rather compromised by this route and a better solution could be found. There was also a question as to why the 'kink' in Blocks A, B, C stopped for F and D?

Connectivity led by David Knight (DK)

The Panel asked what sort of people would buy or rent at Ekin Road. Would they be key workers for instance? The applicant advised that although the mix had not been fixed it would include council rental, shared ownership, and open market sales.

There was a comment that the parking allocation of 0.5 per dwelling was relatively low but this had been sensibly arrived at by using the current car ownership on site. The 2011 census showed that half the households are car free, and that 40% have only one car, leaving only 10% owning two cars. When the mix of leaseholds is

fixed it will be important how the different tenancies are located around the site, and how car parking spaces are allocated. The applicant agreed that car parking spaces should be clearly allocated and tightly controlled.

The panel suggested that there could be further analysis of how the proposed connections actually worked by identifying design lines noting only frustrating dead ends etc.

The panel is generally supportive in terms of connectivity and is pleased to see a focus on active travel and routes outside the site. Care needs to be taken to avoid mistaking routes within the site, with clear signage and wayfinding, and conflicts between cars and pedestrians, and cycles and pedestrians.

The Panel supports the lower parking allocation but do note the impact of cars across the site at this density. Every effort needs to be made to promote active travel and to look at creating new (potential) routes through the existing cul-de-sacs to NE and SE.

Community led by Stephen Platt (SP)

The panel noted that the Cambridge Council Housing Scrutiny Committee had approved the comprehensive re-development of the site. The applicant had not finalised whether some tenants would remain on site until they could be decanted or whether all tenants were to be re-housed to offer a clear site for re-development.

The applicant reported that there had been a mixed reaction to the re-development proposals but 79% had voted for re-development. This engagement will continue through the planning process. East Barnwell is a deprived area, compared to the rest of Cambridge, and re-development will offer the opportunity for much, better quality flats (with lift access etc) lower energy bills, better public spaces, and new links through the site. Currently, the site has a poor frontage onto Wadlow Road, and no clear 'front door' or gateway to the site.

The panel was concerned that every effort is made to maintain or re-introduce social cohesion to the Estate and avoid issues of conflict (such as car parking). The location and mix of housing tenancies needs to be carefully considered, along with phasing to keep some existing tenants on site?

Given the strength of the existing community on the site (as witnessed in the webinar from June 2021, the Cambridge Independent on Ekin Road) could retrofitting some of the houses and/or phasing help retain community cohesion.

There is a balance to be sought between the number of new homes lost and reduction in density against the potential loss of a healthy, stable community. The panel urged the applicant to look at any measures to encourage cohesion between the public and private owners' flats and houses, families, and individuals etc. measures to encourage informal meetings solid interaction and to reduce areas of potential conflict. Can lessons be learnt from similar schemes?

Climate, led by Nopi Exizidou (EN)

The panel asked that the potential to retain and refit some of the existing houses be re-examined, even if this was a pilot study that could inform the partnerships developments elsewhere, or other developments in Cambridge. The applicants explained how this had been thoroughly investigated and that the flats were certainly not capable of refitting. The panel welcomed the current proposal to design and deliver all the homes to Passivhaus standards. There were some concerns that the 'broken' massing proposed in 3D for townscape reasons, would make it difficult to achieve efficient wall to floor ratios (see also character).

The panel asked what other sustainable features the building and landscape could offer, were the proposals to include renewable energy sources eg solar panels, or air source heat pumps or can the demolition or re-development contribute to a circular economy?

The panel would like to see more definitive targets set for sustainable performance eg for whole life carbon. Are there opportunities to contribute a circular economy, or for the use of ground source heat pumps or a 'heating network'.

The contribution of renewable energy sourcing needs to be taken into account early on, in order to achieve the Passivhaus standards and/or to net zero carbon.

DK also noted that the designers needed to consider the embodied carbon in the structural elements (and consider timber).

Landscape led by Lindsey Wilkinson (LN)

The panel asked what percentage of the existing trees were retained. The applicant responded that everything in the 'green edge' to Wadlow Road is retained and healthier trees are retained where possible. (There has been a detailed arboriculturalist survey). The layout needs to consider where tree canopies (and therefore tree roots) clash with the proposed building footprints.

Overall, the panel saw the landscaping proposals as 'pretty positive' and were "onboard" with the landscape strategy. The green infrastructure is in a good position but, can the new public spaces become a "green destination" in itself.

There are some problems with 'snickets' or narrow alley ways, care needs to be taken to encourage behaviour change (due to considerations of safety). There could be a 'two-tier' plan for these green connections with alternative routes if they are not seen as safe.

The panel would like to see as many mature trees as possible retained and for the applicant to check the layouts properly retain trees on the ground of quality and amenity value.

The landscape strategy is supported where it increases the provision of social intervention spaces of a variety of scale eg pocket parks. There needs to be an understanding of who will use the green infrastructure, who is the attracting, and how will life spaces be managed.

The panel could see that a lot of effort had gone into provision of green spaces in the centre of the scheme, they urged the applicant to look at the site boundaries; do they provide “openness” and intervisibility or are they screening, managing views, private gardens with trees, can contribute to the sense of ownership, and can contribute to the overall landscape strategy.

It is important to keep biodiversity in mind, and how it can contribute to (a slightly wilder) character and wider local initiatives.

Summary

The collective feeling of the panel was that the architecture had yet to emerge and that laying out the rooms in the flats and houses would raise questions about their relation to other homes, the road system, where their car is parked, the existing trees and communal areas.

The panel asked the applicant to look again at the highway strategy (will it be adapted) or running around the edge of the site, crossing pedestrian routes, and at how the pedestrian link to the South-East is linked to the central green space, and the built forms that enclose it.

The panel support the low provision of cars but can see that the current number of spaces does impact on the residential amenity. The parking will have to be imaginatively landscaped and well managed. The applicant needs to look outside of the site to identify the best long-term links to wider Cambridge.

The panel urged the applicant to consider phasing the development and to make every effort to retain or re-build community cohesion. In terms of sustainability some of the houses might be refurbished, as a potential case study/exemplar put forward by the council.

The introduction of the Passivhaus is strongly supported by the panel but other sustainable measures should be added to this central concept.

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.

Contact Details

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