



By Online Planning Register

Cambridge Past, Present & Future  
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04/10/2023

Dear Cuma

**Response to 23/03204/OUT: Outline application for redevelopment of site for Commercial, community and employment floorspace at the Beehive Centre. Coldham's Lane. Cambridge**

Cambridge Past, Present & Future is Cambridge's largest civic society. We are a charity run by local people who are passionate about where they live. We operate in the greater Cambridge area and working with our members, supporters and volunteers we:

- Are dedicated to protecting and enhancing the green setting of Cambridge for people and nature.
- Care about Cambridge and are an independent voice for quality of life in the strategic planning of Greater Cambridge.
- Are working to protect, celebrate and improve the important built heritage of the Cambridge area.
- Own and care for green spaces and historic buildings in and around the city for people and nature, including Wandlebury Country Park, Coton Countryside Reserve, Cambridge Leper Chapel & Barnwell Meadows, Bourn Windmill and Hinxtton Watermill.

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Cambridge Past, Present & Future strongly **object** to the application because it is proposing a strategic scale employment site within a residential suburb with inadequate access by public transport. It is a speculative development, contrary to emerging policy and with no justification for the need for this scale of development. The high-density development with buildings reaching 40m in height will have a detrimental impact on the Mill Road conservation area, Coldham's Common and the historic skyline of Cambridge. Cambridge PPF has no objection in principle to the redevelopment of the Beehive site and for many years has been pressing for better use to be made of the surface car parking, ideally to provide much needed residential accommodation adjacent to a residential area.

We object to the proposal on the following grounds: -

- Proposed use
- Need
- Traffic and accessibility
- Scale and height
- Landscaping
- Car parking
- Impact on Heritage

**Proposed Use**

The emerging Local Plan identifies this site as an Opportunity Area where the policy direction is to deliver mixed uses and multiple functions. Although of little statutory weight, the emerging plan does indicate the Council's direction of travel for this area. This site is well located for a residential-led mixed use development at a density that respects its immediate context.

Cambridge PPF consider it is important that housing is provided to support the commercial element of the proposal. In planning the future growth of Cambridge, the Council has to balance the housing growth with the economic growth. New commercial space has to be delivered through a plan-led system to be built in the right place, and with adequate public transport infrastructure. Speculative high density employment developments such as this proposal will upset this balance and fuel the need for further homes on greenfield sites and encourage in-commuting by car, both of which have environmental impacts.

## **Need**

The development and expansion of business space is directed by adopted policy 40. The Adopted policy identifies key employment sites to meet the city's need. The Beehive Centre is not identified to meet this need.

To support the emerging joint Local Plan the two councils have commissioned Employment Land and Economic Development Evidence (2020) and Housing and Employment Relationship Report (2020). In 2022 an update report was prepared which was presented to the 'land north of Cambridge North Station' Public Inquiry.

Cambridge PPF consider that the need for this employment floor space is not justified by an objectively demonstrated lack of consented floor space in and around Cambridge. The applicant's Office and Laboratory Occupational Market update refers to future supplies and anticipated delivery in 2023-24. It does not appear to consider available planning approvals awaiting implementation which will be delivered 2024 onwards.

Reference should be made to the Greater Cambridge Employment and Housing Evidence update (Iceni, January 2023). The report concludes that the need for the offices or office / R&D, which is already essentially met through the current supply, will be positively met and exceeded through the proposals at North East Cambridge, Cambridge East, Cambridge Biomedical Campus and Babraham Research Campus (paragraph 5.54). In addition, there are recent consents at Botanic Place, and Lockton Houe, Clarendon Road, to give just two examples. The Council's own evidence is therefore that there is a 'no need' argument for this proposal.

## **Traffic and Accessibility**

Policy 5 supports development which promotes travel by active and public transport modes. We consider that the site has inadequate accessibility by bus and the proposed travel plans are not sufficient to ensure employees and visitors will not travel by car to the site.

This is an inappropriate location for a high-density employment development because of the limited accessibility by public transport. The proposal is of a regional scale and density and so requires public transport accessibility from the wider region, such as proximity to a main line train station or other mass-transport system. We are concerned that there is insufficient evidence on the geographical distribution of the workers and how the proposed sustainable mode shares will be achieved through off-site interventions and their travel plan. There is evidence that Cambridge has one of the longest travel-to-work zones in the UK, due to high house prices close to Cambridge, it is therefore impossible to argue that the proposed development would not lead to workers commuting from distant locations where the only realistic mode of transport will be private car.

We consider that the baseline traffic modelling is inappropriate. Using 2011 Commuting patterns tells us nothing about traffic patterns to the site now, and probably not much about commuting patterns to such a specialist type of employment site in the future. Similarly, using modal share data from the Cambridge North development is not appropriate as the mix of uses is different and the site is right next to Cambridge North Station and so will have different travel patterns to that proposed for the Beehive Centre.

The pedestrian route from the development to the nearest station (Cambridge Station is 20-25 minutes' walk away) runs along narrow pavements along Devonshire Road, Kingston Street, Hooper Street, Ainsworth Street and York Street or Sleaford Street (depending on which entrance to the site is chosen). Even if the Chisholm Trail route alongside the railway line between the station car park and Hooper Street, comes forward, there is no route that avoids Ainsworth Street, which is especially narrow and unlikely to be able to accommodate peak flows of pedestrians, cycles and motor vehicles (residents and deliveries) at peak times. Even if there is not a safety issue, it will have a significant impact on the quality of life in this quiet part of Petersfield.

There is particular concern about the access onto York Street, which has very poor visibility. As there is vehicular access at this point, there is very limited opportunity to mitigate this (e.g., with a build-out of the pavement). It may be better to open up vehicular access from Sleaford Street instead along with remodelling the pedestrian/cycle access from the development site.

The reduced number of car parking spaces does not appear to include any provision for retail and community visitors. The scheme must not lead to on-street parking in the neighbouring residential areas, which currently do not have Residents Parking Zones. This includes St Matthews Gardens and neighbouring streets (which are a short walk from the development site), Silverwood Close, Cromwell Road and Coldham's Lane industrial/retail estate.

The proposed enlargement of the Coldham's Lane roundabout somewhat improves access for pedestrians but appears to increase the area of asphalt without resolving existing conflicts between users. Cycles crossing on the eastern arm are in conflict with pedestrians on both sides of the road: on the south side, you have people cycling at speed down the (poorly designed) active travel bridge and people waiting to cross the Coldham's Lane. On the north side, there is no clear path to reach Cambridge Retail Park (which will take over from the Beehive as the main destination for shoppers from Petersfield). This whole junction needs to be redesigned to prioritise active travel.

## **Design**

The proposed development represents a massive over-development of the site, which is surrounded by two storey residential development. This is contrary to Policy 55 requiring development to respond positively to its context.

Policy 60 of the Adopted Local Plan sets the criteria for determining applications involving tall buildings, which includes impact on key landmarks and viewpoints. Cambridge has a distinctive skyline that combines towers, turrets, chimneys and spires with large trees. The overall character of the city's skyline is one of relatively few taller buildings that emerge as 'incidents' above the prevailing lower buildings and trees. The key design principles include creating a varied skyline. However, we are concerned that large blocks 35-40m in height are particularly bulky and will be visually intrusive from the Conservation Area to the west and from Coldham's Common to the east, as well as impacting views from Castle Hill

The CB1 development already stands out as a bulky addition to the backdrop of the historic city. This proposal would introduce another bulky intrusion. The visualisations show how the flues do add articulation, but the bulk of the buildings are above the roof tops and above the tree line.

It is important to strictly apply the tall buildings policy in each individual application or otherwise the cumulative impacts of development such as this, redevelopment of the Grafton Centre, North East Cambridge and Cambridge East will result in the skyline becoming dominated by large bulky buildings rather than the slim and elegant towers and turrets of the churches and chapels.

The Railway Corridor Buildings are the tallest proposed buildings and at only 12m apart will create a wall of development along the eastern edge of the site, creating a hard boundary to the site. The breaking down of the massing by a central break and terracing are not considered successful and will be hard to read from a

distance. The overarching impression will be that of a solid wall of development, with little variation in height, creating a hard boundary to the site, which will be particularly visible from Coldham's Common.

### **Landscaping**

The proposed landscaping does not create a quality public realm. This is contrary to Policy 56(i) and Policy 59 which require proposals to create and improve public realm, open space and landscaped areas that respond to their context.

The green space provided is limited in scale and is thinly distributed between the buildings and much is also adjacent to the roads. The areas are pinched and mean and narrow in relation to the scale of development that surrounds them. They are likely to be overshadowed and suffer from wind tunnel canyon impacts.

It is unclear whether the space between buildings is sufficient for the new trees to be able to grow to their full span without the need for pollarding.

No landscaping is proposed along the eastern elevation adjacent to the railway line which would help to break up the bulk of the buildings. It also ignores the railway bank as a wildlife corridor, where there is an opportunity to contribute positively to biodiversity networks in the area

### **Heritage**

This application proposes a substantial change to the setting, and therefore character, of the Mill Road Conservation Area. In particular, the north-eastern corner of the Conservation Area will be impacted, an area occupied by terraces of two-storey former working-class housing. As a group of assets, the terraced houses on York Street, which is closest to the site, are considered to make a substantial positive contribution to the significance of the Mill Road Conservation Area. The proposed development site forms part of the setting of the Conservation Area. At present, the buildings that occupy the site make a negative contribution to the significance of the Mill Road Conservation Area, due to their substantial massing. However, the plain, unobtrusive nature of their facades mean that they allow the focus of views in this area of the Conservation Area to remain on the historic terraces.

The introduction of taller buildings on to the site will substantially alter the character of the north-eastern corner of the Mill Road Conservation Area, limiting the ability to understand the streetscape as part of a Victorian suburb, and instead making it appear more urban and characteristic of a city centre. We disagree with the Heritage Statement's view that the development will be an improvement by introducing a frontage development to the Conservation Area. The proposed structures will dominate in views towards the site from within the Conservation Area and will be visually overpowering in contrast to the small, domestic scale of the Conservation Area terraces. This is considered to be over-development of the site, with the resultant bulk of the new buildings being overbearing in the Conservation Area.

This application is contrary to policy 61, which sets out the parameters for new development within historic context in the city. The development will not enhance the significance of the Conservation Area. It is not of an appropriate scale, form, height or massing to be adjacent to a residential area of the Conservation Area.

It is not considered that there is substantial public benefit from the scheme to justify this harm. The retail and 'community' components lack credibility as a contributing benefit for the surrounding residents.

### **Conclusion**

This application is a poorly considered reaction to a perceived demand for R&D and laboratory space. The Council must consider this proposal in the context of the strategic development of the city, and the appropriate use of this site in the longer term. Land is a precious resource in the city and the best use must be made of it.

I trust that you will take our comments into consideration.

Yours sincerely  
*Sarah Nicholas*  
Principal Planning Officer