

Greater Cambridge Share Planning Service

By Online Planning Register

15/10/2024

Dear Cuma



Cambridge Past, Present & Future
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Response to 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.

Cambridge Past, Present & Future submitted an objection to this application in October 2023. CambridgePPF has considered the revised plans and do not consider that they overcome our objections to the principle of this development.

Adopted Policy 40 (Development and expansion of business space) does not identify the Beehive Centre as a location for offices and R&D development. It therefore requires development to be considered on its merits. We consider that the need for the development is not justified. The Council's evidence shows that there is sufficient development in the pipeline to meet the need and longer-term requirements should be identified through the Local Plan.

Notwithstanding changes to the design and the reduced building heights, we consider that the buildings are still overpowering from some views and have a negative impact on the Conservation Area contrary to policies 60 and 61.

The emerging Local Plan shows the Council's direction of travel. It identifies the site as an opportunity area for mixed uses and multiple functions which requires a policy framework to promote and guide overall change.

Proposed use

We are disappointed that Railpen are still pursuing a development which does not include a residential element. Speculative high density employment developments such as this proposal will upset the balance between homes and jobs and fuel the need for further homes on greenfield sites and encourage in-commuting by car, both of which have environmental impacts.

Need

We do not consider that there is justification for the additional employment floorspace over that provided for in the adopted and emerging local plan. Furthermore, over the past 18 months there has been a plethora of applications to build speculative lab facilities for the science and R&D sector, which were not factored into the current Local Plan or the emerging plan. This includes Grafton Centre (approved), Hauxton (approved), Fulbourn (approved), Melbourn (approved) Westbrook Centre (approved) and Coldham's Lakes (approved). In addition, there are new developments on the Science Parks.

The Greater Cambridge Growth Sectors Study: Life science and ICT locational, land and accommodation needs (Iceni, September 2024) concludes that the need for wet lab space has been met by recent permissions and that any shortfalls for scale up space and longer term needs can be met through draft allocations in the emerging Local Plan. In relation to ICT, that the future supply of general office space appears healthy and well catered for. We therefore do not consider that the need for this speculative development is justified. The Iceni study identifies the locational priorities for life science and ICT developments. A Plan-led approach, as opposed to permitting speculative developments, would ensure these priorities are met and Greater Cambridge remains a key player in life sciences and tech evolution at the national and international level.

Accessibility

We still consider that 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. The Greater Cambridge Growth Sectors Study (Iceni September 2024) concludes that for both life sciences and ICT, development should be located where there is good public transport connections and rail connections are a priority for businesses needing a London connection.

We note the applicant is looking into subsidising the Park and Ride fare for site users. However, Park and Ride sites only encourages car journeys as people have to drive to the P&R sites. A more environmentally sustainable approach is to support better public transport from surrounding areas as is being proposed for St Neots, Huntingdon, St Ives and Ely. This approach will need to be strengthened to include trips from a wider range of settlements. Funding of bus improvements needs to be guaranteed until it is assured that the routes are commercially viable, otherwise the Transport Authority will have to step in with additional funding, or the services will have to be reduced, which will make them less attractive, potentially undermining long-term sustainable mode-share targets.

Traffic

We note that the cycle through-route is being improved by being changed to a direct, segregated cycle/pedestrian route through the centre of the site. However, the width appears to decrease for most of the length and is considered too narrow and confined to be safe.

Coldham's Lane roundabout is a major barrier to cycling and its redesign is noted. However, it is considered that the current design will cause conflict or congestion on the cycle track.

- Right turn off Coldhams Lane active travel bridge to enter Cambridge Retail Park, if made at the first opportunity (not intended from the design, but likely to be attempted) will conflict with people moving around the roundabout.
- Continuing straight on from the active travel bridge will conflict with people cycling north.
- Right turn into the retail park will conflict with people cycling clockwise around the roundabout.
- Right turn onto the active travel bridge will conflict with people cycling south.

We are concerned that the bus stop locations currently proposed will not encourage a modal shift. The distance from eastbound stops on Newmarket Road to the site are further than the normally accepted walking distance. The proposed stop within the site requires a detour to the western edge of the site that will add 3-4 minutes to the timetable.

Scale and height

We note the reduction in height of some buildings but do not consider that it is sufficient to lessen the overall impact on the neighbouring area and the city skyline.

Reducing the building heights has led to some buildings having larger floorplans to maintain the overall floor area and therefore the building mass remains and from a distance the buildings will still merge with one another to create a large block with only a slightly varied flat roof line.

The revised plans do not appear to have increased the distance between buildings, and this will do little to mitigate the amalgamation of buildings into one mass in longer distance views.

From some locations, this development will be seen at close quarters with the Grafton Centre development. This will create a very large area of bulky, flat roofed development in direct contrast to historic assets and the attractive and varied roofscapes of the historic core.

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.

Despite the reduced building heights, the buildings still merge into one large mass of only slightly varying flat roof heights and flues and the development will still be prominent in the panorama from Castle Hill Mound (AVR 01), Red Meadow Hill (AVR 10), Lime Tree Hill (AVR 10) and Lime Kiln Road Layby (AVR 14). From these locations the development has a direct visual relationship with the historic core and will detract from the historic assets such as Kings College Chapel and the University Library Tower.

The development when viewed from Coldham's Common (AVR 02 and AVR 03) will be overpowering in contrast to the domestic scale of building in the foreground.

Not all the surrounding communities have benefited from the reduced building heights. Although the length of the façade of block 10 facing Silverwood Close has been reduced it is no further away and is a sheer sided multi storey car park with the associated nuisance of noise and lighting. Greening the elevations does not mitigate these principal objections.

Impact on Heritage

Despite the development mainly now not breaking the skyline, we consider that the development will still impact the conservation area because of the significant contrast between the fine grain, varied historic roofscape and the mass of flat roofed development.

Landscaping

We note the consolidated approach to landscaping and public realm. However, our objection to the lack of landscaping along the eastern boundary remains. This would help break up the bulk of the buildings and contribute to the biodiversity network provided by the railway bank.

Car parking

The scheme has the potential to lead to on-street parking in the neighbouring residential areas, and lead to spaces on the Cambridge Retail Park being taken

Sustainable development

We note the ambitions to achieve BREEAM outstanding.

We are concerned whether the water supply can be supplied sustainably and would not cause harm to the environment by reason of impact on ground water bodies including chalk aquifers.

I trust that you will take our comments into consideration.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Nicholas

Principal Planning Officer