

Greater Cambridge Share Planning Service

By Online Planning Register



04/06/2024

Dear Charlotte

Cambridge Past, Present & Future
Wandlebury Country Park
Cambridge CB22 3AE

Phone 01223 - 243830

www.cambridgeppf.org

Response to 24/01408/FUL All Weather Retractable Roof Canopy with Living Meadow Walls and Associated Works at The Varsity Hotel and Spa 24 Thompsons 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 Hinxton Watermill.

Cambridge Past Present and Future object to this application. The differences between this application and previous applications which have been refused (24/00488/FUL and 23/01137/FUL) have not overcome our reasons for objection.

Over the course of the last two applications and the current application, the design of the retractable roof sections has been modified, the frame has been set back on the western elevation and a living meadow cladding has been introduced to the canopy.

The engineering of the structure and the external cladding may have changed but the impact on the skyline, Conservation Area and listed buildings remains the same.

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 Varsity Hotel is already a much taller building than the buildings around it. The additional height of 2.1m created by the canopy would introduce an uncharacteristic form on top of the building which would compete with the finer, articulated spires and towers of the skyline. The introduction of a living wall does not change the fact that the building will become taller than those around it. Viewing a seventh floor, clad in meadow plants rising above the masonry and slate of nearby buildings is considered incongruous.

The impact on the Conservation Area, listed buildings and Buildings of Local Interest has been well considered and presented in the Conservation Officer's response and the case officer's delegated report in relation to 24/00488/FUL and found the proposal would adversely impact on heritage assets contrary to Policy 58 and Policy 61. The introduction of a living wall does not overcome these objections.

The visualisations highlight how intrusive this development will be within the Conservation Area and adjacent to listed buildings. Of particular note are views from Jesus Green and Magdalene Bridge, particularly the illumination of the roof terrace at night.

A material consideration is that application reference 22/00778/FUL for a light retractable roof canopy was refused at appeal. The inspector was concerned about the introduction of a large, glazed structure on an already tall building which would be highly visible from key view points in the city and would be a jarring to the skyline of the city. The inspector found that “the proposal would fail to preserve the settings of nearby listed buildings, would fail to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area, and have an adverse effect of the proposal on the skyline of Cambridge city.” Although of a different design and use of materials, the current proposal does not overcome these concerns.

In light of the dismissed appeal and the refusal of 24/00488/FUL and 23/01137/FUL, there has been no significant change in circumstances to justify granting permission. The previous reasons for refusal still stand.

Despite the changes introduced in this application, the height, scale, bulk, appearance and lighting of the proposed development still fails to respond positively to its surrounding and would be an incongruous addition to the Cambridge Skyline. It would harm the character and appearance of the Central Conservation Area, the setting of listed buildings and buildings of local interest and the landscape of the river Cam.

The settings of Listed buildings are of the highest significance and are within the historic core of Cambridge and should be given great weight in the decision on this application. We consider that the policy support for visitor attractions does not outweigh the harm to heritage assets. The application should therefore be refused.

I trust that you will take our comments into consideration.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Nicholas

Principal Planning Officer