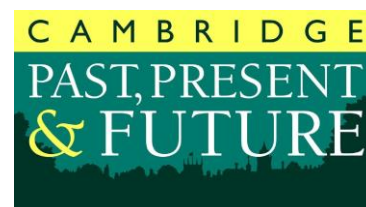


Railpen
c/o Marengo Communications



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By email to:

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31/07/2023

Dear Nick

Response to proposals to redevelop Beehive Centre, 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.

We have considered the proposals set out in this third round of consultation. We are disappointed that the proposals have not taken account of the comments we raised.

Our main concerns remain

- Suitability of the employment use and lack of residential as part of a mixed scheme
- The scale and height of the buildings
- Open space / urban greening / biodiversity
- Sustainability
- Relocation of current uses

Land use

We are disappointed that the land uses have not included residential. Although of little statutory weight the emerging local plan does indicate the Council's direction of travel. This site is designated as an Opportunity Area where the policy direction is to deliver mixed uses and multiple functions. This site presents a wonderful opportunity 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, Greater Cambridge Planning are having to balance the housing growth with the economic growth. New commercial space has to be delivered through a planned 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.

We are concerned that the provision of R&D and laboratory space is a poorly considered reaction to the current demand rather than understanding the longer term role of this site in the strategic development of the city and considering the uses suitable on this site.

Building Heights

We consider that the proposed development, despite changes from 2021 proposals, represent a massive over development of the site that is surrounded by two storey residential neighbourhoods.

Even with the lowering of building heights to 3 storeys on the site edge, we consider that the neighbouring properties will be dominated by the development.

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. Your key design principles include creating a varied skyline. However, we are concerned that large blocks of 7-8 storeys 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. The buildings will be visible above the roof tops. Articulation of the buildings to break down their bulk needs to be carefully considered, especially how it will be seen from a distance. Terracing of the façades will be hard to read from a distance creating an overall impression of a solid wall of development.

Plans must show building heights in meters as well as storeys and clearly show the overall heights including roof plant and flues.

Future consultations or the planning application must clearly demonstrate how the proposal interfaces with the surrounding areas. Views into the site or views showing any retained buildings would provide context. The current images provided are too low resolution to see these in detail and the virtual tour of the site doesn't convey the context of the site. No account is taken of the significant difference in levels at the south-western periphery of the site (i.e. the view adjacent to Vera's Way from Sleaford Street and the view adjacent to the path from York Street).

We await with interest reading the Landscape Visual Impact Assessment.

Transport

This is an inappropriate location for a high density employment development because of its poor 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. Cambridge station is at least a 20 minute walk away along narrow and inadequate pavements.

It is unclear how many parking spaces are proposed in the proposed multi-storey car park, and it is also unclear how car commuters would be prevented from parking in the retained surface parking on the adjoining retail park. Although the removal of surface parking on the Beehive site is welcome, the trip generation from this high density employment development will be quite different from a retail development as the trips will occur on weekdays at peak times rather than spread over the weekend.

The infographic on "changes in travel choices" has a label "Existing (2011 Mode Share)". The choice of 2011 as the reference year strongly suggests that this data is taken from the 2011 Census, which reports only commuting trip modes. That data is mostly irrelevant for a retail destination. The infographic also picks out a few percentage-point changes and incorrectly reports these as percentage increases/decreases (16% to 40% is a +150% change). In any case though, comparisons of mode shares are meaningless when the absolute

numbers are different. This should be re-presented showing estimated absolute numbers of trips for all purposes, using the same scale for now and the future.

The proposed enlargement of the Coldhams Lane roundabout somewhat improves access for pedestrians, but appears to increase the area of asphalt and does not fundamentally overcome the barrier to cycling. The only cycle crossing, on the eastern arm, leads people between two conflicted spaces: on the south side, you have people cycling at speed down the (poorly designed) active travel bridge and people waiting to cross; 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.

We look forward to reviewing your transport impact assessment.

Open Space / Urban greening / Biodiversity

Notwithstanding the amendments you've made, we consider that proposals remain poor. The number of buildings has only been reduced from 15 to 13 separate buildings and includes two large blocks. The amount of greenspace does not appear to have increased significantly. The greenspace provided remains limited in scale and is thinly distributed between the buildings and much is also adjacent to roads. It is unclear whether it provides sufficient room for the new trees to be able to grow to their full span without the need for pollarding. The scheme ignores the railway bank as a wildlife corridor.

Due to the proposed heights and bulk of the buildings and the small scale of the open space, much of it is likely to be in "canyons" which are often subject to wind tunnels and over-shading, and which are more typical of high-rise urban developments in large cities than suburban Cambridge.

To be used by the community, the open spaces must be welcoming and enjoyable. The character areas appear more akin to that found between skyscrapers in the centre of large cities rather than the suburban location they are in.

Sustainability

Our members welcomed the approaches to sustainability in energy and water usage and would like to see details and a firm commitment in any future planning applications.

Current Uses

Railpen have committed to relocating ASDA and other retailers to an improved Cambridge Retail Park. We would be interested to know what these improvements are and request that they are subject to pre-application consultation with the local community.

Conclusion

Cambridge PPF has fundamental concerns about this proposal and considers that it should be completely rethought.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Nicholas

Principal Planning Officer

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cc Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service
City Councillors for Abbey Ward