

Greater Cambridge Share Planning Service



By Online Planning Register

15/08/2023

Dear Michael

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

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**Response to 23/02685/FUL: i) Demolition of 11-12 Burleigh Street and Abbeygate House, ii) Part demolition and alterations to the Grafton Centre, removal of existing façades, erection of new floorspace for life science use, new and replacement façades and shopfronts, provision of terraces at fourth floor level, installation of plant and enclosures, iii) Redevelopment of existing bus turning head and redundant service area to provide new hotel and leisure quarter, iv) New pedestrian access route from Christchurch Street to Burleigh Street, provision of cycle parking spaces, public realm and landscape improvements, v) Highway works to East Road providing new bus stops, pedestrian and cycle routes and other associated works. | Grafton Centre Fitzroy Street 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 and Future object to this application on the grounds of its detrimental impact on heritage, specifically on the Cambridge skyline, and on distant views of significant heritage assets.

The proposal involves increasing the height of the Grafton Centre. Cross Section AA shows the complex increasing by 1 floor, whilst cross sections BB and CC which include the life science uses and the hotel illustrate that the buildings rise to 5 floors with the hotel building having 8 floors and being about 27m above ground level.

The current roofline includes some articulation provided by the stairwell towers for instance. The alterations to the buildings remove this articulation and create a new complex where the majority of the roofline only varies by 3m (LVA Appendix 5D Appendix A - +37.95m to +41.125m).

Policy 60 of the Adopted Local Plan sets the criteria for determining application 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. This is recognised in the LVA Appendix 2B which identifies the towers and spires which emerge above the skyline.

We consider that the proposals will have a particularly adverse impact on views from Castle Hill, Red Meadow Hill and Midsummer Common.

In the view from Castle Mound, it can be seen how the towers of Christ Church will be lost against the new development (LVA Appendix 5A page 29). The Heritage Statement notes how the church turrets reference the roof line of King's College Chapel and consider the church to be a good level of significance. However, the Heritage Statement does not address how the development will impact views of Christ Church from a distance such as from the Castle Mound, where views of the church towers will be lost against the Grafton Centre buildings.

Similarly, Jesus College is visible from the Castle Mound. The Heritage Statement (page 104) recognises that Jesus College holds a high level of significance with the chapel holding a very high level of significance. However, the Heritage Statement concludes that the development site makes a neutral contribution towards the setting and significance of the assets. It dismisses the impact of the new development on skyline and impact on Jesus College by referencing "other large scale modern buildings ... and the site therefore reads as one aspects of a varied, built-up urban area, rather than a stand-out element of the setting."

In the views from Red Meadow Hill, it can be seen how the roofline of King's College Chapel will be lost against the new development (LVA Appendix 5B page 35). The Heritage Statement groups Great St Mary's Church, King's College Chapel and the University Library. It recognises that the Chapel holds a very high level of significance. We disagree however that the proposal only makes a neutral contribution to the setting of this group of buildings. The outline of King's College Chapel will be lost against the outline of the proposed Grafton Centre and it will significantly diminish the distinctive skyline of Cambridge by removing the outline of King's College Chapel from this group of iconic buildings.

The Heritage Statement recognises that the additional mass of the proposal will impact views from Conservation Areas of the current open skyline. The view from Midsummer Common shows how the proposal will result in additional built form behind Christ Church and houses along the southern boundary of Midsummer Common (LVA Appendix 5A page 23). The proposed buildings will break the skyline and add another large bulky building to the skyline.

We disagree with the conclusions of the Heritage Statement as to the impact the proposed development will have on these significant heritage assets. We consider that the assessment of the proposal is contrary to the aims of the Council's Tall Buildings Policy. It does not maintain the character and quality of the Cambridge skyline nor is it considered appropriate to its context. The applicant argues that the proposed development should be seen in the context of the existing large scale bulky modern buildings seen in the skyline. However, we argue that it should be seen in the context of the towers and turrets of the skyline. The CB1 development already stands out as a bulky addition to the backdrop of the historic city. This proposal would introduce another bulky intrusion. 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 Beehive 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.

We consider that there is potential to lower the height of some blocks and increase the height of others to provide articulation which can be visible from a distance. Tall elements of the proposal need to be tall relative to their width i.e. tall and narrow as opposed to that being proposed which is high and bulky.

Currently the Grafton Centre does not make a positive contribution to the street scene, especially along East Road and the bus turning head and the service yards along Fitzroy Lane. Cambridge Past, Present and Future are therefore supportive of proposals where they improve the public realm. The site contains a number of existing trees which are well established and gaining in maturity. It is important that these are retained as they will provide a 'head start' to the greening and softening of the development.

I trust that you will take our comments into consideration.

Yours sincerely

*Sarah Nicholas*  
Principal Planning Officer