



Cambridge Past, Present & Future
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Response to 26/02567/OUT: Outline planning application for flexible phased development of Cambridge Business Park, Cowley Road, 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.

1. Principle of Development

Cambridge Past, Present & Future (CPPF) welcomes the overall principle of redeveloping and densifying Cambridge Business Park. The comprehensive redevelopment and adaptive reuse of an existing commercial estate to create a mixed-use residential and employment quarter represents a sustainable use of previously developed land within the city.

We recognise the opportunity for the redevelopment to create a distinctive and genuinely urban part of North East Cambridge. Our concerns therefore relate not to the principle of redevelopment, but to whether the proposed height, massing and spatial arrangement will achieve the quality of place and architectural legacy that such a significant development should deliver.

2. Building Height, Massing and Spatial Context

CPPF remains concerned about the proposed upper height parameters, notwithstanding the reduction from the 15-storey buildings previously proposed, to 12 and 13 storeys, approximately 39–42m, for residential buildings at the northern and eastern ends of the site.

The proposed height and massing need to be considered against Policy 55 (Responding to Context) of the adopted Local Plan, which requires development to identify and respond positively to local character and context, including through appropriate scale, density, massing, height and landscape setting. Policy 60 (Tall Buildings and the Skyline in Cambridge) is also directly relevant. It establishes a particularly careful approach to significantly taller buildings, requiring consideration of their effect on key views, the skyline and their wider visual and spatial context.

The proposed 39–42m buildings are above the 32m upper height recommended in the Greater Cambridge Skyline and Tall Buildings Baseline, Strategy and Guidance (2026) produced to support the emerging Local Plan, as it relates to North East Cambridge. The Strategy does not establish 32m as a general height allowance, but identifies it as the upper limit of the tested scenarios and recommends that top heights should not exceed 32m, with the majority of taller buildings below this level.

CPPF recognises that the Strategy is emerging evidence. Nevertheless, the scale of the departure is significant. The applicant should provide compelling evidence as to why buildings approximately 7–10m above the Strategy's recommended upper height are appropriate at Cambridge Business Park and how the additional height can be accommodated without unacceptable effects on the Cambridge skyline, strategic views, townscape and the relationship with surrounding development.

The issue is not simply the height of individual buildings. Successful tall buildings require an appropriate spatial setting, including sufficient space around them to allow their form and architectural quality to be appreciated. Placing 12–13 storey buildings within a relatively tight spatial context risks creating an overbearing cumulative mass, visual coalescence and a sense of cramming, even where individual buildings are well designed.

The acceptability of taller buildings therefore cannot be assessed solely by reference to their architectural treatment. Their relationship with surrounding buildings, streets, public spaces, landscape and the wider skyline is fundamental to whether their height can be successfully accommodated.

3. Architectural Legacy and Design Quality

Policy 56 (Creating Successful Places) requires major developments to deliver high-quality design, successful public spaces and a positive long-term legacy for Cambridge. In CPPF's view, this development should be judged against that ambition.

We support the ambition expressed in the application Design Code to move away from the traditional science-park model and create an urban, plot-based and human-scaled environment which responds to Cambridge's character in a contemporary manner.

However, supporting the principles and ambitions of the Design Code does not mean that the proposed height and massing should automatically be accepted. Indeed, the Code's own requirements reinforce CPPF's concerns. Its approach requires buildings to respond to adjacent buildings in scale and character, avoid visual coalescence, introduce variation in height and form, provide articulated massing and contribute coherently to the Cambridge skyline. It also recognises that increased building height carries additional architectural responsibilities.

While the Parameter Plans clearly allows for taller marker buildings, the proposed 12–13 storey buildings are significantly above the normal building typologies envisaged for the commercial buildings. Where taller marker buildings are proposed, the Code requires careful attention to proportion, articulation and architectural character, enhanced architectural quality and increasing slenderness as height increases.

CPPF considers these requirements important. If buildings substantially taller than the prevailing building typologies are to be accepted, there should be a correspondingly higher standard of architectural quality and a clear demonstration that their additional height produces a positive contribution to the city rather than simply additional development capacity.

The illustrative material submitted with the application does not, in CPPF's view, yet demonstrate that the proposed 39–42m buildings will achieve the elegance, visual lightness, slenderness and harmony with the Cambridge skyline required of such prominent structures.

This is therefore not an objection to tall buildings in principle. It is an objection to height which has not yet been sufficiently justified by exceptional architectural quality, slenderness, appropriate context and adequate spatial separation.

4. Design Code and Parameter Plans

CPPF welcomes the use of a Design Code to establish a framework for the subsequent detailed design of the development. We consider that the Code has the potential to ensure that the redevelopment develops a coherent character and a genuinely high-quality public realm.

However, we are concerned that the maximum height parameter plan is too high and has not been sufficiently justified.

The Design Code should subsequently be used to ensure that development within those parameters achieves the highest possible standard of architectural and urban design. In particular, the Code's requirements for human scale, contextual response, variation in height and form, slenderness, articulation and avoidance of visual coalescence should be applied rigorously if the proposed taller buildings are retained.

The Code appropriately requires detailed townscape and visual assessment, including consideration of relevant TVIA and LVIA viewpoints, as part of the subsequent reserved matters process. It also recognises that the relationship between plots needs to be considered and tested in near and long-distance views, and that roofscape articulation and massing breaks should be legible in relevant views from outside the site.

These requirements are important because the acceptability of a tall building cannot be assessed solely by reference to its architectural treatment. Its relationship with surrounding buildings, streets, public spaces, landscape and the wider skyline is fundamental to whether its height can be successfully accommodated. The cumulative effect of the development therefore needs to be considered, rather than assessing each taller building in isolation.

CPPF's position is consequently that the parameter plans should set lower maximum heights, while the Design Code and reserved matters process should then secure the detailed architectural response within those revised parameters. If the Planning Authority is nevertheless minded to accept the proposed 39–42m parameters, the permission should include sufficiently robust controls to ensure that any buildings at these heights demonstrate the enhanced architectural quality, proportion, slenderness, articulation and spatial separation contemplated by the Design Code for taller and more prominent buildings.

5. Active Travel, Junction Works and Cycle Parking

CPPF welcomes the specific infrastructure commitments included within the outline application.

Milton Road / Cowley Park Junction: We welcome the submission of the means of access for full determination, including dedicated signalised pedestrian and cycle crossings and active travel links connecting towards Cambridge North Station and the Guided Busway. These connections will be important in ensuring that the redevelopment functions as an integrated part of North East Cambridge rather than as an isolated development.

Cycle Parking: We also support the proposed hybrid cycle parking strategy, retaining secure, covered, long-stay cycle parking within individual building footprints for convenient access, alongside centralised Mobility Hubs providing visitor parking and facilities for cargo bikes and other forms of active travel.

These measures are consistent with the objective of creating a more sustainable and accessible urban quarter and should be secured through the planning permission and subsequent detailed design.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

CPPF supports the principle of the comprehensive mixed-use redevelopment of Cambridge Business Park and welcomes the ambition to transform the existing Business Park environment into a distinctive, landscape-led and genuinely urban part of North East Cambridge.

However, we object to the proposed upper height parameters of 12–13 storeys / approximately 39–42m.

Our objection is not based on an opposition to taller buildings in principle. Rather, we consider that the proposed height has not been sufficiently justified in relation to the Cambridge skyline, the emerging strategic approach to tall buildings, the spatial context of the site, the cumulative massing of the development and the requirement to deliver a positive architectural legacy.

We therefore ask the Planning Authority to:

1. **Reduce the maximum height parameters:** Require the maximum building heights to be reduced towards the 32m upper height identified in the Greater Cambridge Skyline and Tall Buildings Strategy, unless the applicant can provide compelling evidence that greater heights can be accommodated without unacceptable effects and are justified by exceptional architectural quality and townscape benefits.
2. **Secure appropriate spatial separation:** Ensure that the Design Code and subsequent reserved matters applications provide sufficient space around taller elements to prevent cramped massing, visual coalescence and an overbearing cumulative effect.
3. **Require exceptional architectural quality:** Where buildings exceed the normal building typologies identified in the Design Code and Parameter Plans, ensure the Design Code delivers enhanced architectural quality, appropriate proportion and articulation, and increasing slenderness as height increases.
4. **Assess the cumulative skyline effect:** Ensure that townscape and visual assessment consider the development as a whole, including near and long-distance views, rather than assessing individual tall buildings in isolation.

In summary, CPPF supports the ambition of the Design Code, but it is precisely because we support its principles of human scale, contextual response, slenderness, variation, architectural quality and avoidance of visual coalescence that we remain concerned about the proposed height and massing. This is a major opportunity to create a positive and lasting legacy for Cambridge, and the quality of that legacy should not be compromised by excessive height or insufficient spatial context.

I trust that you will take our comments into consideration.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Nicholas

Principal Planning Officer