Greater Cambridge Share Planning Service

By Online Planning Register

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Cambridge Past, Present & Future
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Response to 26/02610/FUL: Demolition of existing building and development of new commercial building, at 163 Cambridge Science Park Milton 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.

Cambridge Past, Present and Future have no objection in principle to the redevelopment of this site. However, the building must align with the emerging Cambridge Science Park Design Code and Parameter Plans, respect the sensitive edge of park/edge of city location and Cambridge's historic skyline. We are therefore concerned about the excessive building height and scale being proposed, conflict with emerging and established planning frameworks, and inadequate provision for landscape mitigation.

1. Building Height, Massing, and Visual Impact

Policy HQ/1 (Design Quality) which requires developments to preserve or enhance local character and be compatible with the scale, height, and massing of surrounding buildings, include variety and interest which creates a positive sense of place whilst responding to local distinctiveness.

The proposed building reaches a total height of 40.02 metres above finished ground level (33.945 metres to the top of the parapet).

As detailed in the application's Design and Access Statement, the proposed parapet line sits approximately 11m higher than Vitrum, 9m higher than Merlin Place, and 8m higher than the Trinity Hall Estate buildings along Milton Road.

The proposal fails to satisfy Policy HQ/1. Located directly on the edge of Milton Road and at a key northern gateway into Cambridge, a structure of this verticality and massing will appear overly dominant and visually intrusive. Furthermore, we consider the external architectural treatment to be poor in quality and insensitive to its immediate context. The regular grid of windows on all elevations, with no variation in parapet height does not contribute variety or interest to the street scene or skyline.

2. Conflict with Emerging Strategic Frameworks & Precedent Risks

While we acknowledge that the application has been submitted independently as a full planning application, it significantly undermines the emerging strategic vision for the wider site:

Trinity College's Outline Planning Application (ref: 26/01902/OUT) and associated Design Code (CA.03 & CA.04) set a maximum height parameter of 31.5m above existing ground level for this area, inclusive of parapets and secondary roof structures. At 40.02m to the PV peak and 33.9m to the parapet, Plot 163 exceeds this height parameter by up to 8.5 metres.

The applicant justifies the additional height in order to optimise solar energy generation and considers that the townscape impact is acceptable.

We do not consider that this is compelling justification for departing from these parameter limits. Approving an isolated scheme that ignores the masterplan parameter heights sets a damaging precedent. It threatens to compromise the cohesive planning process currently underway across the broader Cambridge Science Park and North East Cambridge area.

3. Inadequate Spatial Provision for Landscape Mitigation

Policy HQ/1 demands high-quality, site-appropriate landscape design capable of integration with surrounding infrastructure.

The applicant's Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) relies heavily on future tree canopy cover to soften and mitigate the visual impact of the building. However, the physical constraints of the site compromise this mitigation strategy.

The submitted Tree Strategy indicates that the proposed replacement trees will achieve canopy diameters of only 5 to 6 metres after 20 years. These represent modest, small-scale street trees rather than substantial, forest-scale canopy species (e.g., Oak, Lime, or Beech).

The impact of a 40-metre tall building cannot be meaningfully softened or visually integrated by small-scale planting on a constrained boundary plot adjacent to the highway. Because the site boundary lacks sufficient physical space to establish large-scale mature vegetation, the conclusions of the LVIA regarding visual impact mitigation are fundamentally flawed.

4. Sustainability & Biodiversity Net Gain

On a positive note, CPPF welcomes the applicant's commitment to achieving over 35% Biodiversity Net Gain (exceeding local and national thresholds) and an Urban Greening Factor of 0.44. We also support the integration of blue roofs, rain gardens, and greywater recycling systems targeting a 55% reduction in potable water usage.

However, we are disappointed that BREEAM "Outstanding" is treated merely as an aspiration rather than a firm commitment, and we urge the Council to secure maximum environmental standards via condition should permission be considered.

Conclusion

In summary, the application represents a significant overdevelopment of a tight edge-of-park site. By exceeding the 31.5m height parameters established in the overall Science Park Masterplan and failing to provide adequate physical space for meaningful tree canopy mitigation, the application conflicts directly with Policy HQ/1.

We request that the Local Planning Authority require the applicant to reduce the overall height and massing of the building to align with the emerging Science Park Design Code and allow sufficient room for effective, large-scale landscaping.

I trust that you will take our comments into consideration.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Nicholas

Principal Planning Officer