

APPLICATION - CONSULTATION RESPONSE

Consultee:	BNE - Conservation
Reference Number:	23/03204/OUT
Proposal:	Outline application (with all matters reserved) for the demolition of existing buildings and structures and redevelopment of the site for a new local centre (E (a-f), F1(b-f), F2(b,d)), open space and employment (office and laboratory) floorspace (E(g)(i)(ii) to the ground floor and employment floorspace (office and laboratory) (E(g)(i)(ii) to the upper floors, along with supporting infrastructure, including pedestrian and cycle routes, vehicular access, car and cycle parking, servicing areas, landscaping and utilities. (The Development is the subject of an Environmental Impact Assessment)
Site Address:	Beehive Centre Coldhams Lane Cambridge CB1 3ET Cambridgeshire
Case Officer:	Cuma Ahmet
Responding Officer:	Paul Robertshaw
Date:	07.11.24

Documents Reviewed

- Plans
- Environmental Statement Addendum
- Environmental Statement Chapter 7.0 – cultural heritage; Chapter 10.0 – Townscape and Visual
- Built Heritage Statement by Bidwells dated 28.08.24
- Design and Access Statement Addendum
- Design Code

Background information /additional comments:

See comments dated 22.09.23.

General comments

The proposals have been amended in response to heritage and other objections. A revised built heritage statement has been provided which provides a detailed assessment of heritage assets affected. The amendments to the proposals are summarised in the DAS addendum.

The number of buildings has been reduced, with reductions to the height of some plots. The layout, open space and landscaping has also been revised to address some of the challenges previously identified. Furthermore, the design code includes more prescriptive language on aspects considered contentious such as the design of plant and flues and provides the opportunity for further scrutiny and refinement.

Despite the reductions in the revised parameters, the height and mass of the buildings remains a concern, with several of the plots ranging from 30-40m in height (excluding flues) which is considerable in relation to the local context of Victorian terraced housing or historic landmarks a short distance away in the historic core.

Local impacts

The site is immediately adjacent to the Mill Lane Conservation Area where the existing buildings and car parking make a neutral or negative contribution to the area's significance. The conservation area is summarised in the conservation area appraisal (2011) as an example of a well-preserved and well-detailed Victorian suburb, with a coherent townscape dominated by two-storey terraced houses. The appraisal states that '*Views across, into and out of the Conservation Area are important and need to be protected.*' (p.55), identifying examples of important local views from York Street, the cemetery, and Mill Road bridge.

The development would be most visible from York Street at the junction with Sleaford Street where currently there is no view of the modern retail buildings. The contrast in scale and character between the revised proposed development would remain striking, although the additional setbacks and revised layout are considered to be an improvement. Flues are likely to be visible from this location as illustrated in

submitted views, and although they would not be on the nearest buildings they could have an overbearing appearance. It is acknowledged that the new layout and improved public green space would be easily accessible from this location, therefore providing an enhancement at the edge of the conservation area.

From Mill Road Bridge, the revised scale of the development would more comfortably relate to the scale and form of existing modern developments either side of the railway line, albeit with the addition of substantial flues above the roofline. From Mill Road Cemetery, the upper storeys of the development would be visible above the current roofline in some locations, resulting in a low degree of harm to its significance as a registered park and garden and a key open space in the conservation area.

Notwithstanding the positive amendments outlined above, due to the height and scale of the development as experienced from key viewpoints in the area, the impact on the Mill Road Conservation Area is considered harmful. The design code provides the opportunity to mitigate the harm, but this would not counteract the general conflict in terms of scale and character.

Wider impacts

Local Plan Appendix F states, in relation to the historic environment that *'It is possible to attach a degree of weight to those views that relate to the buildings, landscapes and settings, and particularly listed buildings and their settings, conservation areas, etc. Views of the historic core and the key buildings within the core are therefore particularly important to protect. In this case, distant views of the historic core from Red Meadow Hill, Lime Kiln Hill, and the Gogs are especially important, as are more localised views of the historic core from Castle Mound, The Backs, and open spaces within and around the historic core.'* (F.24).

In the view from Castle Mound, the amended proposals are more comfortably aligned with the horizon than the previous submission, with the building facades and the majority of plant storeys now sitting below or slightly above the horizon. The

reduction in height of plot 2 is a noticeable improvement in how the scheme relates to its context, and limits the perceived 'sprawl' of the development. There is a similar improvement in heritage terms in the view from Redmeadow Hill.

Overall, however, the development would still be noticeably higher and bulkier than the surrounding low-rise context and would in effect be a cluster of tall buildings. Therefore, it is considered there would continue to be adverse impacts on the historic townscape and is regrettable the proposed parameters have not brought more of the buildings and their associated rooftop plant convincingly close to, or below, the horizon. The concern remains that the development would create a new focus on the skyline, drawing the eye away from the historic core and its landmark buildings, undermining the appreciation of the form and development of Cambridge as a compact historic settlement focused on St Mary the Great and Kings College Chapel. There would be cumulative impacts with the approved Grafton Centre redevelopment which is of comparable scale and sits beside the proposals when viewed from Castle Mound.

The flues remain a serious concern due to their likely prominence on the skyline, rising up to 25% above the height of each building and being of unspecified location and design within the outline parameters. This is notable in the Castle Mound and Redmeadow Hill views. The updated design code recommends the PV zone is omitted from the calculation, allowing the flues to be meaningfully shorter, which would be greatly beneficial. It is disappointing this hasn't been formalised in the parameters proposed for approval as it would assist in mitigating the remaining harmful heritage impacts. The code also offers some comfort with regard to the location and design of the flues. A worst-case scenario is that the flues above all else challenge and undermine the prominence of historic city landmarks, and thereby harming their significance.

Harmful impacts were previously identified to Kings College Chapel, All Saints Church, St John's College Chapel, St Mary the Great and the University Library. These listed buildings derive part of their significance from their contribution to the Cambridge skyline, a factor which is highlighted in Appendix F. This also applies to

the Central Conservation Area, which encompasses the earliest part of the medieval city and includes an exceptional collection of highly graded heritage assets. The area partly derives its significance from how it is experienced in views outside its boundary as a low-rise historic settlement with a notable collection of important landmark buildings.

Harm was previously identified to the significance of the Kite Conservation Area and Riverside and Stourbridge Common Conservation Area due to the development's large scale in relation to the low-rise form and character which is prevalent across the historic central Cambridge and its immediate environs. The prevailing roofscape and treeline, and the presence of landmarks including Christ Church, Newmarket Road, Jesus College Chapel, St Giles Church, the Leper Chapel, and the Cheddars Lane Pumping Station are sensitive and significant elements of these conservation areas. Harm was identified to the Castle and Victoria Road Conservation Area which is also a predominantly low-rise residential area at the edge of the historic core, deriving part of its significance from the panoramic views over the city from the Castle Mound scheduled monument.

The partial reduction in height of the development, with the main bulk of the tallest buildings sitting closer to the horizon rather than exceeding it, has lessened these impacts to a degree. The reduction in the scale of plot 2 is a notable improvement. The harm to the University Library is now considered to be low. However, the scale of the development remains considerable in its context, drawing the eye and competing with the historic focus of the city. The potential for coalescence between the blocks, and the cumulative impact of the Grafton Centre scheme, would add to its visual prominence. The flues in particular risk challenging the prominence of the other buildings on the skyline, introducing large bulky elements of up to 10m each. It is considered that harmful impacts remain, albeit with the opportunity for mitigation through the design code and further detailed design at a later stage.

Recommendation

It is considered that the proposal would adversely affect the setting and significance of Kings College Chapel, St Mary the Great Church, St John's College, All Saints Church, Jesus College, and Christ Church for the reasons set out above.

It is considered that the proposal would adversely affect the significance of the Mill Road, Central, Kite, Castle and Victoria Road, and Riverside and Stourbridge Common Conservation Areas for the reasons set out above.

It is considered the proposal would adversely affect the significance of the Mill Road Cemetery registered park and garden for the reasons set out above.

The harm in all instances is considered to be less than substantial and therefore in respect of NPPF paras 206-208 the harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, giving great importance and weight to the conservation of designated heritage assets. Cumulatively, the harm to the significance of heritage assets is considered to be less than substantial at a moderate level.