

Beehive Centre, Cambridge **Ref APP/Q0505/V/25/336016**

Better Beehive Cambridge Group **Statement to Planning Inquiry**

The Better Beehive Cambridge Group is a community collaboration representing people across the City of Cambridge. We formed in 2022 in order to take part in the democratic planning process with regards to the Beehive application. Within our comments and within our website guidance we apply the NPPF, Local Plan policies, material considerations and reasoned arguments to which we add our considerable knowledge of locality, character, and community.

We believe that there is a better outcome to be achieved for the Beehive site. A solution that would benefit the local community more than the current proposals. Our previous comments detail our aspirations.

Cambridge residents are well used to change, expansion and growth; our population has increased by 17.6% between 2011 and 2021 and our city has continued to grow. We understand the need for Cambridge to be a UK wealth generator but firmly believe that this should not be at any price or at the expense of culture, biodiversity, mental health, and community.

We have consistently objected to the revised Beehive proposals because there remains a disproportionate change in scale and mass between the proposals and the city scale and the neighbouring area giving rise to unacceptable harm to residential amenity. This view is shared by GCSP planners with their recommendation to refuse and by the planning committee, who made it clear that if RailPen had accepted more appropriate reductions, the proposal would have been accepted.

We note that the applicant has taken some measures to reduce the scale of the proposals; we were told by the developer team at the most recent public consultation in July 2024 that the scheme had been reduced by 10 percent. This was considered a significant reduction by them. We dispute this as the site sections in the Design and Access Statement clearly show - 10% is not enough of a reduction from the excessive original proposal.

Unacceptable harm to residential amenity has been demonstrated in a recently undertaken independent sunlight and daylight review which highlights the disproportionate difference in scale between the surrounding housing and the current proposals.

The report concludes that 70 windows across the nearby residential areas of St Matthews Gardens, Silverwood Close, Sleaford Street, York Street and Hampden Gardens do not meet BRE guidelines for VSC. Additionally, 75 habitable rooms across St Matthews Gardens,

Silverwood Close, Sleaford Street, York Street, Hampden Gardens and The Terrace do not meet BRE Guide default target for Daylight Distribution.

We draw your attention to the consideration that some properties may be multiple-occupancy with more people affected than expected and that Sleaford Street properties would be a mere 6m from Plot 6.

The independent surveyor noted that, 'No daylight distribution contour plots are provided.' This, coupled with the fact that the applicant turned down a request for a Residential Visual Amenity Assessment and Councillors' statements that no 3D model of the proposal was submitted for their review. We regard this as an extraordinary circumstance. It suggests that RailPen has been circumspect about supplying expected assessment and modelling; essential for accurate analysis. An unexpected omission for such a significant development site.

Concerns also arise from the application's reliance on an illustrative design in this outline application. Without constraints, the final design could fully utilise the maximum parameters. Indeed, it would be commercially desirable and rational for the applicant to maximise the available volume. We draw your attention to the uncertainty over the positioning of the extraction flues that potentially add another 25percent to the height. This need for flexibility adds to the ambiguity over the appearance of the buildings.

Building 10 and its proximity to Silverwood Close are among the sources of concern. In the revised submission Building 10 was reduced in height by one storey. Regrettably, while Building 10's height decreased, it's form has shifted to an orthogonal design resulted in the leading face casting a greater shadow over properties in Silverwood Close. This effect was apparent in the submitted images, evidenced by reduced visible sky in post-update images. It is obvious that these modifications to Building 10 worsen conditions for Silverwood Close residents.

We believe that it would be a mistake to grant outline permission that, in effect, gives the applicant the right to build to the maximum parameters. We argue that the scheme should be reduced further at outline stage and that the issues of scale, massing and over-shadowing cannot be solved with conditions.

As well as our concern with scale and massing we remain convinced that other vital issues have not been resolved adequately.

For instance, our position on the impact on the setting of conservation areas, historic assets and on the historic city skyline/panorama has not changed. Having a development of such a contrasting scale to the existing mainly low-rise city will undoubtedly be harmful. There will be views of the upper floors of the development, and in particular, the flues as one moves through the city. And as one enters the site, the obvious change in scale would, we suggest, be overbearing.

The existing panorama of the city, highlighted in Policy 60 and Appendix F of the Local Plan, is of a rich and interesting roofscape with its differing yet harmonising colours, textures and forms. The panorama similarly includes intriguing, old and modern architectural events and all punctuated by trees, collegiate towers and church spires. In some views, the proposed Beehive scheme would present a large cluster of unremittingly boxy form buildings, breaking the skyline and adjacent to iconic buildings such as King's College Chapel and St Mary the Great Church.

We ask that consideration of the cumulative views is carried out as an imperative; the Beehive, coalescences with the Grafton permitted scheme, would clearly dominate the city panorama when viewed from the elevated viewpoints highlighted in Appendix F as well as other vantage points in the city.

We are naturally concerned about the effect the Beehive development would have on the local environment, specifically the local water resource, the Urban Heat Island Effect and increased congestion. We note the efforts that have been taken to mitigate these issues, but argue that a high-density, high-water demand development cannot possibly have a neutral or beneficial effect.

The latest updated Water Resource Management Plan from Cambridge Water (March 2025) states that increasing water supply will be from either/and the Grafham Transfer which is due to connect in 2032, and the Fens Reservoir which is due to come online in 2036. It seems until then measures to reduce demand are the only way of keeping the taps flowing. The WRMP aspires to reduce demand through various initiatives but at the same time it predicts non-household growth such as the Beehive is forecast to increase by 55% by 2038. The WRMP also states that to achieve the reduction all future non-household growth would need to be water neutral or have an ability to offset demand together with a reduction of the existing non-household demand.

It is realistic to say that reduction in water consumption is difficult. Couple that with a wait of at least seven years before we have any relief in the water supply it all seems a bit 'wing and a prayer'.

By far the best mitigation for the urban heat island effect would be to plant large species trees to shade buildings and hard surfaces. But there is not enough space to plant large scale trees and allow them to mature in the heart of the development.

Since the Beehive proposals would create thousands more skilled jobs, it would pull in new skilled workers from outside the region creating more traffic and indeed more housing need. Cambridge is desperately short of affordable housing; an excellent way to mitigate this development would have been to include housing.

Our conviction is that the buildings causing the overshadowing, overlooking and overbearing issues should be further reduced in scale. The multi-storey car park should be moved back to its original location and sunk into the ground by at least two storeys. We further question the necessity of a multi-storey car park when two car parks are proposed for the nearby retail park.

In conclusion, the Better Beehive Group offer our conviction that the Beehive scheme remains an over-development of the site that would significantly impact the City of Cambridge and the immediate community.

An alternative type of development of mixed use, including housing, that is complementary to and in scale with its suburban setting and would have a genuine city/local community benefit would be more appropriate.