



Statement by Cambridge Past, Present and Future.

Inspectorate Ref: PCU/RTI/Q0505/3360365

Site Address: Beehive Centre Coldhams Lane Cambridge CB1 3ET

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 upper floors, along with supporting infrastructure, including pedestrian and cycle routes, vehicular access, car and cycle parking, servicing areas, landscaping and utilities.

Sarah Nicholas BSc (Hons) MRTPI
Principle Planning Officer
Cambridge Past, Present & Future

My name is Sarah Nicholas, and I am the principal planning officer for Cambridge Past, Present & Future. We are Cambridge's largest civic society, run by local people who are passionate about where they live. Our aims include protecting, celebrating and improving the important built heritage of Cambridge and protecting and enhancing the green setting of Cambridge for people and nature

This application has been brought before you with just one reason for refusal drafted by the Council. Yet, the Officer's Report to Planning Committee on 12 February 2025 (CD3-01) identified fourteen key considerations. We ask that as you consider this application that you are satisfied with the Council's assessment of these considerations. There is little or no dispute between the applicant and the Council on these matters and therefore we welcome your careful consideration of the third-party representations from individuals, local interest groups and organisations and Member representations against the council's conclusions.

In this statement I would like to particularly draw your attention to the issues of the principle of development and need, heritage and townscape.

Principle of Development/Need

The officer justifies the need for new lab and office space in section 13 of the Officers Report. There appears to be a contradiction between the Council's evidence and the officer's conclusions.

In paragraph 13.18 the officer concludes that 'demand for high quality office space is likely to outstrip short-term supply in the City'. However, at paragraph 13.16 the officer refers to the Council's own evidence '*The Greater Cambridge Growth Sectors Study: Life science and ICT locational, land and accommodation needs*,' (Iceni, September 2024)(CD9.19) which states that 'the future supply of general office space appears relatively healthy looking ahead'. The additional requirements needed later in the post 2030 period being met through the emerging local plan.

The officer also concludes that Lab space availability is currently underprovided. Yet, the table at paragraph 13.15, again from the Council's own evidence, shows that large amounts of dry lab space are forecast to be delivered over the next 15 years. Paragraph 13.16 states the supply for wet lab space through 2025-2030 and beyond is now substantial and the draft allocations in the emerging Local Plan will meet shortfalls post 2030.

Although not specifying floorspace type, paragraph 13.14 sets out the Council's overall supply and demand figures demonstrating that there is an oversupply compared to demand for the period to 2041.

Our conclusion is that the Council's own evidence from September 2024 demonstrates that there is sufficient supply to meet demand. We are concerned that allowing these speculative developments whilst there is a healthy supply will lead to vacant plots and empty buildings.

Moving on to the site's suitability for housing, Cambridge PPF has long promoted and lobbied for an element of residential development on these large retail park sites. In paragraphs 13.43 – 13.45 the officer states that residential development on this site would not be contrary to policy.

Cambridge PPF consider that this site is well located for a residential-led mixed use development.

We consider it is important that housing is provided to support the commercial element of the proposal. In planning the future growth of Cambridge, Greater Cambridge Planning are having to balance the housing growth with the economic growth. Speculative developments such as this site will upset this balance and fuel the need for further homes on greenfield sites and encourage in-commuting, both of which have environmental impacts.

Heritage

We ask that you note that despite the design amendments, the Council's conservation team have concerns about the maximum height and massing of the proposed buildings, specifically given their local context of Victorian terraced housing, and the proximity to historic landmarks in the city centre. I Refer you to section 15 of the Officer's report.

Townscape

The officer concludes at paragraph 16.26 that only a low level of harm has been identified regarding the townscape and visual effects of the proposed development, and therefore there would only be slight conflict with Policy 60 which aims to preserve Cambridge's unique and varied skyline.

We disagree.

From a distance the buildings will visually merge and create a large block with only a slightly varied flat roof line. The gaps between the buildings are not sufficient to mitigate the amalgamation of the buildings into one mass.

The proximity to the Grafton Centre development will create an exceptionally large area of bulky, flat roofed development in direct contrast to historic assets.

The development will be prominent in the panorama from several key viewpoints, including Castle Hill Mound, Red Meadow Hill, Lime Tree Hill, and Lime Kiln Road Layby.

From these locations, it will have a direct visual relationship with the historic core and detract from the historic assets such as Kings College Chapel and the University Library Tower. The view from Coldham's Common will be overpowering in contrast to the domestic scale of building in the foreground.

We therefore believe that the proposed development's design, characterised by its large, uniform mass and its negative impact on key viewpoints and historic landmarks, directly clashes with the core principles of Policy 60.

Planning Balance

Officers are of the view that the overall public benefit of the scheme outweighs these heritage and townscape harms identified.

We disagree.

As I have hopefully highlighted, the evidence for the need for the development is not clear and therefore the harm to the heritage and townscape is unnecessary.

We do not oppose development of this site. Over the years and through successive local plans, CambridgePPF have suggested that these retail warehouse sites, with their large areas of surface parking could be made better use of. There is potential for them to be redeveloped for retail, commercial, leisure and residential uses and we have made this case to the applicants through their consultations.

What Cambridge needs is for future growth to be delivered through a plan-led system, which balances housing growth with economic growth and delivers the right services and facilities alongside this growth. Speculative developments such as this, upset this balance. This site appears

to be planned and designed for the benefits of the pension fund not for the benefit of Cambridge residents.

We ask that you recommend refusal of this application so that a mixed residential and commercial scheme, which is sympathetic to its residential neighbours and heritage assets can come forward.