

## South Cambridgeshire District Council

## Design Enabling Panel

**PANEL MEETING REPORT**

<b>Scheme:</b>	Demolition of existing buildings and construction of an 80-bed care home with associated car and cycle parking, landscaping following demolition of existing buildings.
<b>Site address:</b>	Hotel Felix, Whitehouse Lane, Girton, Cambridge CB3 0LX
<b>Status:</b>	Pre-planning Enquiry, ref: 20/51137/PREAPP
<b>Date:</b>	Wednesday 13 January 2021
<b>Venue:</b>	The DEP meeting was conducted online via Microsoft TEAMS due to Covid-19
<b>Time:</b>	15:00 – 17:00
<b>Site visit:</b>	A site visit was conducted by DEP officer on 7 January 2021 who filmed the site visit. Videos of the site visit were viewed by Panel Members prior to, and on the day of the DEP meeting which took place on 13 January 2021.

**Panel Members**

Graham Whitehouse (Chair) – Director, GWP Architects Ltd

Dr. Jon Burgess – Director, Head of Cambridge, Turley

David Grech - Independent retired Architect

Sarah Morrison – Associate, Fielden + Mawson Architects

**Local Authority attendees**

Dr. Bonnie Kwok – Principal Urban Designer / DEP manager

Tom Davies – Urban Designer / DEP Support Officer

Apologies - Katie Christodoulides – Principal Planning Officer (Case Officer) (Could not attend due to planning committee)

**Applicant/Representatives**

Ben Pentreath - Director of Ben Pentreath (Architect)

Melissa Magee - Managing Director, Carless & Adams Architects (Architect)

Adrian Pancott - Chief Executive Officer, KYN (Applicant)

Mike Derbyshire – Partner, Head of Planning, Bidwells (Agent)

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Rebecca Smith - Principal Planner, Bidwells (Agent)

James Gant – Group Property Director, KYN (Observer)

Nick Vose – Director, Marengo Communications (Observer)

### **Relevant planning policies**

*'National Planning Policy Framework' (2019) (NPPF)*

Paragraph 124 - The creation of high-quality buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities. Being clear about design expectations, and how these will be tested, is essential for achieving this. So too is effective engagement between applicants, communities, local planning authorities and other interests throughout the process.

Paragraph 127 - Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments:

- a) will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;
- b) are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;
- c) are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);
- d) establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit;
- e) optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development (including green and other public space) and support local facilities and transport networks; and
- f) create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users<sup>46</sup>; and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience.

Paragraph 128 - Design quality should be considered throughout the evolution and assessment of individual proposals. Early discussion between applicants, the local planning authority and local community about the design and style of emerging schemes is important for clarifying expectations and reconciling local and commercial interests. Applicants should work closely with those affected by their proposals to evolve designs that take account of the views of the community. Applications that can demonstrate early, proactive and effective engagement with the community should be looked on more favourably than those that cannot.

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Paragraph 129 - Local planning authorities should ensure that they have access to, and make appropriate use of, tools and processes for assessing and improving the design of development. These include workshops to engage the local community, design advice and review arrangements, and assessment frameworks such as Building for Life. These are of most benefit if used as early as possible in the evolution of schemes, and are particularly important for significant projects such as large scale housing and mixed use developments. In assessing applications, local planning authorities should have regard to the outcome from these processes, including any recommendations made by design review panels.

Paragraph 130 - Permission should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions, taking into account any local design standards or style guides in plans or supplementary planning documents. Conversely, where the design of a development accords with clear expectations in plan policies, design should not be used by the decision-maker as a valid reason to object to development. Local planning authorities should also seek to ensure that the quality of approved development is not materially diminished between permission and completion, as a result of changes being made to the permitted scheme (for example through changes to approved details such as the materials used).

Paragraph 131 - In determining applications, great weight should be given to outstanding or innovative designs which promote high levels of sustainability, or help raise the standard of design more generally in an area, so long as they fit in with the overall form and layout of their surroundings.

Paragraph 133 - The Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.

Paragraph 143 - Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.

Paragraph 144 - When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. 'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

Paragraph 145 - A local planning authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in the Green Belt. Exceptions to this are:

- a) buildings for agriculture and forestry;
- b) the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use) for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and burial grounds and allotments; as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it;

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- c) the extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building;
- d) the replacement of a building, provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces;
- e) limited infilling in villages;
- f) limited affordable housing for local community needs under policies set out in the development plan (including policies for rural exception sites); and
- g) limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land, whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would:
  - not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing development;
  - or
  - not cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt, where the development would re-use previously developed land and contribute to meeting an identified affordable housing need within the area of the local planning authority.

*'South Cambridgeshire Local Plan' (2018)*

### Policy HQ/1 Design Principles

1. All new development must be of high-quality design, with a clear vision as to the positive contribution the development will make to its local and wider context. As appropriate to the scale and nature of the development, proposals must:
  - a) Preserve or enhance the character of the local urban and rural area and respond to its context in the wider landscape;
  - b) Conserve or enhance important natural and historic assets and their setting;
  - c) Include variety and interest within a coherent, place-responsive design, which is legible and creates a positive sense of place and identity whilst also responding to the local context and respecting local distinctiveness;
  - d) Be compatible with its location and appropriate in terms of scale, density, mass, form, siting, design, proportion, materials, texture and colour in relation to the surrounding area;
  - e) Deliver a strong visual relationship between buildings that comfortably define and enclose streets, squares and public places, creating interesting vistas, skylines, focal points and appropriately scaled landmarks along routes and around spaces;
  - f) Achieve a permeable development with ease of movement and access for all users and abilities, with user friendly and conveniently accessible streets and other routes both within the development and linking with its surroundings and existing and proposed facilities and services, focusing on delivering attractive and safe opportunities for walking, cycling, public transport and, where appropriate, horse riding;
  - g) Provide safe and convenient access for all users and abilities to public buildings and spaces, including those with limited mobility or those with other impairment such as of sight or hearing;

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- h) Ensure that car parking is integrated into the development in a convenient, accessible manner and does not dominate the development and its surroundings or cause safety issues;
  - i) Provide safe, secure, convenient and accessible provision for cycle parking and storage, facilities for waste management, recycling and collection in a manner that is appropriately integrated within the overall development;
  - j) Provide a harmonious integrated mix of uses both within the site and with its surroundings that contributes to the creation of inclusive communities providing the facilities and services to meet the needs of the community;
  - k) Ensure developments deliver flexibility that allows for future changes in needs and lifestyles, and adaptation to climate change;
  - l) Mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change on development through location, form, orientation, materials and design of buildings and spaces;
  - m) Include high quality landscaping and public spaces that integrate the development with its surroundings, having a clear definition between public and private space which provide opportunities for recreation, social interaction as well as support healthy lifestyles, biodiversity, sustainable drainage and climate change mitigation;
  - n) Protect the health and amenity of occupiers and surrounding uses from development that is overlooking, overbearing or results in a loss of daylight or development which would create unacceptable impacts such as noise, vibration, odour, emissions and dust;
  - o) Design-out crime and create an environment that is created for people that is and feels safe, and has a strong community focus.
2. Larger and more complex developments will be required to submit Masterplans and Design Codes to agree an overall vision and strategy for a development as a whole that demonstrates a comprehensive and inclusive approach.

### Policy NH/8: Mitigating the Impact of Development In and Adjoining the Green Belt

1. Any development proposals within the Green Belt must be located and designed so that they do not have an adverse effect on the rural character and openness of the Green Belt.
2. Where development is permitted, landscaping conditions, together with a requirement that any planting is adequately maintained, will be attached to any planning permission in order to ensure that the impact on the Green Belt is mitigated.
3. Development on the edges of settlements which are surrounded by the Green Belt must include careful landscaping and design measures of a high quality.

### Policy NH/9: Redevelopment of Previously Developed Sites and Infilling in the Green Belt

1. Redevelopment of Previously Developed Sites and Infilling in the Green Belt will be inappropriate development except for:
  - a. The re-use of buildings provided that the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction, are consistent with Policies E/17 and H/17, provided they preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land in Green Belt;
  - b. The extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building;

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- c. The replacement of a building, provided the new building is in the same use, and not materially larger than the one it replaces;
- d. Limited infilling, where infilling is defined as the filling of small gaps between existing built development (excluding temporary buildings). Such infilling should have no greater impact upon the openness of the Green Belt and the purpose of including land within it than the existing development. The cumulative impact of infilling proposals will be taken into account;
- e. The partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed sites (brownfield land), whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt and the purpose of including land within it than the existing development.

### *'District Design Guide' (2010)*

This document sets out minimum residential amenity standards for new developments in the district, e.g. minimum private and communal amenity space, minimum back-to-back distances, minimum garage sizes, etc.

### *'Cambridgeshire Quality Charter for Growth' (2010)*

This document sets out core principles of the level of quality to be expected in new developments in the district: the 4Cs, i.e. Community, Connectivity, Character and Climate. Collectively, they form the basic principles for achieving higher quality development that meets the needs our communities. New housing development should provide a great choice of housing along with the active participation of local communities. New developments should be located where people can benefit from high connectivity to jobs and services. Climate change should be tackled through imaginative landscaping and innovative approaches to transport, energy and waste. Places of character should be created, with distinctive neighbourhoods and a first-class public realm.

## **Panel views**

*It should be noted that the comments below include items from the Panel's online in-camera discussion and amplify the brief opinion delivered at the end of the online session.*

## **Summary**

The Panel welcomed the opportunity for involvement at this pre-application stage while the design remains a work-in-progress.

The presentation showed potential for a high-quality facility and environment for residents and staff. However, the Panel wished to see a robust justification for the proposed demolition and design approach. Although the demolition of the existing hotel may be acceptable, it is important to deliver a new building which does not appear to be a conversion/adaptation of an older building and displaying the compromises that a conversion would involve.

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A more rigorous site and context analysis should inform the design decisions rather than applying a rigidly symmetrical façade which does not always reflect the uses of the spaces within; i.e. the form is not necessarily following function.

### Discussion

#### Demolition of the Victorian and other buildings on site

While the existing hotel building retains significant and attractive original Victorian elements, notably to the south elevation with feature gables and a projecting curved bay, it is accepted that much of the building, and in particular the more modern additions, fail to make a positive contribution to the setting. Notwithstanding this, it is important to note that there is significant embodied energy invested in the existing buildings, and that also needs to be part of the consideration for total demolition proposal.

Therefore, a robust justification is required for the demolition of the existing buildings, particularly with regard to sustainability, where re-use has to be first consideration for benefit in terms of embodied carbon. Justification should include the reasons why the original parts of the hotel could not be retained and provide the social spaces. If this is not justifiable, then new build may be acceptable on this site, but again the design needs to be justified in terms of sustainability, e.g. better orientation, elevation treatment that has regard to solar shading, Passivhaus fabric standards etc.

The replacement structure should be of demonstrably equal or better quality, and is capable of delivering a positive environment for the elderly/frail residents whilst also making an appropriate statement within the Green Belt setting. A replacement building that is architecturally an enhancement on what is on site at the moment could be a justification for demolition, but further work would be required to ensure that the current proposal attains that level.

#### Design approach

The design is the result of a collaboration between two Practices, with one firm developing the functional layout to reflect the ethos and ambitions of the Client, with the second Architect developing the elevations/facades in order to deliver the preferred style.

There is a need to refer to South Cambridgeshire Local Plan Policy HQ/1, which requires all new developments to relate well to their context. As part of the justification for the demolition of the buildings, there is a need to demonstrate that the proposed new care home building is both an improvement on the existing condition and is an appropriate form of building for this specific context. The proposed neo-Georgian style would require justification in terms of its appropriateness in edge of town Cambridge, adjacent to new housing developments that are largely contemporary in style.

The Panel considered that if one accepts that the period style using facing materials widely encountered around Cambridge (because this is an attractive proposal for the potential occupants of the building), then it is necessary to pay attention to details.

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### Siting and scale of the proposed care home building

The siting of the proposed care home building may be considered appropriate with adequate space all round. However, the impact upon the openness of the Green Belt should be further assessed and illustrated, in accordance with Paragraph 145 of the NPPF and South Cambridgeshire Local Plan Policies NH/8 and NH/9, as the proposals are effectively shifting the position of the building and making it a materially larger. The applicant would need to provide accurate Before and After images to clearly demonstrate this as part of their justification.

### Detailed building design

The presentation included no sections through the building. The Panel would strongly encourage the production of such drawings, including section through the central courtyard, as such drawings would help to demonstrate the integration of structure, mechanical and electrical installation, storey heights, natural light, ventilation and relationship of elevational treatment to the proposed floor and ceiling heights.

Sections should also demonstrate that all plant and equipment may be accommodated within the building envelope. This should include such matters as lift overruns (likely to be approximately 3.6 metres minimum above second floor level).

There is scope for the proposed care home building to accommodate a more sustainable approach and response to context.

### Layout

The proposed new care home building comprises four pavilions with glazed links. The Panel considered these links demonstrate the potential to create visual interest and an enhanced relationship with the landscape. They also have the potential to offer an opportunity to consider breaking the relatively plain linear form of the elevations to north and south.

There may be scope for an east-facing main building of traditional form and appearance, with a series of, say, four linked pavilions arranged around a courtyard on the west side of the main block accommodating the bedrooms, along with some of the smaller social areas in the links. This might then allow for a different architectural expression on the pavilions, possibly a more contemporary expression, which could allow a greater marrying up between the buildings use and the architectural detailing (e.g. not having to have traditionally proportioned openings with glazing bars etc).

Perhaps the architect could also consider reflecting the form of the extant curved central bay of Hotel Felix.

The detailing of the connections between the proposed glazed links and the proposed pavilions. The proposed floor plans are very deep with a central 1.8 metre corridor serving rooms to both sides. This would lead to an extensive area of flat/crown top roof. The detailing of these areas should be considered at an early stage.

The siting of the proposed laundry at second floor level was questioned due to the logistics and noise and vibration issues.



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The imposing front approach although attractive upon arrival, would restrict the accessible landscape for residents. This may be inevitable given the various categories of care and need for safeguarding. However, it would be good to see some possible pedestrian routes extending along the southern green space.

### Elevational treatment

The regular form of the facades regardless of orientation was questioned. The Panel encourage further consideration of the context, views and opportunities to north, south, east and west. The site has the advantage of a mature landscape with specimen trees which should be celebrated. This is likely to involve a departure from the rigid symmetry of the presentation in order to allow enhanced views and experience, for instance, when using the stairways.

Similarly, the siting of the proposed kitchen in east-north front corner is likely to lead to conflict between fenestration and the function within. The proposed kitchen would require deliveries preferably with direct access, plus access to refuse etc. Care facilities of this nature generally have significant amount of waste, both general, clinical and food.

### Other considerations

It is recommended the planning application incorporates appropriate facilities in response to the above. The siting of the building means that it is relatively public on all fronts. There is no obvious hiding place for elements such as waste disposal and servicing.

**Note:** *Please note that these comments are informal opinion of the Council's Design Enabling Panel and relate to the design aspects of the proposals. The comments are produced for discussion purposes only with the applicant. The views expressed will not bind the decision of Council members should a planning application be submitted, nor prejudice the formal decision-making process of the Council.*