

# Cambridge North Landscape

Appeal Reference: APP/W0530/W/23/3315611

Appellant - Proof of Evidence - SUMMARY

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Robert Myers Associates  
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

# 1.0 Introduction

1.1 My name is Robert William Myers, MA (Cantab), PGDipLA, CMLI, MSGD. I am a chartered landscape architect with over 30 years' experience working as a practising landscape architect in the private sector, much of it in and around Cambridge. I hold an MA degree in Geography from Cambridge University and a postgraduate Diploma in Landscape Architecture from Birmingham Polytechnic (now Birmingham City University).

## **Background to my evidence**

1.2 I have prepared my Proof of Evidence (PoE) on behalf of Brookgate Land Ltd (the 'Appellant') to present evidence relevant to landscape design, in respect of the Appeal. The description of development is set out in the Statement of Common Ground between the Appellant and the LPA.

## **Appointment**

1.3 My practice, Robert Myers Associates (RMA), was appointed by the Appellant in April 2017 to provide landscape architectural design services. The appointment included an overall landscape strategy for the Site, illustrating landscape typologies, visualisations, precedent images and hard and soft material palettes. All landscape design was included as a detailed matter in the planning application, and RMA prepared the details for the hard and soft landscape of the public realm and private garden spaces, including cycle parking, materials selection, planting and street furniture. This included detailed layout plans, typical sections and tree and other planting layouts.

## **Scope of Evidence**

1.4 My PoE addresses matters relevant to landscape strategy, design and detail of public and private external spaces. The evidence demonstrates how the landscape proposals provide well-designed, high quality public spaces with an appropriate quantum of open space and play, and with a distinctive character that complements the Site 's history and context. Through this, the evidence addresses issues raised by the local authority as reasons for refusal. As an appendix, the evidence also shows how the proposals satisfy national and local planning policy.

# 2.0 The Site and its context

2.1 My PoE describes how the Site is a transitional, edge of city space, positioned between the residential neighbourhoods and semi-natural open spaces to the west and the low-lying grasslands, river corridor and wider fens to the east. The Appeal Site has always had an urban and industrial character, created historically by the railway infrastructure and today by the presence of the existing roads, surrounding industrial and office uses, and the recently constructed station square and large 428-space surface station car park.

2.2 Existing green infrastructure in the immediate context includes a green 'finger' of planting associated with the First Public Drain along Cowley Road, and a linear tree belt along the Guided Busway to the west, separating the Site visually from the allotments. In the northern part of the Site, colonising scrubby trees and derelict elements of former railway infrastructure are set within a wildflower 'open mosaic habitat' (OMH).

- 2.3 Key constraints for the Site are related to the railway and surrounding road infrastructure which create an awkward tapered shape that constrains opportunities for laying out public space.

## 3.0 Planning process & design evolution

### **Background**

- 3.1 The landscape design vision and strategy were initially developed by RMA in 2017 and 2018 in conjunction with Formation Architects as the masterplanners. With their replacement by ACME in 2020, the scheme became less car-dominated, and larger public spaces and gardens were introduced, the SUDS strategy made more explicit with the introduction of the swale on Station Row, and pedestrian and cycle connectivity enhanced. The northern area of the Site (now known as the 'Wild Park') was introduced as an important additional area of the masterplan with a different character, to serve as a public open space, a setting for play for older children and an opportunity for additional biodiversity enhancements arranged around an important natural SUDs pond feature.

### **Engagement on Landscape Matters**

- 3.2 My PoE demonstrates how the design development has progressed through an iterative process, advanced over 5 years with Greater Cambridge Planning Service officers, Camcycle, and through public consultation. Feedback has resulted in many positive design changes to the landscape scheme.

## 4.0 The proposals

### **Policy**

- 4.1 The landscape design was developed in line with the relevant local plan policy and SPD documents. Evidence of this compliance is set out in tabular form in the Appendix to my PoE.

### **Design Standards**

- 4.2 The PoE describes how landscape proposals at Cambridge North present a high-quality design which will result in a well-designed coherent sense of place that contributes to distinctiveness. Designed with high quality and robust materials, they will provide a flexible framework of green spaces that serve the users both as vibrant active social spaces and as verdant, restful places for relaxation and exploration. The proposals will create a distinct sense of place by drawing inspiration from the existing site and its environs.
- 4.3 The PoE demonstrates how the design of the landscape and open space has been guided by a rigorous set of overarching design principles concerning character, place-making, green and blue infrastructure, connectivity, residential amenity and the creation of a high-quality pedestrian, urban realm.

## **Distinctive Character**

4.4 I have described how a distinctive character for the development has been drawn from the former railway use, of the Site, the remaining railway infrastructure on-site, and the rich OMH that has arisen on the derelict site, as well as the distinct landscape of Cambridge and the Fens, including drainage ditches and brooks. This will respect the ‘memory’ of the Site’s past and set up a strong character of buildings set in an informal, slightly wild and biodiverse landscape. There will be a strong character derived from the creative tension between the architectural urban built forms and the wilder, ‘open mosaic mimic’ planting that will surround it, which is very particular to this place and its history.

## **Play**

4.5 The inclusion of play is a key part of the design; this is most evident in the residential Chesterton Gardens, but accompanied children are also engaged through play across the wider site, such as in the Wild Park, and the swale and jet fountains of the commercial side of the development. A robust set of design principles underpins the play strategy including integration of informal play opportunities into social spaces, and natural play into the various green spaces.

## **National Standards for design**

4.6 The government’s National Design Guide<sup>1</sup> sets out the characteristics of well-designed places and demonstrates what good design means in practice. The PoE sets out in detail how every characteristic in the Guide relating to nature and public space is met by the landscape design for Cambridge North.

## **Residential environment**

4.7 The Sunlight and Daylight Assessment<sup>2</sup>, produced by Arup as part of the EIA, demonstrates that Chesterton Gardens will significantly exceed the BRE guidelines. It is therefore deemed to be a suitable space for a residential garden in terms of light, and the enclosed nature of the space also creates a sheltered, safe and quiet environment for recreation and play.

## **The Eastern edge**

4.8 A significant amount of time has been spent on the development of the landscape design of the eastern edge of the Site, between the laboratory buildings, mobility hub and the railway tracks. The PoE describes how the design has been developed to include a wider ‘walkable’ street, and a belt of tree planting including plane trees that will create a green edge in proportion with the scale of the proposed buildings.

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1 National Design Guide, Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government, 2021

2 Lighting Assessment, Appendix 13.1 of the Environmental Impact Assessment; Arup, May 2022

## 5.0 Open space provision

### **SCDC Standards**

- 5.1 The standards for the calculation of Open Space are set by the South Cambridge District Council's Open Space SPD<sup>3</sup>. My PoE sets out the calculations required to determine the number of expected occupants for a new development and shows how the various categories of open space have been achieved and, in some cases, exceeded.

### **Informal Open Space**

- 5.2 The total offering of open space well exceeds the requirement. This generous overprovision is a reflection of the development's commitment to open space provision and an understanding of the importance of green spaces in cities more generally.
- 5.3 The addition of the Wild Park as informal open space was designed into the proposals when the attenuation pond became a compelling opportunity for informal recreation to residential and public users, and an enhancement to the rich ecological plant community Open Mosaic Habitat (OMH) that currently exists there. The PoE describes how the Wild Park forms a unique ecological, recreational and educational opportunity, which celebrates the OMH.

### **Food Growing Opportunities**

- 5.4 Local and accessible food growing has shown to be an activity with social, mental and ecological benefits. The proposed allotments alone meet the standards, with additional community growing space on both the residential roof and ground floor of Chesterton Gardens, exceeding the policy requirements.

### **Play**

- 5.5 Play provision is divided between Chesterton Gardens and the Wild Park and exceeds the total area required by policy, and complying in each category of open space. The LPA has objected to the division of equipped play area into two spaces and the distance from Chesterton gardens. However, the PoE explains the constraints in relation to locating all of the equipped play in Chesterton Gardens, and the benefits of locating play within both contexts. This relates to creating varied play opportunities and enriching opportunities for older children in the Wild Park that creates a greater sense of adventure and opportunities for imaginative play, as part of a high-quality play experience.
- 5.6 Outside of the counted play areas, it is also noted that the water jets and open spaces of Chesterton Square and other areas of public realm will also be extremely popular with children of a range of ages. On a hot day, the water jets, along with its surrounding seating and shady grove, will certainly be occupied by children and carers, and can be enjoyed by people of all ages.

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3 Open Space in New Developments SPD, South Cambridge District Council, Jan 2009.

## 6.0 Conclusions

- 6.1 My PoE describes how the landscape design for the Cambridge North development will achieve a high-quality public realm that will contribute to the Site's sense of place and distinctiveness. The Appeal Scheme meets the policy standards for open space provision and the other relevant local plan policies, and the design also complies with the 10 characteristics of 'well designed spaces' set out in the government's National Design Guide.