



**PROOF OF EVIDENCE of JAMES LITTLEWOOD
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**APPEAL BY BROOKGATE LAND LTD
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**LPA REFERENCE: 22/02771/OUT
APPEAL REFERENCE: APP/W0530/W/23/3315611**

1. Introduction

James Littlewood

- 1.1. I have been CEO of Cambridge Past, Present & Future since December 2017. My background is in landscape and ecological management. Before coming to CPPF I worked for the Natural History Society of Northumbria. I have also been Director of Operations for Groundwork North London and worked in the environmental sector for the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, London Walking Forum and Kent County Council.

Cambridge Past, Present & Future

- 1.2. Cambridge Past, Present & Future is Cambridge's largest civic society. We are a charity run by local people who are passionate about where they live. We operate in the greater Cambridge area and working with our members, supporters and volunteers we:

- Are dedicated to protecting and enhancing the green setting of Cambridge for people and nature.
- Care about Cambridge and are an independent voice for quality of life in the strategic planning of Greater Cambridge.
- Are working to protect, celebrate and improve the important built heritage of the Cambridge area.
- Own and care for green spaces and historic buildings in and around the city for people and nature, including Wandlebury Country Park, Coton Countryside Reserve, Cambridge Leper Chapel & Barnwell Meadows, Bourn Windmill and Hinxton Watermill.

The appeal site

- 1.3. Development of this site will create a new edge to the city. It is vital that it is designed and developed to the highest standard so that it makes a positive contribution to the special characteristics of Cambridge.

2. Policy context

- 2.1. Policy HQ/1 sets out some overarching design principles. Key points are that development includes variety and interest, is appropriate in terms of scale, mass and form in relation to surrounding area; and landscaping and public spaces integrate the development with the surroundings.
- 2.2. The landscaping and design also need to respect the site's setting on the edge of the Green Belt in accordance with Policy NH/8
- 2.3. Para 2.31 of the Local Plan identifies the special character of Cambridge and its setting. These include
- Key views of Cambridge from the surrounding countryside;
 - A soft green edge to the city;
 - A distinctive urban edge.

3. Landscape Character

- 3.1. The landscape context to the appeal site is the river Cam and the higher land of Fen Ditton to the east. These are described in the Greater Cambridge Landscape Character Assessment¹.
- 3.2. The low-lying landform to the east of the site creates a very open landscape where the sky dominates, and the landscape is only broken up by hedgerows. The river running through Stourbridge Common creates a green corridor which contrasts with the city edge.
- 3.3. The river corridor is largely undeveloped and therefore the built form on the city edge is a distinctive feature in the landscape. (Appendix A photo A)
- 3.4. The land to the east of Ditton Meadows rises slightly and is characterised by arable farmland in smooth rolling chalkland. From this higher land there are views of the outskirts of Cambridge.
- 3.5. The countryside setting of the river Cam and its tow path are enjoyed by thousands of walkers, cyclists, boat users, picnickers, etc every week. We would estimate over 500,000 visits per year.
- 3.6. Overall, the character of the land to the east of the appeal site is open and rural on the chalklands and intimate and pastoral in the river valley.

4. The impact of the development

- 4.1. There is a strong relationship between the countryside and the appeal site because the city edge is visible from the Cam Valley and higher chalklands. Hence it is important for the development of this site to respect the edge of city location in terms of scale, mass and form.
- 4.2. Until recently that edge was 'soft' because of the lack of development but we can now see the impact of the recently constructed Novotel and One Cambridge Square on this edge. These developments give us an insight into the impact the proposal will have on the character of the river corridor and higher chalklands to the east. (Appendix A photos C, E, F)
- 4.3. Although only guidance at this stage, the Area Action Plan indicates the building heights for this area to be 4-6 storeys typically (13m-19m), with landmark building of maximum 7 storeys (22m). Heights are assumed at 3m per floor with 4m at ground floor and are inclusive of plant. (Figure 21). The proposed buildings S6 and S7 are 22.1m high and are not identified as landmark buildings therefore exceed emerging Area Action Plan policy.
- 4.4. Building S6 is 61.2m long and S7 is 64.5m long². The gap between the two blocks is 13m. In addition, the mobility hub, although lower, is 74.8m long³. When viewed at distance this will create the appearance a wall of development 200m long.
- 4.5. The appellant's Visual Assessment and Technical Visualisations demonstrate the impact that the mass and bulk of the buildings would have on the character of the landscape to the east.
 - The Visual Assessment (Appendix 12.3) demonstrates that there will be a significant visual impact when viewed from the river towpath.
 - The impact from viewpoint 8 is identified as 'major adverse'.

¹ Landscape Character Area 9A: Cam River Valley (page 177) and 6A Fen Ditton Fen Edge Chalklands (page 125)

² PA2001 REV 00 Levels 01-02 Typical Plan

³ 239-ACME-PLA-S05-1100

- The technical visualisations (Appendix 12.4)
 - viewpoint 06 demonstrates how visible the eastern elevations are even after 15 years of landscape growth. It also demonstrates that the higher blocks behind are visible and increasing the perception of a wall of development.
 - Viewpoint 07b from Baits Bite Lock demonstrates how the bulk of the development will impact views of the edge of Cambridge, even from some distance.
 - Viewpoint 08 - View from footpath 86/6 Fen Ditton visualises the major adverse impact identified in the Visual Assessment. From this location, one will not only be able to see blocks S6 and S7 but also A9/10 (1 Chesterton Square) and the residential blocks. These latter blocks are higher than S6/S7. The impact does not diminish even after 15 years of vegetation growth.
 - Viewpoint 09 – demonstrates how the blocks are visible above the roofline of Fen Ditton. Again, the taller blocks behind are visible, increasing the overall visual bulk of the development with large expanses of flat roof and little contrast in height. There is little difference to this view even after 15 years of landscape growth.
 - Viewpoint 15 – The development is clearly visible across the meadows and appears as a single wall of development.
 - Viewpoint 20 – The development is very visible. The hotel is already very visible from this location and therefore the additions of the mobility hub, blocks S6 and S7 will dominate. As with viewpoint 8, block A9/10 and the residential block is visible. It demonstrates the little contrast in height across the development.
- 4.6. The appellants have attempted to reduce the bulk of buildings S6 and S7 by breaking each block into 4 fingers which are articulated up and back introducing terracing. The highest parts of blocks S6 and S7 are 22.1m high and the lower ‘finger’ being 20.9m high. This is only a difference of 1.2m meaning the modulations will be hard to read from a distance and the overarching impression is that of a solid wall of development, with little variation in height, creating a hard boundary to the city.
- 4.7. The limited variation in height is uncharacteristic of Cambridge’s distinctive skyline that combines towers, turrets, chimneys and spires with large tree. The overall character of the city’s skyline is one of relatively few taller buildings that emerge as ‘incidents’ above the prevailing lower buildings and trees. This development is one of large blocks, all at similar heights with no noticeable variation. Appendix A photo D shows the prevailing lower buildings and how currently the Novotel is a single high block, but the proposed development would result in the appearance of a wall of development at a similar height.
- 4.8. We welcome the planting of large, medium and small trees along the eastern edge. However, we considered that the buildings are not sufficiently set back from the railway line to accommodate successful tree screening. The proposed London Planes have an eventual spread of about 20m. The width of Cowley Road between the buildings and the railway track is shown as 19.1m. The tree canopy would cover the entire width. Pollarding of the trees would likely become necessary and reduce their benefit as a tree screen and softening the development edge.

- 4.9. We object that the application does not intend to retain the Wild Park in perpetuity. The park is an important ecological and recreational benefit to the development and the wider area. It is assumed that the park forms part of the biodiversity net gain and the Environment Act states that habitats should be secured for a minimum of 30 years but the intention is for it to be in perpetuity.
- 4.10. We are concerned that the overall design does not allow connectivity between green spaces to benefit wildlife. In particular, Blocks S13-S16 form a barrier between the open space and the allotments and Bramblefields Nature Reserve to the west; and the relatively narrow entrances into Chesterton Garden are not conducive to wildlife connectivity across the development. The appellant's attempt to overcome this with bat and bird 'hop over' routes to the Wild Park, openings in fences, tree planting, green roofs and invertebrate friendly planting does not mitigate for the lack of ecological connectivity in the design.

5. Heritage

- 5.1. The Riverside and Stourbridge Common Conservation Area (CA) is characterised by commons and open fields. A backcloth of trees surrounds the commons, softening and, at times, hiding the built-up area beyond. The attractiveness of Stourbridge Common and Ditton Meadows means they are important open spaces for Cambridge, benefitting the health and wellbeing of people across the city. The Conservation Area Appraisal (CAA) notes that it is important to preserve and enhance the setting of the commons (section 7).
- 5.2. The water meadows within Fen Ditton CA lie between the village and the river and combined with the surrounding fields, visually separate Fen Ditton from the city. The CAA identifies a number of positive views from the village across the meadows towards the appeal site. Ditton Meadows are open areas of grassland interspersed with trees. The land is low lying and the tower of St Mary's Church in the village is on slightly higher ground and rises above the trees. (Appendix A photo B)
- 5.3. The CAAs identify the overwhelming character is one of a rural and open nature which is not dominated or overshadowed by adjoining buildings in the city. It highlights the importance of the relationship between the river, open spaces and views across the meadows and fenland. (Appendix A photo B)
- 5.4. Development of the appeal site will have a significant impact on these conservation areas. The height and mass of the buildings will dominate the views westwards and lead to a significant degree of change to the character. These are already being impacted by the Novotel and One Cambridge Square which give an indication as to the impact of the block S6 and S7 with the higher development behind. The feeling of the countryside, with its open views and attractive village, extending into the city will be replaced by the feeling of being in a constrained green space in a large city; with a wall of development looming behind the meadows and commons. We consider this to be a moderate level of harm.
- 5.5. This harm will not be outweighed by the benefits of the development. We consider that these benefits do not compensate for the permanent loss of the rural and open nature of the conservation areas nor the hundreds of thousands of people who enjoy the meadows and commons who will no longer experience the open vistas.