Land North of Cambridge North Station

URBAN DESIGN CONSULTATION RESPONSE

Reference: 22/02771/OUT

Description: A hybrid planning application for: a) An outline application (all matters reserved apart from access and landscaping) for the construction of: three new residential blocks providing for up to 425 residential units and providing flexible Class E and Class F uses on the ground floor (excluding Class E (g) (iii)); and two commercial buildings for Use Classes E(g) i(offices), ii (research and development) providing flexible Class E and Class F uses on the ground floor (excluding Class E (g) (iii)),together with the construction of basements for parking and building services, car and cycle parking and infrastructure works. b) A full application for the construction of three commercial buildings for Use Classes E(g) i (offices) ii (research and development), providing flexible Class E and Class F uses on the ground floor (excluding Class E (g) (iii)) with associated car and cycle parking, the construction of a multi storey car and cycle park building, together with the construction of basements for parking and building services, car and cycle parking and associated landscaping, infrastructure works and demolition of existing structures.

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Introduction

Following this introduction and a brief overview of policy and site context, this consultation response has been drafted in three parts:

Part A deals with issues relating to layout, height and massing of the masterplan. This includes elements applied for in full and in outline.

Part B considers the outline planning application and parameter plans for the three proposed residential blocks and two commercial buildings.

Part C relates to the full planning application for the multi-storey car park, three commercial buildings and all landscape and public realm design associated with the development.

Policy context - summary

The site lies within fully within the South Cambridge District Council Local Plan boundary but is bounded to the north, south and west by land that falls with the Cambridge City Local Plan Area. Design policies of both councils will need to be considered.

Since 2013 the councils have worked jointly on the production of the North East Cambridge Area Action Plan (NEC AAP). The site falls wholly within the boundary of this emerging plan that envisages a new, high density, mixed used urban quarter to the northeast of the city. This plan is currently in draft form and its policies have not yet been adopted. However, a series of technical studies have been undertaken to inform the content of the AAP, including

the NEC Landscape Character and Visual Impact Appraisal, NEC Strategic Heritage Impact Assessment and NEC Townscape Strategy.

The recommendations from these technical studies have helped inform this consultation response.

Site context

The Cambridge North Masterplan site is located to the immediate northeast of Cambridge North railway station on land previously used for railway sidings. As well as by train, the site is also well served by buses (including the Guided Busway to St Ives, Hinxton and Northstowe) and two strategic cycle routes. Excellent connectivity with centre of Cambridge, London, Waterbeach, Ely and key residential, commercial, and other major destinations in the wider area makes this one of the most accessible sites by sustainable transport modes within Greater Cambridge.

The Cambridge North Masterplan site forms part of a large area of land in commercial and industrial use that is bounded by the A14 to the north, the A10 Milton Road to the west, the railway line to the east and the guided busway to the south. The primary road serving this area, and the only vehicle route into the application site, is Cowley Road / Milton Avenue which connects with Milton Road just south of its interchange with the A14 and terminates at the Cambridge North station – effectively making the whole area a large cul-de-sac development (for vehicles).

The recent development of the Cambridge North Station, as well as the adjacent Novotel hotel and emerging One Cambridge Square office building (under construction) have signalled the start of the change in use of this part of Cambridge, for which the NEC AAP seeks to present a holistic vision.

The Cambridge North Masterplan boundaries are formed to the immediate east by the railway tracks, with the river Cam and the village of Fen Ditton beyond. The land between the tracks and the river Cam is currently occupied by a low-density, low-rise development of caravan parks and low-grade industrial units accessed from Fen Road. Beyond the river, the village of Fen Ditton is a designated Conservation Area. Further south, the river and the large open spaces associated with it form a green corridor with public access that link the Fen landscape with the heart of the city. They form an important aspect of the character and setting of Cambridge and are designated Conservation Areas. Thus, the eastern edge of the site is very sensitive; a design response that successfully balances the opportunities provided by the redevelopment of this well-connected and valuable location, while simultaneously addressing the sensitivities in terms of landscape, the Conservation Areas and existing urban form along Fen Road is required.

The boundary to the southwest is formed by the guided busway. South of the guided busway are Nuffield Road Allotments, Bramblefields Local Nature Reserve which, together with a band of dense vegetation along the bus corridor forms a green buffer to the residential area of Chesterton. Chesterton consists primarily of low-density, two-storey family housing. Although the green space and vegetation provides a buffer between the residential area and the development site, tall buildings will be visible from some streets as is evident on Discovery Way where the office building currently under construction can clearly be seen rising above the roof tops. There are no convenient, direct routes between the residential area and the development site with the guided busway and the green spaces forming a barrier to movement. Although located very close to established residential areas, the site

feels remote and isolated from it. This needs to be considered when considering the cross-benefits between communities that the development may bring.

The Cambridge Business Park bounds the site to the north-west. This consists predominantly of large 3 to 4 storey office buildings surrounded by large areas of surface car parking. Sensitivities to this edge are low. To the north of the site, beyond Cowley Road, is an area of mostly vacant railway land, part of which is included within the application boundary as a “Wild Park” to serve drainage, public open space and biodiversity purposes. Adjoining and beyond this park are further industrial uses including the Cowley Road Industrial Estate, Aggregate Works and Sewage Treatment Plant. Sensitivity of the existing uses would be low, but the impact of noise and odour generated by these uses on the proposed residential development in particular needs to be carefully considered.

In summary, the railway line and guided busway form “hard” boundaries to the east and southwest that create barriers to movement between the proposed development and existing communities beyond. Due to the open and low-lying nature of land and buildings to the east, development of Cambridge North will be very visible and exposed in places. The NEC AAP and its supporting document including the Landscape Character and Visual Impact Appraisal, Strategic Heritage Impact Assessment and Townscape Strategy include recommendations on the design of eastern edge of the development to seek to minimise the impact on this landscape.

PART A LAYOUT HEIGHT AND MASSING OF THE MASTERPLAN

Description of the proposals

The masterplan area is triangular in form, with Cambridge North railway station and the station square located at the southern tip. Milton Avenue runs due north from the railway square to meet Cowley Road on the northern boundary of the masterplan. Milton Avenue is a recently constructed road and includes a carriageway flanked by green verges / swales and footpaths at both sides and a bi-directional cycleway on the western side of the road. The Cambridge North Masterplan incorporates Milton Avenue (in a slightly altered form) to provide the primary vehicle access into the masterplan area. The street also organises the proposed land uses across the site, with the plots to the east of Milton Avenue proposed primarily for commercial uses (four lab-office / office buildings and a multi-storey car park) and plots to the west primarily for residential development (as well as one further office block).

East of Milton Avenue

A key move to the development of the masterplan (and a departure from the NEC AAP spatial plan) is the introduction of Station Row. Station Row is a pedestrian and cycle only street that runs parallel to the railway tracks and links the station square at the south of the site to the proposed Wild Park on the northern boundary of the masterplan site. It is envisaged that in future this route would be extended to link with the residential / mixed use development that is envisaged here following the relocation of the sewage treatment plant. However, this does not form part of this the planning application. Station Row also serves to organise the land east of Milton Avenue by extending the “grid” set up by the Novotel building. The street defines and provides access to the plots between Station Row and the tracks which are proposed for commercial development and a multi-storey car park. The remaining “Triangle Site” between Station Row and Milton Avenue will include further commercial development.

The masterplan introduces one further north-south street located hard up against the railway line. “Cowley Road East” provides vehicle and service access to buildings along the railway track. It is envisaged that following the development of the wider NEC area the road will link directly with the primary road proposed in the NEC AAP that will be located north of the application site. In the meantime, access to Cowley Road East will be from Milton Avenue via a proposed street immediately north of the Novotel. Options to link it from the proposed new street at “Cowley Road North” (in line with Cowley Road), thus removing a large proportion of station traffic from Milton Avenue were investigated but proved difficult to deliver due to the presence of a National Rail compound and track access requirements in this location.

A number of streets and squares provide east-west links between Milton Avenue, Station Row and Cowley Road East and allow (visual) permeability to and from the Fen Road, the river corridor and the landscape beyond. They also define the five development plots as follows:

East of Station Row:

- A mobility hub with 725 car parking places predominantly aimed at users of the railway station
- 1 Station Row, a lab-office building
- 3 Station Row, a lab-office building

West of Station Row:

- 1 Chesterton Square a further lab-office building
- 2 Milton Square, a “regular” office building

West of Milton Avenue

West of Milton Avenue the predominant land use is residential. Although at first sight it seems logical to locate the residential development adjacent to existing residential area of Chesterton, in reality the guided busway and adjoining green space will preclude direct linkages between the sites. The residential development is envisaged to be delivered in a series of 3 articulated blocks of varied height and depth that align with and provide a frontage to the adjacent streets including Milton Avenue and the guided busway to the east and southwest and a new street against the boundary with the Cambridge Business Park to the northwest. The three blocks enclose a large, car-free garden space (“Chesterton Gardens”) which, although strongly associated with the surrounding residential blocks, will be accessible to all by means of three generous openings to surrounding streets.

Towards the railway station, between the consented office block “One Cambridge Square” and the proposed residential development, the proposal is for a further office building. A pedestrian and cycle only street between the office block and the residential development would links Milton Avenue and the guided busway and adjoining cycle track. Thus, proposed development west of Milton Avenue includes:

- 1 Milton Avenue, an office building
- The residential quarter, consisting of 425 units within three main blocks

Urban Design Comments on Masterplan Layout

The following sets out points of support and identify (potential) areas of concern that (may) arise from the proposed layout. The latter are assessed in further detail in subsequent sections of this consultation response.

- The proposed block structure creates a legible pattern of streets and open spaces. This includes the primary lines of movement, such as Milton Avenue and the guided busway that are clearly defined and overlooked by the proposed development blocks. This is supported.
- The masterplan proposes a mix of commercial and residential development. The employment-led nature of the proposal is supported by current planning policies. The residential development is welcomed to help create a vibrant, mixed-use community that would help support a diverse range of supporting uses across the site. However, there is also concern how and where future residents would safely and conveniently access everyday services, such as schools, shops and sports facilities that can't be realised on site, as the Cambridge North Masterplan feels very isolated from its immediate surroundings and the surrounding communities. This issue would be addressed if the wider area would be developed as set out in the NEC AAP. However, the status of this plan is still uncertain. As such, the proposals do feel somewhat pre-mature.
- The commercial development in the Cambridge North Masterplan is primarily proposed as lab-office buildings. These buildings typically require large and simple floorplates and have taller floor-to-floor heights, more / larger plant equipment and more complicated ventilation and extraction requirements that regular office buildings. There is a concern about the compatibility of these types of uses up against the sensitive eastern edge as their size, scale and relative inflexibility of the floorplate limits scope for articulation. Although the applicant has been confident throughout that an architectural solution can be found, there is a concern that this has not been entirely successful (see further below).
- The location of the mobility hub adjacent to the station is supported. However, the justification of the capacity of the car park, which the officers have been asked to take as read since the start of this application process remain unclear. Considering the implications of the required of parking provision on the design of the masterplan – not only on the mobility hub but also the overspill in basement provisions in other buildings, this needs to be addressed.
- The masterplan seeks to activate the ground floor of the buildings along the primary streets and spaces through the introduction of amenity, retail and food and beverage uses in addition to the entrance lobbies to the office and residential buildings. This would help to support a lively, vibrant streetscape which is welcomed. In the residential quarter the introduction of private entrances to ground floor units would result in a high density of front doors on the street. This is also welcomed.
- The introduction of Station Row as a secondary north-south route in addition to Milton Avenue, is supported in principle. As well as providing a convenient and traffic-free cycle and pedestrian access through the proposed development and towards the (longer term) envisaged development beyond, it also forms a potential attractive space and focus for supporting amenity uses and outdoor activities (such as pavement cafes, outdoor seating and dwell space) which will be more difficult to deliver along the trafficked street of Milton Avenue. However, it is critical that Milton Avenue retains a frontage environment and there was some initial concern that a focus on Station Row could have detrimental effect on the potential of the Triangle Site (i.e. 2 Milton Square and 1 Chesterton Square) to deliver an active ground floor and front doors on Milton Avenue. However, as set out Part B of this response, this challenge is considered to be met. A further concern is that a clear hierarchy of scale, and distinction in character of the two streets needs to be realised to ensure that

Milton Avenue clearly reads as the primary access to the wider NEC area. This has proved more challenging as set out in further detail in Part C of this response.

- The arrangement of the residential blocks around a public garden space is supported. It is considered an efficient way to deliver a relatively large opens space while simultaneously clearly defining and fronting onto the key streets of Milton Avenue and the guided busway (and cycle route) in a constrained and rather awkwardly shaped site. The buildings will serve to screen the garden from the main road to offer a sense of security and enclosure, while the three generous gaps between buildings will ensure accessibility and permeability. Nevertheless, there is some concern about the relation between the block and the guided busway. The masterplan envisages this stretch of the guided busway to become a traditional street (one-way for private vehicles) rather than a bus-only route, introducing on-street parking and accesses into flat blocks and a basement car park. It is not clear if/ how the introduction of local traffic would impact on bus journey times. This is considered in further detail in Part C of this response.
- There is no objection against the principle of introducing a further office building 1 Milton Avenue between the consented office development and the residential quarter, although there are issues of scale.
- The introduction of a public space “Chesterton Square” to provide a focal point for the commercial development and a physical and visual link to the residential gardens opposite is supported.
- The introduction of a public space “The Piazza” at the conversion point of Milton Avenue and Station Row is supported. This forms a key moment in the masterplan.
- The form and function of the four east-west streets / passages linking Station Row and Cowley Road East feel unclear and underdeveloped. Early in the pre-app process these where envisaged as vistas out towards the landscape, but as the design evolved, they increasingly started to feel and function as service yards. The potential of these spaces to help mitigate impacts of the development on the sensitive eastern edge also feels under-explored. This is considered in further detail below.

Masterplan Layout - Comments on height and massing

The NEC AAP context

The NEC AAP provides guidance on appropriate height and massing of buildings throughout the NEC AAP. The document sets out three different height parameters for the Cambridge North Masterplan site. These are included in table below alongside the proposed development heights proposed in the masterplan. The NEC AAP heights are given in metres, based on the assumptions of floor heights and the inclusion of rooftop plants as stated in the AAP. The building heights of the Cambridge North Masterplan have been interpreted from the drawings to provide the height of the majority / bulk of the building, rounded to the nearest half metre. The minimum height figures set out in the DAS often refer to lower-level terraces and the outer edges of the building, with a further floor (and plant) set back from this edge making up the large proportion of the building footprint. Although setbacks are an effective way to reducing bulk and height as seen from street level, it is less effective in reducing the massing when viewed from longer distances and upper floor are clearly visible.

Table 1. Comparative height NEC AAP and Cambridge North Masterplan

NEC AAP	**CAMBRIDGE NORTH MASTERPLAN**				
Red zone	**Mobility hub**	**Lab 1**	**Lab 2**	**2 Milton Square**	**1 Chesterton Square**
Typical 13m-19m Maximum 22m	T: 14-16m Max: 18	T: 21-22m Max 22m (reduced to 18m on most edges)	T: 21-22m Max 22m (reduced to 18m on most edges)	T: 24m (reduced on edges to 21m)	T: 26m (reduced along edge to 22m)
Landmark on corner (i.e. can be higher)					Not expressed by height
	Complies	**Exceeds typical**	**Exceeds typical**	**Exceeds typical and maximum**	**Exceeds typical and maximum**
Yellow zone	**Block 1 (S11 -S12)**	**Block 2 (S21 -S22 only)**			
10m-16m typical	Sections of 18m, 24m, 27m. Latter two reduced along edges by 3m	Sections of 18m, 21m, 27 and 30m, latter two reduced along edges by 3m			
	Exceeds typical and maximum	**Exceeds typical and maximum**			
NEC green zone	**1 Milton Avenue**	**Block 3 S13-S16**	**Block 2 S17-S19**		
Typical 10m – 19m Max 25m	31m	15m-27m	18m-27m		
	Exceeds typical and maximum	**Exceeds typical and maximum**	**Exceeds typical and maximum**		
Existing	**Novotel**	**One Cambridge Sq**			
	18m and 26m	30m			

It is clear from the above table that proposed building heights exceed those set out in the NEC AAP. It also appears that whereas the NEC AAP – by giving a wide range of development heights - seeks an articulated development form, the buildings within the Cambridge North Masterplan are generally (for the largest part) of a single height (with exception of the residential blocks).

However, the NEC AAP is not an adopted document. Also, development opportunities in the Greater Cambridge area at locations as well-connected by sustainable transport as Cambridge North are rare, and consideration should be given to the argument for optimising the use of a brownfield sites in such a sustainable location. Furthermore, the proposed development heights are on par, or lower than, recently consented development at One Cambridge Square.

This is a complicated issue and further review of the technical work that has informed the NEC AAP draft policies has thus been undertaken. It should be noted that these documents didn't become available until relatively late in the pre-app process.

The review has focused on the NEC Townscape Strategy. This document has been prepared alongside the NEC Landscape Character and Visual Impact Appraisal and NEC Heritage Impact Assessment and cites and incorporated the recommendation from both these documents. Recommendation that specifically relate to the Cambridge North Masterplan site include:

- *Heights to vary between buildings up to a maximum of 5 (residential) storeys.* [Note: This translates to 15m based on the assumed residential floor height of 3m].
- *Two taller buildings are already permitted / constructed next to the station (Hotel and office development), which provide prominence and legibility to this gateway. No further tall buildings are necessary or proposed in this area.*
- *Opportunity for a local height accent of up to 7 residential storeys to terminate the view along Cowley Road / First Public Drain at the intersection with the boulevard.* [Note: this is formed by the north-west corner of One Chesterton Square. Seven residential storeys is 21m, One Chesterton Square is mostly 26m and 22m on the edges]

More guidance on height, massing and the interface with existing development which has been developed in parallel with the NEC Heritage Impact Appraisal work and that is relevant to the Cambridge North Masterplan Area include:

- *Siting taller buildings away from the more sensitive eastern and south eastern edge of the NEC site to avoid removing the rural character of wider views in Fen Ditton and from Baits Bite Lock and in views from Riverside and Stourbridge Common Conservation Area.*
- *Keeping taller buildings (i.e. 10-13 storeys* [30m to 39m] *) as occasional 'markers' with defined purpose and roles as part of a considered composition in the landscape rather than the predominant height to avoid an 'urbanised' wall of development effect in the backdrop of wider views from elevated positions such as Castle Mound, the tower of Great St Mary's Church and from nearby rural open locations such as Baits Bite Lock Conservation Area and Fen Ditton.*
- *Dropping down the heights of buildings where they interface with surrounding existing development, to avoid being an over-dominant presence, particularly to the south of the NEC near to The Golden Hind pub and to the east near to Fen Ditton and Baits Bite Lock Conservation Areas.*
- *Using a palette of colours that are more characteristic of the 'earthy' or muted spectrum of colours seen in Cambridge. These colours should generally be recessive in the wider landscape to minimise their visual intrusion and create a harmonious fit within surroundings and skyline.*
- *Using materials that are more characteristic of the materiality seen in Cambridge which would include masonry facades, brick or sturdy materials. Use of reflective*

materials including glass should be more limited as this is more out of character in the wider Cambridge context and will act as too much of a focal point in views from and towards heritage assets, therefore creating visual intrusion.

In relation to the eastern edge of the development the Townscape Strategy quotes the Landscape Character and Visual Impact Document that states that:

"The eastern edge of the site is particularly sensitive to development and so proposals here should incorporate the following principles:

- *Variable set-back of buildings on plots;*
- *Variable roofline;*
- *Minimal hard boundary treatment such as fences and walls;*
- *Use of semi-mature trees and space to allow them to grow to a size that can compete with the proposed building heights;*
- *Creation of an irregular parkland edge of adequate space to accommodate forest scale trees;*
- *Permeability of built form and landscape allowing views into the Site along green corridors of adequate space to accommodate forest scale trees;*
- *Avoiding an abrupt transition between development and countryside*

Source: North East Cambridge Townscape Strategy Final Report, Urban Initiative Studios on behalf of Greater Cambridge Shared Planning, October 2021

The following conclusions can be drawn based on this review of evidence base documents:

- The proposed development heights exceed those considered appropriate by in-depth technical studies prepared in support of the NEC AAP.
- An appropriate design response to the interface of the Cambridge North Masterplan development with the more sensitive eastern and southern edges does not only relate to maximum heights, but also to building form and articulation, the juxtaposition of buildings and open spaces and opportunities for integration of forest scale trees as well as colour and materiality.
- The NEC AAP technical studies focus on aspects of height and massing in relation to a) the interface with the surrounding landscape / townscape and b) the relative heights within the whole of the NECAAP area, with higher / denser developments accepted / promoted around local and district centre to aid legibility and create a sense of place. Place-specific consideration, such as the height and massing of buildings in relation to the width of streets and spaces, considering issues such as sense of enclosure, sense of place and impact on micro-climate have not been considered.

In the context of the above, a more detailed appraisal of layout, height and massing of the Cambridge North Masterplan has been set out below.

The eastern edge

The eastern edge is formed by three rectangular blocks, including a multi-storey car park and two lab-office buildings, that have been aligned parallel to the railway tracks. The height of the multi-storey car park has been significantly reduced in the latter stages of the pre-application process to 14-16m to fall within the parameters set by the NEC AAP. The lab-office buildings have also been reduced in height but at generally 22m they exceed the typical heights set out in the NEC AAP.

The buildings are separated by a series of east-west orientated streets or yards that measure 17m / 10m / 13m (from south to north) in width. Relative to the building frontage and depth, the gaps between the blocks are narrow and become “invisible” when seen from a distance and at and angle.

With typical heights of 14m-16m for the multi-storey car park and 22m for the two lab buildings, the development edge is both higher and more uniform in height than recommended in the various technical studies. This raises the concern that the design would create the “urbanised wall effect” that was stated as being undesirable in the NEC AAP Townscape Strategy document.

The design has sought to address this issue in three ways:

1. Creating space for the introduction of large species trees along Cowley Road East by increasing the setback of buildings from the railway tracks. The setback of buildings from the tracks varies between 12m and 19m, with the multi-storey car park stepping back in relation to the building line of the Novotel hotel and the two lab-office buildings stepping back in relation to the multi-storey car park. This is considered moderately successful and a significant improvement on earlier version of the plans. However, the trees will not develop to a height to break the skyline and the building line will continue to define and dominate the skyline.
2. Integration of vegetation within the built form. This includes the introduction of planting against the façade of the multi-storey car park and on lower-level terraces of the lab-office buildings. Although this softens and creates an attractive feature of the building form, this is not considered a successful strategy at screening the buildings. The planting rises above the treeline, and reads therefore as part of the built form, rather than the rural landscape.
3. Articulation of the building blocks. The design of the lab-office buildings introduces stepping in both height and building line to visually reduce the overall massing of the buildings and create the impression of a series of smaller-grained linked / terraced blocks. This is further emphasised by changes in materiality. However, the stepping occurs along the edges of the building only, as the bulk of the building remains at 4 floors (and full-storey plant). Thus, although effective in reducing bulk and massing when viewed from street level, the stepping is less effective in addressing this when seen from a distance and the full silhouette of the building is visible. The stepping is not sufficient for the trees to break the skyline or create significant sky gaps. Instead, the buildings form a relative continuous line on the horizon. That said, the architecture has merit. Further concerns relate to impact the development of 2 Milton Avenue and One Chesterton Square have on the gains made by articulation of the lab-office buildings. Both buildings are proposed to be taller than the lab-office buildings and will be seen rising above and extending to the north of them. Because they look relatively indistinct from the lab-office buildings when viewed from a distance, this adds to the impression of an “urbanised wall effect” and result in a large and solid mass when viewed from the east and northeast.

The issues identified above are considered not only a product of building height and design, but also site layout and land use. As previously noted, lab-office buildings that appeal to a wide-range of potential occupiers, require substantial and flexible floorplates that limits scope of more extensive and finer grained “pushing and pulling” of the building form to create the breaks in the skyline that would have made the development edge appear less abrupt and “wall-like”. Furthermore, the introduction of Station Row as an organising principle, although supported as a movement and placemaking feature, further restricted the

shape and form of the development parcel and limited the scope for the introduction of a more substantial landscape buffer of varied width.

Throughout the pre-application process, the applicant has been asked to progress the LVIA work so it could be used as tool to assess a variety of design and layout options, and test how changes in site layout and massing may, or may not, have a positive impact on the design of the eastern edge. Unfortunately, the LVIA work wasn't progressed until the later phases, when the site layout and land use proposals were largely fixed with the emphasis being on architectural design to address any issues. Thus, there has been no opportunity to test the recommendation of the Townscape Strategy, or to explore alternative solutions for the eastern edge that would have better met the applicant's land use and commercial aspirations.

In conclusion, although the architectural design of the lab-office buildings is considered to have merit, it does not fully overcome the concerns raised in the Heritage and Landscape Character and Visual Impact studies and does create a relatively hard, urban edge to the development. This is exacerbated by the buildings proposed on the Triangle Site (outline application) which will rise above the lab-buildings and, at a distance, appear relatively indistinguishable from them, thus creating a large and solid mass of development on the horizon that has a significant impact on views towards the city.

The south-west edge

The residential development in Chesterton, to the south-west of the Cambridge North Masterplan typically includes low-density, low-rise family housing. The Nuffield Road Allotments, Bramblefields Nature Reserve and vegetation around the guided busway creates a green buffer between the site and the existing neighbourhood. However, there are no trees tall enough to filter views, and the proposed Cambridge North development is considered to have an overbearing presence on the existing housing - as is evident from Viewpoint E5 of the Technical Visualisations done by VuCity. Although some intervisibility is considered acceptable, the proposed development is too solid and continuous. More modulation and steps in the skyline between 1 Milton Avenue and the consented office building would soften and improve this interface. Further modulation / reduction in heights of the residential edge is also desirable.

NEC centre hierarchy

The Townscape Strategy promotes a hierarchy of local and district centres that is expressed in height and density of the development.

It recognises the railway station as a centre and gateway but states that development heights should be reduced away from this node, with "*no further tall buildings necessary or proposed in this area".* The Cambridge North Masterplan proposes building heights in (slight) excess of One Station Square (the consented office block) at 1 Milton Avenue and seeks outline consent for development on the Triangle Site and the residential quarter that are typically / regularly of similar height (and or taller) as the Novotel.

As previously noted, the whole of the Cambridge North Masterplan area is within easy walking distance of the railway station and guided bus stop making it is one of the most accessible locations by sustainable modes in the City. Furthermore, the development of the wider NEC area as envisaged in the NEC AAP is uncertain. Therefore, there is no objection to these height on the grounds of "centre hierarchy" as promoted in the NEC Townscape Strategy. However, as also noted above, the impact of the Triangle Site development on the eastern edge as it rises above the lab-office buildings and the overbearing presence of One

Milton Avenue and the residential blocks on the southern edge are considered an issue. Addressing this by reducing development heights would automatically bring the development more in line with the principle of hierarchy promoted in the NEC Townscape Strategy.

Development height and massing in relation to streets and spaces

As noted above, the assessment of development heights and massing in relation to existing and newly created streets and spaces within the masterplan area fall outside the scope of the Townscape Strategy. However, it is here that some potential tension exist between what is an appropriate development height in relation to its existing surroundings and that to the street and spaces within the development itself.

The NEC Townscape Strategy recognises the area as *"a key gateway into North East Cambridge"* and states that "*the character of this area should be urban and celebrate the arrival in the NEC area"*. More generally, the strategy also states that streets within the NEC area should provide for an attractive walking and cycle environment with a good sense of enclosure and benefit from passive overlooking from development.

The submission documents include several visualisations that illustrate streets and open spaces in the masterplan in relation to the height and massing of proposed building blocks. These images generally demonstrate relatively modest building heights and levels of enclosure in relation to the width / size of key streets and spaces in the development (Milton Avenue, Station Row, Chesterton Square) when viewed from street level. Thus, it is considered that building heights as seen from within the masterplan area are appropriate in creating the "urban" environment promoted in the NEC Townscape Strategy.

There is a concern that a reduction of building height alone will have a negative impact and the sense of enclosure and the urban character of these streets and spaces. Thus, addressing issues relating to height and massing in relation to its impact on the eastern and southern edges will not just be question of reducing storey heights, but also necessitate a review of the scale and size of these key streets and spaces and the architectural design and grain of the development that define them.

Part A conclusion

In conclusion, there is a concern about the impact of the scale and form of the proposed development on the southern and eastern edges. However, when seen from within the development, the height of buildings feels compatible to the width of street and spaces and help to create an appropriate "urban" feel. If the impact of the development on the eastern and southern edges is considered to be of overriding concern, substantial changes to the layout of the masterplan and design of streets and spaces are also likely to be required as a blanket reduction of building heights without these may result in a too open, suburban, "business park" style development that is undesirable for this gateway into the NEC area.

PART B Outline Planning

Outline planning consent is sought for the development of the Triangle Site and Residential Quarter. This consists of

The Triangle Site

- One Chesterton Square: A lab-office building set over 7 floors including basement and rooftop plant. The parapet is at generally at 22m and the rooftop (plant) at 26m.
- 2 Milton Avenue: An office building, also set over 7 floors, including basement and plant. The building parapet is 21m and the roof at 24m. The slightly reduced height in comparison to One Chesterton Square reflect the difference of use, with regular office buildings requiring slightly lower floor-to-floor heights than lab-office buildings.
- The basement of the buildings is connected and runs under Chesterton Square.

The Residential Quarter

- A total of 425 units and supporting uses, set across 11 modules that vary in height between 14-16m to 28-30m, and are linked to create three blocks. The blocks are aligned to Milton Avenue to the east, the guided busway to the southwest and the boundary with Cambridge Business Park to the north-west, thus enclosing a triangular space, Chesterton Gardens, which forms part of the Full planning application.

All matters are reserved, except access and adjoining landscaping. Comments on landscaping are included in Part C of this consultation response.

The DAS includes detailed drawings to illustrate the envisaged floorplans and elevations of the proposed buildings. A series of parameter plans seek to fix:

- Maximum building envelope of basement, ground and typical floor level
- Building heights and modulation across the blocks, identifying 8 zones from 14-16m to 28-30m height
- Ground floor uses and activation zones
- Pedestrian cycle and vehicle access point
- Landscape and open space typologies (although this seems unnecessary as these are fixed in further detail as part of the Full planning application).

The parameter plans are very specific and closely match the illustrative floor plans set out in the DAS. Although this provides greater certainty that the proposed blocks will be delivered as envisaged in the Cambridge North Masterplan, this also causes concern, as any changes required to the blocks that may become apparent at Reserved Matter stage may turn out to be incompatible with the parameter plans.

Issues regarding the proposals are set out below. The brackets at the end of each point state if this is considered an issue for Outline or (future) Reserved Matters Consent.

One Chesterton Square

- The height of the building in relation to the lab-office buildings along Station Row and the cumulative impact this has on the eastern edge is a concern as set out in Part A of this response (Outline).

- The layout / building footprint of this part of the Triangle Site has seen considerable change during the pre-application stage, which originally envisaged this to include two separate blocks. The DAS provides a justification for this evolution and shows

that in comparison to other commercial buildings in the Cambridge area the building is of medium size. It further illustrates how an architectural solution can be found to reduce the apparent scale and massing of the building when seen from street-level. However it doesn't address the issues of scale and bulk and the (cumulative) impact of this and the adjoining buildings on the eastern edge. As the proposals stands, the land uses do not allow for a more modulated and finer grained solution, thus the issues relating to scale and bulk in particular remain an issue in terms of the longer distance view (Outline).

- There is a concern about the extent of the basement, and the impact this has on the landscaping of Chesterton Square. It is noted that the basement is cut-away to accommodate the main areas of tree planting proposed for the square. Does this mean that alternative arrangements of trees would not be possible? This may prove an issue as there are concerns about the proposed layout of the square as set out in further detail in Part C of this response. (Outline)
- There are some concerns about the design / appearance of Station Row as set out in further detail in Part C of this document. Opportunities to address this issue would be hampered by the very detailed / prescriptive nature of the parameter plans (Outline)
- As noted in Part A of this response, a concern of the proposed masterplan layout was the challenge of creating a "frontage environment" on at least three (Milton Avenue, Station Row and Chesterton Square) and possibly four (subject to the envisaged future development of the "wild park") sides. It is considered that the proposed floorplan (Page 159 of the DAS) demonstrates that this can be achieved. However, we consider that a change in layout that places the café on Chesterton Square and the main reception / foyer on Milton Avenue would be a better arrangement. (Outline)
- Further consideration should also be given to the location of the entrance to the cycle stores. Considering the high percentage of employees / visitors that are likely to arrive by cycle, this should be considered as much as a "main entrance" as that for pedestrians. Currently the cycle entrance is located with the car park at "the back" of the building. This is not well located in relation to the primary cycle routes on either Milton Avenue or Station Row. Moving the entrance to the Station Row or Milton Avenue (with access to cycle path via large crossing outside Chesterton Square) side of the building would elevate the status of those arriving by cycle to the same level as pedestrians, add to the activity on along these streets and send a strong message of the support to sustainable modes of travel. (Outline)
- The kinked elevation and sharp north-west corner creates an eye-catching building that responds to its "landmark" location on Cowley Circus (the corner of Cowley Road / Milton Avenue) as promoted in the NEC AAP and NEC Townscape Strategy. However, the appropriateness of the "wedge-shape" corner depends on the future role of North Cowley Road. Currently this is a cul-de-sac that provides a service access to One Chesterton Square and 3 Station Row only, whereas the wedged-shape corner suggests it leads to something more significant. In a future in which street provides access to a permanent large park (as envisaged on the "wild park" location) and a potential route across the railway track as was once set out in a wider vision for the area by the applicant, this build form would be supported. However, these proposals don't form part of this application and may never come to pass, thus raising some concerns. (Outline as building footprint with sharp corner is fixed in parameter plan)
- The deep recesses of the building could serve to help reduce scale and massing of the building as illustrated by the reference image on page 156 of the DAS (top left).

However, the introduction of the red glazing feels counterproductive. (Reserved Matters).

- The white and reflective material proposed for the building is the opposite to the earthy, receding colour and materials palette recommended in the Townscape Strategy. This is a concern, as even though the building sits behind the lab-office buildings, the northern façade is very visible from north-eastern viewpoints. (Reserved Matters).
- One Chesterton Square and 2 Milton Avenue are both eye-catching "look-at-me" style buildings, but of very different form, style and materiality. There is a concern that this has a negative impact on the cohesion of Chesterton Square, which the current landscape design is not considered to overcome. (Reserved matters, or Full if landscape solution can be found).

Two Milton Avenue

- The height of the building in relation to the lab-office buildings along Station Row and the cumulative impact this has on the eastern edge is a concern as set out in Part A of this response (Outline).
- There is a concern about the extent of the basement, and the impact this has on the landscaping of Chessington Square as set out above. (Outline)
- There are some concerns about the design / appearance of Station Row as set out in further detail in Part C of this document. Opportunities to address this issue would be hampered by the very detailed / prescriptive nature of the parameter plans (Outline)
- The access to the cycle store from Station Row is supported. The second access from Milton Avenue is questioned as there is no provision for cyclists on the east side of the road. (Outline)
- As noted in Part A of this response, a concern of the proposed masterplan layout was the challenge of creating a "frontage environment" on all side of the building (Milton Avenue, Station Row and the Piazza). It is considered that the proposed floorplan (Page 169 of the DAS) demonstrates that this can be achieved. However, we consider that a change in layout, that places the café / restaurant on the Piazza would better realise the potential of this key space in the masterplan (Reserved matters but closely related to the design of the Piazza which is Full – see Part C of this response)
- Concerns about "competing" design styles of facades on Chesterton Square as set out above. (Reserved matters).
- The tapered and rounded corner make for an eye-catching building that responds to its "landmark" location on the Piazza (the corner of Milton Avenue and Station Row). However, there is a question about the compatibility of this building and One Chesterton Square as noted above and there is a concern that the parameter plan fixes the rounded corner at the tip, which sets the tone for the design of the other elevations, including that on Chesterton Square. The lack of flexibility in the parameter plans is an issue as this would preclude this from being resolved at Reserved Matters stage. (Outline).

Residential Quarter

- The height of the building both in relation to the south-western edge and the cumulative impact with the Triangle Site on the eastern edge is a concern as set out in Part A of this response (Outline).
- The symmetrical, rounded design of the northern corner of blocks (S19-20) is not supported. In the future as envisaged in the NEC AAP vehicles will approach the station / Cambridge Masterplan site from the north at this point, along a street roughly aligned with the existing access to the Aggregate Works. Blocks S19/20 will be sited at the end of the vista along this street. The rounded and symmetrical form of the building suggest that the two streets on either side have “equal status”. This is not the case as the street to the north is part of the local access loop around the residential quarter, whereas Milton Avenue will form the continuation of the primary street through the NEC area. A building form that better responds to this significant moment in the NEC masterplan is required. (Outline, as the parameter plans fix the building footprint).
- Further to the above, the joined role of both One Chesterton Square and residential blocks S19 and S20 to define Chesterton Circus and direct the main routes of movement (for both cyclists and pedestrians and vehicles) needs further consideration. The current building form does little to positively frame this space. (Outline)
- The application doesn’t include a full set of drawings to illustrate how elevation design, unit floor plans, cycle stores, plants and bin stores would be designed. This is understandable, as the application is for outline planning only. However, the parameter plans seek to fix the location of entrances to front doors, lobbies and cycle stores. There is a concern that any changes to envisaged layout that emerge in the Reserved Matters process may be impossible to be accommodated in the parameter plans. (Outline).
- Vehicular access, including loading / unloading / bin collection etc is organised in a loop road including Milton Avenue, the guided busway and a new road proposed alongside the boundary with Cambridge Business Park. There is a concern that any congestion along the guided busway area (i.e. with delivery vehicles double-parking alongside parking bays) may impact on the guided bus journey times? However, the intention to avoid vehicle access inside the block is supported. Further details on how any issues could be managed / overcome are required. The concern is that a secondary access / additional road width may be required which could not be accommodated in the proposed parameter plans. (Outline)
- The entrances to cycle stores are not well aligned with cycle tracks. For example, the cycle track along the guided busway is located to the south-west of the carriageway, requiring the cyclists to cross the road and (as further detailed in Part C of this response) manoeuvre through a line of parked cars. Conversely, there is a cycle track located on the west side of Milton Avenue, but here the entrances to cycle stores are located at the back of the building. The reasons for this are not fully understood. Fixing the location of entrances to cycle stores in parameter plans feels pre-mature (Outline).

PART C – FULL PLANNING

LANDSCAPE

The following section focuses on the proposals for the landscape design of the key streets and spaces within the Cambridge North Masterplan.

Milton Avenue

Milton Avenue is an existing street that is retained as the primary vehicle access to Cambridge North Station and the proposed masterplan development. Milton Avenue also serves as an important route and gateway to the wider NEC area for those arriving by train and cyclists and pedestrians arriving from the south and east parts of the city (including the City Centre, Cambridge Central Station area and Cambridge East).

Under the proposals Milton Avenue will retain its existing 7.2m wide carriageway but a number of changes are proposed to other elements of the street. The green verge to the west of the carriageway is retained and will accommodate large species tree planting. The building line to the residential quarter (west side) is set back by over 12m to accommodate a bi-directional cycle lane, an (adopted) footway, an existing service zone as well as spacious additional 3m-6m pedestrian / dwell zone (pavement cafes, space outside building entrances etc). The setback from the tree line to the east are near equal to the one to the west so that the proposed large species trees that line the carriageway appear to be at the centre of the street. This is an interesting feature that is supported.

The apparent width of Milton Avenue (measuring between the most forward projecting building line) is around 25m. Building heights to the recess line (as experienced at street level) vary but generally are around 22m – thus creation a street just over the 1:1 ratio. This feels an appropriate level of enclosure considering the envisaged dense and urban character of the NEC area.

There are several issues / questions in relation the landscape design proposals that need to be clarified or reviewed:

- The raised table adjoining the Piazza is very long with side street junctions coming off it and a cycle crossing (with priority) crossing it. Is the raised table meant to signify pedestrian priority? Why is the cycle crossing marked with give way signs, but not the pedestrian crossing? This feels confusing.
- There are three informal crossing points proposed, but it is unclear how these are detailed. In the north, at Cowley Circus and in the south at the Piazza, the crossings form part of a raised table. Is the change in material required? Does this signal pedestrian priority?
- Why is the crossing between Chesterton Square and Residential Gardens not a raised table? This is a significant crossing point?
- The shape of the green verge outside of One Milton Avenue is tapered. This appears at odds with the geometry of the rest of the space. What is design intent?
- There are a lot of different materials proposed. Does each material have a clear meaning / message to road users? Who has priority where?

Station Row

Station Row is a new street that has several roles:

- Provide a traffic-free pedestrian and cycle link that follows the desire line through the commercial quarter of the Cambridge North Masterplan towards the “wild park” at the northern extend of the development, and, in the longer term, to the envisaged future mixed use development along the railway tracks north of the site.
- Provide a “front door” address for the lab-office buildings that don’t face Milton Avenue.
- Create a traffic free space that can become an attractive location for mixed use and dwell space within the commercial quarter.
- Provide a drainage function (at pre-application stage it was known as Swale Street).

The reasons for the introduction of this route are understood and there is no objection to it in principle. However, there are some concerns about route hierarchy and its relationship to Milton Avenue. It is important to route hierarchy and legibility of the wider NEC area that Milton Avenue is distinctive as the most important route within the NEC area and there is a concern – as illustrated on Page 174 of the DAS (views from the south of 2 Milton Avenue looking north) – that the routes appear to similar and “compete” in the order of scale and hierarchy.

Enclosure ratio. Station Row is proposed to be 18m wide. Buildings enclosing the space are around 22m (to recess line), thus creating an enclosure ratio of just under 1:1. This is very similar to Milton Avenue.

Linearity. Like Milton Avenue, Station Row is a very straight street, with long views terminating on the “wild park” at the northern boundary. Some slight pinching has been introduced in the later phases of the design, when the lab-office were moved further from the tracks although this is not obvious from the visualisations. Some further pinching / kinking may help to make the street more distinct from Milton Avenue.

Landscape design: Station Row was originally envisaged as a “green street” with the swale as the main feature, with cycling and pedestrian movement intended to be a more slow, meandering route (in comparison to Milton Avenue). There is a concern that this distinction has been eroded as the design progressed; the swale and landscape zones have reduced in size, hard paving has become more dominant, and the meandering of the cycle route has been designed out. Although each of these changes happened for a reason there is a concern that the resulting space appears mostly as a “thoroughfare” whereas its role as a dwell and green space is less obvious.

Chesterton Square

Chesterton Square is the main public open space east of Milton Avenue and will be a focal point of “public life” for employees in the commercial quarter. It is located immediately opposite one of the two main access into Chesterton Gardens, thus providing a visual and physical link between the commercial and residential quarters and increasing (potential) footfall in the square to include the residential community – and visa versa. This is supported.

The size and proportions of the space, in relation to the buildings that surrounded are acceptable. However, there is a concern about the design and layout of the space, both in its relationship with surrounding built form and the potential lack of comfort it provides.

The buildings that enclose the space to the north and south have evolved significantly in the later stages of the design and now include a curving building line at 2 Milton Avenue and a meandering and stepped building line at One Chesterton Square. To the east the lab-office buildings present a much more regular and grid-like facade. The landscape design proposed a number of features including a grid of trees, a “kinked” planting bed, some further triangular planting beds, a water feature and a large species single tree. The space seems to lack a clear hierarchy / defining feature and there is a concern that the buildings and the landscape elements appear as a random collection of elements rather than create a distinct sense of place.

The purpose of the various landscape features, the zones they seek to define and the level of comfort they provide is also unclear. For example, there is a spill out zone identified on the north-west corner of 2 Milton Avenue. This doesn’t seem to relate to the landscape features. Furthermore, this space will often be shaded by the office building. There is a sense that the square would benefit from more (large) tree planting to create better definition of the space, and improve micro-climate, comfort and sense of enclosure. However the basement car park severely restricts where tree planting can take place.

The Piazza

The piazza is an important moment in masterplan as it is located at the conversion point of Milton Avenue and Station Row and also connects to Chesterton Gardens via the raised table crossing on Milton Avenue. Thus, the space is likely to see some of the highest levels of footfall in the Cambridge North masterplan site. With no large development to the south, the space is also well placed to catch the sun for a large proportion of the day.

The space is bounded by the mobility hub (FULL) to the east and wedge-point of proposed office block at 2 Milton Avenue (OUTLINE). The application indicates commercial / community units on the ground floor of the mobility hub to help activate the space. This is supported, although these units will feel separated from the “heart” of the space outside 2 Milton Avenue due to the location of the cycle path and swale. The ground floor of the corner of 2 Milton Avenue is envisaged for office use. This feels like a missed opportunity, as a café / restaurant in this location would help to enliven this key space in the masterplan and take full advantage of the sunny location by spilling out into the space with outdoor seating.

The current design envisages this space as a continuation of the layout of Station Row, with a focus of its role as a place for movement and “front door address” for the office block. There is a sense of that this doesn’t realise the space’s potential an attractive dwell space that makes the most of the high footfall and sunny orientation.

Cowley Circus

This junction forms a gateway into the Cambridge North Masterplan site when approaching from the north and west via Cowley Road.

Long term, if the NEC area is developed along the lines set out in the NEC AAP, Cowley Road will become the main east-west pedestrian and cycle route through the area. The main vehicle route will also continue to converge on this space but will enter it from the north, rather than the west.

In the shorter term, as shown in this planning application, three minor roads converge on the main Cowley Road / Milton Avenue corridor at this point. This includes an access to the Aggregate Works to the north, Cowley Road North and access to the National Rail compound to the east and a one-way residential street to the southwest.

The residential block S21 (OUTLINE) and One Chesterton Square (OUTLINE) are located on Cowley Circus. Both buildings address the space with a corner elevation. This emphasises the space as a place to move through, by emphasising the streets / movement corridors that lead away from the space. The design of the public realm, such as the shape of the planter outside One Chesterton Square and the continuation of the green verges along Milton Avenue, further emphasise the road function of this space.

An alternative approach, in which buildings and / or landscape are used to define Cowley Circus as a "place" (as suggested by the word "circus") rather than a through-route should have been explored as this could have created a greater variety spaces and a richer overall user experience when travelling through the masterplan.

Chesterton Gardens

Chesterton Gardens' primary function is to provide an open space and a focal point of activity for the surrounding residential buildings. However, large openings onto Milton Avenue also invite lab-office workers and passers-by into the space. This is supported.

The design for Chesterton Gardens is attractive. However, there are some queries relating to the detailed design of the landscape adjacent to lobby entrances, cycle stores and ground floor units. However, it is difficult to assess how this would work based on the information provided in the Landscape and Open Space Document and with the full details of the residential development not yet available (OUTLINE).

Cowley Road North

This street provides access to cycle and car parking at basement level and the service entrance to One Chesterton Square.

It is unclear from the drawings within the Landscape and Open Space document how the crossings into the wild park from Station Row and Cowley Circus are to be detailed. There is an inconsistency in the use of materials which could cause confusion amongst road users. For example, the crossing from Station Row is indicated by a grey shading. But this same material is also used to indicate the entrance to the basement car park into the lab-office buildings. But not the entrance to One Chesterton Square basement car park. This needs clarification.

Cowley Road East

Cowley Road East provides access to the mobility hub and the basement cycle stores and service bays for the lab-office buildings. But it also presents the front of the development when viewed from the railway line and the landscape beyond and forms part of the arrival experience of users of the mobility hub.

Changes to the masterplan in the latter stages of the design process introduced planting zones with space for large species trees adjacent to the lab-office buildings. These are welcomed to soften impact of the development of the eastern edge and introduce a better quality of space for people moving through Cowley Road or passing by on the train.

Cowley Road East is located hard up against the railway tracks. This, together with restrictions on what can be planted close to tracks, has meant that the security fencing along the tracks remains a dominating feature of the street. More generous planting zones along the security fencing to soften its impact and improve views from the "lab pocket parks" (see below) would have also been desirable.

Lab pocket parks (aka as "passages")

These are two spaces linking Station Row with Cowley Road East. At the start of the design process these streets were envisaged to help provide a level of permeability and visual links to the landscape and open skyline beyond the railway tracks. However, with Cowley Road East located hard up against the railway track, opportunities to screen the security fence with a generous planting zone are lost. Thus, the security fencing has remained a dominant and unattractive feature terminating the vistas along the street. Furthermore, as the design for Cambridge North progressed, the masterplan also became reliant on these spaces to provide access to the service entrance and (some) cycle stores of the lab-office buildings.

The landscape design for these spaces has sought to address these issues by introducing low planting and strategically placed trees to screen the security fencing and service bays, while retaining the sky-gaps between the building. Working within the constraints of the masterplan, this is considered a logical solution. However, there is a sense that these are quite “confused” spaces – part vista, part service yard, part passageway and part dwell space and that they could become a management / maintenance problem in the longer term.

Cowley Road South

This street is not included in the Landscape and Open Space Document but provides access from Milton Avenue to Cowley Road East. This is shown as a tree-lined street on the masterplan. Can these be accommodated while retaining the servicing arrangements to the Novotel?

Milton Way

Milton Way is envisaged as a green street that provides pedestrian and cycle access between Milton Avenue and the guided busway. The cycle storage units that at one stage were proposed here have been moved within the building which is welcomed.

The Link

No comments

Chesterton Way

This is currently part of the guided busway but will become part of the vehicular route around the residential quarter. There are a number of queries / concerns:

- Would cars queuing for the car lift into the One Milton Avenue basement car park delay the guided bus?
- What is the meaning of the zones of surface treatment (darker shaded areas?) They relate poorly to the parking spaces along the street.
- Are raised table acceptable on the guided bus route?
- Build outs at the cycle crossing from Milton Walk is supported, but these should be aligned with the raised table ramps and change in surface material.
- How will cyclists comfortably cross from the cycle path to the front doors / cycle stores of the residential blocks? The access may be blocked by parked cars.

Bramblefields Way

- Consider access for cyclists to cycle store if on street parking bays are fully occupied. Need to allow for a path alongside the tree / verge outside the northern entrance (as currently shown for the southern entrance).

BUILDINGS

Mobility hub

The mobility hub is located adjacent the Novotel. It provides a total of 724 parking spaces set over 6 floors including a basement. The building has a split-level arrangement with the higher proportion of the building facing Station Row. The ground floor includes space for commercial uses that provide an active frontage to Station Row.

- The height of the bulk of the building varies between 14.2m and 15.8m. This falls within the parameters set out in the NEC AAP and supporting documents. This is acceptable.
- Most of the parking (622 spaces) is intended for use by commuters. This exceeds the capacity of the existing car park and the justification for this number is not fully understood. Whilst the bulk / massing of the building is acceptable, a reduction of car parking spaces for commuters would allow this space to be used by others and could help address issues identified elsewhere in the masterplan (i.e. make the requirements for a basement below Chesterton Square or One Milton Avenue obsolete).
- Additional floor to floor heights to allow for conversion into alternative uses is supported.
- The introduction of commercial floor space at the ground floor facing Station Row is supported.
- The addition of an external and visually interesting staircase is supported.
- The elevation design and colour and materials strategy are well-considered and supported.

Lab-office buildings 1 & 3 Station Row

1 & 3 Station Row are two (near) identical lab-office block located adjacent to the railway tracks. The buildings' front door is on Station Row but they have been designed to work "in the round" to define, and create an attractive frontage onto all surrounding streets and spaces.

- There is some concern about the height and bulk of the buildings and the impact of this on the eastern edge. This is discussed in detail in Part A of this consultation response and not repeated here.
- Articulation of the buildings through changes in heights, building line and materials serves to creating four "bays" that appear linked to create the urban block. The bays are nicely proportioned and successful in reducing the apparent massing and proportions of the building when viewed from relatively close up, i.e. from street level or from a passing train. It is less effective when viewed from further away along the eastern edge as some of the subtleties are lost – especially with the development of the Triangle Site beyond.
- Despite the large and regular floor plans with a traditional laboratory grid, the elevation design introduces a sense of depth and rhythm, and a finer grain / human scale to the buildings. This is welcomed. The entrances are successfully articulated.
- The elevation design successfully integrates the rooftop plant.
- The ground floor includes spaces for retail uses on Station Row. This is supported. Plans also show an area marked for "Future Activation". It is unclear what this means or how this would be delivered.

- Access to some of the cycle parking is from the passages between the yards. This has good links to the cycle path along Station Row and is acceptable. However, the bulk of the cycle parking is in the basement with access from Cowley Road East via steep (1:4) stepped ramps. This is a very poor-quality solution not befitting an industry / community with very high levels of cycle use. Links to the main cycle routes are also poor and lack legibility.
- The varied materials palette serves to further emphasise the articulation of the blocks. This is welcomed. However, the predominant light grey colour is considered too bright, particularly with reference to its position on the eastern edge. The Townscape Strategy suggests a more muted, receding colour palette to help soften the impact on long distance views.

One Milton Avenue

One Milton Avenue is an office building set over 9 floors including a basement car park and integrated rooftop plant. The design of the building started as a singular block and in the course of the design process the building has become more articulated to reflect its role as a transition block between the consented office block One Cambridge Square and the proposed residential development. The building includes setbacks at the sixth and seventh floor to create rooftop terraces and reduce the apparent height when viewed form street level. The light brick frame that establishes the grid of window openings is cut back in places to reduce the apparent massing and visually break down the building in a series of smaller elements. A colonnaded cut-through is introduced on the southeast corner to facilitate improved visual and physical links between the residential gardens and the Piazza.

There are several concerns in relation to the building:

- Will the car lift entrance to the basement cause queuing and on Chesterton Way and delays to the guided bus services?
- The proposed route to the cycle storage appears quite convoluted and the proposed 1:4 ramp with steps difficult to negotiate. Could a higher quality entrance not have been incorporated into Milton Walk, and also allowed day light to enter the basement cycle storage?
- Although the intent of setbacks, cut backs and cut throughs is supported, the proportions of the resulting (visually) separate elements feel unbalanced. For example, the visualisation on page 232 of the DAS: The colonnaded element appears too small and feeble in relation to the bulkiness of the south-eastern portion of the building.
- The many terraces at different levels creates a pyramid-shaped development that appears as an attempt to overcome issues of a bulk and massing that is just too much for its location, rather than an elegant and considered context-led response.

SUMMARY

There are numerous urban design related concerns with the proposed development:

- The heights of the development exceed those recommended in the NEC Townscape Study and the appearance of the eastern and southwestern edges may be considered harmful from some views.
- The design of the eastern edge is not just an issue of height, but also scale and massing, as well as the layout of the masterplan and proposed land uses. The masterplan layout and land use proposals limit opportunities for further softening and modulation of the eastern edge. Considering these limitations, the proposed lab-office buildings are considered of good quality.
- The development of the Triangle Site rising above the buildings on the eastern edge adversely impact the gains made by modulating the building line to address concerns on impact on eastern edge
- The reduction of building heights along Station Row and Milton Avenue would negatively affect building proportions, and potentially also the level of enclosure and sense of “urbanity” of the main thoroughfares.
- In the visualisations included in the DAS, Station Row appears very similar in width, alignment and character to Milton Avenue. This is a concern as Milton Avenue should be legible as the primary movement corridor in the (future) NEC area.
- It is unclear if the number of employees and residents in the area will provide the required footfall to make proposed commercial floorspace viable.
- It is unclear how / where future resident will access day-to-day facilities that cannot be delivered in the application site.
- There is a concern that the architectural design of some buildings – although of good quality in their own right – may “jar” in some locations and will fail to deliver a coherent sense of place.
- There are numerous concerns relating to the detailed design of streets and spaces. This includes a lack of a clear and consistent message in design and materiality on the prioritisation of user groups.
- The level of car parking provided for station users is unclear.
- There appears to be a disconnect between cycle paths and entrances to cycle storage at several locations.
- The design of One Milton Avenue is unresolved. In its current form it feels like it is too big / bulky for its location