# Historic Environment

## Conservation Officer’s Consultation Response

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| Reference Number: | 22/02771/OUT |
| Proposal: | 1. An outline application (all matters reserved apart from access and landscaping) for the construction of: three new residential blocks……etc 2. 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……etc |
| Site Address: | Land North of Cambridge North Station Milton Avenue Cambridge |
| Case Officer: | F Bradley |
| Responding Officer: | C Brady |
| Date: | Oct 2022 |

### Comments:

**The Heritage Assets**

There are no heritage assets on the site itself but close to it, the Riverside & Stourbridge Common Conservation Area (City of Cambridge) and Fen Ditton Conservation Area (SCDC) are affected as is the Listed building called The Biggin. My comments relate to these heritage assets but begin with a short extract immediately below about the broader relationship to the City.

**The Significance of the key Heritage Assets**

Cambridge Local Plan 2018 Section Seven: *Protecting and enhancing the character of Cambridge*

7.1 An essential aspect of Cambridge’s attractiveness as a place to live, work, study and visit is its character. This character stems from the interplay between its rich architecture and the spaces between buildings. Trees and high quality public realm also play a significant role. The interface between the urban edge and the countryside is a key component of how the city is appreciated in the landscape and contributes to the quality of life and place.

(*My underlining*)

Riverside & Stourbridge Common Conservation Area

There is a conservation area appraisal. The area covered by this Appraisal is the stretch of the River Cam from Victoria Bridge north-eastwards to the City boundary. It comprises the river frontages and towpaths and the adjacent meadows (including Midsummer and Stourbridge Commons); the ‘Brunswick area’, north of Maid’s Causeway and the north side of Newmarket Road towards the Leper Chapel and the former Barnwell Junction.

The boundary includes land either side of the railway river crossing ie Stourbridge Common and the western Ditton Meadows. These are two of the three large open spaces deemed in the conservation area appraisal to be amongst the key characteristics of the conservation area. The river corridor forms the Northern boundary here.

It borders other Conservation Areas to the west, and south. On the northeast side, beyond the City boundary, are the Bait’s Bite and Fen Ditton Conservation Areas, which lie in South Cambridgeshire District.

The river, its landscape setting and its use, are central to the significance of this conservation area. The landscape becomes rural as Fen Ditton is approached. A backcloth of trees surrounds the open commons, softening and at times hiding the built-up areas beyond.

Fen Ditton Conservation Area

The conservation area appraisal comments:

3.2 The village has an unmistakably rural feel with its grass verges, large trees and its bucolic riverside setting. The riverside spaces are all open areas of grassland interspersed with very few buildings and some houseboats. This creates a very definite edge to the village and approaching from the west, the Church of St Mary the Virgin and the Old Rectory rise magnificently above the water meadows from behind a canopy of mature trees.

3.5 The village has two distinct character areas - Green End (the site of the original settlement) which stretched along the river between The Biggin and the church, and the expanded Medieval village which runs from High Ditch Road to the church.

4.3 The original settlement at Fen Ditton was principally a strip that ran parallel to the river, with Biggin Abbey at the north and the church at the extreme southern end.

The role of the river and setting is also commented on at:

5.4 Attractive water meadows lie between the village and the river and these, combined with the surrounding fields serve visually to separate the village from the city. This separation is enhanced by the boundary of the River Cam and the fields on the west bank.

Vistas across the river (eg from the footpath running between Green End toward Baits Bite Lock) towards the West are a feature noted on the appraisal map.

The Biggin (Listed grade II\*)

This highly graded, nationally designated, farmhouse of the late C14 - C17 is a surviving part of the residence of the Bishops of Ely and was once moated. It lies in a largely rural open landscape and consequently, this setting adds considerably to its character. This is appreciated in views from for instance, the footpath between Horningsea Road and Baits Bite Lock.

**The Proposals Impact on Heritage Assets and their settings.**

These comments relate to the Eastern side of the site which will be more openly apparent from distances and “natural” landscapes.

The descriptions above highlight the importance of the relationship between these areas and the river corridor, open space and views of meadows and fenland and views across these as components of the significance of the various heritage assets and their settings in the landscape.

Though the impacts affect a limited number of views or vistas from or around these assets, *the components affected are of fundamental importance to their character*. *For this reason, the degree of change involved – even if limited, has the potential to be of significant impact on the perception of these heritage assets as sitting within a non-urban landscape.*

The existing hotel building and the nearby office building under construction already demonstrate how such buildings intrude on the settings of the heritage assets. However, the proposed development would form a further urbanising element via intensification of the urban backdrop.

The proposed applications building heights and unfavourable comparison with those indicated by the AAP have been set out in for instance, the GCSP Landscape Officer’s response with reference to the submitted Parameter Plan 6 – Building Heights Plan.

That the promoted development of the NECAAP would also be visible from viewpoints is recognised in the NEC HIA which seeks to mitigate the effect. Such mitigation would clearly be less successful with taller buildings or buildings more consistently rising to maxima (such as those the subject of the current application) intended to be exceptions - not all the buildings can be landmarks. Where building height is exacerbated by the massing of numbers of buildings of height together, impacts will be greater. There may be additional visual impact from these being lit during darkness.

**Mitigation**

The visual impact of the height, mass and bulk of buildings on the surrounding landscape, especially when viewed from Fen Ditton CA. Buildings S6 and S7 are two large buildings creating a near continuous roofscape of similar height. These adverse effects will not be effectively mitigated.

The proposed buildings looming up behind the eastern edge buildings will tend to negate the impact of the limited setbacks / height changes etc that have been incorporated to try to minimise the prominence of these track-side blocks.

I note that despite the application for the eastern edge buildings being a full application, the elevations for buildings S6 and 7 the drawings are indicated to be “illustrative” which presumably applies to the materials and palette as well as elevational treatment.

**Conclusion**

The effects on Fen Ditton and Riverside & Stourbridge Common Conservation Areas would be on the important riverside setting of these conservation areas. The proposals would generate increased visibility and presence of urbanising elements of development within of the conservation areas and would affect the experience of their rural character. The intensification of development would affect the riverside setting which is a fundamental characteristic of the Conservation Areas and sensitive to change. Therefore, additional negative impact ought to be assigned considerable weight.

This leads to the view that the proposals result in more than a very minor detrimental alteration to the rural setting of the Fen Ditton and Riverside & Stourbridge Common Conservation Areas which affects their significance because the appreciation of the relationship between these areas and the river corridor, open space and views of meadows and fenland is affected. Whilst this is considered to result in “less than substantial harm”, I consider this to be at a moderate level ie a higher level of harm than the “very lowest end of this scale” suggested with the application.

Harm already done to heritage assets does not provide any justification for these proposals. There is no basis in local or national policy for accepting harmful impacts on heritage assets because a lesser level of harm has already been done.

**Policy & NPPF**

With regards to the local planning policy, development needs to meet the criteria within the South Cambridgeshire district Council’s Local Plan (2018) policy NH/14: Heritage Assets. I consider that the proposals do not “sustain and enhance” nor “respond to local heritage character” as required by this policy.

Referencing the Cambridge City Local Plan:

Policy 61: Conservation and enhancement of Cambridge’s historic environment

To ensure the conservation and enhancement of Cambridge’s historic environment, proposals should:

a. preserve or enhance the significance of the heritage assets of the city, their setting and the wider townscape, including views into, within and out of conservation areas; etc.

I consider that the proposals do not meet the requirements of this policy.

NPPF

“Harm” to a heritage asset can include that from development within its setting (NPPF para 200).

I consider that paragraph 202 applies ie that the development proposal will lead to “less than substantial harm” at a moderate level of this scale, to the significance of designated heritage assets / their settings (and this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal).

End.