

Report of the Swale Design Review Panel

Kent Science Park return

28th August 2020

The design review meeting

Reference number	1451/140820
Date	14 th August 2020
Meeting location	Online via Microsoft Teams
Panel members attending	Liz Gibney (chair), Architecture, Urban Design David Prichard, Architecture, Urban Design, Historic Environment Paul Reynolds, Landscape Architecture, Urban Design
Panel manager	Jade Huang, Design South East
Presenting team	Paul Turner, Corstophine & Wright Richard Lane, GW Pharmaceuticals Manuel Loureda, GW Pharmaceuticals Matthew Slepian, GW Pharmaceuticals Michal Nowak, GW Pharmaceuticals Simon Hoad, Trinity Investment Management David Downing, Baker Hicks Tom Cole, Montague Evans James Ainsworth, Montague Evans
Other attendees	Alison Peters, Swale Borough Council Joanna Russell, Swale Borough Council Simon Algar, Swale Borough Council Cllr Mike Dendor, Swale Borough Council Cllr Tim Gibson, Swale Borough Council Cllr Monique Bonney, Swale Borough Council Cllr Paul Stephen, Swale Borough Council Cllr Mavis Hibben, Tunstall Parish Council Cllr Brian Clarke, Bredgar Parish Council Cllr Victoria Berkeley, Milstead Parish Council
Site visit	This review was carried out during the Covid-19 outbreak in 2020. As a return review, the independent site study and digital walk-around was not required.
Scope of the review	As an independent design review panel, the scope of this review was not restricted.
Panel interests	Panel members did not indicate any conflicts of interest.
Confidentiality	This report is confidential as the scheme is not yet the subject of a detailed planning application. Full details of our confidentiality policy can be found at the end of this report.

The proposal

Name	Kent Science Park Return
Site location	Cornforth Drive, Sittingbourne, ME9 8PX
Site details	The proposed site area measures approximately 4 hectares and sits adjacent to the south of the Kent Science Park (KSP), two and a half miles south of Sittingbourne. The site is currently used as agricultural land and is exposed to the south towards the M2. The main entrance into the KSP is located to the north of the park, off Ruins Barn Road, via Broadoak Road.
Proposal	The proposal is for the expansion of the KSP to accommodate a range of employment uses, including a state-of-the-art facility for manufacturing pharmaceuticals, and associated landscaping, carparking and road networks.
Planning stage	Pre-planning, with intention to submit a hybrid application. Detailed consent is sought for the manufacturing facility, access and outline consent sought for remaining employment plots.
Local planning authority	Swale Borough Council
Planning context	The site is currently used as agricultural land and is not allocated under the local plan, although the wider Kent Science Park is identified as a Regeneration Area, which allows for the possibility of the park's extension subject to Policy Regen 4. A number of rural heritage assets exist on neighbouring parcels including three Grade II listed farm cottages: Woodstock Home Farmhouse, Woodstock Cottages and Woodstock Cottage Farmhouse. The Kent Downs AONB lies to the south bordering the M2 approximately two miles from the site boundary.
Planning history	There exists a consented planning application on the site for 12,000m ² of B1 class development for up to 10m in height, which will expire in December 2020.
Planning authority perspective	The planning authority perspective remains as it was for the previous proposal that was reviewed, that the broad principle of development is supported, and additional employment use is welcomed. However, there are concerns with landscape setting, biodiversity and visual impact, building height and design, sustainable transport and highways impact.
Community engagement	Elected members and parish councillors expressed concerns with contaminated land, and a lack of a comprehensive masterplan for the

wider Science Park, which was expressed during the course of this meeting. The outcome of previous community consultation is not known to Design South East.

Previous reviews

This scheme has previously been reviewed by the Swale design review panel on July 30th 2020. Following that review our report stated that the landscape, place-making, movement strategy and architectural design required significant improvement in order to satisfy the potential of this site, and that an overall audit of the wider KSP should feed into a comprehensive masterplan strategy.

Summary

There are many improved aspects to this scheme since the previous review, such as the development of the landscape and architectural quality of manufacturing building. We welcome the proactive engagement in the design review process through which the applicant team has addressed many of the design issues previously raised by the panel.

However, there needs to be further consideration of place-making and activity on the site, with a focus on enriching experiential qualities. Although the architecture has improved, the relationship between the building and its landscape still requires development. Focussing on 'people-led' design will be key for the success of the manufacturing facility and of the Kent Science Park (KSP) as a desirable place of employment.

The impact of the expansion buildings that fall under the outline application have not been assessed thoroughly as part of this review, but it is noted that their design could have significant impact on the surrounding landscape, character and identity of the KSP. We welcome a return presentation on the development of the masterplan for the wider KSP, which should ideally be reviewed or workshopped early in the process, at a strategic level.

Key recommendations

1. A focus on the end-user narrative and experience should further inform the landscape design, amenity spaces, routes and entrances into the manufacturing facility, and include provision for specific social activities.
2. A 'meanwhile' tree nursery could be incorporated within the initially empty areas of the site, in order to provide screening, landscape character and biodiversity, in anticipation of implanting semi-mature trees across the science park in the future.
3. Significantly improved cycle facilities should be provided, including secure internal storage, changing and shower facilities to maximise transport modal shift to cycling.
4. Carparking areas, particularly at the entrance of Plot 2, but also as part of future outline sites, should be thoughtfully landscaped and arranged to not dominate entrances and pedestrian routes.
5. Commitments to sustainability, including the approach to reaching future carbon neutrality in line with national policy must be clearly defined.
6. Any issues and risks with land contamination and ground water must be investigated, evidenced and resolved prior to any planning application.
7. The option to combine the outline application with the development of the overall masterplan, separate to the detail application for the manufacturing facility, should be considered. This would allow more thorough exploration of connections, impact and opportunities across a wide area beyond the red-line boundary of the KSP.

Detailed comments and recommendations

1. Design strategy and wider masterplan
 - 1.1. Whilst there are many improvements and positive architectural developments made in this revised scheme, there are overall design risks inherent to the hybrid application format. It may be beneficial to consider the detail application of the manufacturing building separately from the outline application, which has not been developed sufficiently and could significantly impact the site area in a negative way, visually and experientially (such as unknown carparking requirements). Instead, these outline sites would ideally form part of the overall Kent Science Park (KSP) masterplan, which requires further development and broader analysis to get right. It is positive that the same design team has been appointed to complete the wider masterplan exercise, therefore, the outline permission sites could be comprehensively addressed along with the science park's wider strategies.
 - 1.2. A future KSP masterplan should be informed by a much wider audit and analysis of the area, reaching far beyond the science park's red-line boundary. The impact of this expansion will be extensive and needs to consider its wider connections and movement as well the existing facilities on the site.
 - 1.3. We suggest that the Local Authority could play a proactive role in the development of the wider masterplan, which needs to comprehensively incorporate adjacent land parcels, farmsteads and heritage assets. The potential impacts and conflicts must be understood. This should be resolved at a strategic level and could form a process equivalent to a compulsory purchase order (CPO), and avoid piecemeal expansion of this important site.
 - 1.4. As part of the wider masterplan, the team is encouraged to work with the County Council (as Highways Authority) to identify where off-site highway improvements might be made to improve safety and to further encourage active travel (in particular cycling) to the Park as a sustainable alternative to driving.
 - 1.5. The proposed sustainability strategy for the manufacturing facility and future expansion sites should be clear, with a defined programme of how they will meet net carbon neutral requirements that will come into force before 2050. If new buildings require upgrading or retrofitting in order to meet these targets, this will require further investment and should be considered as part of the strategy at this early stage. Further advice is provided in Section 6.
2. Landscape and amenity
 - 2.1. Generous and meaningful landscape and external amenity spaces are crucial to the sense of well-being, community and place. Although significant improvements have been made since the previous review, including positive links between the site and the central park as well as additional structural landscaping, more can be done. We believe that the quality of these green spaces should be further enhanced and led by

user experience and the specified activity. For example, the proposed pocket park on the southern boundary could house a covered seating area for a potential meeting place or vantage point. A jogging route could be provided around the site, connecting local public rights of way and pedestrian networks outside of the science park; the pocket park could include a water fountain and become a meeting point along this route. More consideration as to how individuals and groups may choose to use the external spaces provided will help enhance and enrich the quality of the landscape, using a narrative approach to design and prioritise the site design. A quality building in isolation is not enough and must gel within its landscape and form a comprehensive network for human-scale experience and interaction. Section 5.2 discusses this further in relation to the architecture and interior spaces.

- 2.2. The amount of carpark still dominates the entrances of Plot 2, which should be looked at with regards to place-making measures that enhance the pedestrian experience. Additional hard and soft landscape to break up the large areas of tarmac is encouraged, which could then help to form useful amenity space should car capacity become reduced in the future, in line with enhanced cycle and sustainable transport facilities, further discussed in Section 4.
3. Nature and biodiversity
 - 3.1. We encourage that whilst the outline permission for the surrounding sites remains extant, the remaining unbuilt land could house a nursery of trees. Not only would this help screen the manufacturing building from surrounding vantage points, it would provide a supply of young trees that would mature in 5+ years' time that can be moved around the science park for implementation of the future masterplan. This would cost less than bringing semi-mature trees directly from elsewhere. This strategy would also provide meanwhile biodiversity on the site and create a characterful landscape amenity for employee use in an environmentally positive way.
 - 3.2. Night-time illumination and security lighting should be modelled to minimise impact on wildlife and night habitats. A large building on an exposed site risks harming habitats; therefore, the lighting design strategy needs to be addressed correctly.
 - 3.3. Any risk of land contamination should be thoroughly investigated, as this site was once housed bio-chemical/industrial manufacturing processes. We understand that there may be a natural aquifer in the vicinity of the site, whose risks must also be assessed prior to any planning application.
4. Movement
 - 4.1. We have concerns that the buildings forming the outline application could create a significant increase in future carparking requirements on the site, potentially diminishing the effects of the positive landscape and amenity provisions currently proposed. This should be addressed proactively, ensuring that the projected future

parking requirements across the site is clear, and include enough cycle and sustainable transport provision to balance any changes in need.

- 4.2. Although there is some improved provision for cyclists in the form of cycle racks, more should be done to encourage people to shift to more sustainable means of transport. Internal cycle storage should be provided to secure more expensive bikes such as electric bikes. Much more can be done to directly encourage cycling and behavioural change away from vehicular use.
5. Architecture, materials and detailing
 - 5.1. The design of the manufacturing building has developed in a positive way since the previous review and makes a more positive architectural contribution to the science park. The reduced volume of the roof, and the broken-down bulk and mass is more articulated and architecturally distinctive.
 - 5.2. Although the overall quality of the architecture is improved, more work can still be done to enhance the experiential day-to-day use of the facility. The two identical entrances, for example, are counterintuitive and are likely to cause legibility issues. The interior quality of spaces, such as the entrance lobby, public and communal spaces, do not appear to have yet been considered. We encourage that future user's daily experience is used to drive the design, quality and priorities of the interior spaces.
 - 5.3. The size and height of the proposed extract flues on the building's roof should be handled carefully. They are already prominent, presumably to extract fumes further away from human contact. Care should be taken to ensure they do not become larger.
 - 5.4. We support the revised and improved quality of materials selected, including stone, copper and flint, which demonstrate a positive commitment to better quality design. These materials are expensive and therefore a simple and realistic palette of details must be proposed, in order that it is retained throughout the planning process and not diluted to become a cheaper alternative. Paragraph 130 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2018) states: *'Local planning authorities should also seek to ensure that the quality of approved development is not materially diminished between permission and completion, as a result of changes being made to the permitted scheme (for example through changes to approved details such as the materials used).'*
 - 5.5. In order to be consistent with this national policy, the applicant team and local authority should note Design South East's general guidance on material quality and detail. At planning application stage, the quality of the detailing should be demonstrated through large scale drawings at 1:20 and 1:5 of key elements of the building/landscape and should be accompanied by actual material samples which should be secured by condition as part of any planning approval.

6. Energy strategy

- 6.1. Our guidance is that at the planning application stage the proposal must produce a clear energy strategy which details how the development will optimise thermal performance, minimise the demand for energy, supply the remaining energy requirements efficiently and optimise the use of renewables in order to align with the Government's emerging zero carbon policy. This strategy should be informed by detailed modelling work informed by respected calculation methods.

Confidentiality

If the scheme was not the subject of a planning application when it came to the panel, this report is offered in confidence to those who attended the review meeting. There is no objection to the report being shared within the recipients' organisations provided that the content of the report is treated in the strictest confidence. Neither the content of the report, nor the report itself can be shared with anyone outside the recipients' organisations. Design South East reserves the right to make the content of this report known should the views contained in this report be made public in whole or in part (either accurately or inaccurately). Unless previously agreed, pre-application reports will be made publicly available if the scheme becomes the subject of a planning application or public inquiry. Design South East also reserves the right to make this report available to another design review panel should the scheme go before them. If you do not require this report to be kept confidential, please inform us.

If the scheme is the subject of a planning application the report will be made publicly available and we expect the local authority to include it in the case documents.

Role of design review

This is the report of a design review panel, forum or workshop. Design review is endorsed by the National Planning Policy Framework and the opinions and recommendations of properly conducted, independent design review panels should be given weight in planning decisions including appeals. The panel does not take planning decisions. Its role is advisory. The panel's advice is only one of a number of considerations that local planning authorities have to take into account in making their decisions.

The role of design review is to provide independent expert advice to both the applicant and the local planning authority. We will try to make sure that the panel are informed about the views of local residents and businesses to inform their understanding of the context of the proposal. However, design review is a separate process to community engagement and consultation.

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