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CAMBRIDGESHIRE QUALITY PANEL

REPORT OF PANEL MEETING

Scheme: Chesterton Cycle Bridge

Date: Friday 18th March 2016

Venue: Shire Hall Room 022ab, Cambridgeshire County Council, CB3 0AP

Time: 14:00 -16:00

Quality Panel Members

Lynne Sullivan (Chair)

Nick James

Simon Carne

Luke Engleback

David Birkbeck

Phil Jones

Panel secretariat and support

Judit Carballo – Cambridgeshire County Council

Stuart Clarke – Cambridgeshire County Council

Local Authority Attendees

Elizabeth Verdegem – Development Management Officer, Cambridgeshire County Council

Applicant and Representatives

Liz Waring – Cambridgeshire County Council

Patrick Joyce – Cambridgeshire County Council

Simon Harris – Knight Architects

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1. Scheme description and presentation

Architect/Designer Knight Architects
Applicant Cambridgeshire County Council
Planning status Pre – application stage

2. Overview

The proposal is for a new pedestrian and cycle bridge across the River Cam (known as Chesterton Bridge) connecting Ditton Meadows to the south of the river to Chesterton to the north. The bridge will help facilitate a strategic cycle link across the city, known as the Chisholm Trail, however, the bridge is a stand-alone project and separate to the Chisholm Trail project.

The bridge will be around 50m in length and provide a segregated deck for pedestrians and cyclists (denoted by a raised kerb) of about 4 – 6m in width in total with picture window openings for views out over the river and common and seating opportunities.

The bridge sits adjacent to an existing railway bridge and will require new ramp provisions to the bridge landings to enable onward travel. These take the form of a linear pathway across Ditton Meadows and a loop formation on the north bank to connect to the river towpath.

The north bank has a more urban setting and the south bank a more environmentally sensitive meadow setting.

3. Cambridgeshire Quality Panel views

Introduction

The Panel's advice reflects the issues associated with each of the four 'C's' in the Cambridgeshire Quality Charter. The comments below include both those raised in the open session of the meeting and those from the closed session discussions.

Community

On a broad level, the Panel recognised that the bridge is not only connecting two communities but will help facilitate wider links that can bring communities closer together. The proposed new railway station at Chesterton, the existing science park and potential redevelopment of Cambridge northern fringe east will all be more accessible to new communities as a result of the new crossing.

More specifically, the Panel recognised and welcomed the opportunities to engage with wider users of this area but did query whether the design needed so many seats. The applicant responded that the bridge sits at a finishing point for some boat races on the river and that the picture windows and seating provide opportunities for people to congregate or pause. Many other users of the river and meadow corridor, such as runners, cyclists and recreational users will also have new opportunities to enjoy the enhanced corridor community at this point too.

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Connectivity

The Panel strongly supported the new connection across the river, especially as it promotes sustainable transport uses. However, the Panel were concerned that the segregated cycle section is not sufficiently wide enough to accord with best practice and therefore the bridge is not future proofed in that respect.

The Panel referred to Sustrans guidance that sets out a minimum route width in excess of that shown, and Sustrans specific Bridge guidance (2015) states 3m min for a segregated cycleway (with 2m for pedestrians). This is of concern given the popularity of cycling in Cambridge and also the emerging prevalence of bikes such as cargo-style or trikes that can require more width space.

The applicant responded that originally the bridge had been developed as an unsegregated route which was of a sufficient width and that through public consultation the design had changed to provide for segregated spaces. This, together with engineering constraints and not wanting to compromise the splayed bridge parapets, dictated the width of the bridge. Further, it was added that the Carter Bridge and Riverside Bridge had similar, but not necessarily identical arrangements elsewhere in Cambridge and they worked well.

The Panel acknowledged how the project had reached the point that it had, and supported the decision to move from a shared space to segregated space, but felt that with modest tweaks to the proposed bridge section, and particularly at the 'landing points', further space for cyclists could be accommodated that met Sustrans guidance.

The Panel questioned whether the raised kerb separating the cycle and pedestrian routes was a hazard, but accepted that provided the kerb was clearly delineated, it would be more successful than a white line.

The northern landing of the bridge requires a 180 degree loop to access the river towpath and the Panel asked why the route did not take a different alignment. The applicant explained that this would require using the railway level crossing which was not something supported the Council or the public. The geometry of the loop was to enable a smooth transition down to the towpath and to ensure good sight lines for safety reasons.

Character

The applicant explained that the lattice design is informed by and reflects the adjacent railway bridge but in a more sympathetic design that stands on its' own merits. The bridge and its landing and ramp approaches have been designed to minimise impact on the adjacent sensitive meadows and river corridor. Decisions on colour are not yet finalised but Cambridge Blue is emerging as the preferred colour (with Olivine and Powder Blue as alternatives) and the Panel supported this colour and local connection. On reflection, during the closed session, the Panel subsequently suggested a willow green/grey colour may work well too.

The Panel broadly supported the above approach and sought assurance that the mesh covering the picture windows would allow children to see through, which the applicant confirmed it would be.

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The Panel, whilst welcoming the seating, did challenge the nature and form of the proposed planters on the northern bank suggesting that they could end up not working as intended and just becoming 'dirt boxes', as planters with sharp points consistently fail to support planting. The applicant highlighted that the north landing area reflects the more urban nature of the setting whilst meeting safety requirements. The south landing area and ramps are more organic to blend in with the meadow.

The Panel had concerns about the nature of the 'low level shrubs' proposed in the adjacent planted bank, and felt any planting needed to have a strong sense of the riverside/meadow setting and reflect indigenous species. The applicant was unable to comment on the landscape strategy as the landscape advisor was not present.

The low level lighting strategy was supported by the Panel which they thought would work well in respecting the dark setting of the meadows whilst having a functional and design element at night. They liked too the potential use of different colours for the seating and bridge parapets.

Climate

The Panel noted that such a structure would have a lot of embedded energy because of what it is but did ask could the lighting strategy use energy saving options to only be lit when people are crossing the bridge rather than continuous lighting for example.

The Panel also asked what acoustic testing had been undertaken. The applicant said that they had not modelled this as they intended to use an asphalt surface which would absorb noise rather than a boarded grit top which would be noisier.

4. Conclusion

The Panel strongly supported the principle of a new pedestrian and cycle bridge across the river and very much liked the emerging designs. They described the bridge as beautiful.

The Panel made the following recommendations, further details can be found above:

- Reconsider meeting Sustrans minimum design widths for the cycle section of the bridge crossing to ensure the bridge provides sufficient space for passing bikes and is future proofed.
- The applicant should satisfy themselves that the raised segregation kerbs are not a hazard.
- The Panel had concerns about the planter design and planting on the north bank, which may not work as intended, especially at the pointed ends.
- The Panel broadly supported the lighting strategy, but suggested ways to make it more efficient such as 'follow the user' style PIR lighting which would be more efficient.
- The mesh covering the lower picture windows on the parapets should enable users to see out with little restriction.