

Masterplan

How the University of Cambridge is building a community for its staff

Laura Mark takes a look at plans for 3,000 new homes, 2,000 student accommodation units, a new urban centre and 100,000m² of research space – part of Cambridge's £1 billion extension to the city



Lot 4
21 key-worker homes and 47 homes for market sale
Architects Cottrell & Vermeulen, Sarah Wigglesworth Architects, and AOC
Contractor TBC
Completion TBC



Lot S1 & S2
155 homes for market sale
Architect Proctor & Matthews Architects
Contractor Countryside
Completion Winter 2016/2017



Lot M1 & M2
250 homes for market sale
Architects Alison Brooks Architects and Pollard Thomas Edwards
Contractor Hill
Completion Winter 2016/2017



Lot 8
73 key-worker apartments
Architects Witherford Watson Mann with MaccreanorLavington
Contractor RG Carter
Completion Spring 2017



Lot 5
Student accommodation for 325 postgraduates alongside a porters lodge
Architect RH Partnership
Contractor Graham Construction
Completion Winter 2017



Lot 2
264 key-worker apartments, a market square, shops and a cafe
Architect Stanton Williams
Contractor Wates
Completion Summer/winter 2017



Lot 3
232 key-worker homes alongside residential squares
Architect Mecanoo
Contractor BAM Construction
Completion Spring 2017



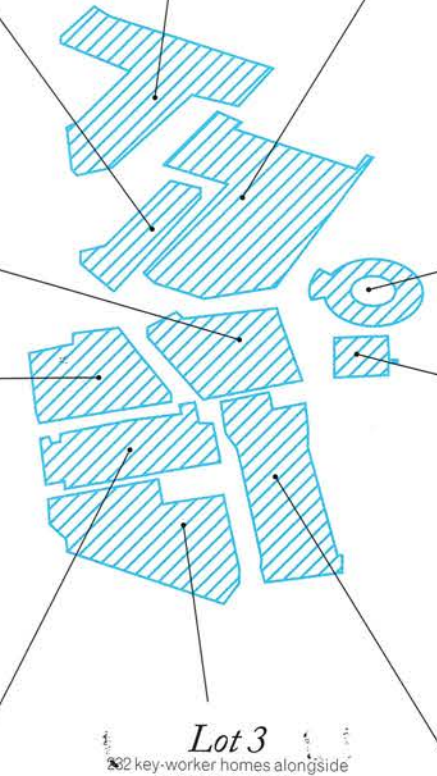
Lot 1
117 key-worker homes, supermarket, energy centre and health centre
Architects Wilkinson Eyre with Mole Architects
Contractor BAM Construction
Completion Spring 2017



Lot 6
Primary school and nursery
Architect Marks Barfield
Contractor Willmott Dixon
Completed 2015



Lot 7
Community centre and nursery
Architect MUMA
Contractor Farrans
Completion Spring 2017



'We novate all our architects'

Interview Client Heather Topel talks about how design quality is maintained on a 150ha development site

How has the masterplan developed?

The university started thinking about its developing needs in the 1980s. It recognised it wanted to be able to recruit and retain staff, bring them in to Cambridge and maintain its competitiveness in a global market. It was thinking about how it could create the right environment to persuade people to come here, as opposed to Stanford, Cambridge MA or Singapore.

One challenge that has always been here – and it is becoming even more difficult – is affordability of housing. There has always been an intention to look at how we respond to create places where people can come together, collaborate, innovate and support the university. North West Cambridge has become the place where the university can help to support its research activities by providing affordable accommodation.

We have 800 years' development history but not a very extensive history of developing residential. That is why North West Cambridge is slightly different for us. We started masterplanning as early as 2001, at which point it was focused mainly on capacity testing; the more detailed masterplanning began in 2009 and led on to an outline planning application in 2011. The masterplan sets out the vision for the entire site and lays out about 20-25 years' growth.

Why this site?

Having looked at the university's land, this site was identified as the most appropriate to respond to residential need. In developing it the university was very keen to make sure it was done in a responsible way that established a community and also an integrated extension to the city of Cambridge. I hope that if we come back in 15 years it will feel like a part of Cambridge.

How do you manage a development of this size?

We set up a specific governance programme and appointed a professional delivery team along with three panels – a public art advisory panel, a sustainability panel and a quality panel – to help inform our governing bodies and set out quality and sustainability standards. The quality and sustainability panels have merged now and the result is similar to a design review panel. We must do reviews through Cambridgeshire's own process but we wanted our own panel that would see the project through from start to finish. We've also made sure the masterplanning team we engaged in 2009 has had a continued and long-term involvement.

You've already sold of some of the lots to developers; do you plan to sell more?

Most of the site will be retained by the university. We will have 1,500 homes for its staff and, in the first phase, are building all of those and will rent them. We also have 3,000 student bedrooms; 325 of those are in the first phase, which we are building alongside all the local community facilities. There will also be 1,500 homes for sale – for those parts of the site we have provided developer briefs and will be selling on. We've identified a number of developer partners for this, the first two of which are Hill and Countryside.

How do you maintain the quality on the plots that you have sold on to developers?

They are subject to the same design reviews as our own team's. We maintain a very strict level of control – that starts at the briefing stage and before we select the developer. We require a highly worked-up level of design as part of their submission and have a strong weighting on quality within this

and throughout the selection process. Once chosen, we require that developers maintain the same team and we continue to undertake design reviews. They have to present to our own quality and sustainability panel.

How is this working?

The response from developers has been extraordinary and the level of quality exceptional – even in the Cambridge market where it is already very high. I think it is because we set a vision very early on and established the role of the university in creating a community here.

How have you chosen the architects for your part of the development?

We have only selected architects for the first phase. That includes 11 architectural teams, some of which have partnerships within, so there are about 14 different architects in total. We had an open selection process but it was not a design competition. We sought architects with the right experience and track record. As we would have many architects working simultaneously they had to be able to collaborate and realise an overarching vision, not just a singular building. The selection process was really based on their ways of working rather than the outcomes.

Will you use the same process for the later phases?

I don't know but it served us well for phase one. This was complex in that it included such a wide range of different uses and we wanted to see a diversity of styles. We needed architects with experience in building supermarkets and community centres to build up those facilities. The next phase is likely to be more residential focused as we will have already built the local centre. As such, there might be less need for use-based differentiation but we may still be seeking a diversity in our architects. It's still all to play for.

How do you work with architects to ensure the quality of schemes?

The process we set up in phase

one comes from a very clear outline planning permission that had parameters. Design codes are approved by the university and local authority. Those are another set of guidelines that deal with character, activity, climate and community. They are focused on interfaces, public realm, how buildings come together and maintain frontages. We also have very clear design briefs with design reviews at all key stages of the project.

How do you keep that quality at construction stage?

All but one of our phase one lots are Design and Build contracts but all of our architects are novated. The lot that isn't Design and Build follows a traditional procurement route.

How did you make the decisions about which parts of the masterplan would finish first?

It's not standard in such a large residential scheme for all the local centre facilities to be provided at the very beginning but it was quite important for the university that that was the case. Many of the university staff moving onto the site will be from outside the Cambridge area and, in some cases, will be new to the UK so we wanted them to have a community to move into.

There is also a practical reason for building the school, shops, and healthcare facilities first – we wanted travel behaviour to become established. All of the facilities being close to where people live means they can walk or cycle there without feeling the need to get in their cars and go somewhere else. It's easier than trying to change behaviour later on.

The primary school coming forward as the first building and the heart of the community was really a key objective for the university. We wanted to make sure that, as people moved on to the site, there was somewhere for their kids to go to school. It is also the first university training primary school so we had talked to the Department for Education about when would be the right time to open.

Heather Topel is acting project director at the University of Cambridge's development vehicle, North West Cambridge

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