



Appeal Decision

Hearing held on 10 September 2025

Site visit made on 10 September 2025

by **Paul Martinson BA (Hons) MSc MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 21 November 2025

Appeal Ref: APP/Q0505/W/25/3365274

21 Hobson Street, Cambridge CB1 1NL

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by SSHS Redevelopment Partners against the decision of Cambridge City Council.
 - The application Ref is 24/01588/FUL.
 - The development proposed is described as: 'Redevelopment of site involving: 1. demolition of existing buildings except for 16 – 17 and 18 - 19 Sidney Street façades, 16 – 17 street facing roof aspect and chimneys; and 2. provision of: - no. replacement retail units totalling 882m² (use class E (a) (b) (c) & (e)); - 4,107m² of office space (use class E (g) (i) & (ii)); and - 349m² of community space (use classes F1 and F2); 3. new shopfront to 16 – 17 Sidney Street and alterations to roof and northern chimney; and 4. public realm enhancement works'.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Applications for costs

2. An application for costs has been received from SSHS Redevelopment Partners against Cambridge City Council. This is considered in a separate decision.

Preliminary Matters

3. The Council's fourth reason for refusal on its decision notice related to flood risk. The appellant provided information in response to an objection by the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA) during the course of the application, however the LLFA provided no further comment at the application stage and as such this lack of information was included as a reason for refusal by the Council. However, at appeal the LLFA has confirmed that the additional information that had been supplied had satisfied its concerns and that any additional matters could be dealt with by a planning condition. The Council has confirmed it is no longer contesting this reason for refusal, and I see no reason to disagree.
4. The site lies within the Cambridge Central/Historic Core Conservation Area (the CA) and within the setting of listed buildings and the Christ's College Registered Park and Garden (RPG). Owing to the nature of the viewpoints that the parties consider would be affected by the proposal, I have considered the effect of the proposal on the Cambridge skyline as part of my assessment of the effect on heritage assets.

Main Issues

5. The main issues are whether the proposals would preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the CA; whether the proposals would preserve the nearby Grade II* buildings, Grade II listed buildings and Grade II listed RPG, including settings; and the effect of the development on non-designated heritage assets (NDHAs).

Reasons

Appeal Site

6. The appeal site comprises three adjoining buildings located between Sidney Street and Hobson Street, namely 16-17 Sidney Street (Nos 16-17), 18-19 Sidney Street (Nos 18-19) and 21 Hobson Street (the former cinema). These buildings are identified as positive buildings in the Cambridge Historic Core Conservation Area Appraisal (2016) (the CAA), whilst the former cinema is identified as a Building of Local Importance (BLI) and a NDHA. The appeal site also includes Hobson Passage and the western half of the section of Hobson Street fronted by the appeal buildings.

Special Interest and Significance

Conservation Area

7. The CA covers the entire historic core of Cambridge. Generally, the commercial heart is tight and compact with virtually all buildings hard against the back of footpaths giving the narrow streets an intimate character. The buildings of the 'town' (as opposed to the 'gown' colleges) are usually of two to four storeys in height, though along the main streets and the market, five storey structures can be found. The topography of the CA is very flat, ensuring that longer range views are limited except from the open spaces and the few tall buildings, such as church spires, that break the skyline.
8. The CA is made up of a high concentration of listed buildings, with their fine architecture and surviving historic fabric comprising of many of the commercial buildings as well as college buildings, associated with the city's origins as a centre of education for hundreds of years. BLIs, identified by the Council as of interest within the Cambridge context are also key buildings within the CA. All buildings that make a positive contribution to the CA are identified on maps forming part of the CAA.
9. The interrelationship between the wide, open spaces on its fringes and the compact commercial heart comprising of a mix of vernacular buildings and the grand buildings of the university and its colleges are key elements that contribute to the CA's special interest and significance.
10. Nos 16-17 is a Jacobean Revival style building dating from the 1930s when it was constructed as a purpose-built Sainsburys foodhall. It is now in use as a Japanese restaurant. The building is of red brick with stone detailing and extends to three floors. Its detailed chimneys, gables and tiled roofs are distinctive features of the streetscene here and are visible as part of channelled views of Sidney Street seen along Market Street. The front elevation of the building contributes positively to the CA in this regard.

11. The somewhat altered and less refined rear of the building backs onto Hobson Street. This elevation has a negative influence on its character due to the presence of back of house facilities, rear entrances, yard and service doors. Views of this rear elevation are prominent along Hobson Street and it is identified as a 'key negative view' in the CAA.
12. Nos 18-19 is a red brick, five storey building that was formerly a bookshop for a Cambridge bookseller and is now in use as a clothes store. The building has a strong street presence and is visible in the channelled views along Market Street. In these views the 1960s mansard extension is visible and detrimental to the overall positive effect of the building on the character and appearance of the CA.
13. The extent of the facades of Nos 16-17 and Nos 18-19 contribute to an understanding and appreciation of the 1930s redevelopment of this part of Cambridge. They also make a special contribution to the aesthetic values and significance of the CA.
14. Hobson Street is a typically narrow street with a tight sense of enclosure, due partly to a near continuous frontage of tall buildings on the west side. Described in the CAA as 'cliff-like', it nonetheless includes variation in the urban grain as buildings step back and forth in their plots, adding interest to the streetscene. Many of these buildings are early twentieth century in origin with a range of design styles of that period. These include the former cinema, and the Art Deco, 27 Sidney Street (No 27), both of which are identified by the Council as BLI. The east side of the street has buildings which are generally lower in height with irregular and larger gaps between them that are bounded by Christ's College's old boundary walls. These buildings are of a variety of ages but are mostly older than those to the west side.
15. The four storey former cinema building occupying part of the appeal site was constructed in 1930 and, above ground level, features a distinctive white 'faience' tile cladding on its front elevation, punctuated by highly stylised geometric openings. A central entrance is accessed via a wide run of steps below an entrance canopy. The faience cladding wraps around the side elevation forming one side of the narrow walkway of Hobson Passage.
16. The cinema became a bingo hall in 1972. That use ceased in 2009, following which it has stood empty. Its current somewhat dilapidated appearance is reflective of the long period of vacancy. Nonetheless, its imposing frontage and distinctive materials, reflective of the Art Deco period, presents a prominent and readily distinguishable architectural presence that provides visual interest along Hobson Street. Although Historic England has declined to list the former cinema as recently as 2023, it is identified as a BLI within the Cambridge Local Plan (2018) (the LP) and a Positive Feature in the streetscape within the CA.
17. Notwithstanding that the former cinema is clearly vacant, it is an integral part of the twentieth century typology that characterises the distinctive urban grain of the western side of Hobson Street, and makes a positive contribution to the streetscene, and thus to the character and appearance of the CA.
18. The aforementioned Hobson Passage, forming part of the appeal site, is a pedestrian walkway that is a poor quality route, dark, and enclosed by largely blank frontages. It has low quality surfacing and is used as a storage area for large waste bins. These elements impact negatively on the character and appearance of the

CA, but the negative influences are contained within the visual envelope of the passage itself.

19. I conclude, in relation to the aforementioned NDHAs, that they have architectural merit in their own right and make a positive contribution to the CA. They are of moderate significance in that respect. My reasoning in this regard is supported by the content of the CAA which, in addition to designating the former cinema as a BII, also identifies Nos 16-17 and Nos 18-19 as positive buildings within the CA.

Church of the Holy Trinity – Grade II* listed building

20. Located broadly opposite the appeal site, the Church of the Holy Trinity is a parish church dating to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. It is a local landmark, prominently located at the corner of Market and Sidney Streets. The exterior comprises of the smooth rendered body of the church and the roughly dressed nineteenth century stone facing of the east end and tower. There is a small landscaped area around the church with the bulk of the area enveloping it comprising of paving associated with the shopping street. Its special interest and significance derive principally from its age, use as a parish church, its surviving intact historic fabric and thirteenth and fourteenth century architecture, and its spatial relationship with the layout of central Cambridge which reflects the city's evolution over time.
21. The building's railings which define the edge of the churchyard are separately listed at Grade II. Their special interest and significance is primarily associated with their age and architectural design and the church provides their setting.

1 Market Street and 2 Market Street – Grade II listed buildings

22. These are a pair of separately listed buildings located adjacent to the junction of Market Street with Sidney Street. 1 Market Street is an early eighteenth century timber-framed building located over three storeys with an attic. It has a mansard tiled roof, multi-pane sliding sash windows beneath an eaves bracket cornice and parapet. The building is currently in use as a restaurant.
23. 2 Market Street is a narrow eighteenth century building with a nineteenth century frontage. The use of render and the presence of multi-pane sliding sash windows and third floor dormer windows in the roof are unifying features between these two adjoining buildings.
24. Their special interest and significance derive from their architectural and historic interest as buildings of considerable age, incorporating surviving timber-framing. The appeal buildings at Nos 16-17 and Nos 18-19 contribute to the attractive mosaic of commercial buildings within the immediate streetscene, making positive contributions to the settings of 1 and 2 Market Street.

Christ's College Tutor's House – Grade II listed building

25. The Tutors House sits on the opposite side of Hobson Street to the appeal site. It is an early nineteenth century house backing onto grounds associated with Christ's College. Constructed of gault brick, it has a slate roof incorporating a pair of former windows.
26. From the evidence before me, the special interest and significance of the listed building are largely derived from its illustration of mid-nineteenth century domestic

architecture and its historic association with Christ's College, along with its polite architectural style and composition. The former cinema has no historic association with this building and makes no contribution to its special interest or significance.

County Hall – Grade II listed building

27. Dating to 1913, this is an imposing seven-bay Neoclassical ashlar faced three storey civic building. It has a rusticated ground floor with timber multi-pane arched windows with giant order Ionic columns to the central bay that extend across the first and second floors. The building is currently used as student accommodation, backing on to the Christ's College site. Its special interest and significance derives from its imposing neoclassical architecture, and its historic interest as a former civic building.
28. County Hall lies a short distance away from the appeal site and within its visual envelope. However, the more recently constructed commercial buildings on the opposite side of Hobson Street, of which the appeal site forms part, make no contribution to its special interest and significance.

Christ's College 'X' Staircase – Grade II listed building

29. This is a seventeenth century timber-framed building with an eighteenth century front of mathematical tiles. The building is of two storeys plus an attic. Its special interest and significance derive from its architectural composition, surviving historic fabric, evolution over time and its association with Christ's College. The key elements of its setting are the visual and historic association with Christ's College. The former cinema makes no contribution to its special interest and significance.

Christ's College – Grade II Registered Park and Garden (RPG)

30. The RPG occupies the area of Christ's College and bounds the edge of Hobson Street, being predominantly set behind a high wall and the buildings of the Tutors House and Christ's College 'X' Staircase. Trees seen extending above the height of the wall from Hobson Street allude to its presence beyond. The RPG is made up of multiple 'courts' with differing characters created by the use of formal and more informal lawns, sunken features, terraces, pools and more formal gardens. These enclosures, in combination with the college buildings, create intimate spaces that contribute to the character of the RPG. On this basis, its special interest and significance derive from being an example of the historical development of a large College site with buildings, landscape and private gardens.
31. Occasional views of buildings along Hobson Street are possible, however, given the intimate nature of the spaces within the RPG, these are limited to glimpses between buildings and through trees. The former cinema, located alongside the adjacent cliff-like buildings that line the opposite side of Hobson Street, makes no contribution to the special interest or significance of the RPG due to its physical separation, being located beyond the boundary wall and its lack of any functional or historic association with Christ's College.

Proposals and Effects

Conservation Area

32. The proposal would involve the demolition of the former cinema which would result in the loss of a distinctive façade within the CA that contributes to the distinctive

character of the Hobson Street streetscene. However, the principal facades of Numbers 16-17 and 18-19 would be retained along with a roof frontage and chimneys at Nos 16-17, which would limit the visual impact of the development on the Sidney Street streetscene.

33. The development would comprise new ground floor retail units fronting Sidney Street with a ground floor community space alongside Hobson Passage, accessed from Hobson Street. The remaining ground floor space onto Hobson Street and the five floors above would be dedicated office space. The new frontage along Hobson Street would extend across the former cinema's plot and the rear of Nos 16-17 using a mix of pale brick and stone with floor to ceiling glazing giving a vertical emphasis and forming rectilinear bays. There would be active frontages to the ground floor with the community space fronting Hobson Passage. The two uppermost floors (the fourth and fifth floors) would be stepped back from the edge of the building. This would amount to a considerable distance in the case of the top floor. As such, in views along Hobson Street, the height and mass would be reflective of the cinema building that it replaced and that of No 27, alongside which it would be seen.
34. Seen as part of the wider streetscene, the proposed building would maintain the cliff-like appearance of the buildings to this side of Hobson Street. Through the use of materials that reflect those that characterise the CA, the rectilinear emphasis of the elevations and the active nature of the ground floors, the proposed building would constitute a high-quality design. Its architecture would add interest and variety to the streetscene here.
35. I acknowledge that the precise nature of the plots along Hobson Street and Sidney Street has evolved over time. Nonetheless, by extending across the plots occupied by the former cinema and Nos 16-17 as well as abutting the edge of the pavement for almost the entirety of its length, it would erode the existing plot definition and the variation in the position of buildings, resulting in a loss of urban grain within this part of the streetscene.
36. The uppermost fifth floor of the proposed building would comprise of a series of five 'pavilion' gables clad in timber and metal sheet tiles. This would be the tallest part of the proposal. The gables would be set progressively further back contributing to a staggered and somewhat disordered appearance to the roof that would, to my mind, draw the eye. This, alongside their considerable scale would likely prevent them appearing as dormer windows, a common feature of the streetscene here. At this height and, seen above lighter buildings, including the lower floor of this building, and on the skyline, their dark cladding would not appear recessive. Rather, it would add to the prominence of this element on the skyline.
37. I acknowledge that there would be many parts of the CA where this upper floor would not be seen due to screening and the angle of the viewer. However, in the channelled views along Market Street, the roof structure would be seen straddling the two plots, defined by their retained frontages. The pavilion structures would be prominent elements of these views and for the reasons set out above, and, seen against the traditional roof form of the retained No 16-17, would appear incongruous in this setting. This harm would be visible for a considerable stretch of Market Street and from the junction with Sidney Street.

38. I am mindful that there are some buildings within the CA with upper floors that appear discordant in streetscene views. However, evidence of existing harm to the character and appearance of a conservation area is rarely justification for additional harm.
39. Nevertheless, the fourth floor, below the pavilion sections, would include a new brick and stone element above the existing gable at Nos 16-17. The fenestration would reflect that of the existing fenestration on the first and second floors of the retained westerly façade beneath. Mindful that this would be set well back behind the elevation of Nos 16-17, to my mind, it would not dominate the remaining façade and roof structure, instead, it would appear as a complementary structure to that building.
40. Having viewed the site from Christ's Pieces and considered the Visual Impact Assessment provided, I am satisfied that, owing to the distances involved and the considerable screening provided by mature trees, the appeal site would have extremely limited visibility from the open space of Christ's Pieces.

Cambridge Skyline

41. Policy 60 of the LP seeks to protect the existing skyline of Cambridge and sets out assessment methodology. Having regard to the images that have been provided in respect of the impact upon the setting of the designated RPG, the proposal would appear significantly taller than the building it replaced, and those immediately adjacent, in views from the Master's Garden within Christ's College. Notwithstanding that there would be some screening by deciduous trees, the pavilion structures to the uppermost part of the roof would likely be highly evident here and the oblique view of the building that would likely be gained would accentuate its mass and height. It would have significantly greater massing than the adjacent buildings in this view. As such I am unable to conclude that the proposal would not have a detrimental effect on the skyline of this part of Cambridge.
42. As set out above, the scale and design of the uppermost floor of the proposed building would contribute to visual harm to the channelled views along Market Street towards Sidney Street, where it would appear as a prominent and incongruous addition to the skyline. This is irrespective of the visual improvements that would occur to the roof of Nos 18-19.
43. I have viewed the appeal site from the relevant viewpoint of the Church of St Mary the Great, as set out in Appendix F of the LP. I have also been provided with a visual representation of the proposed development within this view. The building would certainly appear larger than the existing building in this view. However, it would be seen as part of a varied roofscape of traditional and modern buildings, many of which include utilitarian additions to the roof. Given the distances involved and taking into account the context, I am satisfied that the appeal scheme would have a negligible effect on this view.
44. Nonetheless, I have found that the proposal would have an adverse impact upon the surrounding historic environment, and, through a combination of its scale, massing and architecture, there would also be an adverse impact on the Cambridge skyline. It therefore follows that the proposal would not represent a high-quality addition to the skyline.

Former cinema

45. The proposal would result in the total loss of the former cinema, an NDHA, and the removal of a distinctive period façade that contributes to the CA's street scene as well as reflecting earlier leisure use within the city.
46. The appellant has provided marketing information to demonstrate that the appeal building as a leisure/community sports facility is no longer needed in line with the requirements of Policy 73 of the LP. The Council was satisfied with the appellant's evidence in this regard. I see no reason to disagree.
47. Whilst the Council consider that the building has not been maintained appropriately, there is sufficient evidence before me to demonstrate that this is not the case and that the building has been maintained in accordance with its status as a vacant building that has been unoccupied for at least 15 years.
48. The appellant has supplied details of a feasibility study considering the potential retention of the façade. This demonstrates that this would present some challenges including the positioning and lack of windows, and floor levels in relation to the retained facades along Sidney Street, as well as issues such as providing step-free access. The study considers that prospective occupiers are unlikely to attach any value to the heritage significance of the retained Hobson Street façade and are likely to prefer a modern, purpose-designed façade. Ultimately, it concludes that retention of the façade would be less feasible, harder to deliver and less viable.
49. However, I find this argument unconvincing, particularly as the lack of viability is not supported by any convincing evidence. In my experience, offices within converted buildings in city centre locations are highly desirable. I am also mindful of the positive contribution that the conservation of heritage assets makes to the local economy, as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework). Moreover, a retained façade would comprise a relatively small part of the building overall and it has not been demonstrated that the glazing of other 'new' parts of the building could not offset the more limited glazing to the retained frontage.
50. The Framework sets out that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource that should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance. The former cinema has a moderate degree of significance, both for its own merits and for its contribution to the CA. The loss of its principal façade would result in a loss of historic fabric and would also diminish the special character and appearance of the Hobson Street streetscene. Whilst I appreciate that it is unlikely that a new use could be found for the building as a whole, the evidence in relation to total demolition is not compelling. On this basis I consider that the scale and extent of loss, would not be acceptable.

Conservation Area – Conclusion

51. For the reasons set out above, namely, the incongruity of the proposed fifth floor in views from Market Street and the adverse impact on the Cambridge skyline, the loss of the former cinema from the streetscene, and the loss of urban grain, the proposal would fail to preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the CA. It would adversely affect its special interest and significance.
52. My assessment is reinforced by the comments of Historic England in this regard which challenged the need for the demolition of the former cinema and concluded

that the proposed building would not relate to the historic grain or plot division and its upper storeys would have a conspicuous and cluttered appearance that would detract from kinetic views along Market Street.

Church of the Holy Trinity – Grade II* listed building

53. Whilst I have found that the uppermost floor of the proposal would be a prominent incongruous addition that would harm the CA, it would not adversely affect the ability to appreciate the special interest and significance of the Church of Holy Trinity. This is, in part, owing to the extent that the proposal would be set back from the retained frontages of Nos 16-17 and Nos 18-19. As such, the structure would appear to be part of a different building beyond the adjacent row of buildings. Therefore, whilst appearing dominant set amongst the surrounding roofs, it would not erode the dominance that the church has on its immediate setting along Sidney Street.
54. Given the limited contribution of the appeal site to the special interest and significance of the Church of the Holy Trinity and taking into account the retention of the existing frontages at Nos 16-17 and Nos 18-19, I am satisfied that the appeal scheme would preserve its special interest and significance having regard to the effect on setting.

1 Market Street and 2 Market Street – Grade II listed buildings

55. The retained frontages of Nos 16-17 and Nos 18-19 would continue to contribute positively to the setting of these listed buildings following the carrying out of the appeal scheme. Given the distance between the pavilion structures on the uppermost floor and the listed buildings as well as their different orientation, the appeal proposal would preserve the special interest and significance of 1 Market Street and 2 Market Street, with particular regard to their setting.

Christ's College Tutor's House – Grade II listed building

56. The loss of the former cinema from its setting along Hobson Street would not adversely affect the setting of the Tutor's House as it does not currently make any meaningful contribution to its special interest or significance. The proposed building would continue the cliff-like form of the buildings along Hobson Street and as such the ability to appreciate or understand the listed building would be unaltered as a result of the appeal scheme.

County Hall – Grade II listed building

57. As set out above, the former cinema contributes little to the special interest or significance of the listed building. Its loss from its wider setting would therefore not affect the ability to appreciate or understand the asset. The appeal scheme, sitting between the more recently constructed commercial buildings on the opposite side of Hobson Street, would maintain the character of this side of the street in views from County Hall.

Christ's College 'X' Staircase – Grade II listed building

58. Similarly, the loss of the former cinema which contributes little to the special interest or significance of Christ's College 'X' Staircase would not adversely affect its setting. The proposed development, continuing the cliff-like appearance of more recent commercial development to the opposite side of Hobson Street, would not

adversely affect the ability to appreciate or understand this asset or its historic association with Christ's College.

Christ's College – Grade II Registered Park and Garden (RPG)

59. Owing to the intimate nature of the RPG and the prevalence of substantial buildings interspersed by trees, the proposed building would be predominantly screened within the RPG. Where seen, this would be in gaps between buildings and through foliage. Based on the VU.CITY Views Shared with Gardens Trust, it would be most prominent from The Master's Garden where it would be seen in a gap between buildings, albeit partly through trees. The building's additional height and mass, in comparison to that of the former cinema would be evident in this view. As set out in my above assessment in relation to skyline, the building would be seen at an oblique angle from here, and, unlike the views along Hobson Street, its mass and upper storeys, including the pavilion structures, would likely be highly evident.
60. On the basis of the VU.CITY outline drawings, it would appear to me that the proposed building would have considerable massing in this view with the side elevations of the upper storeys being visible extending above the majority of the adjacent built form. Based on the evidence that is before me and having regard to my above assessment, I am of the view that the upper elements of the building, including the staggered pavilion structures, would appear imposing in views from the Master's Garden within the RPG. Moreover, these elements would likely appear significantly more imposing than the existing buildings or the other cliff-like buildings that form part of the surroundings along Hobson Street. These imposing structures would likely detract from the intimate nature of the spaces around the Master's Garden.
61. I am mindful of the screening provided by deciduous trees and that the majority of the RPG would be unaffected by the appeal scheme for the reasons above. I have also taken into account the most recent comments of the Gardens Trust who concluded that the proposal would not harm the significance of the landscape, partly on the basis of screening by trees. Nonetheless, having regard to what is before me, the proposal would likely adversely affect the setting of the RPG, which, albeit in a small way, would diminish its significance as a designated heritage asset.
62. Due to its lack of contribution to the special interest or significance of the RPG, the loss of the former cinema from Hobson Street would not adversely affect its setting.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

63. Whilst I have not found any harm to the special interest or significance of nearby listed buildings, I have found that the proposal would fail to preserve the character and appearance of the CA. This would be contrary to the requirements of section 72(1) of the Act¹. In doing so it would cause harm to the significance of this designated heritage asset. The proposal would also result in a more minor level of harm to the significance of the RPG, also a designated heritage asset. Having regard to my above reasoning, collectively I consider the harm to designated heritage assets to be towards the higher end of 'less than substantial' harm as set out in the Framework. Paragraph 215 advises that this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.

¹ Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

64. In this regard I am mindful that the scheme is a joint proposal by neighbouring landowners and presents a potential opportunity for greater benefits than if there were a more piecemeal development of the site. On this basis, minor heritage benefits would arise from the works to the shopfronts of the retained frontages. More significant benefits would arise from the works to the roof structure of Nos 18-19, through the removal of the 1960s roof extension and provision of more sensitively designed dormer windows. This would result in an enhancement to the character and appearance of the CA. Redevelopment of the area to the rear of Nos 16-17 that is currently designated as a key negative view would also represent a visual improvement to the CA. There would also be significant aesthetic improvements to the public realm through the opening up of Hobson Passage and provision of an active frontage here. This aesthetic improvement would represent an enhancement to the CA.
65. There would be economic benefits to the appeal scheme through the provision of much needed office and research accommodation within the city centre. The proposal would result in job creation, both from the construction phase and through the provision of an estimated 268 full time jobs once in operation.
66. The provision of a community space would represent a significant benefit of the scheme which would occupy a sizeable area of ground floor space within the building. Sustainability benefits would arise from the construction methods employed, incorporation of renewable technologies, rainwater recycling and use of SuDS. There would also be benefits in terms of improvements in accessibility.
67. Whilst I appreciate the extent of floorspace required to make the scheme viable, few if any of these benefits are dependent upon the specific scheme before me, including the precise arrangement of the upper floor and roof of the building, which limits the weight I can attribute to them. Nonetheless, these benefits would still carry moderate to significant weight in favour of the appeal scheme.
68. The Framework requires me to give great weight to the conservation of heritage assets. Moreover, any harm to the significance of designated heritage assets should require clear and convincing justification, which, despite the extent of public benefits as evidenced, I find not to be the case in the appeal scheme before me.
69. As such, whilst the public benefits carry moderate to significant weight in favour of the proposal, this is not sufficient to outweigh the considerable importance and weight I attach to the identified harm to the significance of the designated heritage assets.
70. The proposal would fail to preserve the character or appearance of the CA. This would be contrary to the requirements of section 72(1) of the Act. The proposal would also be harmful to the significance of the RPG.
71. The harmful impact would conflict with LP Policies 10c), 60, 61 and 62 and the guidance set out within Appendix F, which together, seek to ensure the historic environment, and the Cambridge skyline, is protected, and heritage assets are preserved. There would also be conflict with the provisions within the Framework which seek to conserve and enhance heritage assets.
72. Similar conflicts would occur with Policy 40 of the LP which supports the provision of office and research development uses within the city centre, providing they are of

an appropriate scale, and Policies 55, 56 and 57 of the LP which together seek to ensure proposals constitute high quality design that respects its context.

73. For the reasons set out above, I consider that the total loss of the former cinema, as a non-designated heritage asset, would not be acceptable having regard to the moderate significance of the building. On this basis the proposal would conflict with Policy 62 of the LP and the provisions of the Framework that seek to conserve heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance. Nevertheless, as is inherent in my above reasoning, even if I were to give no weight to the loss of the non-designated heritage asset, the degree of conflict with the Act, the LP and the Framework in relation to the effect on the CA, including from its loss, would still outweigh the public benefits identified.

Planning Obligation

74. The appeal was supported by a section 106 legal agreement (S106) that was signed and dated on 17 September 2025. Schedule 3 seeks to secure a transport contribution of £125,000 towards the GCP Hills Road corridor improvement scheme and/or for works to relocate the bus stop including the provision of a new bus stop and shelter.
75. However, the sum of £125,000 appears to be based on comparison with what was required at other schemes rather than based on a specific assessment in relation to this development. The Council advances the argument that the majority of future occupiers of the office space would arrive by bus or cycle along Hills Road following a train journey. However, the appellant's Transport Assessment, submitted as part of the application, sets out that just 8.7% of users would arrive by train, which would amount to a very small increase in use of Hills Road.
76. Furthermore, various highways improvements including works to Hobson Passage, Hobson Street in front of the eastern end of Hobson Passage, 21 Hobson Street and the rear of Nos 16-17, form part of the development and would result in an enhancement of the public realm. This would provide significant improvements for pedestrians, cyclists and bus users in the immediate vicinity of the site.
77. As such I am unable to conclude that the proposed contribution would be fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the proposed development, in accordance with CIL Regulation 122 and paragraph 57 of the Framework. In any case, as I am dismissing on other grounds, I need not consider this matter any further.

Other Matters

78. I have had regard to the letters of support from local businesses however this has not altered my reasoning.

Conclusion

79. The proposed development would conflict with the Act, the development plan and the Framework. There are no material considerations of sufficient weight that would lead me to conclude otherwise. Therefore, for the reasons given, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Paul Martinson

INSPECTOR