Historic England

The Examining Authority for the Cambourne to Cambridge Busway Transport and Works Act Order:

Richard Clegg BA (Hons) DMS MRTPI
Geoff Underwood BA (Hons) PGDip (UrbCons) MRTPI IHBC

Direct Dial: 01223 582729

Our Ref: PL00797508

8 August 2025

Dear Sirs,

Historic England was consulted about the Cambourne to Cambridge Busway Transport and Works Act Order Application last year; our response (8 January 2025, our ref.:PL00797508) is available as part of the Public Inquiry documentation.

In our response we stated that 'we are in agreement with the scope and methodology used to assess the potential impact of the proposed development on the historic environment', and that we considered 'that any adverse impact of the proposed development on designated heritage assets would be minimal.'

Broadly, this remains our considered position. It has very recently been brought to our attention, however, that there is a discrepancy between the details shown in some of the submitted drawings, and that the potential impact of the proposals on the significance of the grade II*-listed buildings of Clare Hall may have been overlooked.

We appreciate that the deadline for the submission of evidence has passed. In the circumstances, however, we would like to request that you consider accepting the late submission of this letter as an addendum to our initial response.

**Clare Hall**

Clare Hall occupies a long, thin site bounded by Herschel Road to the north and the private road known as Rifle-range Road to the south; the principal college buildings are towards the east end and span the whole width of the site. These buildings were designed by Ralph Erskine in the mid-1960s and completed in 1969. They are



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remarkable for the imaginativeness of both of their large-scale planning and their design details, and are listed at grade II* for their special architectural and historic interest.

**Significance: Planning (topography and permeability)**

A particularly important aspect of the planning is the way in the which the college buildings address the roads to the north and south. Faced with a flat site, Erskine contrived a slope from north to south by building a sunken car park on the north side and building on top. The buildings to the north are hence relatively high, set back from Herschel Road behind generous planting beds, and accessed by two separate compositions of steps and terraces. This arrangement creates a slightly defensive character to this side of the site, in reference to the long tradition of college buildings.

The south side of the college is entirely different. Erskine's buildings fall from the northern ranges in a series of slopes and terraces, meeting Rifle-range Road at ground level. The buildings here are more domestic in scale, and are primarily of a single storey. The elevations are screened to some extent from the existing metalled track by a row of semi-mature lime trees, but the windows, by design, address the track directly.

Within the complex, Erskine's buildings are divided into three blocks by two pedestrian routes, running straight across the site from north to south. These routes take the form of stepped and terraced streets which descend from the steps on Herschel Road to ground level, where they join Rifle-range Road.

Access to the site at this south side is open, and uncontrolled: there are no fences, gates, or other formal barriers, and the paved pedestrian routes simply meet the grass of the present verge. This radical permeability is in deliberate contrast to the more formal arrangements on the north side of the buildings, and is an important aspect of their character.

**Significance: Detail (drainage and water features)**

Whilst there is no formal boundary to the south side of the college buildings, there is an open drainage conduit, which runs west-east close against the face of the walls. This is no barrier to either the physical or visual permeability of the site, as it is bridged



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repeatedly by simple concrete slabs, is not raised above ground level, and is notably shallow.

It is, however, a key aspect of Erskine's detailed design. One of the notable features of the buildings at Clare Hall is the way in which the rainwater drainage system was made an explicit part of the architectural expression. Erskine designed bespoke downpipes in the form of large timber-clad conduits which empty directly into the drain on the southern boundary; in the centre of the site the roofs of the largest building drain into a larger version of the same downpipes, which forms a playful water feature. These elements are an important part of Erskine's design, both functionally and aesthetically, and they contribute strongly to the significance of the buildings.

**Impact**

The proposed Cambourne to Cambridge busway would run along Rifle-range Road, and would necessitate the heavy remodelling of the current metalled track with broad grass verges to accommodate the busway and flanking path.

It has recently been brought to our attention that this remodelling might necessitate physical alterations to the drainage conduit on the south edge of the site, with associated changes to the access routes to the college from Rifle-range Road. Any such alterations would have a direct physical impact on an important aspect of the college buildings, and have the potential to cause harm to their significance.

Further, even if the proposed remodelling of Rifle-range Road would avoid such physical impacts, changes in this location have the potential to cause harm to the significance of the listed buildings by altering their setting.

**Advice**

Overall, as stated in our January response, Historic England considers that the harm that would be caused to designated heritage assets by the proposals taken as a whole would be 'less than substantial' in the terms of the National Planning Policy Framework, and 'could be satisfactorily weighed against the public benefits of the proposals.' We continue to have no objection to the proposals on heritage grounds.

The harm to the significance of the listed buildings at Clare Hall that would be caused



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by the proposed works cannot be fully assessed until detailed designs are brought forward. Historic England considers, however, that there is potential for some harm in this location, and that this could fruitfully be addressed at this stage in the planning process.

It has been brought to our attention that the deemed planning drawings are potentially misleading at this point in the proposed route. The proposed site plan (sheet 17 of 17) shows that the boundary of the CtoC order limits almost abuts the southern elevation of the college buildings, but is of insufficient detail to determine whether physical works to the drainage conduit would be necessary. As stated above, any works which would physically compromise the drainage conduit would cause harm to the significance of the listed buildings by affecting a key element of their functional and aesthetic design.

The existing and proposed section 17 must be considered inaccurate: it shows a large expanse of open space between the edge of the CtoC order limits and the buildings to the north, which does not exist in this location. The proposed section also suggests that the busway here might be fenced on either side. In this context we note that any works which would compromise the physical and visual permeability of the Clare Hall site on its south side, through the introduction of level changes, barriers, insensitive surfacing materials, road furniture or other clutter, would cause harm to the significance of the listed college buildings by altering the character of their setting.

The proposed treatment of the semi-mature lime trees is also unclear at this stage; if they were to be felled, some harm could also be caused to the significance of the college through the alteration of its setting.

**Recommendation**

Historic England considers that the potential harm to the significance of designated heritage assets described above could probably be avoided or mitigated through careful design. As the application stands, however, there is not sufficient clarity about the details of the intended works to judge their impact. We therefore suggest that the Examining Authority considers asking the applicant to seek to address the issues raised here by providing more detailed design drawings for the relevant part of the route.

As set out above, Historic England does not wish to change its position with respect to the proposal as a whole, or raise any objections. It seemed to us sensible, however, to



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bring these matters to the attention of the Examining Authority whilst the application is still being considered, so that the potential harm can be precluded or mitigated at an early stage.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Tom Taylor
Inspector of Historic Buildings and Areas
E-mail: tom.taylor@historicengland.org.uk



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