Commentary by Prof Jeremy Sanders, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Institutional Affairs

I offer this brief commentary from the perspectives both of the University and of myself as an individual.

Some explanatory background: As Deputy Chair of the West and North West Cambridge (NWC) Estates Syndicate I am heavily involved in many aspects of this exciting development: I provide the most senior academic liaison between the project team and the University, and I am Chair of the Appointments Panel that will choose and recommend architects for Phase 1. As PVC I am responsible for overseeing all aspects of the University’s Human Resources strategy and policy, and that includes ensuring that in future we have attractive affordable accommodation for postdoctoral researchers and other new staff coming to Cambridge. I am also responsible as PVC for liaison with local partners, including the City Council, the County Council, and the Marshall Group (who have generously funded the Sir Arthur Marshall Visiting Professorship of Sustainable Urban Design).

The University is determined that we will create in North West Cambridge a successful, sustainable, mixed-use community as an extension of the City, with buildings and public space of high quality design. We aim to achieve this in part by engaging with a wide range of interested groups within the University and in the wider community in addition to our professional project teams and consultants. We were therefore very pleased that John Ellis, the inaugural Sir Arthur Marshall Visiting Professor, offered — together with Ying Jin — to lead a charrette focussing on the first phase of NWC.

It seems to me that there are at least three major positive outcomes of this charrette:

• It was clear that the students benefited hugely from this experience. They obviously greatly appreciated the opportunity to interact with John, Ying and the many senior individuals from within and without the Department of Architecture who participated, giving so generously of their time and expertise. This is a fine example of how the convening power of Cambridge can enhance the learning experience of our students.

• The final Report contains many ideas that will inform our thinking and the further development of the Master Plan.

• Finally, I personally was delighted to be able to attend all three workshops and to be able to contribute to the discussions and evolving thinking. I have learned a good deal about how architects and designers think and work together, and I now look at urban developments with a more critical and informed eye. This experience will be invaluable in the coming weeks and months as we choose architects and landscape designers. The charrette will therefore make a major contribution to the quality of our decision-making in the short term, and to the success of North West Cambridge for decades to come.

This is also an excellent example of how philanthropy, in this case thanks to the Marshall Group, can make a major contribution to the development of the University and Cambridge more generally.