



URBAN DESIGN COMMENTS

Site Address: Union Park UP4, North Hyde Gardens
Planning ref: 75111/APP/2025/739
Case Officer: Michael Briginshaw
Design Officer: Todor Kuznetsov
Date of comments: 28.04.2025
Proposal: Redevelopment of site to deliver extension to existing Union Park data centre campus consisting of (a) free standing data centre building (b) energy, power, and water infrastructure (c) site access and internal roads (d) site security arrangements (e) hard and soft, green landscaping and (f) other ancillary and auxiliary forms of development

1. Summary

This proposal seeks the addition of a fourth data centre block at North Hyde Gardens, adjacent to the Hayes Village redevelopment. The principle of an additional block has been discussed in previous pre-application meetings, with the applicant making the council aware of their intentions. Given the in-principle support for a data centre use on the wider site and for this extension, the scheme is largely driven by capacity demands, the applicant's business case, and operational requirements relating to access, infrastructure arrangement (construction and long-term maintenance logistics, energy supply, ventilation and cooling), and security considerations.

Given this planning context and the design of the proposed appearance and landscaping, we are broadly supportive of the proposal, which comprises UP4 (main data centre use) and EC4 (ancillary energy centre use).

However, a number of points require further clarification or resolution, including:

- Verified pedestrian-level townscape views (including rooftop plant and services).
- Further justification for the proposed use of concertina razor wire, and exploration of less utilitarian alternatives.
- Confirmation that underground utilities will not impede landscaping delivery or establishment.
- Clarification regarding the "species-rich reinforced grass" specification.
- Strengthening of the canal-side green buffer to mitigate visual impacts, alongside appropriate fence colouring.

2. Townscape Views

The following comments on scale and height are based on pre-application material and unverified CGIs. Verified pedestrian-level views are required for review / assessment to fully demonstrate the visual impacts of the proposed design from key locations.

The submitted TVIA report does not currently demonstrate the visual impacts, providing only a limited selection of key locations and a commentary on significance and potential effects, without clearly evidencing the actual impacts.

As part of a complete TVIA report, we expect to see the following views in the following formats following LVIA guidelines.

AVR Level 3 Views (fully rendered photomontage with photorealistic texture, shading and reflections):

- View 4 (from North Hyde Gardens Bridge)
- View 12 (from across the canal at North Hyde Gardens Bridge)
- View 14 (from across the canal, centre of Hayes Village canal-side public realm)
- View 15 (from across the canal, end of Hayes Village avenue)
- View 18 (from Station Road Bridge, Hayes Town Centre view)
- View 18a (from Station Road Bridge, Hayes Town Centre view)

AVR Level 0 Views (massing or photowire of the proposal within a 3D context photograph demonstrating discernibility or the lack of):

- All remaining identified views.
- For views where the proposal will be indiscernible, we are willing to accept either an utmost height line or maximum extent marker to identify the location and confirm the proposal's limited visibility.

Include all Rooftop Plant, Equipment and Services

As part of the TVIA, it is important that all expected rooftop plant, equipment and services are included to represent an honest, genuine representation of the proposed design, including any rooftop projections.

3. Scale and Height Considerations

The scale and massing of the proposal are primarily driven by the operational requirements and capacity identified by the applicant as necessary for their business case. This informs the number of data servers located within the data halls at the core of the UP4 block, flanked to the north and south by gantries and abutted by servicing and ancillary uses (office, storage, and others) within the AB5 intermediate block, following the principles established with the UP1, UP2, and UP3 blocks. The Energy Centre (EC4) is positioned adjacent to UP4 along the east, facing the canal, making use of the site's triangular form and smaller space requirements, and arranged in line with the principles outlined on pages 22–25 of the DAS.

While the proposal will have a visual impact on the canal-side and in medium- and long-distance views, several design strategies have been employed to help mitigate these effects:

- The proposal has been designed to read as part of the wider infrastructure site already consented and under construction.
- The reduction in scale and height towards the canal, Hayes Village and Hayes Town Centre helps to moderate the visual impact at this more sensitive edge, although the development will remain visible and have impact on the area's character.

- The architectural treatment of EC4 and the AB5 office block addresses the canal-side edge with a more playful and distinctive façade design, introducing animation, opportunities for views in and out, and variation in lighting. EC4 has been designed as a sculptural form intended to provide visual interest and mark this important bookend to the site.

4. Appearance Considerations

The proposal has been designed to remain largely in keeping with the wider redevelopment, while giving special architectural treatment to the EC4 block. While the main body of the extension, the UP4 block, largely mirrors the rest of the development in its appearance, height, massing, and architectural dressing, the Energy Centre (EC4) follows the wider design principles but is treated as a distinct feature / a 'special', with a reduced height and playful visual accents that both break from and complement the established character.

Colour Considerations

In terms of colour, the applicant explored a number of options and it was concluded that the most appropriate approach would be to continue the established rhythm of the wider development. UP4 will utilise a light grey finish (aluminium white RAL 9006), while AB5 and EC4 will adopt a darker anthracite grey (RAL 7016). While concerns were raised that a darker colour might accentuate the scale and massing, it was mutually agreed that maintaining consistency with the overall rhythm of the development took priority. It was also considered that making AB5 and EC4 the same light grey as UP4 could lead to a more monolithic appearance, potentially increasing the perceived scale rather than breaking it down.

Evening Lighting

The inclusion of evening-time lighting for EC4 is also supported, as it is expected to enhance the building's animation and contribute to a more lively and engaging presence throughout the day and night. However, it is important that the lighting is appropriately dimmed to avoid adverse impacts on surrounding biodiversity and to minimise potential visual disturbance to Hayes Village across the canal.

External Cladding Finish – Explore Options for Low-Level Reflectivity Finish for EC4

In addition, it was discussed with the applicant that introducing a slightly more reflective finish for EC4 could help further differentiate it as a special feature within the development. While not seeking a highly reflective or mirrored surface, a low-reflective finish could provide a subtle visual animation, allowing the building to respond more dynamically to natural light and daytime conditions. Although a matte finish matching the wider development would also be acceptable, we strongly encourage the applicant to explore the potential for a more responsive treatment through condition discharge.

5. Outstanding Visual Impact & Mitigation – Green Buffer, Colour of Fence

While we support the design strategies outlined above, it is important to acknowledge that some visual impact will remain and must be considered as part of the overall planning balance in this case.

One opportunity for further mitigation would be for the applicant to work with their neighbour, the Canal & River Trust, to enhance the green buffer along the site boundary. Strengthening the landscape edge - by supplementing existing vegetation with additional tree planting, increasing the overall height and density of the green buffer, and infilling existing visual gaps - could help better screen the development and reduce the perceived scale of the built form from key views.

This is particularly important given that the applicant proposes to introduce a taller and more secure site boundary fence, including features such as barbed wire, which will introduce additional visual impacts not fully represented in the submitted visuals. Furthermore, the density of vegetation shown in the applicant's imagery appears to be significantly exaggerated compared to

existing conditions, where the current green buffer is considerably more visually permeable, thereby limiting its effectiveness in mitigating views of the development as seen from the canal-side.

It is also highly recommended that all elements of the proposed fence facing the canal-side utilises green colour to blend it with the existing green buffer and avoid drawing undue attention.

6. Sound / Noise Considerations

The potential for noise generation from the data centre, the Energy Centre, and associated ancillary functions was raised and discussed during the pre-application process, although no final conclusion was reached. Regardless, it is expected that all plant and operational equipment should be appropriately acoustically treated to ensure there are no significant adverse impacts on the surrounding public realm - including the canal-side and Hayes Village public realm - as well as the residential amenity and accommodation quality within Hayes Village and the wider area.

7. Landscaping

As outlined above, the proposed site layout and the distribution of massing and footprint are largely driven by the proposed capacity, business case, and performance requirements of the data centre use. As a result, the landscaping is highly residual in nature and largely privatised (non-publicly accessible). Consequently, the public benefits of the proposed greening are limited mainly to improvements for staff and visitors, alongside some general urban greening and biodiversity gains, and must be recognised as a material consideration within the overall planning balance.

Through the pre-application process, the potential to locate some landscaping outside the proposed fence line was explored. However, due to security concerns, including Secured by Design guidance and the risk of ASB in the area (particularly rough sleeping and related issues) expanding into publicly accessible spaces, it was concluded that the potential public benefits would not outweigh the security risks. In addition, there was limited interest from the Canal & River Trust, who own and manage the adjoining green buffer, in facilitating or supporting publicly accessible landscaping in this area. As such, the security requirements were considered insurmountable to allow for publicly accessible landscaping in this location.

Given these constraints, the proposed landscaping is considered broadly acceptable and makes the best use of the limited residual land available.

However, there are still some queries which require clarification / confirmation, further information and may benefit from further design development as follows.

Underground Utilities

The relationship between the proposed landscaping and underground utilities remains outstanding. While this issue was raised during the pre-application process, it has not yet been conclusively addressed. It is essential to ensure that underground services do not impede the delivery or long-term success of the proposed greening strategy. In particular, confirmation is required - ideally through a coordinated services plan and supporting sections, or alternatively via annotations on provided plans - that utilities are not routed through landscaped areas in a way that would compromise the proposed planting, and that sufficient soil depth and quality will be provided to support the healthy establishment of trees and other vegetation as proposed.

“Species rich reinforced grass for heavy vehicular turning”

The term “species rich reinforced grass for heavy vehicular turning” is unclear and requires further clarification. It is unclear how landscaping which is meant for heavy vehicular turning can also be species rich and reinforced grass at the same time. We’d like to understand the product / system for this in principle before detailed condition discharge.

Fence Design – Explore Alternatives for Barbwire

While we acknowledge that the proposed data centre use requires a specific level of security, driven by end-user requirements and guidance for nationally significant infrastructure projects, we would welcome further justification for the use of Concertina Razorwire and clarification as to why less utilitarian [alternatives](#) - such as outward cranked toppings, bulldog spikes / croctop / security spikes or similar, or at the very least a simpler outward cranked barbwire solution - are not considered suitable.

Canal-side Greening Buffer & Colour of Fence

For comments regarding the greening of the canal-side buffer and colour of proposed fence, please refer to the section above.

8. Suggested Conditions

- External materials, finishes, and detailed design drawings (including cladding, landscaping features, and boundary treatments).
- Landscaping strategy, including planting quantum, species selection, and distribution.
- Green buffer enhancement plan and delivery (subject to agreement with the Canal & River Trust, if applicable).