

Appendix 3: Oxford Design Review Panel Comments

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6 October 2014

Darren Sumeghy
Capita
71 Victoria Street
London
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Our reference: DCC/0603

Oxford City Council: Littlemore Park

Dear Darren Sumeghy,

Thank you for submitting this scheme to us; we reviewed the proposal on 18 September 2014. For the purposes of the comments below, the parts of the site to the west and north-east of the pinchpoint on Armstrong Road adjacent to the principal green space along Littlemore Brook are referred to as the 'western' and 'north-eastern' areas respectively.

We are pleased to see an overall improvement to the design since the previous design workshop on 8 May 2014. The proposed tenure mix, quantum of housing and building heights across the site are sound. In the western area, we commend the distinct site layout of terraced houses and well-defined street pattern. In the north-east, the Home Zone principles are set to encourage residents of all ages to be more active and use the public space more. At present, the site and landscape strategies should be stronger and more aligned to help unify the west and north-eastern areas and make the overall scheme more cohesive. A landscape strategy for the entire site will help to clarify the purpose of each green space for residents and visitors, and determine how trees and planting define and characterise the streets and spaces in the development. We recommend the Home Zone principles should be expanded across the entire site to create a more appealing residential feel.

Streets and public spaces

The residential character of Littlemore Park as an attractive and safe place to live will be improved by strategically integrating Home Zones across the entire site. The Home Zone format successfully prioritises pedestrians and supports informal outdoor recreation and play. In the western area, Home Zones between the rows of terraced houses would help to achieve a pleasant environment for residents and visitors, and reduce vehicular traffic and noise. Focal points, such as strategically placed trees and visual connections, could help to contain and strengthen the character of the neighbourhood, and we question the positioning of the Home Zone to the north-east as it does not currently lead anywhere. We recommend that the street layout of the north-east should reflect the road pattern



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to the west, potentially increasing the housing density in the north-east, to help the scheme to feel more like a single neighbourhood, reduce the hard surfaces and ensure maximum benefit from sunlight.

The mixture of undercroft, street and private bay parking which helps to reduce the impact of cars across the scheme and make parking areas more legible for residents and visitors is to be commended. However, we recommend further improvements to the parking strategy across the site. The larger parking area along the A4074 on the western part of the site is concerning as it is likely to feel unsafe and unwelcoming both to visitors and residents, especially at night. It is a long distance for residents and visitors to walk between the car park and the houses closer to Armstrong Road. We suggest investigating how these parking spaces can be incorporated between the terraced houses and apartment blocks to ensure that the parking is overlooked and feels safe. More on-street parking could also be incorporated across the scheme to help make the streets feel more active and reduce the size of car parking areas in the neighbourhood. The pedestrian route connecting the principal green space at the junction of Armstrong Road and Sandford Road and the north-eastern part of the site feels unpleasant and unsafe where it crosses the car park, for example.

Landscape strategy

The efforts to make the scheme more appealing with parks and playspaces and trees to help buffer the vehicular noise along Armstrong Road and the A4074 are positive. The conceptual sketches of the green spaces are strong but inconsistencies between the different diagrams need to be resolved to give a clearer steer on the landscape strategy for the entire site. At this stage, it will be important to decide which trees to keep and which to remove to give more purpose and structure to the streets and open spaces.

Creating a public open space at the pinchpoint along Armstrong Road and retaining mature trees is positive. However, a stronger focus at the 'green heart' is needed to draw residents and visitors from either the north-east or west, by creating a defined public space with hard landscaping and seating surrounded by trees, for example. The existing public space to the west of the pinchpoint seems randomly placed and it will be overshadowed by the mature trees. Retaining more existing mature trees along Armstrong Road immediately west of the pinchpoint would better define the route to and view of the principal green space. We also suggest continuing to look for opportunities to make the open spaces feel more secure. The apartment blocks adjacent to the principal public space at the pinchpoint provide good passive surveillance. However, whilst the principle of a green space to the west is sound, this green space is less successful as it is currently much less overlooked increasing the risk of antisocial behavior. Opportunities to increase passive surveillance for this space, from housing for example, and enhancing the emphasis on the principal public space at the pinchpoint, as opposed to the western park, should be explored.

Homes

The housing arrangement could be refined to make the west and north-eastern areas feel more like a whole. To the west, the tight, defined layout of the terraced housing has the makings of a safe, inviting neighbourhood. We also

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welcome the taller apartment blocks in the west which create a suitable visual termination of the terraced housing rows, make use of the topography of the site and protect the terraces from the A4074. In the next design stages, noise attenuation can be designed for the apartment blocks to mitigate the impact of the A4074, supported by acoustic fencing along the boundary to the main road. To help maintain this strong urban configuration, the rows of terraced housing could be extended closer to Armstrong Road which could also help to provide more space to deliver the proposed quantum of houses. The three houses to the south of the nursery currently seem isolated and could be incorporated in the longer rows of terraces when readdressing their configuration. A stronger neighbourhood character could be created with a broader mix of tenures and apartment blocks and terraced housing designed by a range of architects.

Thank you for consulting us and please keep us informed of the progress of the scheme. If there is any point that requires clarification, please telephone us.

Yours sincerely



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cc (by email only)

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Review process

Following discussions with the design team and local authority and a pre-application review, the scheme was reviewed on 18 September 2014 by Joanna van Heyningen (chair), Deborah Nagan and Peter Studdert. These comments supersede any views we may have expressed previously.

Confidentiality

Since the scheme is not yet the subject of a planning application, the advice contained in this letter is offered in confidence, on condition that we are kept informed of the progress of the project, including when it becomes the subject of a planning application. We may share confidential letters with our affiliated panels only in cases where an affiliated panel is taking on a scheme that we have previously reviewed. We reserve the right to make our views known should the views contained in this letter be made public in whole or in part (either accurately or inaccurately). If you do not require our views to be kept confidential, please write to designreview@designcouncil.org.uk.



Littlemore Park, Oxford
Design Workshop
Notes from Thursday 08th May 2014

Thank you for attending Cabe's Design Workshop on Thursday 08th May 2014. We are delighted to comment on the scheme at this stage of the planning process and offer our advice as the proposal continues to develop. Littlemore Park is a fantastic site on which development should be of an exemplary standard to provide spaces and buildings that work with the site characteristics.

The site has a special landscape character and is located adjacent to historic buildings of St. George's Manor. The decision to facilitate access to Littlemore Brook and provide new public open spaces is a good starting point. Despite the limitations of flood risk, adjoining ownership, infrastructure and environmental designations, we encourage you to seize the opportunity that this site offers and develop a site strategy that responds sensitively to the context and creates a stronger identity.

Site context

- The site offers potential to enhance linkages to the Oxford Science Park, local amenities and across the railway line to the wider area. We encourage you to engage with the adjoining landowners early to establish the future access arrangements in principle. Such linkages would potentially impact on the site layout, location of the public open space and requires to be prioritised at the earliest.
- A site section will help to understand the site topography and how buildings could relate to the site landscape features and surrounding building context.
- Understanding what assets are available on the site and how they can enhance the quality of the scheme will help to determine the 'special characteristics' of the project. The site masterplan vision should set out the future of the site in terms of creating a distinctive identity that sets this scheme apart from other housing developments.

Development capacity

- We feel the current proposal requires further testing prior to deciding housing numbers. There is lack of a robust constraints and opportunities analysis in determining the site's development capacity. For example, the parking area as currently shown on the masterplan may not be sufficient to meet the projected need. It is essential to be realistic at this stage and review constraints carefully prior to finalising the proposed development quantum for the site.

Site layout

- A well-defined masterplan vision needs to demonstrate how the proposed design works with the context, builds on this character and develops around the site assets.
- The site access and street grid could be improved by anchoring them to the key site features and testing variations to the internal road layout, distribution of open spaces, density, housing typology, parking arrangements, building orientation and ways to reduce road noise.
- The location and distribution of open spaces will benefit from further work to make the most of the site potential. For example, we are not convinced with the proposed principal square location.
- A potential for a new public open space at the end of Armstrong Road between the Eastern and Western part of the site, could be explored to improve the relationship with SAE Institute. The proposed public open space would also be visible from the street with views towards Littlemore Brook. It could be treated as a home zone with potential public realm improvements along Armstrong Road signposting its new residential character.
- We liked the idea of a buffer zone along Littlemore Brook if its boundary is informed by technical evidence. There is an opportunity here to engage with the surrounding landscape and establish a positive relationship between building and landscape. Buildings proposed near Littlemore Brook should celebrate its presence rather than turning its back. If designed carefully and appropriately sited, five storey buildings are acceptable at this location. For example, Accordia housing in Cambridge could be an interesting precedent study for this site.

Landscape

- The existing tree survey including their root protection zone and proposed car parking requirements should be fully considered prior to identifying the development area. In particular, the edge condition and interface with Armstrong Road is challenging. Retaining mature trees, hedgerows along this road will help to maintain the distinctive site character.
- The landscape concept for the site should be informed by an overarching strategy, including wider green infrastructure and SUDs, flood management, ecology and play space provision.
- There is a scope to integrate parking within the landscape buffer by using the site topography to build apartments around or over the parking area.
- Future maintenance, management cost and responsibilities for green infrastructure should be considered at an early stage to inform quantum and location of the public open space.

Outline planning application

- A site masterplan should clearly communicate what driving factors are generating the design. The outline planning application should set the vision, development capacity, mix and design principles. These design principles will guide the outline planning stage, inform the detailed design and determine how the scheme is most likely to evolve in the future.
- If parameter plans are sufficiently developed and supported with a design and access statement, we feel the design code would not be required at the outline planning application stage. The key parameters for the application could be the layout, building height, development parcels and open spaces.
- The design and access statement should include typical housing layout and typology. It should also establish a quality threshold for the landscape design and public realm consolidated into a landscape strategy for the site.
- Armstrong Road determines the primary access and secondary road grid into the site. Provided that the design principles are fixed, the internal road layout can be determined at a later stage if it is consistent with the overall development strategy.

Attendees

Design Workshop Panel

Fred Manson (chair)
Peter Studdert
Deborah Nagan

Scheme Presenters

Tony Rackstraw	Capita Property and Infrastructure
Darren Sumeghy	Capita Property and Infrastructure

Project Team

Janette Findley	Urban Vision
Sheila Aldred	Oxford University Hospitals NHS Trust

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