

14 July 2015

Felicity Byrne
 Oxford City Council
 St. Aldates Chambers
 109-113 St. Aldates
 Oxford, OX1 1DS

Our reference: DCC/0659

Oxford City Council: Fairfield Residential Home

Your reference: 15/01104/FUL

Dear Felicity Byrne,

Thank you for consulting the ODRP on this scheme; we reviewed the proposal on 29 June 2015. This is our formal response to the planning application.

We continue to support the aim of the applicant to work collaboratively with the adjacent site by using their collective assets and shared vision to create an excellent place for elderly people and post-graduate students to live within shared grounds. Given the immediate site context, the height and quantum of accommodation for the proposed Fairfield Residential Home is acceptable. Designing for a backland site however presents challenges which have not yet been met. We think that the current site layout and architectural response is neither ambitious nor sensitive enough for this unique site. We are therefore unable to support the scheme in its current form and recommend that substantial design work, perhaps with the support of other architects, is needed to overcome weaknesses in the current proposal.

For the purposes of this review letter, Fairfield Residential Home is referred to as "Fairfield" and University College Oxford Student Accommodation is referred to as "Univ".

Landscape design

The attempts to embrace the garden landscape in the site layout are to be commended. The herb garden offers a space for inter-generational contact and provides a rich living experience for residents, and a successful sequence of spaces, routes and uses has been established between Fairfield and Univ. Continuing to develop the walking routes across the site will help to engage the users in the open space. A lighting strategy is needed to ensure the safety of residents and visitors after dark, as well as their pleasurable use of the grounds. Whilst there has been some thought on the collective food production and shared use of the garden, developing more meaningful



opportunities in the landscape design and daily site operations will allow residents to enjoy the garden to a greater extent.

Site layout

We recommend taking a far more ambitious and imaginative design approach to creating a place that is inspiring and enhances the wellbeing of people in later stages of life and staff. The footprint, organisation and massing of the building do not yet sufficiently relate to the garden landscape or surrounding buildings to create a scheme that achieves this. Given the backland nature of the site, the 'Victorian arboretum' feel and the areas available for construction of the buildings, the idea of pavilions set within the landscape is compelling. The proposed site layout is beginning to respond to the site's special qualities, its boundaries and the wider leafy suburban context, in particular to the south and east. However, at present, the proposed building feels bulky and cramped between the Univ student housing, the Arts and Crafts Redcliffe-Maud House and the site boundaries.

The western and northern parts of the site deserve a more sophisticated response. The proposed arrangement of the three blocks for leisure, dining and kitchen facilities does not yet work with the landscape setting or as a legible sequence of spaces, and could be more sensitive in terms of the views from neighbouring sites. This could be achieved, for example, by combining the kitchen and dining room/lounge areas to create two instead of three distinctive blocks. More generous space between the blocks will allow more through views to better embrace the surrounding landscape and strengthen the pavilion concept.

The proposed car parking area to the west of the site is poor and a missed opportunity to create an inviting place. An attractive and positive entrance courtyard with car parking should prioritise pedestrians over the car, capitalise on the successful design of the manager's house and use the kitchen/dining building to frame the entrance space. Better hard and soft landscaping is required in the design of this space. We recommend that the kitchen/dining building is redesigned to respond to this opportunity and to achieve better service access from the west. The bin store and service yard to the south of the kitchen block within close proximity to the Redcliffe-Maud House is not ideal.

Entrance experience

Given the proposed location of the building in a backland site, the experience of entering the home is key to its success. The new Gateway Square is welcoming and has the potential to provide a high quality entrance court. Such high quality public realm should be carried through along the access road from Banbury Road to the site. This key route into the site should be designed as a pedestrian priority with careful hard and soft landscape design, and effective lighting without appearing to be dominated by service vehicle movements, parking and drop-offs.

The main entrance to the building could be more prominent and visible when approaching it from Banbury Road. We recommend revisiting the layout of the entrance hall to allow a more generous entrance, together with the canopy design to signal the building entrance more effectively.



Elevations

Whilst we appreciate that the elevations have been greatly changed we feel that a significant redesign, driven by clear design rules and informed by the context, is needed. The proposed elevational treatment appears superficial and we question whether it is appropriate for all the building elements. The proposed frame of reconstituted stone and timber panels appears to be 'stuck-on' without a clear logic informed by its use or orientation. For example, the frame should be used in a meaningful way to support balconies or provide solar shading for the southern elevation. For the residential elements of the project, balconies would provide a softer relationship between the building and its landscape, and allow the residents direct contact with the outdoors from their rooms. Any potential health and safety concerns can be addressed through careful design. In refining the overall elevational language, the impact of the southern elevation, currently treated as of secondary importance yet visible directly from the Univ courtyard and the surrounding landscape, should be addressed. By contrast, the design approach to the manager's house is to be commended as it is simple and elegant, successfully combining the architecture of the old and new.

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

Victoria Lee
Cabe Advisor, Design Council

cc (by email only)

Kevin Minns	Fairfield Residential Homes
Nick Caldwell	Oxford Architects LLP
Steven Sensecall	Kemp and Kemp LLP
Ben Croot	LDA Design

Review process

Following a site visit and discussions with the design team and local authority, the scheme was reviewed on 29 June 2015 by Joanna van Heyningen (chair), Dan Jones and Jessica Byrne Daniel. These comments supersede any views we may have expressed previously.

As this scheme is the subject of a planning application, we will publish our views on our website, www.designcouncil.org.uk



