

London/Latimer Road, Oxford

Design Workshop

Notes from 16 October 2014

Thank you for attending Cabe's Design Workshop on 16 October 2014. We welcome the opportunity to offer our advice at this stage and look forward to engaging in future dialogue as the proposal develops. We welcome student housing on this site as it is related to other civic, academic and commercial uses in the local area, and we feel that private housing on the site is also appropriate. The proposed building height across the scheme works in this context. However, we do not support the design in its current form. The building feels cramped on the site due to the proposed quantum of housing and seems to be somewhat bland in its design. A clearer design strategy for the building configuration, architectural treatment, internal layout and open spaces is needed to ensure that the distinct character of the site is reflected in the building design and quality internal and external spaces are provided for all residents. We recommend that the design team should develop the scheme through design studies with sketch options and on-going consultation with the local planning authority. We offer the following suggestions in taking the design principles forward.

Landscape and shared space

- A landscape strategy that incorporates a richer aboricultural mix is needed across the site. Look at ways of making the open spaces more characterful, accessible and usable with more defined areas for planting and seating. Explore how the private open space along London Road can be treated more creatively to make this space more welcoming and usable. Incorporating seating and more hard landscaping along the pavement will create a resource for local community.
- Consider how to make the open spaces for the student and private housing feel more private as the current arrangement of the student courtyard and garden for the private housing seems contrived and somewhat unsecure. Enhance the character of the courtyard, which currently is likely to be overshadowed and dark, by incorporating larger areas of hard landscaping and seating for groups to congregate. More hard landscaping will also help in the overall maintenance of this space. Extending the look and feel of the courtyard into the main entrance foyer of the student block will help to create a stronger focal point in the building.

Building configuration

- Continue to explore the height and massing to determine if/how additional space can be provided to alleviate the strain on the internal and external spaces. Taller building elements can be acceptable on the site provided that that the design is appealing, contextual and built to a high standard with good quality materials and detailing. Variations in height and possibly roof types will also contribute to a more interesting articulation of the building.



- Consider how the whole building can be used more efficiently to provide better quality residential units and open spaces; large outdoor spaces can be provided for the students on the roof, for example.
- Separating the student and private housing blocks can help to make the building functions more distinct and legible for residents, visitors and the local community. A clear separation in the building form and/or elevational treatment of these buildings can also improve the sense of security for both blocks and contribute to the commercial viability of the private housing units. A natural break between the private and student blocks can be created following the stepped frontage along London Road, for example.
- Continue to consider if/how car parking can be provided for the residents living in the private housing, either as on-site bay parking or allocated street parking. Where on-site car parking is possible, explore how it can be incorporated without hindering the quality of the residential accommodation or public spaces. Should on/off-site parking not be feasible, other types of users could be explored who may be more likely and able to use public transportation, such as young professionals.

Architectural treatment

- Look at the trees as significant structuring elements of the site. Envisaging the trees as “pieces of natural architecture” through a stronger understanding of their height, width and seasonal character and drawing them more accurately in plan and elevation will help to inform the articulation of the façade and material palette. Think about how the London Road will work with the trees and how a restrained, understated façade can work as a background for the trees.
- Creating a building that is inspiring in its design will help to reflect the prominent site location and add to the character of the townscape. The set back and design of the top floor with metal cladding, for example, is not contextual and appears gratuitous. Explore a more homogenous elevational treatment across all floors and/or defining key design elements, such as parapet walls.
- Continue to develop the character of the building along Latimer Road as it is the point of arrival for the majority residents and visitors to the site. A more legible entrance can be developed with more hard landscaping and no trees, for example. We feel that the large, overhanging trees on the opposite side of the road provide sufficient greenery to this main entrance and elevation.
- The junction of London Road and Latimer Road is a focal point that could be more celebrated in the building design. Increasing the height or using the materials more creatively at this corner, for example, will help to add vitality and interest to the street.

Internal layout

We welcome the variety of clusters of student rooms with shared communal living spaces. However, the student rooms on the basement floor along London Road are not appropriate at this

level and in this position as they will experience poor levels of daylight and have no direct views to the outdoors as a result of the small north-facing windows above head height. Continue to explore the configuration of the rooms on each floor and internal layout to ensure that views and maximum daylight is provided. Strategically position communal living spaces in the building to achieve more sunlight, with larger windows where needed.

Sustainability

Develop environmental strategies to promote sustainability through use of renewables, shading and SUDs. For example, the roofscape can be used for solar panels, brown roofs and green roofs that support biodiversity; likewise, green walls can provide habitats for nesting.

Attendees

Design Workshop Panel

John Lyall (chair)
Deborah Nagan
Eddie Booth

Scheme presenters

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|----------------------|------------------|
| Adam Carroll | CJCT architects |
| Michael Mansell | Frontier Estates |
| David Morris | Frontier Estates |
| Roger Smith | Savills |
| James Stewart-Irvine | Savills |

Local Authority

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| Fiona Bartholomew | Oxford City Council |
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Cabe at Design Council staff

Thomas Bender
Victoria Lee

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.

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