

CONFIDENTIAL

London/Latimer Road, Oxford City Council

Design Workshop

Notes from 4 December 2014

Thank you for attending Cabe's Design Workshop on 4 December 2014. We are pleased to continue engaging on this scheme and find much to applaud since our last design workshop on 16 October 2014. The proposal is significantly improved by the bold design changes to the building configuration. We commend the initiative to separate the student and private blocks and think the building is beginning to work successfully both internally and with the streetscape, in particular on London Road. In general, the proposed height and massing are sound. With further refinement, the scheme has the makings of a successful architectural piece that helps to marry the academic, residential and civic character of the local area. We offer the following suggestions in taking the design principles forward.

Building configuration

- The increased building height at the corner of both streets helps to give this corner prominence, whilst lower building heights towards the west and south help to respond to the surrounding townscape.
- Whilst we welcome the overall building configuration, the student building feels uncomfortably close to the root protection area of the large mature trees on London Road, particularly at the northern corner of the building. More technical information on the footing of the building at this corner and further site investigations via trial holes on the scope of the tree roots is needed as a priority. We recommend that opportunities are explored to create a wider gap between the trees and the building.
- The placement of the private housing on the site boundary to the south needs particular attention at this stage. Investigate the detailed nature of the boundaries and discuss access arrangements for future construction and on-going servicing works with the neighbours.

Elevations

- The elevational approach across the scheme has significantly improved; the buildings now appear calmer and more statuesque, in particular along London Road.
- Continue to explore in more detail how the elevations could be a simple and calm backdrop to the existing mature trees on London Road. Think about their size and placement given their north-facing aspect and the likelihood that views and daylight is likely to be obstructed by the tree foliage, particularly for rooms on the upper floors when the trees are in full bloom. We welcome the use of fixed and openable window systems.
- Explore how the depth of windows can help to animate intriguing the simple, planar elevations, for example, using full brick width reveals.



CONFIDENTIAL

- The building mass on London Road is successfully broken down by the three separate facades. Think about how to incorporate the westernmost part of this elevation in this design approach as it currently appears like unsympathetic add-on.
- Explore how the main entrance on London Road can be more subtle and elegant, and be more in keeping with the current elevational approach. At present, it does not appear to belong to either of the two adjoining sections of the elevation.
- Treating the ground floor like a loggia could be interesting and also help to inform the elevational approach on London Road.
- The student block elevation on Latimer Road will benefit from further work. Currently it appears commercial and seems overbearing on the surrounding residential context. Continue to investigate the proportions of the façade in relation to the size and placement of the openings to help break down its scale. Explore coupling larger areas of the façade in larger horizontal tiers, for example.
- Continue to address the relationship between the London and Latimer Road elevations and how they meet at the building corner. At present we feel this is yet to be resolved. Investigate how the cornice across both elevations could be maintained across both elevations.
- The proposed elevation of the private block is successful. It feels in keeping with the student block whilst having a strong residential character. Address the southern elevation as it will impact significantly on the existing neighbouring care home. A calm elevation with high quality materials is crucial and some planting, such as a green wall, could be appealing.

Internal courtyard

- The internal courtyard shows the beginnings of a lively, attractive space for staff and students. The direct views from London Road through the lounge to the internal courtyard is particularly intriguing.
- The initial design approach to the internal elevation is sound. Consider how the internal elevations could be more in keeping with the character of the external façade, for example using glazed brick. A stronger end point should be created in the design of the north-facing wall.
- The long and narrow access route that divides the scheme from Headington School feels somewhat unpleasant. Consider if/how this space could be wider and more creatively designed, incorporating planting in the dividing wall for example.

Internal layout

- The improvements to the internal corridors are to be applauded. They are now more efficiently arranged with less back to back rooms.

- Explore how corridors accessed by bedrooms could be more private. At present students must walk past private rooms to access the communal room at the end of the corridor. Relocating the communal room closer to the lift and staircase will reduce noise and disruption and the number of private rooms facing the internal courtyard, especially at lower ground floor level.
- Explore how the communal spaces could feel more active by considering the range of recreational activities for this space.

Public space and entrances

- The student housing to the north predominantly accessed via London Road and private housing to the south accessed via Latimer Road works well.
- We also welcome the secondary entrance on Latimer Road for students and services. Consider how this entrance can be linked to the main entrance on London Road via an external pedestrian route as this is likely to be a key thoroughfare for students.
- Access to the bike storage at lower ground floor in the student block is acceptable but not ideal. Look for ways to make access to this space easier for students to access, by locating the bike storage closer to the lift, as it will encourage students to continue to cycle. Bike parking facilities in the forecourt on London Road will cause unsightly clutter and should be avoided in this key space.
- Improve the character of the entrance forecourt on London Road using hard and soft landscaping to clearly mark the building entrance. High quality materials and detailing in this space will be crucial. Consider how wayfinding could also be improved with signage that matches the look and feel of the building and the mature trees.
- Look at opportunities to extend the look and feel of the forecourt into the building to better unify the outdoor and indoor spaces, and make the lounge feel more special. This could be achieved by incorporating hard landscaping, such as paving stones, in the lounge. More hard-wearing materials in the lounge would also be more resilient to frequent footfall and moving bikes through this space.
- The scale and placement of the car park at the rear of the private housing seems to work well on the site. However the vehicular route from Latimer Road into this space needs careful attention as it could be dark, unsafe and uninviting, especially at night. Widening the road could also make it feel more open and allow cars to pass more easily; lighting, good quality hard landscaping and detailing will also improve its appearance and make it more resilient to wear and tear. Gates will also help to prevent this car park space from becoming a space for antisocial behaviour and flytipping. The size and configuration of windows looking onto this space also needs to be addressed in more detail.

Landscape

- The initial landscape approach is sound. A full detailed landscape strategy on the placement, species and future management of trees and soft landscaping across the scheme is needed. Look at ways of incorporating more planting on London Road, and assess the character of the trees on Latimer Road.
- The green roof in the student block is an attractive new feature of the scheme. Consider how the roofscape could be more characterful with different types of shrubs and planting that better contributes to the local ecology and biodiversity. Explore how more photovoltaic panels can also be sensitively incorporated as solar heating for the scheme will be preferable if CHP is not provided on site. It seems to be a missed opportunity to restrict access onto the roof; health and safety concerns can be addressed through careful design.
- The trees in the private car park work well as they help to soften the impact of the tarmac. Trees in the private gardens will also be beneficial to future residents. Where possible, look at ways to increase the amount of green space, by reducing the number of car parking space for example.

All drawings need to be updated in the planning application package.

Attendees

Design Workshop Panel

Keith Bradley (chair)
Deborah Nagan
Eddie Booth

Scheme presenters

Michael Mansell	Frontier Estates
Michael Mansell	Frontier Estates
Adam Carroll	CJCT
Roger Smith	Savills
James Stewart-Irvine	Savills

Local Authority

Fiona Bartholomew Oxford City Council

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.

This page is intentionally left blank