

21 September 2015

Michael Mansell and David Morris
Frontier Estates
2 Bedford Street
Woburn
Bedfordshire
MK17 9QB

Our reference: DCC/0647

Oxford City Council: London/Latimer Road, Oxford

Your reference: 15/00858/FUL

Dear Michael Mansell and David Morris,

Thank you for presenting this scheme to us at a planning application review meeting on 13 August 2015. This is our formal response to the updated planning application drawings, presented at the review, following your discussions with Oxford City Council at the planning application stage.

We continue to support student accommodation on this site which responds to both the civic and residential character of Headington. There has been an improvement in the design for London/Latimer Road since the last ODRP design workshop on 4 December 2014. The client and the design team are to be commended for taking on board the panel comments and resolving a number of elements of the scheme, particularly aspects of the site layout. There are, however, some aspects of the design that will benefit from further resolution, namely the impact of the energy centre on the internal spaces and the elevational treatment particularly on Latimer Road. In addition, an assessment of the full planning application on this prominent site in Headington requires more detailed drawings and design information. The success of this scheme will greatly depend on the quality of the detailed design, materials specified and construction. Ongoing involvement of the design team on the scheme during construction, for example, will provide support to address these issues.

Landscape design and public realm

In principle, the landscape design approach is successful. The entrance arrangements for the London and Latimer Road entrances feel safe and are inviting; they could be made more so if the external materials extend into the entrance of the building. This will help to achieve a welcoming and attractive access point which is sufficiently robust to accommodate the high user traffic expected in this entrance space. The internal courtyard has the potential to be a pleasant place for students and staff. We question the benefit of the boundary wall along London Road as the proposed green space already forms a barrier between the street and student accommodation; the boundary could



be further defined by planting. A strategy for protecting the mature trees along London Road and the existing tree planting in the adjacent school site during construction is required.

The rear gardens to the private housing have an awkward relationship to the vehicular service access and communal student courtyard. Further consideration should be given to these gardens to provide the residents with a more rational and functional external amenity space.

Internal layout

The internal layout incorporating clusters of student rooms with shared facilities is working well. The energy centre, however, will benefit from further thought. Whilst relocating the energy centre from south-west of the site at the rear of the proposed private housing to the lower ground floor of the student building is sound, its close proximity to the student rooms is concerning due to noise and disturbance as a result of frequent access and maintenance. Access to the energy centre for large and heavy machinery via the ground floor is likely to be inadequate and needs to be fully thought through. Careful detailing, including sound proofing of the energy centre and adjacent student rooms, will be required.

The proposed bike storage on the lower ground floor and access via a ramp within the central entrance staircase is far from ideal. This will provide an awkward bottleneck for users accessing the lower ground floor facilities and bike store, particularly at peak periods, and is also likely to result in ongoing damage to the stair and stair wells. Alternatives should be explored, such as swapping the bin and bike store with the energy centre, to provide a more robust solution which addresses the functional, service and maintenance requirements of each space and to ensure the in- and out-door communal spaces are not cluttered with bikes in the future.

Elevational treatment

Whilst the elevational treatment has improved, a building of this scale in this prominent location in Headington requires a more confident elevational approach in keeping with its characterful setting. The gridded façade along London Road helps create a simple backdrop to the mature trees and the three pavilions work well in breaking up this long façade. However, the elevational approach along Latimer Road and at the junction of London and Latimer Road is underdeveloped and the proposed elevational drawings in general are still diagrammatic. The building at this key corner should be more special, for example, to respond to the adjacent main road and large trees. In addition, the westernmost corner of the building along London Road feels disjointed and should be more effectively incorporated in the elevational treatment. More detail on the fenestration is needed; this should clearly illustrate the fenestration language proposed and show window frames and fenestration bars to accurately reflect which panes are fixed and opening. This detail will be important as it will greatly influence the appearance of the glazing, cladding and elevations. In developing the design of the fenestration consideration should be given to low level window panels where desks are located in front of windows in student rooms. In order to ensure adequate thermal comfort and daylighting there also needs to be a successful balance between solid and void.



Given the proposed simple palette of materials, the colour and quality of the materials will be crucial to the building's overall appearance and its long-term durability and maintenance. The use of brick is sound but the proposed zinc cladding on the upper floors seems a generic approach and apologetic in terms of trying to reduce its visual impact. A more integrated solution should be developed and care should be taken to show material thicknesses that allow for excellent thermal insulation in the window panels as well as the masonry walls. Further details should be provided on all building materials and their durability as well as key junctions in the proposed buildings.

The proposed staggered layout for the private housing provides a successful transition between the new student accommodation and St Luke's Nursing Home. In keeping with this approach, the elevational treatment of the private housing could appear more different to the student accommodation to relate more strongly its use.

Sustainability

The ambition to achieve thermal comfort and efficiency primarily through the building fabric is commendable and should be detailed in the planning application. In this respect, we suggest the design team considers the fenestration in more detail, including the effect of overheating as a result of the south-facing communal rooms with floor to ceiling height glazing. Noise from London Road is also an important consideration. Finally, further initiatives to support biodiversity and sustainability should be investigated and integrated in the building design. We urge the client and design team to consider brown roofs for photovoltaic panels and green roofs for planting.

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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Design Review presentation material

Drawings presented at the ODRP Design Review included the application submission drawings and updated drawings following discussions with Oxford City Council at the planning application stage.

Review process

Following a site visit and discussions with the design team and local authority and a pre-application review, the scheme was reviewed on 13 August 2015 by Joanna van Heyningen (chair), Paul Appleby, Eddie Booth, Tom Holbrook, Deborah Nagan and Mark Swenarton. 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.