

### Oxford Brookes University, Oxford

#### Design Workshop

Notes from 26 March 2015

Thank you for attending the ODRP Design Workshop on 26 March 2015. We welcome the opportunity to offer our advice at this stage of the planning process and look forward to engaging in future dialogue as the proposal develops. The general approach is promising and we find many aspects compelling. Refurbishing the existing building and giving it a new lease of life is commendable, both in terms of sustainability and continuity for Oxford Brookes University. The recently completed Abercrombie building and the high standards of the new outdoor spaces demonstrate the client's commitment to quality and we look forward to seeing the detailed design of the current scheme evolve further. We have a number of comments to make regarding the landscape design, the approach to upgrading the existing façades and the internal organisation.

#### Landscape design

- Think beyond the redline boundary to minimise the impact of Headington Road and improve the relationship with Gypsy Lane. Set up an enclosure to protect the campus from road noise and define zones that are private and quiet versus active and animated public spaces. Use the trees or introduce a stronger gesture, for example a curved wall, to achieve this.
- Safeguard the 1960s quality of the place and strengthen the idea by designing spaces that are both contemporary and reflect the 150 year history of the university; perhaps the horizontality of the 1960s buildings can give cues for the landscape design.
- Investigate how to improve the spaces between the buildings and back-of-house areas by giving them their own sense of place to animate them, for example use of materials, detailing, texture, colour, plants, light and sunshine, or surviving parts of history embedded in the site.
- Explore how the material palette of the outdoor spaces, signage and graphics across the campus can complete the overall appearance of the university; use this potential for branding and creating a feeling of arrival.
- Commission a landscape architect to support the design development at the earliest stage

#### Façades

- Explore how the refurbishment of the buildings can be used as a design generator to combine environmental improvements and a new, ambitious and bold appearance for the university while protecting the elegant 1960s horizontality of the existing façades; accentuate the horizontal feel of the Clerici building for example by addressing the plant facilities on the roof and work in a more aspirational way with the concrete frame of the buildings to retain the "1960s-ness". Repeating the approach and branding of the recent refurbishment of the Abercrombie building and new main entrance would be unfortunate.
- Investigate how to translate the aesthetic complexity of the existing façades into something new; avoid introducing new façade features that do not relate to the structure of the existing



building, for example the proposed ground floor treatment with the upper storeys floating which does not appear to be functionally or aesthetically appropriate.

- Define which elements of the existing buildings are more important than others, the entrance and the old library block for example, and prioritise expenditure here.
- Enhance the setting of the former library and work with its concrete elevations and solid, gritty character.

**Building organisation**

- Explore different ways to accentuate the entrances into the building from Gipsy Lane; the proposed orange frame is not fully successful.
- Safeguard the 1960s quality of the interiors including their spatial generosity, for example the double height spaces and link connections.
- Reassess the lecture hall and explore how to retain its importance, for example by preserving the ceiling height and using a landscape solution to negotiate the level differences.
- Continue to explore how to minimise noise across the buildings and create a calm acoustic environment.

**Attendees**

Design Workshop Panel

Joanna van Heyningen (chair)  
 Dan Jones  
 Deborah Nagan  
 Eddie Booth

Scheme presenters

Sue Holmes	Oxford Brookes University
Adrian Stokes	Oxford Brookes University
Hamish McMichael	BGS Architects
James Roach	BGS Architects
Tim Jervis	Turner & Townsend
Rick Lee	ARUP
Neil Hooton	ARUP

Local Authority

Murray Hancock	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](mailto:designreview@designcouncil.org.uk).

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