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Council**

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23 July 2015

Amir Ramezani
 Avanti Architects
 361-373 City Road
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 EC1V 1AS

Our reference: DCC/0648

Oxford City Council: Florey Building

Dear Amir Ramezani,

Thank you for presenting the scheme at the follow-up ODRP design review on 2 July 2015. We are pleased to continue our involvement in this significant scheme for Oxford and look forward to the completed works. The scheme has progressed significantly since the last ODRP design review on 16 October 2014. The proposed design is responding well to the 21st century needs of Queen's College students while building upon the architectural quality of Stirling's work. We applaud the heritage report which is testament to the design team's thorough analysis of the listed building. The changes to the floor plans of the Florey Building including the additional rooms at ground floor, and the improved access arrangements and landscape design across the site are successful. Whilst the proposed annex building has also improved, the design could be even more distinct to the Florey Building to ensure a fully successful scheme. It is important that the design, detailing, materiality, and even colour of the new elements of architecture should be distinctive and consistent for both the annex building and the ground level insertions to the existing Florey Building. This would then confidently delineate where the work of Stirling finishes and the new architecture interacts with it.

Public space and landscape

The proposed landscape design is highly commendable as the open spaces – the riverside walk, central courtyard and the public space to the south – are now more distinct and their uses more defined. A pleasant route is beginning to emerge across the site that links these outdoor spaces. We encourage the team to continue to develop the character and use of the outdoor spaces for 21st century university students and define site-wide route in the treatment of the hard and soft landscaping.

The access improvements and the public space to the south of the Florey Building, particularly through strategic discussions with neighbouring landholders on the shared use of the vehicular road from St. Clement's Street, are to be greatly congratulated. Removing the car parking, repositioning the entrance gate and providing new hard



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landscaping and signage create a legible, safe and inviting main entrance. The new planting beds to the west and east of the Florey Building add greenery and soften the impact of the hard surfaces.

The landscape design of the central courtyard is in keeping with Stirling's original proposal and the meadow-like species and potted plants reflect the arid character of this space. The efforts to maintain and enhance the original truncated handrails that form one edge of the central courtyard are commendable as they are key sculptural features of Stirling's original concept. Whilst the combined ramp and steps connecting the central courtyard to the riverside is a useful feature, ensuring this route is easy to use and safe, particularly at the junctions between these elements, will be key to its success.

Stirling's vision of the riverside walk is successfully reinterpreted in the current design proposal. The new elements of the riverside walk work well as they are distinct from the listed elements of the Florey Building, for example, the proposed grey paving stones alongside the terracotta brick wall. The riverside location is successfully expressed in the choice of hard and soft landscaping, particularly the proposed weeping willow that provides a focal point along the riverside walk and the marshland planting. We suggest considering the growth and long-term maintenance of the weeping willow at this stage and removing the proposed planting bed that obscures the A-frame along the riverside. More detail is required on the treatment of the edge along the river, such as railings and lighting, to ensure it is safe for all users, particularly at nighttime and in the winter months. A collaborative initiative by the Oxford City Council, Queen's College, neighbouring landholders and other key stakeholders to clear rubbish in and alongside the river will also help encourage rest and relaxation along the river, as well water-based leisure activities such as punting.

Florey Building

The design interjections to the Florey Building have been sensitively handled and preserve the quality of the listed building. The changes to the ground floor student accommodation – moving the inner wall of the cloister, relocating some ground floor rooms and providing a wider gap between the ground floor units and the C-shaped building above to highlight the existing A-frames preserve the effect of a 'floating' building – are to be commended. Lifting the ground floor rooms onto a plinth is also a positive change; a different colour or material could help to further differentiate the plinth from the original elements of the Florey Building. Punctuating the ground floor elevation facing the central courtyard with windows is successful as it provides outdoor views to the north and helps to activate the central courtyard without undermining the original concept. Continuing to explore the size and placement of these windows – possibly creating more or larger openings – could further strengthen this concept. The improvements to the main building entrance, including the level changes, create a more legible and pleasant entrance experience. Stirling's narrow entrance, on the other hand, creates a more private and secluded courtyard as the open space is more hidden. The proposed plant and photovoltaics on the roof, and changes to the breakfast room are acceptable ensuring the existing building functions successfully as 21st century student accommodation. It is unlikely that the original and replacement ceramic tiles will look the same in terms of their appearance and texture; both types of tiles



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are likely to weather differently over time creating a patchwork effect. We urge the team to take great care in assessing and selecting the new ceramic tiles.

Florey Annex

The proposed annex building is now more compelling and shows architectural merit in its own right but could be refined further. The dark crimson hues of the vertical metal cladding contrast well with the horizontality of the terracotta tiles of the listed building. However, some aspects of the proposed annex building still appear too referential to the Florey Building. An even braver design approach – one that matches the design rigour without recreating the design of the Florey Building – will help to ensure a confident building. Emphasising the new elements even further, in the proposed colour, scale and texture of the materials, will help to ensure the annex building is a distinct new addition to the site. We suggest exploring a simpler building by incorporating a parapet wall to calm the roofline and by revisiting the shape and scale of the proposed windows. Currently the proposed projecting windows on the roof and to the west detract from the simple building form. Conversely, the vertical window on the east corner of the annex building seems appropriate. We recommend a nighttime view of the Florey Building and annex building to ensure coherence between the two within their surrounding context.

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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Paul Madden	The Queen's College, University of Oxford
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Fiona Bartholomew	Oxford City Council
Richard Peats	Historic England



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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 2 July 2015 by John Lyall (chair), Dan Jones, Deborah Nagan, Eddie Booth, Jon Rowland and Neil Deely. These comments supersede any views we may have expressed previously.

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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 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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03 November 2014

Amir Ramezani
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Our reference: DCC/0648

Oxford City Council: Florey Building

Dear Amir Ramezani,

Thank you for presenting to Cabe's review meeting on 16 October 2014. We are delighted to review this proposal and look forward to continuing our involvement in the scheme as the design progresses. The refurbishment of the Florey Building is timely as it is in need of a general uplift and we commend Queen's College on taking on this worthwhile endeavour. We applaud the extensive analysis and sensitive design approach to this outstanding building that responds to James Stirling's vision and satisfies the needs of the students and college today. The principle of additional student rooms to accommodate a full year group is sound. However, we urge the design team to clearly define which building elements need to be retained to determine the alterations that can be made to achieve the full potential of the scheme. The design rationale for the new building elements that wrap around and dive under the listed building is interesting but requires further attention, and a landscape strategy is needed to improve the relationship between the existing building, new elements and surrounding context.

Design philosophy

A clear philosophy and rigid set of criteria is needed to respond to the complex requirements of the listed building. It appears that the design philosophy is less developed than the architectural thinking. The design philosophy will help to inform the design approach to new and existing elements, and the criteria will precisely define if/what building or public space alterations can be made and to what extent. For example, are there aspects of the listed building or open space that can benefit from alterations that improve their use, such as the breakfast room on the lower ground floor?

We do not think that the new structures are compelling pieces of architecture in their own right yet. They should work with – not replicate or compete with – the listed building. At present, the proposed structures neither have the same look and feel of the listed building nor are they different enough to be read as new elements. It is unlikely that the original and new red tiles will look the same in terms of their appearance and texture; both types of tiles will weather differently over time. We encourage the design team to develop a stronger, bolder design approach and



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palette of colours and materials for both architectural and landscape elements to give more distinction between the old and new, and to echo the strong aspirations of Stirling. Alternatively, developing an architectural style that is high quality but has a transitory feel can give the new structures distinction whilst giving the sense that they can be removed or evolve over time.

Public space and landscape

A thorough landscape and public space strategy is needed to set the scene for this significant building and help it to connect to the surrounding context. The entrance route from St. Clement's Road is part of the experience of the listed building for residents, employees and visitors. To help improve wayfinding to the building, access into the site and views, we suggest that through discussions with the landowner of the adjacent site this route, where possible, should be wider to ensure that safe access is provided for cars and pedestrians. Leftover spaces, such as the west corner of the site above the sewer, should be fully incorporated in the landscape design to create a pleasant and feel across the whole site.

The private courtyard is a key element of Stirling's design and efforts to maintain the character and develop the use of this space are crucial to the success of the scheme. The proposed trees at the centre of the courtyard weaken the clear horizontal hierarchy and sight lines established by Stirling, and block the views from bedrooms, and we therefore feel that they are not appropriate in this space. The courtyard is adequately framed by trees on the opposite side of the river. The new ramp and steps in the courtyard are to be commended as they strengthen the relationship between the public open space and the river, and help to provide passive surveillance to the route along the river and activate this space. Opening the route along the river will help to fulfill Stirling's aspirations for the Florey Building. However, a clear strategy for security and maintenance is needed to determine if/how this space can be used by the public. If public access is provided in the future, new signage, renewed hard landscaping, tree maintenance and a lighting strategy will help to make this space feel safe and appealing.

A long-term strategy for the wider public realm developed alongside the works to the Florey Building through a partnership between Oxford City Council, Queen's College and other relevant neighbouring landholders will help to resolve security, maintenance and accessibility issues for the users, and local and visiting community.

Florey Building

We welcome the principle of dividing some of the single rooms with double height spaces to create two separate rooms, and the ambition to retain some of the double height rooms as a historic reference. However, the changes to the corridor space, while providing each of the rooms with an ensuite bathroom, create a convoluted route around the periphery of the building.

We question whether the removal of the existing separating wall on the ground floor and the principle of placing new student rooms below the Florey Building are still aligned with the original concept of the building. The new rooms on the ground floor reverse the fundamental order of the listed building – they do not face onto other student rooms or



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the river, and are not lifted off the ground. We are concerned that these rooms feel less secure and private as they face onto the vehicular entrance and car parking. An understanding of how this new space will be experienced at nighttime will also be helpful in assessing the quality of this space.

Improving the design of the main entrance of the Florey Building will help to create a stronger focal point for residents, employees and visitors as the current entrance is not particularly obvious. However, we think the entrance could be narrower to maintain the sense of privacy as in the original design and more distinct to help users navigate and orient themselves.

Florey Suite

We welcome the principle of the new Florey Suite to provide new dining facilities, a lecture theatre and supporting amenities for students. The 'wrapped' form of the proposed building works well as it seems to reflect the form of the listed building. As with the other new elements, enhancing the identity of the Florey Suite in its form, detailed treatment and materials will continue to give it integrity as a new piece of architecture.

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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Fiona Lamb	Avanti Architects
Fiona Bartholomew	Oxford City Council

Review process

Following a site visit and discussions with the design team and city council, the scheme was reviewed on 16 October 2014 by John Lyall (chair), Colin Haylock, Deborah Nagan, Eddie Booth, Jon Rowland Neil Deely. These comments supersede any views we may have expressed previously.





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