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21 December 2015

Anne Ward
Ronald McDonald House Charities UK
11-59 High Road
East Finchley
London
N2 8AW

Our reference: DCC/0735

Oxford City Council: Ronald McDonald House

Dear Anne Ward,

Thank you for attending the ODRP Design Review on 3 December 2015 and for delivering a clear and comprehensive presentation. The ambition to provide new facilities at the Ronald McDonald House in Oxford to support families with children in hospital is highly commendable. This site offers the opportunity to create an inclusive and supportive environment for the residents of the Ronald McDonald House in close proximity to the children's clinic and within the landscape setting of what was formerly the park of Headington Manor. In our view, the scheme could be further developed to create an inviting environment for the residents in terms of its siting, external appearance and internal layout. The building and its relationship to the existing and proposed landscape could be enhanced. The proposed garden design successfully provides a range of spaces for a variety of uses. We would recommend that an integrated approach be taken to developing the building and landscape design to create a warm and welcoming environment for families embodying the Mac Donald House Charities UK vision.

Response to the context

The new facilities for the Ronald McDonald House will provide much needed family support accommodation at the John Radcliffe Hospital site. The scheme is in accordance with the objectives set out in Oxford's 'Site and Housing Plan 2011-2026' (policy SP23) which include patient hotel uses.

Oxford University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust is currently in the process of producing a masterplan for the entire hospital site. This masterplan development exercise will underpin the Trust's vision, objectives and planned growth over the next years, assessing comprehensively future development opportunities to create an integrated user and patient focused environment across the entire hospital grounds. We suggest considering the site allocation for the Ronald McDonald House as part of the masterplan approach. Given the potential regeneration of the nursery site to the east of the scheme and opportunities to realign Woodlands Road, we suggest redefining the allocated land for the Ronald McDonald House. This would allow the existing mature trees which remain from the former parkland setting of the manor house to be retained.



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Open space and landscape design

The proposed distinctive landscape areas, one private and protected, and one public and open have the potential to provide quiet contemplative and active and engaging spaces for the users. The opportunities for different kinds of experiences offered by the more interactive and playful design of the private garden are welcomed. The public space reflects the parkland setting with a lawn and trees. We would propose simplifying the design of this space to allow for more informal, flexible uses.

We suggest the project team consider the route from the children's hospital to Ronald McDonald House and routes across the site, to create safe and attractive pedestrian links within the site and the wider area. Woodlands Road and the landscape buffer along the road also require attention to provide a pleasant outlook for the residents in the west facing rooms, particularly on the ground floor.

The loss of the mature tree is regrettable and we urge the project team to revisit the building layout. Shortening the south wing and increasing its height to achieve a more compact plan arrangement would help retain this tree. Moving the building westwards would allow for a more generous entrance from the street and better position the scheme within the parkland. The height and proximity to the northern and eastern boundary is acceptable as there appear to be no significant overshadowing and limited overlooking issues given the houses on Sandfield Road have large gardens and the building fronts the hospital car park.

Building design

In our view, the proposed approach to the façades of the building is not fully successful, and we suggest rethinking them to create a special place that provides a friendly home for families in difficult circumstances. The elevational treatment would benefit from a more composed appearance and a more ordered and proportional articulation of the window openings that relates more effectively to the internal layout. Designing all façades with a consistent architectural language would give the building more integrity and a clearer identity. The choice of brick is appropriate for this context. The quality of all the materials and the detailing will be important and will contribute to the development of a building which is both welcoming and which can be readily managed and maintained.

Internal organisation

Reorganising the building layout would offer the opportunity to enhance the user experience by creating a series of more welcoming and well connected internal spaces, directly linked with the gardens. A more integrated internal layout with, for example, circulation spaces with widened areas which invite families to meet and interact could more readily reinforce the Ronald McDonald objective to create a warm and welcoming environment within which families can stay for as long as they need – be it a matter of days, months or even years. The entrance and staircase have a central location which could be enhanced to give people a stronger sense of arrival. Opening the lobby to the garden would create a physical and visual connection and provide a welcoming environment for people to use and we suggest redesigning the staircase to make it more generous and to allow daylight to come into the stair well

While the guest rooms are comfortable and large, their layout, and particularly the position of the window, could be improved. Currently, the position of windows is dictated by the façade treatment, placing the window centrally in the external wall in rooms would allow for better light distribution in rooms and enhance views out to the gardens. In the absence of balconies, we suggest exploring whether Juliette balconies could be introduced to provide a private space to enjoy the views of the garden from within rooms.

The day rooms and residential communal areas on the ground floor and laundry and store space on the upper floors enjoy the best south west orientation onto the park and are important spaces for residents to



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socialise. We again suggest improving the quality of these environments by providing larger windows and at ground floor better level access to the gardens.

Next steps

The Ronald McDonald House offers the opportunity both in the design of the building and the landscape to create a high quality welcoming and nurturing environment to support families. One that, in line with the Mac Donald House Charities UK vision, puts the user at its centre. Given this opportunity we would recommend that before the scheme is considered for planning submission, the design issues raised in this letter be further explored with Oxford City Council and the Oxford University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust.

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

Review process

Following a site visit, discussions with the design team and local authority and a pre-application review, the scheme was reviewed on 3 December 2015 by Keith Bradley (Chair), Alan Berman, Noel Farrer, Mark Swenarton and Colin Haylock. 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 cabe@designcouncil.org.uk.



