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20 November 2015

Naomi Hubbard
Savills
Wytham Court
11 West Way
Oxford OX2 0QL

Our reference: DCC/0728

Oxford City Council: Former Royal Mail Sorting Office and Vehicle Maintenance Depot

Dear Naomi Hubbard,

Thank you for submitting this scheme to us; we reviewed the proposal on 6 November 2015.

Summary

This scheme has the potential to positively contribute to Cowley, one of Oxford's district centres. Considering the scheme in this context will help ensure it fits within the long-term vision of the area. We support the proposal for the Former Royal Mail Sorting Office and Vehicle Maintenance Depot in principle. The proposed site layout, and height and massing of the buildings are appropriate in the context of the existing business park and the local area. To ensure this scheme is pleasant and safe for staff and visitors and functions efficiently, a clearer idea and approach for the whole site is needed focusing on the open spaces and walkways, landscape and boundaries. We also suggest further improvements to the treatment of the elevations.

Access, security and boundaries

The pedestrian routes between the building units successfully break up the mass of an otherwise large-scale industrial-sized block. Pedestrian access onto Garsington Road helps promote walkability and the use of public transportation. We recommend relocating the cycle racks to a place where they can be overlooked as they are more likely to be more vulnerable to theft between the building units if they are only visible from the street. This will create a stronger sense of safety within the compound. If pedestrian access is possible from Garsington Road, one wider and clearly defined access route to the west of Unit 3 could be explored. This would help to visually link the main entrance gate and the secondary entrance on Garsington Road. We suggest clearly demarcating them from the road side to signify a point of entry.

Internal courtyard

Further opportunities to provide a better quality environment in the internal courtyard for staff and visitors should be explored by introducing more greenery to soften the impact of the hard landscaping. More space for trees and planting would be beneficial particularly at the main entrance to accentuate the way into the site for visitors. Trees



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and planting can work alongside the car parking requirements provided species are selected which offer appropriate clearance for vehicles. We suggest developing a drainage strategy for the site, including SUDs, exploring the opportunity to introduce shallow swales where possible.

Elevational treatment

We support the elevational treatment options that are more "industrial" in character which express their respective building use. Where possible, the design team could look at opportunities to simplify the elevations to ensure a calm appearance. Taking advantage of the existing trees along Garsington Road and Hollow Way and planting trees along the northern site boundary to screen the buildings from the road side and the residents is a positive move. The large 'Oxford Business Park' sign on the façade at this junction may appear confusing as it seems to signify a point of entry.

The sustainable merits of the proposed building materials, durability and ease of construction should drive the choice of materials. Pre-fabricated materials can work in this location. The relationship between the size and location of the glazing with the internal spaces could be strengthened. It is worth examining the effect of overshadowing on the ground level windows from the trees along the site's perimeter. In terms of the roofline, we feel a parapet roof, as in earlier options, is more appropriate while the bull-nose of the shallow gabled roofline is overly imposing. We recommend taking advantage of the large roofs to collect run off water to irrigate the green areas particularly along the site's perimeter which could also help to reduce management costs.

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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Review process

Following discussions with the design team and local authority, the scheme was reviewed on 06 November 2015 by Fred Manson (Chair) and Deborah Nagan. These comments supersede any views we may have expressed previously.

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 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.



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