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20 November 2014

Colin Carritt
International Brigade Memorial Trust
6 Stonells Road
London
SW11 6HQ

Our reference: DCC/0652

Oxford City Council: Spanish Civil War Memorial, Bonn Square

Dear Colin Carritt,

Thank you for presenting to Cabe's review meeting on 6 November 2014. We are pleased to review this significant proposal to commemorate Britain's contribution to the Spanish Civil War. The ambition to educate and engage people in Oxford about the Spanish Civil War, and the good spirit and faith in which this proposal has been developed and presented are highly commendable. A physical memorial in Bonn Square is an appropriate way to commemorate the volunteers of the Spanish Civil War. However, the current memorial neither captures the essence of the Spanish Civil War and feeling of loss, nor does it fit in with its prominent location in Oxford. We encourage the Memorial Trust to continue to persist with this planning application as it is indeed a worthwhile cause, and urge Oxford City Council to develop a citywide strategy to inform the placement and design of artworks in public space.

Concept

A strong, clear message is needed to engage the local community and fuel a sense of curiosity across all ages about the Spanish Civil War and the invaluable contribution of people from Oxford. However, the current, overall message is somewhat confusing. It is unclear whether the memorial is to mark the lives of the six people from Oxford who participated in the war or all the volunteers from across the UK. Highlighting the role the men and women from Oxford had to play in the war will help to justify its location in Bonn Square and relate more strongly to Oxford's local history. Once the message is defined, we urge the Memorial Trust to undertake a rigorous procurement process, such as a design competition, to ensure that the most suitable design expert and solution are selected.

Location

A strategy for artworks in public space across the city is urgently needed. We urge Oxford City Council to identify potential sites for artworks and set clear parameters to ensure proposed artworks achieve high design quality and



CONFIDENTIAL

have a strong relationship to their environment. Such a strategy can help the local community, charitable groups and artisans to be stronger patrons of public space.

We do not support the principle of a freestanding object in the square as it will restrict surrounding uses and future development of this space, and make the square feel more cluttered. Placing the memorial at the north-east corner of the square adjacent to the listed building seems ambiguous and feels apologetic. We suggest exploring whether other physical expressions, such as a plaque, and/or alternative locations might better relay the memory and message of the Spanish Civil War. A memorial that is off the ground and set into the wall, such as a plaque, will be easy to erect, be maintained and protected from vandalism. Integrated lighting will give it more prominence in the square. Alternatively, incorporating the plaque into the ground floor of the square might help to be successful. As the future plans for Westgate Centre enhance the role of Bonn Square in the city, we suggest exploring how the memorial can help to link Bonn Square with the library in the proposed Westgate Centre, via a physical and/or digital platform. The integrated QR Code on the memorial, for example, is useful as it helps to engage younger audiences and could direct them to reference material in the library. We also suggest exploring with the city council ideas for incorporating the Spanish Civil War memorial into the ground works, or other works, associated with the redeveloped Westgate Centre.

Design approach

We feel that the current tombstone-like shape and design approach is difficult to justify. A simpler and bolder design will more readily engage passersby of different ages and will also establish a stronger distinction between the proposed Spanish Civil War memorial and the existing Tirah memorial. We commend the idea of referring to war posters of the 1930s to inform the design of the memorial, but we do not feel that the gripping images and captivating text of these posters have been reflected in the design. The lengthy text and the small font size greatly reduce its impact and legibility; this is further exaggerated by the placement of the text at the bottom of the memorial which makes reading difficult. The unknown figure undermines the known men and women that have fought in the war, and is also likely to be too politically suggestive. Whilst we welcome the use of granite and its relationship to the geology of Spain, there is more potential to explore alternative colours and textures. We recommend making the Spanish Civil War memorial distinct from the Tirah memorial in its shape, scale, texture and materiality to ensure that the value and messages of both memorials resonate in the square. All these issues can be explored as a result of the careful procurement process for the design of the memorial.

Yours sincerely



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cc (by email only)

John Haywood	International Brigade Memorial Trust
Frank Casey	International Brigade Memorial Trust
Felicity Byrne	Oxford City Council

Review process

Following discussions with the design team and the city council, the scheme was reviewed on 6 November 2014 by Joanna van Heyningen (chair), Claire Wright, Jessica Byrne-Daniel and Mark Swenarton. 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 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.



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