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Nick Lyzba
JPPC Chartered Town Planners
Bagley Croft
Hinksey Hill
Oxford OX1 5BS

27 October 2016

Our reference: DCC/0775

Oxford City Council: Castle Mill, Roger Dudman Way

Dear Mr Lyzba,

Thank you for providing the opportunity for the Oxford Design Review Panel (ODRP) to advise on the proposal for Castle Mill, Roger Dudman Way at the Design Workshop on 13 October 2016.

It is evident that extensive work and analysis and thorough consultation and engagement with stakeholders have been undertaken since the last review in June 2016, particularly on the colour scheme for the blocks. This responds to the previous recommendations of the panel. The approach to planting and elevational amendments will reduce the visual impact of the buildings. Incorporating natural ventilation and brise-soleil to integrate sustainability objectives into the development is a positive design step, whilst the proposed landscape improvements to the courtyards provide a far more attractive and useable environment for residents.

However, there is still scope for refinement of the elevational treatment and the detailed planting/landscaping in order to strike a balance between alleviating the visual impact of the built form from long views and creating an attractive environment for the users of the building. Whilst the colour muting of the building significantly softens its impact from a distance, there is a concern that the elevations will appear homogenous due to the repeated pattern of materials, colour and fenestration. We would suggest further exploring ways to add more orders of interest and articulation that are subtle but legible from a distance to break up the overall mass of the built form, whilst also taking the appearance of the buildings close up into account.

Planting

The planting proposed would help to reduce the prominence of the buildings and soften their visual impact from long views on Port Meadow. Given the constrained nature of the site and the

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issues of contamination and drainage, the panel fully support the use of planters. With good maintenance there is no reason why trees could not thrive within this environment.

In addition to providing screening of the development, planting could play a bigger role in the creation of a stimulating place at close quarters. We would recommend exploring ways to create more diversity in the immediate landscape, for example by including small flashes of colour through different species selection, and the specification of landscaping and the colour of the planters themselves. The inclusion of green walls is a positive step as they would provide a degree of camouflage to the building from a distance as well as create interest within the site and a habitat for wildlife. The panel suggests that the detailed planting of the green walls is an opportunity to provide variety and interest to the elevations.

Painting of the Buildings

It is positive that the design team has consulted the wider public on this particular aspect and the painting of the buildings in a muted colour/s will reduce the prominence and perception of the buildings. However, the buildings still read as one single block, and due to their size will remain relatively conspicuous within the area. Utilising a mix of colours could help the blocks to be read as a series of separate buildings and break up their mass into smaller less imposing elements. Ultimately the panel encourage the design team to choose colour(s) that are appropriate to the setting and appearance of the buildings, close up, as well as from distant views. If a single colour approach is taken the panel suggest that one of the blocks could be painted and reviewed before proceeding with the painting of the remaining blocks.

Roof alterations

We understand that the shiny nature of the roofs in certain conditions is a matter of public concern, and that reflectivity tests are being undertaken at different times of the day, in different seasons and weather conditions. We recommend continuing to investigate how glare could be reduced, taking into account how this might impact the budget and structural integrity of the building. We are not convinced that the proposed roof fins will achieve a considerable reduction in the perception of glare.

We are also not convinced that the painting of the gable ends in a darker colour dramatically reduces the sense of height of the buildings and conversely, may make the roofs appear more prominent. Whilst we welcome the inclusion of natural ventilation, we recommend concealing the louvres (i.e. in the roof valleys) in order to reduce the overall visual prominence of the gables and avoid an industrial appearance.

Courtyards

The planting and re-arrangement of cycle storage within the courtyards is a considerable improvement to the scheme and will create much better amenity spaces and outlook from within

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the development. There are however opportunities to improve these areas further and to take a more dramatic approach to the detailing and landscaping within the courtyards to counter-balance the neutral nature of the painting scheme.

Careful consideration should be given to the location, height and canopy size of any trees planted within the courtyard area and how this may affect the quality of the internal environment in terms of daylight and outlook.

Thank you for consulting us and please keep us informed of the progress of the scheme. If there is any point of clarification, please telephone us.

Yours sincerely

Annabel Osborne

Design Council Cabe Advisor
Email Annabel.Osborne@designcouncil.org.uk
Tel +44(0)20 7420 5270

cc

David Brock - Historic England (tbc)
Richard Peats - Historic England (tbc)
Spencer Faraday - Mann Williams
Nicholas Pearson - Nicholas Pearson Associates
Sara Metcalfe - Nicholas Pearson Associates
Edd Medicott - Orme Architecture
Tom Gascoyne - Orme Architecture
Gill Butter - Oxford City Council
Andrew Murdoch - Oxford City Council
Carolyn Puddicombe - University of Oxford
Rebecca Horley - University of Oxford

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 13 October 2016 by Keith Bradley – Chair, Alan Berman, Deborah Nagan and Jo van Heyningen. 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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