

Appendix 2 17/00860/FUL – Greyfriars Court

Oxford Design Review Panel letters



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Paradise Square, Oxford

Design Workshop

Notes from 6 November 2014

Thank you for attending Cabe's Design Workshop on 6 November 2014. We welcome the opportunity to offer our advice and look forward to engaging in future dialogue as the proposal develops. Paradise Square is an attractive location at the centre of Oxford and we support the principle of a hotel on this site. The proposed quantum of hotel rooms and building height seem appropriate in this location. The initial approach to the courtyard has potential but the overall building design is disappointing and further work is required to develop a captivating design narrative, underpinned by a strong understanding of the urban context. We suggest a fresh start is needed to design a building that embraces the rich, local heritage. We highly recommend commissioning additional design support and a follow-up review to assess the design progress. We offer the following suggestions in taking the design principles forward.

Design approach

- Define and develop a captivating narrative for a hotel building in Oxford, appropriate for this prominent site. The narrative should inform the look and feel of the building, both internally and externally, and how it is used by guests and staff.
- Analyse the urban fabric of the immediate and surrounding context, paying close attention to the character of the adjacent listed buildings and Westgate Centre proposals. A three-dimensional model of the proposal and its urban context will help the design team to creatively look at how the building responds to its surroundings.
- A 'green' narrative would help relate to sustainable initiatives across the city and make the scheme more appealing and efficient in the long-term. For example, we commend the car free development as it encourages visitors to explore and discover Oxford on foot. We suggest collaborating with a sustainability consultant at this stage to make the scheme more sustainable and develop ingenious, 'green' design approaches for the building, for example, using green walls and roofs.

Trees and landscaping

- Develop the landscape design strategy once a clear narrative has been established. We welcome the retention of the existing tree to the north-east of the site. However, the existing tree to the south is in a poor condition and likely to be a health and safety risk in future, and we recommend that it should be removed prior to development on this site. Removing this tree provides more room for the building and better views over Paradise Square and contributes towards eliminating the need for a basement.
- Paradise Square is currently an underwhelming but valuable green asset to the site and the local area. Collaborate with Oxford City Council to look at ways of improving the green character of this space and making it feel more attractive and safer, for example, by



opening up its north-facing aspect towards the hotel, and by investing in trees, planting, streetscape and lighting. This will be particularly important as there is little or no space for additional trees and planting on the site.

Height and massing

- Look at ways to make the building more elegant in its height and massing. Taller building elements on the site will be acceptable provided that they are of high design quality and positively contribute to the overall character of the local area. In particular, we feel that the proposed building could be taller at the eastern edge facing Norfolk Street, and remain low to the west facing the existing residential housing.
- To assess the visual impact of the proposal on long distance views, cameras of no less than 50mm should be used following the Landscape Institute guidance.
- Basement rooms are acceptable provided that the ground floor excavation does not affect the archaeology of the site. At this stage, however, a more detailed analysis of the archaeology of the site, in collaboration with the city council, is needed. Should the archaeology restrict the scope of basement floors, the building height and massing can be redistributed, for example, proportionally increasing the building height in key areas.

Elevations

- Explore how the elevations could be more contextual and less corporate, in terms of the proportion and placement of windows. In Oxford there are numerous examples of architecturally successful student housing, which, like hotels, have repeated cellular spaces served by single windows. Explore also the use of materials in relation to surrounding buildings, particularly those to the north.
- Investigate how the eastern elevation can respond to the active frontages of the future Westgate Centre. Consider as well how this façade will appear at night given the luminous street lighting and signage, and high activity levels from the new cinema and shops in the Westgate Centre.
- As the eastern elevation will be the first point of contact for most guests, look at how the elevation could maximise on key viewpoints from the city. For example, the eastern façade could be angled to the north to provide better views of the city centre from the hotel rooms and help attract pedestrians from New Road and Bonn Square to the hotel.
- Look at ways to embrace and protect the green, tranquil character of Paradise Square on the south façade and encourage guests to view the square. Integrating the service area, currently facing onto this square, will be crucial to this façade and streetscape.
- On both eastern and southern elevations, moving the staircases further into the building and replacing them with hotel rooms will help maximise views for guests and improve the façades. Think about how blank walls, such as the western elevation, can be more attractive with green walls, for example.

- Consider how Premier Inn's signage will work on the proposed elevations, in particular to the east and south, ensuring that it successfully marries with the materials and detailing, and does not dominate the façades.

Ground floor and internal layout

- The tight, economical approach to the internal layout and the effort to keep the plant hidden in the internal floorplate of the building are to be commended.
- The initial approach to the proposed courtyard to the north is to be commended as it seems to draw on the charming character and references of historical inns in Oxford. Continue to develop this narrative of the courtyard in the building design and uses surrounding it. A more direct, inviting sightline and path into the courtyard can help to accentuate this space as a feature of the scheme.
- Continue to test the impact of the northern part of the block, which currently separates the courtyard from the north-westerly open space. Incorporating communal uses in this block, such as hotel lobby or café, will help to enliven both outdoor spaces. Alternatively, consider if it will be more beneficial to elongate the courtyard by moving or removing this element.
- Explore the role of the hotel restaurant in more detail to clarify its layout and placement on the site. For example, if the restaurant is likely to be used by the residents at limited times of the day, it could be placed in a more intimate part of the building where it can relate to the courtyard and still be seen by those approaching from the north.

Attendees

Design Workshop Panel

Joanna van Heyningen (chair)
Claire Wright
Jessica Byrne-Daniel
Mark Swenarton

Scheme presenters

Stephen Brooker	Walsingham Planning
Aidan Lewis	Fletcher McNeill
Chris Gill	Allison Pike Architects
Sam Baird	Allison Pike Architects
Julian Munby	Oxford Archaeology

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11 March 2015

Stephen Brooker
Walsingham Planning
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Bourne End
SL8 5AR

Our reference: DCC/0651

Oxford City Council: Paradise Square Hotel

Dear Stephen Brooker,

Thank you for coming to Cabe's follow-up review meeting on 26 February 2015. We are pleased to continue collaborating on this significant proposal. Since the previous workshop on 6 November 2014, the scheme has significantly improved and the collaboration between the design teams has proven to be fruitful. The project has the potential to act as an active link between the train station, Castle quarter and the new Westgate Centre. However, the current scheme appears constrained by the struggle to reconcile a standard hotel typology with the complex requirement of this prominent site. The site calls for a bespoke architectural solution that makes the most of the location overlooking a public space and responds sensitively to the adjacent listed buildings and the conservation area. We strongly urge the client and design teams continue looking for opportunities to improve the quality of the public realm and to readdress the internal configuration of the ground floor and the elevational treatment, particularly the top floor and tower, to design a compelling building that capitalises on the site and offers a unique experience for all users with individuality and character that standard hotel typologies cannot achieve.

Site and wider context

Given the site's proximity to the Westgate Centre, the south facing aspect onto Paradise Square and the location in a conservation area, this scheme can build upon a rich mix of historic urban assets, that if unlocked, would provide a unique opportunity to attract people. We suggest the client explores new ways to use the hotel more intensively throughout the day and night, for example, by expanding the commercial offer and incorporating space for permanent or temporary facilities on the ground floor, such as a bar/grill or pop-up shops respectively, that will be used by visitors and local residents.

We welcome the proposed building scale which successfully relates to the Westgate Centre to the east and existing buildings to the west. Developing a distinctive roofscape that works well in short and long distance views from Paradise Street and Castle Motte respectively, will be helpful in ensuring this building is contextual and appealing when viewed from above and from street level. We note that the north and western elevations are yet to be



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provided to fully determine the impact of the glazed block to the west and the relationship of the hotel to the listed buildings.

Public realm

Since the previous workshop, the public space along the southern frontage of the hotel appears much livelier and more integrated with Paradise Square as a result of the changes to the ground floor configuration and improvements to the landscape design. We encourage Oxford City Council to continue exploring how Paradise Square could be revitalised through collaborations with respective clients and design teams on surrounding development schemes.

On-going support of a landscape architect will help to ensure that the landscape design – which is limited to Paradise Square and the entrance and rear courtyards – is captivating. The colonnade and location of the reception in the entrance courtyard creates a formal character which could be reflected by the planting. Removing the existing steps, which seems to currently serve no particular purpose, will help to make the courtyard feel larger. To avoid the Japanese Garden in the rear courtyard feeling overshadowed and dispiriting, suitable planting and views from reception and the upper floors would help to make this space special and inviting.

Building design

The façade design has improved since we last saw the scheme. Calm, refined elevations will work on this prominent site, but the current design requires further work. A calm and confident façade could be achieved by readdressing the play between solid and void in the fenestration, particularly on the east elevation, the arrangement or texture of the brickwork and the treatment of the top floor. Currently the top floor treatment with the minimal setback and change of material from brick to metal is gratuitous and should be reconsidered. We question the tower concept at the south-eastern corner of the building. If the tower is to remain, it needs to be stronger. Currently the base is cut away, undermining its impact, and further work is required to adjust its height in relation to the building attic. Hotel signage that is in keeping with the character of the conservation area and the calm building design is important to the overall success of the scheme and needs to be developed at this stage of the planning process. Size, colour and placement must be clearly demonstrated in the drawings.

We suggest continuing to address the internal layout of the ground floor to maximize the opportunities that the south facing aspect and adjacency of the public space offer. We urge the design teams to open up the ground floor as much as possible to allow direct access and views to the square via openable doors and/or windows on the southern façade. It is unfortunate that a large part of this key elevation is given to servicing - the bin store and plant to the south-west, and the WCs in the tower. The WCs in the tower should be relocated, and whilst servicing in the south-west corner of the building works well, the arrangement of the plant room and bin store would benefit from further refinement, including alternative locations for example on the roof or at basement level if later archaeological investigations show that this part of the site is suitable for construction. We recommend relocating the guest rooms





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on the ground floor as they are crammed between the plant and bin store and the rear courtyard with potentially low light levels due to their single aspect north facing orientation.

The high ambition to achieve 9+ NRIA ratings and incorporate Passivhaus design principles is highly commendable. In developing detailed proposals for the planning application, more evidence on how the building meets those criteria will be required.

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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Sam Baird	Allison Pike Architects
Stuart Cade	Rick Mather Architects
Fiona Bartholomew	Oxford City Council

Review process

Following a site visit, discussions with the design team and local authority and a pre-application review, the scheme was reviewed on 26 February 2015 by Joanna van Heyningen (chair), Alan Berman, Jessica Byrne-Daniel, Mark Swenarton, Paul Appleby, and Tom Holbrook. 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.



Paradise Street Hotel, Oxford City Council
Design Workshop
Notes from 12 February 2015

Thank you for coming to Cabe's review meeting on 12 February 2015. We are delighted to provide our feedback at this early stage of the design and planning process, and look forward to engaging as the scheme progresses. A new boutique hotel could work well on this prominent site, responding to the rich physical and historic site characteristics. However, the narrative for the scheme could be more defined to make the most of the existing site assets, the waterways on either side of the site, St. George's Tower and the Castle Motte. We encourage the client and design teams to continue developing the hotel design in order to achieve a bespoke solution for Oxford that capitalizes on the site specifics and offers a unique experience for all users with individuality and character that standard hotel typologies cannot achieve. In this way, the benefits of a hotel on this site can outweigh the potential negative impacts of the building, particularly in terms of height and scale. We support the demolition of the existing Victorian buildings on the site provided that the proposed hotel building achieves the above criteria and is of exceptional design.

Design narrative

We welcome the design thinking to date and efforts to create a high quality environment for hotel guests, local residents and visitors. Given the exciting "island" position between Wareham Stream and Castle Mill River, the proximity of St George's Tower and the Oxford Castle and the strategic location between the train station and the city centre, the site is well-suited for a boutique hotel. We would expect to see a compelling design narrative that embraces the rich site assets and creates a charming hotel environment that makes best use of the views over the historic city and the presence of water, for example. Building upon Oxford's identity as an eco-city could also inform the scheme in terms of developing ambitious environmental strategies that integrate photovoltaic panels into the design and reduce the need for air conditioning and mechanical ventilation. Thinking through how people will use the hotel and its spaces at different times of the day will help to inform the design, for example, to ensure that the courtyard provides a sunny breakout spaces and make the hotel experience unique for all users.

Public realm and landscape

The initiative to create courtyard spaces that are accessible to guests and the public is to be commended. We encourage the design and client team to explore how the public realm could further contribute to the well-being of its users and take full advantage of all the site has to offer, namely the waterways on either sides of the site. Removing the single storey building located on top of the bridge is particularly advantageous as it allows the wider public to enjoy the stream and access the site from St. Thomas Street. We suggest continuing to explore how the internal courtyards could be brighter and more spacious, and feel safer and more special, particularly in terms of their scale and placement on the site. It will also be beneficial to look at ways to activate the public space along Paradise Street. Through collaborative partnership with Oxford City Council, for example, the public realm could encourage 'spill out' onto Paradise Street with seating and café facilities. We recommend that, in general, the routes through the site and to the wider



area are further analysed, in particular to clarify public rights of way and to improve the east-west links.

Building design

The concept of a building design informed by the historic plot lines of the site is intriguing. The staggered building form along Paradise Street and Wareham Stream works well as it breaks down the mass of the façade whilst opening up the site and creating variety at ground floor level. We suggest looking at how the height and massing could continue to be addressed in the overall design as the building currently seems somewhat bulky and constrained on the site. The view from Paradise Street is particularly crucial in terms of height and massing given its relationship to St. George's Tower and the Castle Motte. The proposed building should not compete or detract from these monuments, and the scale, orientation and façade treatment of the hotel have to ensure the monuments continue to be prominent features in the cityscape. Further work on the building layout will help ensure that the internal spaces maximise key views and visual connections to Wareham Stream and Castle Mill River. Given the key role of the back of house and servicing areas in the daily functioning of the hotel, we recommend reassessing the placement and design of these spaces. Together with the impact of light on the character of the conservation area, particularly at night, noise will be important to consider at this stage to ensure the hotel is sensitive to its surroundings and neighbours in the future.

Roofscape

There is further design work to be done to ensure the roofscape is a successfully articulated fifth elevation of the hotel. We welcome the concept of gabled roofs and suggest exploring further how the roofscape could be more elegant from all perspectives given that, in its current form, could appear as a solid block from particular angles. Further testing of long and short range views to the hotel from the nearby historic monuments, such as Castle Motte and St. George's Tower, the future Westgate Centre and countryside further afield will be beneficial at this stage. Albeit at the early stage of the design process, we encourage the team to continue working on the proposed rooftop plant to reduce its size and to ensure it is visually pleasing when seen from afar.

Attendees

Design Workshop Panel

Fred Manson (chair)
Gillian Horn
Jessica Byrne-Daniel
Sarah Wigglesworth

Scheme presenters

Preet Ahluwalia	Dominvs Group
Lee Saywack	Dominvs Group
Dexter Moren	Dexter Moren Associates
Mark Wood	Dexter Moren Associates