

Design Council, Angel Building, 407 St John Street, London EC1V 4AB United Kingdom
 Tel +44(0)20 7420 5200 Fax +44(0)20 7420 5300
 info@designcouncil.org.uk www.designcouncil.org.uk @designcouncil



CONFIDENTIAL

Nik Lyzba
 JPPC Chartered Town Planners
 Bagley Croft
 Hinksey Hill
 Oxford
 OX1 5BD

30 May 2017

Our reference: DCC/0819

Oxford City Council: St Hilda's College, Oxford

Dear Nik Lyzba,

Thank you for the opportunity to continue engaging in the proposals for St. Hilda's College and for attending the Oxford Design Review Panel (ODRP) follow-up review of this high-profile project on 25 May 2017. The previous design review of this scheme took place on 16 December 2016 and the respective review letter was dated 8 December 2016. As stated in the previous review letter, we continue to support the demolition of the existing building on the site and welcome the steps taken by St Hilda's College and Magdalene College School to explore the potential to adopt Cowley Place.

Summary

We are supportive the overall design of this scheme. The proposal for St. Hilda's College has been progressed with a high level of skill and care, and an impressive amount of contextual analysis and work to address previous comments has been undertaken since the last review. We are thankful for the careful consideration of the points raised in the review letter and think that the design changes as a result of this analysis have led to a much more successful proposal.

The scheme better integrates within its context and capitalises on opportunities to improve the quality of the campus environment as a result of the changes to the site layout and building design. The changes to the building footprints improve key views and connections across the site and wider area, and due to the reduction in heights of the Pavilion Building and tower, the scheme fits well into its natural and historic setting. We welcome the elevational studies which better balance the serene site character and aspiration for confident, contemporary new buildings in this context. Landscape is now a more prominent and positive feature of the proposal which helps in unifying the proposed buildings and existing waterside environment, creating an attractive setting for students, staff and visitors alike.

CONFIDENTIAL

To achieve the high level of design excellence that this proposal is in reach of, we encourage the design team to continue to balance the fine line between design detail and decoration in the approach to architecture and landscape. There is a slight risk that the detailed architectural elements, specifically of the tower and elevations, will appear over-designed and fussy which may undermine the restrained and calm character of the scheme and setting. As a result, we suggest exploring the narrative and design of the tower a bit further and fine-tuning elements of the elevations and landscape design.

Landscape

Overall, the landscape strategy progressed substantially since the last review, particularly the treatment of the open space at ground level. A significant amount of thought has been given to the use of spaces and soft landscaping, resulting in an improved green setting. The creation of an ornamental water feature to enliven the landscape is a sound concept which could be extended across the site and at the entrance in particular. Opening up of the river pathway is one of the key benefits the new site layout will deliver to the local area and Oxford, and therefore it is unfortunate that this route is not accessible by wheelchair users.

There is scope to further improve the relationship of the scheme and wider area, and also that of the buildings and open space through the landscape design. At the rooftop level, we suggest continuing to soften the long range views of the building with more delicate planting and to simplify the pathways and landscape treatment within the roof garden as it currently appears overly fussy. A greater relationship between the landscape on the rooftop and ground floor level could also be attained.

At ground level, a stronger relationship between the soft landscaping and planting in the college and the near-by Botanical Gardens could be established. The vegetation and the landscaping should also form a key part of the overall sustainability strategy for the site, for example, by utilising harvested water to irrigate the garden. A lighting strategy would be beneficial to enhance the character and feeling of safety of the open space and circulation routes at night time. We think the hard landscaping/paving elements will benefit from equal attention to that of the proposed buildings and suggest continuing to explore the colour of the surface materials to ensure that they harmonise with the buildings.

Pavilion Building

We welcome the amendments to the Pavilion Building, particularly the reduction in the building height, which now frames the key views within the site well and provides a more pavilion-like appearance in terms of its size and form. To refine the massing and footprint of the Pavilion Building, particularly from the south of the site, we welcome the analysis of short range views which will be experienced when walking through the site.

CONFIDENTIAL

In terms of the elevations, the slimmer fins and lightweight framing elements create an elegant building that contrasts well with the solidness of the Boundary building. The internal layout appears sound but we encourage the design team to assess screening systems that help to reduce overheating within the building and ensure the auditorium could be used effectively during performances and rehearsals given the significant proportion of glazing.

Boundary Building

The splayed footprint of the Boundary Building successfully opens up views within the campus and to the wider area enhancing the sense of wayfinding and feeling of permeability. Great care and attention has been given to the articulation of the façades and we are impressed with the detailed drawings and options that were presented at the review. We encourage the design team to allow the building design to express itself through elements such as lighting and shading rather than solely architectural design. In addition, we suggest continuing to fine-tune the elevations to ensure that they are calm and well-mannered. At present, the polychrome colour detailing and the articulation/projecting elements appear to complicate the façade treatment at the roof level.

Tower

The proposed tower is on its way to becoming a successful and distinctive element within the Oxford skyline to the south of the river and an identifying marker for the College at roof level. Its scale and proportions work well with the surrounding buildings, particularly when viewed from the Christ Church Meadows. In the design approach, it might be beneficial to allow the tower to be appreciated as a distinct element within the street-scene by perhaps separating the tower and the Boundary building and continuing the vertical treatment and detailing. It will also be helpful to consider how the tower will be perceived by local people, and the references they may draw to it.

The distinctiveness of the tower, however, is at risk of being undermined by two elements. Firstly, the decorative 'halo' to the top of the tower overcomplicates the strong, clear form of the tower. Secondly, the external staircase adjacent to the tower at the rooftop level appears like an 'add-on' in terms of its design and positioning in relation to the tower. We suggest reconsidering the benefit and added value of the 'halo' to the tower and scheme. If it is to be retained, we recommend reviewing its design and materiality, and unifying the design language of the 'halo' and other key elements across the scheme, such as the entrance gate, outdoor furniture and the college crest.

Next steps

We support the overall design of this scheme. The comments described above are suggestions for minor amendments to further improve the design excellence of the scheme. We are confident the design team can progress these key aspects in conjunction with Oxford City Council and Historic

CONFIDENTIAL

England. If, however, a follow-up desktop review of the tower and/or other elements is required, please do not hesitate to contact us.

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,

A. Osborne

Annabel Osborne

Design Council Cabe Advisor

Email annabel.osborne@designcouncil.org.uk

Tel +44(0)20 7420 5238

cc (by email only)

Neil Hyatt	St Hilda's College
Jay Gort	Gort Scott
Fiona Scott	Gort Scott
Chris Neve	Gort Scott
Marcus Beale	Marcus Beale Architects
David Hawkins	Skelly & Couch
Jonathan Cook	JCLA
Nik Lyzba	JPPC
Andrew Murdoch	Oxford City Council
Alice Brockway	Historic England

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 25 May 2017 by Jo van Heyningen (Chair), Dan Jones, Deborah Nagan, Colin Haylock and Dorian Crone. 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.

CONFIDENTIAL

St Hilda's College, Oxford Design Workshop

Notes from 8 December 2016

Thank you for attending the Oxford Design Review Panel (ODRP) Design Workshop on 8 December 2016. The site visit and presentation were well thought through, giving the panel a clear understanding of the site context. This assisted greatly in providing constructive design advice.

We recognise the high-profile nature of the project and the successful competition undertaken to select an ambitious design and a skilful design team. It is evident that significant thought and work has been given to the environmental and sustainability strategy and incorporating these objectives into the design for the scheme at an early stage.

The proposed demolition creates a number of opportunities, in particular the rationalisation of the site layout, safer movement routes for pedestrians and a more outward-looking face for the College with a better quality landscape. To justify the proposed demolition and achieve the architectural ambitions of the project, the new buildings will need to be of a very high standard of design.

We are particularly pleased to have had the opportunity to comment on plans and drawings at the appropriate level of detail for this stage in the design development process. The design development is promising but the site layout and the design of new buildings needs significant refinement to resolve the relationship between buildings on the site and the impact they have on views within the city. We welcome the opportunity to offer our advice and look forward to engaging in future dialogue as the proposal develops. We make the following observations in taking the scheme forward.

Context/ views

The city skyline is comprised of a rich tapestry of roofs interspersed with towers and spires. The height of the Boundary building is acceptable within this context, but we feel that the roof scape requires some re-thinking. We are supportive of the proposal to create a tower as a point of interest/identification marker for the College but more thorough contextual analysis is required, including the following:

- The impact/contribution of the proposed tower element of the Boundary building on Oxford's skyline requires careful consideration. In its current form we are concerned that it is too bulky. We suggest investigating making the tower less integrated in the architectural treatment of the Boundary building. We recommend carrying out a landscape and visual impact assessment to inform the next design stage.
- The proposed demolition of the existing buildings is supported in principle given the opportunities it creates to improve the layout, landscape and overall architectural composition of the site.

CONFIDENTIAL

- We encourage you to think about the sequence of shorter views that will be experienced when walking through the site. A number of potential views within the site are obstructed by the proposed design of the Pavilion building. We think the proposal could better respond to views across the site and those looking in to and out of the site by refining the positioning, scale, massing and materiality of this building.
- We recommend reviewing the relationship of the proposed buildings with the existing on site buildings. In particular we think there are opportunities to refine the relationship between the new Boundary building and the existing South building.

Landscape

To achieve the greatest long-term benefits from the changes being made to the campus landscape, we think the landscape should be the driving factor in the design of this scheme and make the following comments:

- To provide a rich and stimulating environment for students, staff and visitors, a greater hierarchy and differentiation in the new external spaces of the campus would be of benefit.
- We recommend defining whether external spaces are primarily for movement/circulation or are static/gathering spaces.
- A planting scheme should be developed to maximise biodiversity and ecological value. This should take seasonality and the resilience of species to disease and climate change in the long term into account. Reference in the planting to the historical relationship between the college and the near-by Botanical Gardens could be fruitful.
- The roof terrace presents an opportunity to provide a place for people to enjoy views of Oxford. We would advise that any planting at this level should be minimal in order to avoid creating visual clutter at roof level.
- The site appears to comprise a large amount of hard paving. Taking into account the surface requirements for different areas, opportunities to include more permeable landscaping should be maximised where possible to assist with surface water drainage.
- The site's relationship with the riverside requires more thought, particularly with regards to the functioning of the riverside footpath in the short and long term.

Site planning and relationship of buildings

The scheme presents an opportunity to enhance the site's relationship with Cowley Place and create a more active frontage that establishes a stronger outward-looking face for the College as well as generating a sense of arrival for its visitors. We are supportive of the shaping of the Boundary Building to embrace the site, and to strengthen its unique linear nature. The re-configuration of the site and removing blind-spots will also make the movement routes within and beyond this site much safer. However, we think some further work is required for the site layout to achieve a successful level of integration with existing buildings within and outside the site.

CONFIDENTIAL

- It will be important for the final architecture to sit comfortably with the existing buildings on site. We recommend continuing to explore the dialogue between buildings.
- Of the buildings proposed for demolition the character and shape of the existing Porter's Lodge is the most individual and characterful. If possible it would be good to retain this building or for the proposed replacements to make an architectural reference to it.
- The space between the Hall Building and the new Boundary building is no longer required for vehicular access. This provides a good opportunity for the design team to reconsider the relationship between these two buildings, and new opportunities to develop the landscape strategy.
- This project provides a good opportunity to consider other improvement opportunities within the site. For example, it would be worth exploring if the lean-to structure on the South building could be adapted in order to maximise the potential of that part of the site. We welcome the fact that the College and Magdalene College School are jointly exploring the potential of adopting Cowley Place.

Pavilion

The Pavilion will have an important role in place-making, connecting the other buildings within the wider site and as a space from which to appreciate the site and wider area. We think the relationship of the Boundary and Pavilion buildings needs further work to achieve a successful level of integration across the site, particularly regards to the scale and design of the Pavilion.

- We think the Pavilion needs considerable further development. It might make a better contribution to the composition of the site were it to be more modest in terms of size and height.
- The depth of the Pavilion's fins make the building look bulky and it might contrast better with the solidness of the Boundary building if it were less so.

Boundary building

The proposal presents an opportunity to enhance the site and expand the amenities and accommodation offered by the College. The simple and elegant brick design and window treatment of this building will work well with the surrounding architecture, and the heights (for the tower and main block) are appropriate within this context. We think some further work is required and advise considering how greater visual interest could be achieved through the articulation of the elevations and refining the proportions and detailing of the tower element.

Tower

We recognise the merits of a tower in principle which will form part of the site's visual contribution to the wider context and to aid wayfinding. However, the profile of this building within prominent viewpoints requires careful analysis and refinement. We suggest:

- Continuing to explore the distribution of massing through an analysis of long and medium views and the tower's visual appearance from across the river.

CONFIDENTIAL

- A tower of more slender proportions is likely to sit more comfortably within the city's skyline. In achieving this there is scope to be more adventurous (including, perhaps) with height.
- It might be beneficial to consider making the tower element appear more detached from the Boundary Building, and, as suggested earlier, taking a cue from the existing Porter's Lodge.

Elevation Design

We support the proposed materials for the new building and the use of a distinctive brick colour and pattern. We recommend further work is undertaken to refine the façade treatment for this building, including:

- Refining the size and rhythm of fenestration
- Refining the roofline to introduce more interest and articulation
- Refining the southern-end of the Boundary building and developing the potential of its relationship to the South Building

Conclusion

We strongly support this project's ambitions and welcome the general architectural approach being pursued. We suggest a further review of the scheme following the next stages of design development and exploration of the issues raised through this design workshop.

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 8th December 2016. 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.

CONFIDENTIAL

Attendees

Jonathan Cook	JCLA
Nik Lyzba	JPPC
Jay Gort	Gort Scott
Fiona Scott	Gort Scott
Alice Brockway	Historic England
Marcus Beale	Marcus Beale Architects
Andrew Murdoch	Oxford City Council
Amy Ridding	Oxford City Council
David Hawkins	Skelly & Couch
Jose Castillo-Bernaus	St Hilda's College

Panel Members

Jo van Heyningen	(chair)
Jessica Bryne-Daniel	
Dan Jones	
Jon Rowland	

Cabe Staff

Annabel Osborne	Cabe
James Harris	Cabe

