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Mark Curtis
New College
c/o Turnberry Planning Ltd
41-43 Maddox Street
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14 March 2018

Our reference: DCC/0801

Oxford City Council: New College, Savile Road

Dear Mark Curtis,

Thank you for the opportunity to engage in the Design Review of the proposal for New College Savile Road at the planning application stage on 25 January 2018. This review builds upon the recommendations from two previous reviews of this scheme at pre-planning stage dated 15th September 2016 and 16th October 2017.

Summary

We continue to support the strong brief to provide new student accommodation for the College. The proposal delivers the high ambition of the client to create an exemplary scheme for New College, and the design team has successfully maintained and enhanced the design integrity of this innovative scheme throughout the design process.

Based on the drawings available to illustrate the relationships between the buildings and the immediate and wider areas, we think the building heights appear sound. The Oxford skyline is comprised of a rich tapestry of roofs interspersed with towers and spires. We think the tower would positively contribute to this skyline but some further analysis of its contribution to the Oxford skyline would ensure it integrates well with its heritage context.

The proposal overall for New College has progressed in a positive manner with the architectural expression having been faithfully maintained despite the complexity of the scheme and the challenges in designing a building with a complex curved plan and roof profile. The architecture being explored in this proposal will create distinctive contemporary buildings that will complement the historic buildings on the site and within the local area. Due to the curved building forms, roofscapes and materials, the proposed building forms would be unique to Oxford, which is in keeping with the brief to create a distinctive scheme for New College. The variety of forms, materials and hues give a richness and uniqueness to the proposal. Some further fine-tuning of the elevations could add refinement to the proposal.

There is strong scope for the project to lead on the environmental credentials and be an exemplar in this regard. In line with the innovative architectural approach, we think the scheme should develop an equally rigorous approach to environmental sustainability.

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The existing rampart is a unique historic feature of this site that has been addressed thoughtfully in the proposal. Enjoyable views and ways of experiencing the site have been established by the proposed routes and provision of new planting. The landscape design has progressed well since the previous review. Further refinement to access and servicing arrangements could be considered in preparation for the planning application.

Building heights and design

The current design for New College successfully addresses the points raised in the previous letter including the positioning of New Warham House and the tower, the finish of the parapet and the form and design for the roof for New Warham House which better complements the main building and helps the two buildings to be read as a comprehensible whole. We support the proposed building heights and the proposal to create a tower as a point of interest/identification marker for the College. In progressing the design for the proposed tower element, it would be worth reviewing its level of transparency and considering the use of tinted or stained glass. We think there may be scope to further enhance the northern elevation of the main building by continuing to explore its articulation and detailing, for example, by lowering the eaves line in parts to create more interest along the northern elevation.

Internally, the basement has progressed well, and its curved form has the potential to create a unique space for learning and study. We think some more careful thought should be given to the configuration and geometry of different areas and rooms and how they might be furnished. The internal corridors within the main building are significant in length, introducing some natural light would make them feel more welcoming and would benefit the students.

This architecturally innovative and ambitious scheme could help set the precedent for environmental sustainability in Oxford. We recommend continuing to progress this aspect of the scheme, for example building upon fabric first principles and passive cooling whilst ensuring the approach is bespoke to the project going forward.

Landscape

The existing rampart is a unique historic feature of this site and has been sensitively accommodated and addressed thoughtfully in this iteration of the proposal. We support the creation of the walkway over the rampart to acknowledge its presence within the site whilst optimising the use of amenity space on the site. We suggest considering in more detail the signage and/or lighting to help celebrate the importance of this feature.

The central open space to the south of the main building works well as a meeting point/circulatory space for most residents and visitors within this area. In the development of the central open space, we suggest considering in more detail the noise/disturbance from this space to the residents on the ground floor. The student rooms back immediately onto this public space and a sense of privacy for the students could be created in through the landscape design.

In terms of servicing, in the current proposal the main entrance to Mansfield Road is proposed for both students and service access, we think it would be beneficial to consider a secondary access into the site, for example from Savile Road, to separate refuse

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collection and the main entrance for residents/visitors. Thought should also be given to the function, design and maintenance of the triangle of green space to east of the site adjacent to this entrance.

The boundary treatment could complement the architecture and allude to the innovative building design within the site itself, particularly at the south west corner which is a key focal point/point of arrival to the college.

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

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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 January 2018 by Keith Bradley (chair), Jo Van Heyningen, Dan Jones, Deborah Nagen and Kathryn Davies. These comments supersede any views we may have expressed previously.

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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.

cc (by email only)

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