

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

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

8 December 2017

Our reference: DCC/0870
Oxford Design Review Panel: Northgate House, Jesus College

Dear Neil Warner,

Thank you for attending the Oxford Design Review Panel (ODRP) Design Review for Northgate House, Jesus College on 9 November 2017.

We are supportive of the scheme in principle which will enhance two important streets within historic central Oxford as well as provide new accommodation and academic space. The proposed entrance to Northgate House from Market Street will strengthen and change the College's relationship with this street. The scheme presents an opportunity to support the function of Cornmarket as a retail destination, as well as open up views of historic buildings adjacent to the site.

Northgate House sits at a highly visible point at the heart of Oxford city centre. The historic setting within central Oxford presents challenges and opportunities that demand a sensitive response that carefully integrates the new building whilst preserving the setting of the surrounding Grade I and II listed buildings, including Jesus College and the Covered Market.

It is evident that thorough analysis and research has been undertaken since the last review and a number of positive changes made. We encourage the team to continue finessing the elevations to refine the composition and character of the building when viewed from both Cornmarket and Market Street. Whilst we welcome the reduction in scale since the last review, we think there may be slightly too much bulk at roof level and recommend exploring ways to reduce the prominence of the roof. Some further work on the elevations is also required to strike a balance between consistency and contrast. Whilst there is much to enjoy in the proposed elevations, the building at present appears busy. We would also recommend some further work on the landscape/ garden design for the raised quad/terrace to create a distinctive sense of character for this space.

Heights and massing

The reduction in the overall height and massing creates a better relationship with the neighbouring buildings but we have concerns about the prominence and massing of the roof form. Whilst they are an interesting feature, the size, frequency, positioning and

CONFIDENTIAL

materiality of the dormers make the roof appear very prominent and domineering within the elevation as a whole, and particularly when viewed from Cornmarket. We recommend exploring ways to create a calmer, more subservient roof treatment.

The size and scale of the tower is now more appropriate. We think its location could work well as a marker for the entrance to the building and in relation to the College's other towers, but it would benefit from more thorough contextual analysis to refine its design and better understand its role within the streetscape.

Architecture

Whilst we welcome the strong vertical emphasis in the façade and the lively articulation that is being explored, we think that the elevations appear busy and perhaps too fussy in their treatment. The elevation facing Cornmarket appears to compete with others within the streetscene and would benefit from a slightly calmer treatment, though not at the sacrifice of the current playfulness. We think there could be more refinement of the blocks to strike a balance between consistency and contrast in the materiality and detailing of the facades.

The connection with the neighbouring building on Cornmarket would benefit from further work, particularly at roof level, both to create a more effective transition and to ensure that the contrast between the setback and protruding elements of this primary façade treatment can be appreciated. We also recommend exploring ways to marry the two principal façades (facing Cornmarket and Market Street) as some elements of consistency across the two façades may benefit the overall design.

In terms of the changes to the listed Jesus College building required to provide access to the scheme via the quad, we think lowering the ground plain to create a taller opening, if required, rather than raising the arch in height might be more respectful to this historic building, more appropriate for this access and a more dramatic experience. A sensitive and creative approach to levels within this area has potential to create a subtle but exciting transition between the old and new architecture.

We think the design of the tower at roof level is working well as it will create a 'sparkle' within the streetscene on a night time and enable wider views of Oxford that the building benefits from to be enjoyed. It would be particularly beneficial to incorporate artwork within the new building to add interest but which could also be cleverly used to draw attention to the market and assist with way finding.

Quadrangle, Fellows' Garden and Public Spaces

We are concerned about the effectiveness of the proposed ground level courtyard which could feel dark and unwelcoming. Given the potential overshadowing issues, we are not convinced by the water feature within this space which could compound the feeling of a dark, damp environment, perhaps this space is trying to do too many things and not adequately achieving its various aims. We encourage reviewing the treatment of this area and considering alternatives such as enclosing this space and creating an internal atrium.

CONFIDENTIAL

The development will create a 'quad in the sky' which will have a different character to ground level quads within Oxford that should be reflected within the landscape design. We recommend working with a Landscape Architect in the development of this interesting new typology and looking at roof garden precedents rather than replicating other quads within the college.

More thought should be given to the longevity and resilience of planting in the new development given the varied levels and scale of spaces, and how any planting and landscaped features will be maintained in these environments. A perimeter approach to planting and/or water features for the new sky quad might improve the usability of amenity spaces and make them easier to maintain.

Some of the public realm proposed along Market Street is within the red line boundary. Widening the frontage in front of the Fellows' Library and around the new entrance into a public space, and incorporating features such as street trees or seating would be positive. We recommend engaging with wider stakeholders over opportunities to reduce noise and smells associated with the servicing of the Covered Market.

We hope you have found the review process and the content of this letter useful. Should you have any other queries please do hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely,

Annabel Osborne
Design Council Cabe Advisor
Email annabel.osborne@designcouncil.org.uk
Tel +44(0)20 7420 5207

Review process

Following a site visit, (and) discussions with the design team, the scheme was reviewed on 9 November 2017 by Gillian Horn (Chair), Ruth Butler, Jessica Byrne Daniel, Jon Rowland, Dan Jones and Kathryn Davies. These comments supersede any views we may have expressed previously.

Confidentiality

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.

Panel

Gillian Horn
Ruth Butler
Jessica Byrne Daniel
Jon Rowland
Dan Jones
Kathryn Davies

Cabe

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

James Harris
Annabel Osborne

Design Council Cabe
Design Council Cabe

Attendees

Adrian Arnold
Andrew Murdoch
Gill Butter
David Stevenson
Stuart Woodward
Stuart Cade
Mandy Franz
Derek Farrow
Neil Warner

Oxford City Council
Oxford City Council
Oxford City Council
Jesus College
Jesus College
MICA Architects
MICA Architects
Bidwells
JPPC

CONFIDENTIAL

Northgate House, Jesus College Oxford Design Review Panel Design Workshop

Notes from 13 July 2017

Thank you for engaging in the ODRP Design Workshop for Northgate House, Jesus College in Oxford on 13 July 2017. We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the scheme at this early stage and to engage in a productive dialogue as the scheme progresses.

Summary

We welcome the principle of the redevelopment of Northgate House and the ambition of Jesus College in pursuing this project. It offers a unique opportunity to enhance two important streets within historic central Oxford, and to provide new accommodation and academic space for Jesus College.

The unique historic setting of Northgate House within central Oxford demands a sensitive response that also enhances the significance of the surrounding Grade I and II listed buildings including Jesus College and the Covered Market. At present, the configuration of the height and massing appears overbearing in relation to Jesus College, particularly the Fellows' Library, and surrounding buildings and streets. We recommend further analysis and testing of options for the height and massing within this historic context, regarding firstly the principle of the tower and its location on the site; and secondly, the overall building height and massing as it impacts upon views in and out of the site, across Oxford, and from street level. We welcome elements of the initial design approach but further resolution of the architectural approach is required to test the visibility and dominance of Northgate House in relation to the wider townscape.

The changing nature of 21st century retail creates unpredictability about future demand in Oxford city centre, compounded in and around Cornmarket and Market Streets by the redevelopment of the Westgate Centre. We recommend a flexible approach that places more emphasis on the retail culture along Market Street to further support the vitality of this part of the city centre.

We welcome the strategic steps taken to provide a series of outdoor spaces for users, including the widening of the Fellows' Garden, the creation of a new quadrangle, and the creation of active

CONFIDENTIAL

frontages on both streets. We recommend clarifying the desired function, look and feel of each of the proposed open spaces and how they relate to new and existing buildings, to ensure a coherent composition of buildings and open spaces and sense of place for different users. We suggest exploring further opportunities to activate the ground floor through the creation of a new public space around the entrance to the College and consideration of how uses, entrances, boundary treatment and architecture come together along Market Street.

We strongly encourage the applicant team, City Council and Historic England, along with relevant key stakeholders, to work collaboratively on this major scheme in the continued development of Oxford's historic city core, retail and academic future.

Historic context and townscape

Northgate House sits at a highly visible point at the heart of the internationally significant heritage context of Oxford city centre, and is adjacent to a series of Grade I and II listed buildings including Jesus College and the Covered Market. We recommend the design team consider in further detail how the scheme responds and contributes to this historic and sensitive context, particularly regarding the proposed height and massing. We note that:

- A detailed heritage assessment of Northgate House, Jesus College and the wider context is needed to provide a baseline against which to test the historic impact of the proposals and to build upon the analysis associated with the Central (University and City) Conservation Area
- A visual impact assessment, which explores the impact of the site layout, height and massing and design on the full range of existing and emerging views into, out of and across the city, including but not limited to the Oxford view cones, should be used as part of the iterative design process to ensure that the scheme protects and enhances its wider context
- A tower at the scale currently proposed could be justified, depending on further testing of its impact, but we question the rationale for its current location, which may not be necessary as a marker on the corner of Cornmarket Street and Market Street
- As the roof of the Northgate House will be highly visible from surrounding buildings, the design of the roofscape should be carefully considered, and steps taken to reduce the amount of visible plant and clutter
- A more appropriate relationship between the proposed Northgate House and its wider context could be achieved by slightly reducing the building height, particularly towards the east considering the proximity and building scale in relation to the Fellows' Library
- Pulling back the building frontage of Northgate House further would improve the setting of and views towards the Fellows' Library along Market Street.

CONFIDENTIAL

Future of retail in Oxford City Centre

A flexible and resilient approach to retail is needed to respond to the unpredictable and shifting demand and location of retail activity in Oxford, particularly in relation to the redevelopment of the Westgate Centre. In developing the character and function of the retail uses, we suggest considering ways to further improve the activity at street level and provide more resolution on the juxtaposition between the different uses within the building both internally and externally, including:

- Accommodating different sizes of retail units and/or understanding how the retail units could be reduced or increased in size as market demand changes
- Integrating the retail viability study being commissioned as part of the iterative design process to inform the design of units
- Exploring how smaller units, such as start-up business spaces, more retail entrances, and improved visibility into the shops can be integrated along Market Street to support activity at street level
- Exploring ways of concentrating active uses on the ground floor and to remove the need for a first floor retail space, which negatively impacts internal circulation and the relationship with student rooms within Northgate House. We think that that the basement could provide an opportunity to create a mezzanine level within the large volume between the floor level of the basement and ceiling level of the ground floor.

Access and circulation

The new entrance to Northgate House on Market Street will produce a stronger relationship between the Jesus College and Market Street, including the Covered Market. The nature of this relationship, the changing movement and circulation patterns around and into the College, and routes through the College into Northgate House require further work to ensure easy wayfinding, and active and welcoming routes and spaces. To achieve this, we recommend:

- A collaborative dialogue between the project team, Oxford City Council and the Covered Market regarding servicing arrangements for Northgate House and the Covered Market along Market Street. Considering the proximity to Northgate House, this should seek to reduce the noise, odour and congestion currently associated with the market servicing bay
- Assessing how the new entrance and access arrangements of Northgate House will impact on the current movement patterns across the Jesus College. Considering students and staff are likely to be directed through the main Porters' Lodge on Turl Street, we suggest looking for ways to maintain some level of activity at the Market Street entrance which will help to also activate the Digital Hub
- Exploring how the areas of public realm along Market Street within the red line boundary can support a public space in front of the new entrance, incorporating features such as

CONFIDENTIAL

street trees or seating and strengthening the relationship between the College and Digital Hub, Market Street and the Covered Market

- Assessing the benefits and drawbacks of options for circulation routes through Jesus College to Northgate House, including the impact of physical changes to the existing historic fabric such as the west range of the second quadrangle, the legibility and intuitiveness of routes, and how the route would contribute to the overall collegiate experience
- Investigating historical and recent precedents for college quadrangles on multiple levels to inform the resolution of access and circulation
- Exploring how the routes work from Northgate House to other important College spaces to the north, including the Junior Common Room, the Habbakuk Room and the Old Members' Building
- Explore whether access to the quadrangle could be simplified by locating it on the first instead of the second floor level
- Considering an external route or passageway to the quadrangle rather than internal access through the Digital Hub to improve wayfinding.

Quadrangle, Fellows' Garden and open spaces

We welcome the proposals for the creation of a new quadrangle and the reconfiguration of the Fellows' Garden which continue the historic sequence of spaces through Jesus College that define the collegiate experience for staff, students and visitors. Alongside the roof terraces, they provide important amenity space for these users. However, the function, look and feel of these spaces has not been clearly defined. We make the following suggestions to support the creation of well-integrated and usable spaces:

- Appoint a landscape architect at an early stage to support the project team in defining an overarching strategy and desired function, look and feel of each of the spaces within and around Northgate House
- Explore in more detail how the unique character of Jesus College could be incorporated in the design of the open space and surrounding buildings, including trees, planting and seating, the level of enclosure of each space, and the relationship between the building uses and adjacent spaces
- The majority of existing trees within the Fellows' Garden, except for the Acer, are of little value due to their poor quality and could be replaced in order to make the most of the reconfiguration of this space with new trees and planting. New trees should be of a variety of species, and should be resilient to this urban environment
- Explore ways of maximising the quadrangle as a space for interaction and meeting, in line with its historic function and identity. This could include enabling direct access to student rooms from the quadrangle through a revision of the internal layout of student accommodation

CONFIDENTIAL

Stuart Cade	Rick Mather Architects
Mandy Franz	Rick Mather Architects
David Stevenson	Jesus College
Stuart Woodward	Jesus College
Derek Farrow	Bidwells
Adrian Arnold	Oxford City Council
Andrew Murdoch	Oxford City Council
Gill Butter	Oxford City Council

Apologies

Tom Foxall	Historic England
------------	------------------

Design Council Cabe

Elli Thomas
Victoria Lee

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

- Consider in more detail how the staircases could become more active and welcoming places for sitting, gathering and interacting, such as through the orientation of the staircases to improve the level of natural daylighting.

Architecture

We recommend further analysis on the role Northgate House will play in the overall and existing streetscapes in the historic city centre. The existing building provides a quiet backdrop to Cornmarket and Market Streets, which enables it to sit more comfortably in its setting despite its large scale, location on a corner and key frontages. We encourage the design team to think more carefully about if and to what extent this building should stand out, and to test the balance of its visibility and prominence in the wider context through short and long range views. In clarifying its role and developing the proposals, we make the following suggestions:

- We support the intention for a strong vertical emphasis in the façade which echoes the vertical articulation of the existing buildings along Cornmarket Street and recommend considering other options which reinforce this effect. Currently, the horizontal banding and the pleated facade above the shop fascias overcomplicate this façade making it overly dominant along this key streetscape, and break the vertical emphasis of the existing buildings
- A pleated or angled façade providing views in different directions could potentially work on the more private eastern façade facing the Fellows' Library
- We recommend further information be provided at a later stage to enable the panel to comment on the material palette and the internal layout and arrangement.

Next steps

We recommend the applicant consult the Oxford Design Review Panel at a more detailed stage to ensure the best quality of design as the proposals develop. Should you have any questions regarding the content of this note, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Design Workshop Panel

Keith Bradley (Chair)
Jessica Bryne-Daniel
Kathryn Davies
Jon Rowland

Attendees

Nik Lyzba JPPC
Neil Warner JPPC