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Michael Crofton-Briggs
Oxford City Council – City Development
St Aldate's Chambers
109-113 St Aldates
Oxford OX1 1DS

22 March 2013

Dear Mr Crofton-Briggs

**Student Accommodation at Castle Mill, Roger Dudman Way, Oxford
11/02881/FUL**

Thank you for your letter of 4th March 2013 which was sent following our meeting on 8th February 2013.

In your letter you highlight a number of issues arising from the City Council's West Area Planning Committee meeting, held on 7th February 2013, which included key points raised by speakers at the meeting. You noted also that the Committee had decided to instruct you to "negotiate with the University of Oxford in order to ameliorate the size and impact of the development" with the intent of reporting back to the Committee at its meeting on 17th April 2013. With the aim of assisting you with that report, you have asked for our written response to the various matters raised.

As indicated in your earlier report to Committee on 7th February, the correct planning procedures have been followed with regard to the development. The buildings are being constructed in strict accordance with the plans and details approved by the Planning Committee on 15th February 2012, and the effect of the development, including the views over Port Meadow, was considered by the Planning Officer in the report to Committee, and by members at the Committee meeting.

Various suggestions have been made over recent weeks to reduce the height of some of the buildings by changing the pitched roofs to flat roofs or by removing one or two floors from the buildings. It is not practicable to change the roof form since the pitched roofs contain a large amount of vital services for the buildings. The removal of floors, although being structurally possible, would be extremely difficult to achieve at this stage and would involve a major redesign and rebuild. In addition, any removal of floors would also significantly reduce the student accommodation within the scheme which would have a major impact on the University's ability to comply with the City Council's strict limit on student numbers in privately rented accommodation.

Making such major modifications at this late stage to the largely completed buildings will have major cost implications. We have not undertaken any detailed work, but the costs will be significant and certainly between £10m and £20m when also taking into account the other consequential costs, such as loss of rent.



The University is a charity, with the charitable objective of the advancement of learning by teaching and research. It would be an inappropriate use of charitable funds to incur costs of this magnitude in relation to a scheme which has planning approval and which helps to address the City Council's longstanding requirement for increased student accommodation in the city. Therefore the University will not voluntarily reduce the heights of these buildings.

The University is however very much aware that there have been some serious concerns expressed by certain parts of the community and we are keen to investigate mitigating actions that could be reasonably taken to ameliorate any adverse impacts. We would be comfortable in considering options for further on-site and off-site landscaping, including the possibility of the application in some areas of 'green walls'. We would be willing to work with the relevant officers of the Council to consider these options in more detail.

You will recall that we did change the colour of the render finish and the roofs when the Planning Condition for the colours of materials was approved by the Planning Officer and we would anticipate that no further changes to these approved details is necessary.

A point was raised at the meeting on the 7th February regarding light pollution onto Port Meadow. We have considered this point, and as all of the bedrooms will have window blinds and/or curtains fitted we do not consider that any further mitigation, such as window film, would be necessary or appropriate.

We also note that some concern has been expressed regarding the level of consultation in regard to the development. In this case we believe that we exceeded the normal expectation in regard to consultation, a policy that we follow in regard to all our developments. We are however very happy to participate in any discussion about improvements to this process, both for the preparation of statements of community involvement, and during the application process itself.

Finally, we are also very aware of the City Council's desire to complete the further stage of the 'Views Study' for Oxford, which should more clearly define expectations regarding how the impact of proposed developments should be assessed. I would confirm the University's keen desire to be involved in and contribute to this study.

I think that it would be helpful for us to meet again once you have had an opportunity to consider this letter and I would suggest that we endeavour to arrange a meeting for soon after the Easter break.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Goffin', written over a light blue horizontal line.

Paul Goffin,
Director of Estates.