

West Area Planning Committee

14 September 2011

Application Number: 07/02818/FUL, 09/01557/LBC

Permission granted: 31 March 2009, 15 October 2009

Proposal: Compliance with condition 4 of the planning permission and condition 3 of the listed building consent for approval of exterior materials for the extension to Middle Eastern Centre to provide new library facilities, common area, lecture room, storage areas .

Site Address: 66 And 68 Woodstock Road St Antony's College (Middle Eastern Centre) Oxford Oxfordshire OX2 6HR

Ward: North Ward

Agent: John Philips Planning
Consultancy

Applicant: The Warden And Fellows
Of St Antony's College

Recommendation:

That the use of stainless steel as the external cladding material BE APPROVED

For the following reason:

- 1 The proposed external cladding material is a critical element to the success of this project. The Council considers that the use of polished stainless steel will deliver the design intent for the building whilst producing an intriguing visual experience. The reflective nature of the cladding material emphasises the extruded qualities and fluidity of the building and will reflect its landscaped setting. It will not harm the character and appearance of the conservation area or setting of the listed buildings.

Main Local Plan Policies:

Oxford Local Plan 2001-2016

CP1 - Development Proposals

CP8 - Design Development to Relate to its Context

CP9 - Creating Successful New Places

HE3 - Listed buildings
HE7 - Conservation Areas

Core Strategy

CS18 - Urban design, town character, historic environment

Officers Assessment:

Background

1. The applications were considered by North Area Committee on 7th August 2008 and planning permission and listed building consent were granted for this extension designed by Zaha Hadid Architects in 2009. The design is contemporary and the proposed external material was proposed to be contemporary also – glass fibre reinforced polymer. The colour of this material was not decided, with options for white or black or bronze.
2. The officers report at the time discouraged the use of white or bronze colours commenting that *black is preferred out of the options put forward.... it adds an aesthetic edge to the sculptural quality, achieving sharper reflections of the surroundings*. Because the architects were still exploring the options and because there was not the opportunity to examine samples of the materials (only visualisations) it was agreed at the meeting that the choice of external cladding for this building would be determined by officers in consultation with the committee chairman. The then chairman, Councillor Gotch, was consulted on the current submission of polished stainless steel for the external cladding, but could not support the proposal, hence this report.

Selecting an external cladding material

3. Following the determination of the applications the architects reviewed the options for external cladding and in the summer of 2010 erecting 4 large scale sample panels - dark grey GFRP, Dark Brown GFRP, Stainless steel and weathered steel (COR-TEN), to test durability and weathering properties.
4. At the end of 2010 the architect's and college's preferred option was the use of COR-TEN Steel, based on performance, durability and ease of fabrication, Officers agreed with this and Councillor Gotch, chairman of North Area Committee concurred.
5. There are engineering consequences, involving some structural redesign in the use of COR-TEN. The college has explained that this will add to design and construction costs that will prejudice delivery of the project. More significant, perhaps, is following a design review there is now a design imperative to use polished stainless steel rather than weathered steel. The architects explain that the smooth reflective nature of stainless steel is more appropriate (than weathered steel) and is more appropriate in its setting literally reflecting its context – which will include the greenery and trees within the garden.

6. COR-TEN steel would develop a patina and texture, which will have a more 'organic' quality to it and contextually could work with the colour and hues of the garden setting. It's patina (rusty qualities) may develop unevenly with staining and this would affect the 'extruded' qualities of the design for this contemporary building. It would also be understood as a weighty and solid material. It is unfortunate that the architects promoted the use of COR-TEN when now they are very clearly in favour a material with high reflective qualities and an absence of any patina, something that weathered steel is most definitely not.

Conclusion

7. It is inevitable that there will be individual or personal preferences for one material or another. In this instance in coming to a conclusion officers have reviewed the design roots of this contemporary building to understand the materiality of the proposed building.
8. The work of Zaha Hadid has been described as 'baroque modernism' (by the Design Museum). The building avoids the classically formal, rule bound modernism and the old rules of space — walls, ceilings, front and back, right angles. The spaces are reassembled in what she calls "a new fluid, kind of spatiality" of multiple perspective points and fragmented geometry. Within the context of North Oxford and the rules of gothic architecture there is nothing that this building will have in common with its neighbours. The architects have explored a range of materials to find a contextual link and considered that the use of COR-TEN steel fitted the design objectives of the building and its setting. Following an internal design review they have come full circle back to the original intent of a material that was highly reflective and that accentuated the extruded qualities and fluidity of the building. The use of polished stainless steel is a 'reflection' of the strong will of the creator, but the design objective has been scrutinised and reviewed to ensure that the finished building is true to its architectural form and expression. Further change to the cladding material runs the risk of undermining the design intent for this extruded form and lightweight reflective quality and as the college has explained risks delivery of the project.
9. The success of stainless steel panels rests on a quality and precision in fabrication, installation and maintenance. To ensure this happens it is proposed that the use of this material is subject to:
 - a) The provision of reference panels on site to ensure consistency and quality in fabrication and installation.
 - b) The submission to and agreement by the local planning authority of a repair and maintenance schedule.

Human Rights Act 1998

Officers have considered the Human Rights Act 1998 in reaching a recommendation to approve the submitted materials, subject to conditions. Officers have considered the potential interference with the rights of the owners/occupiers of surrounding properties under Article 8 and/or Article 1 of the First Protocol of the Act and consider that it is proportionate.

Officers have also considered the interference with the human rights of the applicant under Article 8 and/or Article 1 of the First Protocol caused by imposing conditions. Officers consider that the conditions are necessary to protect the rights and freedoms of others and to control the use of property in accordance with the general interest. The interference is therefore justifiable and proportionate.

Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998

Officers have considered, with due regard, the likely effect of the proposal on the need to reduce crime and disorder as part of the determination of this application, in accordance with section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. In reaching a recommendation officers consider that the proposal will not undermine crime prevention or the promotion of community safety.

Background Papers:

Contact Officer: Nick Worlledge

Extension: 2158

Date: 31 August 2011