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06 July 2015

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Our reference: DCC/0589

### **Oxford City Council: Westgate Shopping Centre Lantern**

Dear Sara,

Thank you for presenting to the ODRP meeting on 25 June 2015. The client's commitment to developing a well-designed new shopping centre for Oxford that matches the city's international reputation and outstanding architectural heritage is commendable. We find much to admire in this proposal for a piece of art that complements the building. The vertical element is an interesting addition to the skyline and we find the glass object intriguing. However, the relationship between the piece of art and the tower on which it rests appears somewhat unresolved and requires further clarification to create a compelling whole that will engage people and become a long-lasting, cherished adornment of Oxford.

#### **Impact on the Oxford skyline**

Oxford has evolved over centuries with a multitude of magnificent towers and spires adding to the richness of the skyline, and the proposed glass lantern has the potential to become a delightful 21<sup>st</sup> century contribution. The verified views prove useful to demonstrate how the lantern's height, as defined by the parameters of the outline application, fits into the townscape as a secondary element and that it relates well to its neighbours. It strikes an interesting balance between being a beacon that marks the shopping centre, particularly at night, and blending in seamlessly. It will be important to develop the wider arts strategy and signage for the shopping centre in such a way that they complement the lantern and have a compelling narrative.

#### **The glass object**

The idea of a glass object on top of the shopping centre that captures and reflects sunlight and sends out rays of light at night is compelling. We are impressed by the thinking that has informed this piece of art and the precision with which it is executed. The simplicity of the design depends on a flawless presentation on top of the building and immaculate detailing. We would like to suggest exploring further options in terms of height and width of both the object itself and the glass panels. Currently, the proposed object appears somewhat out of tune with its context, for example the proportions of the tower on which it will sit and the size of the existing windows surrounding it. It will also



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be beneficial to reassess the possibility of glare and glint and the impact on pedestrians. We also ask the client and design team to bear in mind that the use of the lantern may be altered in the future, for example adding different types of lighting, colour or laser beams, and the design needs to be robust enough to deal with these modifications. While the glass curtain covering the oculus is intriguing, it does not relate to the lantern, and we suggest considering a design that establishes a closer bond between the two elements.

### Lantern and tower

The relationship of the lantern and the tower seems to be the least successful part of the project. While the previous cubic iteration of the glass object appeared to grow from the rectangular tower in a convincing manner, the two elements now seem somewhat disconnected. It is unclear whether the lantern wants to be part of the building or whether it is presented as a piece of art on top of a tall pedestal. The former would require a single composition and a strong link between the lantern and the building, for example by giving it a function that is related to the spaces below. To make it a plinth for this piece of art, we would wish to see a tower design that responds in a subtle and minimalist way to the precision and simplicity of the proposed lantern. We suggest looking at the lantern and tower as a whole and revisiting the proportions, the ratio between solid and glass, the junction between the two elements and the detailing of the prosaic parts, eaves and flashing, for example, to match the quality of the other towers and spires of Oxford.

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



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Daniela Schönbacher	Glass Artist
Jeremy Dixon	Dixon Jones
Michael Trigg	Dixon Jones
Murray Hancock	Oxford City Council
Nick Worledge	Oxford City Council
David Edwards	Oxford City Council
David Brock	English Heritage

**Review process**

Following a site visit and discussions with the design team and local authority, the scheme was reviewed on 25 June 2015 by Fred Manson (chair), Eddie Booth, Jessica Bryne-Daniel, Jon Rowland, and Sarah Wigglesworth. 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 [designreview@designcouncil.org.uk](mailto:designreview@designcouncil.org.uk).



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