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Stansfield Park, Oxford Design Workshop

Notes from 18 August 2016

Thank you for attending the Oxford Design Review Panel (ODRP) Design Workshop on 18 August 2016. We welcome the opportunity to offer our advice and look forward to engaging in future dialogue as the proposal develops. We offer the following suggestions in taking the design principles forward.

Summary

A Science and Innovation Centre builds on Oxford's strong history and reputation in learning. The land uses work well on the site and would make good use of the site's rich landscape character.

However, further work on the building and landscape design is required before a planning application is submitted. A bolder design and stronger rationale for the layout of the internal and external spaces is needed. As a Science and Innovation Centre on an ecologically important site in Oxford, it will set a precedent for similar proposals. In terms of its architectural design, the building has a monotonous, industrial look that does not reflect its unique function and appears at odds with its woodland setting. More work is required on the detail and materials to celebrate the landscape and sustainability aspects of the development and deliver an affordable but inspiring building.

Vision for a Science/Innovation Centre

Use the design, in particular sustainability principles and the landscape, to promote the concept and ethos of the building. This includes:

- Thinking long term not short term – investment in the construction of the building may reduce its operating costs in the long term.
- Developing strategies for surface water management and drainage within the site – include SUDs.
- Exploring options to reduce solar heat gain – for example, by including an overhanging roof to deflect sunlight.
- Considering the long term cost benefits of incorporating a green roof into the new building.

We think that it is essential that you take the longer term growth of the Science and Innovation Centre into account in the formulation of this proposal. If additional capacity may be required in the future, consider where and how this could be accommodated within the site.

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Context and site layout

In the next iteration of the scheme, drawings to show how the building will relate to the wider neighbourhood are essential, especially at ground floor level. The topography of the site should be used in the development of the proposal, and it should be acknowledged and addressed on the plans and drawings.

The site's location is an asset as there are no buildings within close proximity and limited views into the site. Within this context, there is scope to be creative with the position, footprint, layout and scale and mass of the building. We are not convinced that building on the existing building's footprint is the optimum siting of the new building, and suggest further exploring alternative site layouts and positioning of buildings, including a central position.

Utilising a consistent height of two storeys would create more open space and would ensure that the available land for development is used efficiently. Options to add additional height to the building could be explored.

Landscaping and parking

Creating safe and successful movement routes for vehicle users, cyclists and pedestrians within and into the site should be a key focus of the development. To achieve a place in which active travel is easy and comfortable, an assessment of how different members of the community with different mobility requirements will move around the site is required. In particular consideration should be given to:

- the purpose, function and use of the path in the car parking area in the middle of the site.
- the access and approach into the site – which should create a sense of arrival and a safe and welcoming route for pedestrians and vehicle users. Particular consideration should be given to the location of passing points.

The inclusion of cycle parking and the proposal to stagger car parking charges, with reduced rates for hybrid and electric cars is positive as it will encourage sustainable modes of travel.

The amount and need of on site parking space should be clearly assessed and justified. The proposed number of car parking spaces on site may be inadequate, given the number of employees, limited range of alternative modes of transport and infrequent bus services. We recommend carrying out a transport assessment to help inform the landscape design and layout for the site. In addition, alternative parking strategies should be explored in order to rationalise the site layout and enable the car parking to better integrate with the surrounding landscape. The parking could be re-located to the edge of the site where it would be

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screened from view by the existing trees on the site. Permeable surfacing for the car park will soften its impact and mitigate surface water flooding.

The development should capitalise on the biodiversity, landscape and setting which are valuable assets and would attract occupiers to the Science and Innovation Centre. Climbing plants on the building could be an educational resource for young children, and provide a habitat for wildlife for example. The existing woodland will be complemented by the planting of indigenous species. A landscape management plan should be developed in conjunction with the proposal to maximise biodiversity and increase the landscape value.

Building design

The building has a poor relationship with its context and has a monotonous, industrial look that does not reflect its unique function nor integrate well with the woodland landscape.

In terms of architectural design quality, we recommend being more creative:

- Re-considering the building's cladding materials, including questioning whether the proposed timber cladding is having the desired effect. Taking into account the building's external appearance and cost and how this might impact the budget – for example there may be cheaper alternatives to copper.
- Considering alternative roof forms to add interest.
- Exploring options to introduce light and permeability within the building to create a pleasant internal environment with views of the surrounding woodland.
- Playing with rhythm and layout – possible different elevational treatments and detailing on different floors/levels.
- Being more flexible with the elevation – glazed strips could be replaced by windows, for example, whilst retaining internal flexibility.

Internal layout

The proposal to construct a single building that would accommodate both land uses is acceptable. However, it is important to consider whether the different uses should be accommodated within a single block, particularly as the Science Centre will be frequently visited by young children. Consider the interaction between the innovation and science uses and how they might be logically accommodated within the new block, for example the building could have a central reception/entrance area with two wings and different entrances for different users. We would recommend exploring options to rationalise access in and out of the new block.

Create a more prominent, welcoming entrance to the building – consider the use of double-height entrance and the relocation of the main stair core to a more central location. The inclusion of the 'knuckle' (key point of connection between both wings) is a sound design

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concept as it creates a central meeting point within the building and a space for people to congregate, so consider whether it should be bigger. Include a visible/prominent entrance to the theatre from this room. Investigate ways to make the theatre a focal point within the building and assist with way-finding. Consider whether the size of the café is adequate for the proposed number of occupiers. Develop the relationship between the inside and outside: is the café in the right place fully to enjoy its surroundings and orientation?

The internal layout feels cramped and more internal circulation space at all levels would be beneficial. Include more communal areas for innovation, collaboration and social interaction. Wider corridors would be beneficial as they would facilitate interaction between users who are likely to meet in these areas.

A follow-up review of this scheme is recommended before a planning application is submitted.

Attendees

Design Workshop Panel

Joanna van Heyningen – Chair
Alan Berman
Deborah Nagan
Peter Studdert

Scheme presenters

Justin Metcalfe - ADP Architects
Wayne Dobbins - ADP Architects
Katherine Jones - Kemp & Kemp
Steven Sensecall - Kemp & Kemp
Helen Palmer - LandShape
Chris Allington - Oxford Innovation
Felipe Castro - Ridge
Steve Burgess - The Oxford Trust
William James - The Oxford Trust (Trustee)

Local Authority

Fiona Bartholomew - Oxford City Council

Review process



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Following a site visit, and discussions with the design team and local authority and a pre-application review, the scheme was reviewed on 18 August 2016 by Jo van Heyningen – Chair, Alan Berman, Deborah Nagan and Peter Studdert. These comments supersede any views we may have expressed previously.

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.

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