

**Appendix 6**  
**18/02065/OUTFUL – Oxford North**

**Oxford Design Review Panel letters:**

- 1. 28 April 2016**
- 2. 8 June 2017**
- 3. 24 May 2018**

## **Northern Gateway, Oxford City Council**

### **Design Workshop**

**Notes from 28 April 2016**

Thank you for providing Design Council Cabe with the opportunity to advise on the Northern Gateway proposal at the Design Workshop on 28 April 2016.

#### **Summary**

The high aspirations for this proposal match the importance of Northern Gateway as Oxford's largest development project, supporting the city's role as a global leader for innovation and research. The recent acquisition of the site by Thomas White Oxford (TWO), a subsidiary of St John's College, and subsequent appointment of a new design team, Fletcher Priest Architects, provide a welcome fresh start to the scheme. The combined expertise and experience of the client and design team as well as the long-term interest of the land owner have the potential to provide a good foundation for the design and delivery of a successful new quarter in Oxford.

We strongly encourage the team to take more advantage of the opportunities this significant scheme offers for Oxford. The current thinking is promising, underpinned by an ambitious vision and ten key design principles to create a new holistic place and the comprehensive analysis of global innovation districts is commendable. Given the limited amount of developable land in Oxford and the planned improvements to the public transportation links across North Oxford, a new quarter in this location that is urban in character is justified. We suggest exploring further how this new place could be designed to be unique to Oxford, taking into account the information from the research at this stage. More time is needed to develop the design thinking and approach and we strongly recommend a hybrid planning application to deliver the project.

#### **The ten design principles for the Northern Gateway**

The points raised at the workshop meeting have been structured around the ten design principles developed by the client and design team as below:

1. Global trajectories
2. Thomas White Oxford (TWO)'s vision
3. 'Oxford-ness'
4. Making a piece of city
5. Transforming perceptions
6. Overlaps and interaction
7. Long term adaptation
8. Landscape
9. Climate and energy
10. Mobility

We offer the following suggestions in taking the design principles forward and look forward to engaging in future dialogue as the proposal develops. It might be useful for the team to consider a



set of objectives that emerges from the exploration of each of these principles. This would help guide the project through the design and then development period.

### 1. Global trajectories

The extensive research by the design team on innovation districts and university campuses across the globe provides a solid basis for the masterplan thinking and design of Northern Gateway. To ensure the scheme is practical and resilient, the lessons learnt through these precedents could be developed more in the project by:

- Undertaking further analysis of the key themes from the growth of a campus and the use of satellite campuses, for example MIT and Cornell Technology.
- Assessing the Kings Cross masterplan in more detail given the similarities in terms of scale and the role of a university as a key element of the development.
- Continuing to compare the site and buildings to other national and international developments through urban studies to better understand and grasp the scale of the Northern Gateway.

### 2. TWO's vision

A high benchmark for this new quarter in terms of creating a place that underpins Oxford's reputation as an exemplary place to live, work and study needs to be defined in TWO's vision, informed by Oxford City Council's strategy for North Oxford, by:

- Designing a development that is innovative and deliverable, by investigating and exploring ambitious concept, for example being carbon neutral, promoting sustainable transport, integrating edible landscapes and food growing.
- Developing innovative long-term operation, management and maintenance strategies for buildings and spaces to ensure Northern Gateway remains a well-run and desirable place.
- Developing a fully integrated mix of uses that is recognisable as being part of Oxford, and that will present a positive draw to investors and researchers from around the world, and meeting their needs.

### 3. 'Oxford-ness'

The extent of 'Oxford-ness' for the new quarter would benefit from further clarification in the masterplan design to demonstrate how the scheme combines ambitious, innovative global standards and the existing character of the Oxford. We suggest:

- Understanding the design briefs, ambitions and approaches of other future developments in the city centre and on the outskirts of Oxford further to ensure Oxford continues to grow and expand as a holistic place in relation to other major developments, such as Barton Park, for example.
- Understanding the character and distinctiveness of the city - the city council's work on character might be a suitable starting point. Continuing to test the building height strategy across the site to create a variegated skyline with slender and articulated buildings to make a positive contribution to the "dreaming spires". Taller elements set against the surrounding

suburban area would reinforce the urban character of Northern Gateway as opposed to the current situation dominated by highway infrastructure.

- Providing verified views of the wider context incorporating existing and future buildings heights for better assessments of the proposed building heights. The initial studies to test long range views across the site with the proposed buildings are helpful. We encourage Oxford City Council to work collaboratively with the client and design team in this regard, particularly if taller buildings above the heights set in the Northern Gateway Area Action Place are proposed.

#### **4. Making a piece of city**

Currently the site layout with a series of blocks “stamped” across the site appears simplistic, evocating a business park rather than the closely knit fabric of a new quarter fostering exchange and synergies between different users. The formal character, scale and orientation of the main east-west street connecting the three parts of the site is successful, but the proposal lacks a clear hierarchy for routes, buildings and spaces and a strong focal point which is required to create a distinct piece of Oxford with a thriving urban character. We recommend:

- Exploring different types and sizes of the urban blocks to create a strong street-based character, taking cues from the historic street pattern of Oxford and small scale alleyways between places to support integration between users.
- Considering how to differentiate the fronts and backs of buildings in more detail, particularly for the mixed-use typologies to create successful street and spaces rather than backyards and service areas.
- Creating a centre of gravity at the heart of the masterplan, offering a singular/special use similar to the market square with the church in the historic town which reinforces Northern Gateway’s role as a key destination in Oxford.
- Using the centre of gravity to enhance the sense of orientation for users across the site. Once this point is fixed, explore different parameters and permutations of the surrounding street layout, open spaces and buildings.
- Using both large scale and finer grained grids that would allow a more interesting urbanity and mix of uses, including large and small public spaces.
- Identifying and reinforcing different levels of use intensities in the layout of the streets, open spaces and building design. Stronger focal points in the north-east and south-west parts would be helpful in activating these areas and developing the urban character.
- Providing more clarification of the rationale for the street hierarchy and creating more opportunities to link streets and key nodes across the site, including for example, a more defined route to the service station to the north. Currently some streets do not appear to have a clear end point.
- Developing a clearer strategy for the location and distribution of uses, particularly housing, across the site including further opportunities to mix housing with other uses. Housing currently appears too concentrated and isolated in some areas, for example in the south western part of the site which appears to be mono-cultural in character and use.
- Considering a stronger edge along the south western boundary of the site to demarcate the transition between the new urban development and the meadows and nearby canal to the west. The detached houses along this edge are particularly out of place from the rest of the

masterplan and surrounding area in terms of building layout, scale and density. Precedents such as Accordia in Cambridge show how such a transition can be achieved successfully.

### **5. Overlaps and interactions**

The success of Northern Gateway will depend on the fruitful exchange between the different user groups, the new quarter and the historic city, currently expressed by physical and social links between the new and existing communities, for example, and the use of schools in the wider area. The proposed multi-layered blocks have the potential to support social interaction between departments, residents, employees and visitors by breaking up the traditional building typologies. This is an interesting and innovative concept, but still in its early stages of development. We suggest:

- Ensuring the masterplan is well-integrated into its wider context and taking a more outward-looking and connective design approach. At present, the current design approach feels somewhat restrained by the redline boundary.
- Continuing to engage with the local authorities and communities in the wider area, particularly Cherwell District Council, given future growth to the north of the site.
- Taking a stronger three dimensional approach to the design of the multi-layered blocks, but ensuring future proofing when change occurs. The initial studies to test these blocks are promising.
- Continuing to test the building scale and massing in relation to the urban context together with the requirements for the internal uses. At present the dimension of a typical block appears bulky, akin to the typical footprints of blocks that can be found in a business park context.

### **6. Transforming perceptions**

Currently, Northern Gateway is dominated by busy motorways. The initial design approach to the arterial roads help transform this character. Reducing the speed of the A44 and limiting the car parking on the site identified in the Northern Gateway Area Action Plan are positive moves. To further transform the current perception of the area we suggest:

- Announcing the new quarter to car drivers heading south from the Peartree roundabout by a distinct change in quality in the street design, for example by planting new trees and introducing well-designed street furniture, and robust, long-lasting paving material.
- Taking a bolder and more strategic approach to the site edges, particularly when seen from the A34 which offers the opportunity to develop a city view that matches Oxford's reputation.
- Reconsidering the multi-storey car parks along the A40. Given this is a major thoroughfare into the city centre, it warrants active building uses which the uses as currently proposed cannot provide.

### **7. Long term adaptation**

At this stage a more holistic and realistic approach to the project is required to ensure this new piece of city will be truly transformational, future-led and innovative, to be able to take into account changing demographics and requirements, transport and technological advances. This is

particularly important with regards to the infrastructure works which seem to be a series of smaller, disconnected interventions without a clear perspective. We encourage Oxfordshire Council and Oxford City Council to define and express their long-term requirements regarding future ambition and innovation at this stage. It would be beneficial to:

- Reconsider the street widths as more infrastructure will require more space which may lead to increased building heights and impact on the proposed building typologies.
- Embed long-term adaptability as a design driver in developing plots and block designs.

### **8. Landscape**

The landscape design starts weaving in the characteristics of the meadows surrounding the site while enhancing the urban setting of Northern Gateway. The concept of a sequence of larger open spaces that are urban in character, serving a wide variety of user groups is positive. However, a stronger landscape narrative and strategy that is fully embedded in the vision for Northern Gateway, strategically addressing the challenges of this new piece of Oxford is required to develop a landscape that is resilient, promotes biodiversity, health and well-being and an active lifestyle, integrates sustainable water management and can sustain a growing population and adapt to their needs over time. We recommend:

- Developing different characters for 'wild' green spaces across the site to help ensure that the open spaces support active uses and do not feel sterile.
- Thinking in more detail about how the existing landscape to the south west of the site adjacent to the canal and wildflower meadow could be integrated, in order to make best use of it as a green and active buffer to the surrounding areas and as an open space that is easily accessible and used frequently, providing a series of 'green rooms' that can be used for leisure and play.
- Exploring ways in which this green space could extend into the site, for example, through a series of green fingers that connect the central parts of Northern Gateway with the surrounding meadows.
- Investigating whether car parking could be integrated within the open spaces to help better distribute car parking across the site and avoid large, concentrated car parking zones or congested streets. Lessons on how other European university cities have dealt with car parking to maximise public space need to be considered. The Northern Gateway offers the opportunity to be innovative.
- Exploring further initiatives for roof planting.

### **9. Climate and energy**

We note that at this stage of the proposal strategies for climate and energy, in line with an overall strategy for sustainability, are yet to be developed. It will be worth developing the green and blue infrastructure, including sustainable urban drainage, much more in the landscape design to support the overall sustainability of this proposal.

### **10. Mobility**

We encourage Oxford City and Oxfordshire County Councils to continue working with the client and design team on the street layout and detailed design, and to provide necessary information on

the future strategy for public transportation. It will be important to see how these plans are being meaningfully and strategically embedded in the proposals. The approach to movement and mobility of users across Northern Gateway, particularly pedestrians and cyclists, and sustainable urban drainage requires further thought and detail. We suggest:

- Exploring in more detail how the buildings and roads could be better designed to mitigate noise, air pollution and congestion along the highways, and the initial attempts to do so in the design approach.
- Identifying different means of access for pedestrians, cyclists and cars across the site and ensure these are secured in the design approach and detail of these routes.

**Planning application**

We recommend a hybrid planning application to initiate development and provide long term guidance to ensure a successful new place will be delivered. To ensure the design of the buildings and spaces is driven by the highest ambition in terms of design, details, materials and construction, we recommend:

- Developing an illustrative masterplan supported by parameter plans to help set and define the ambition for the Northern Gateway, as individual proposals are likely to emerge at different stages of the masterplan delivery.
- Developing public realm and open space, streets, key buildings elements in Phase 1, to set a high standard for the proposal should be part of the detailed application.
- Key performance indicators such as biodiversity, carbon use, water, microclimate should be identified at this stage to help set high environmental and social targets throughout the masterplan delivery and construction.
- Ensuring that the Design Code, if one is developed for this masterplan, is understood by everyone.

**Attendees**

Design Workshop Panel

Keith Bradley (chair)  
 Jon Rowland  
 Noel Farrer  
 Tom Holbrook

Scheme presenters

William Donger	Thomas White Oxford
Marcus Mackay	Thomas White Oxford
Jonathan Kendall	Fletcher Priest Architects
Stina Hokby	Fletcher Priest Architects
Martha Alker	Townshends Landscape Architects

Nick Church                      Peter Brett Associates  
Rob Linnell                      Savills

Local Authority

Andrew Murdoch              Oxford City Council  
Gill Butter                      Oxford City Council

Design Council Caba staff

Thomas Bender  
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](mailto:cabe@designcouncil.org.uk).



2. 8 June 2017



CONFIDENTIAL

## Oxford North (Northern Gateway), Oxford City Council Design Workshop

### Notes from 8 June 2017

Thank you for attending the Oxford Design Review Panel (ODRP) Design Workshop on 8 June 2017. Having advised on the masterplan in October and December 2014, and again in April 2016, we welcome the opportunity to comment on the proposal as it progresses towards a planning application. This report is our formal advice following the Design Workshop of 8 June 2017.

### Introduction

The intention to develop Oxford North, formerly known as Oxford Northern Gateway, as an innovation district at the forefront of international practice, supports Oxford's and the UK's role as a global leader for innovation and research. Expanding Oxford's offer by creating a new, concentrated and highly appealing district for the activities and people involved in the knowledge economy appears to be an entirely appropriate and exciting proposition for this part of the city. We continue to support the high aspirations of the developer, Thomas White Oxford (TWO), which match the project's importance as the city's largest proposed development.

We recognise and welcome the significant amount of work that has gone into developing both the masterplan and the proposals for Phase 1A since the last Design Workshop, and the very helpful presentation at this Design Workshop. We support the approach of submitting a hybrid planning application. However, some of the major opportunities presented by the site, as referred to in our last advice letter, have not been taken advantage of in the current proposal. Overall, we think that the 10 overarching design principles for Oxford North are not yet successfully addressed and delivered in the current proposal. Principally, we see a paradox between the ambition of a thriving, urban innovation district of international status and appeal, and the character shown in the drawn proposals. The masterplan appears to be missing development at the important level of urban design, which is essential to bridge the gap between the strategic masterplan approach and the design of individual buildings.

In our view, more time and work are needed to develop the masterplan and Phase 1A. We make the comments and suggestions below on this basis, to assist the local authority, developer and design team achieve the purpose and ambitions of the project.

### Masterplan

As the proposals for Oxford North develop and a new piece of city emerges, the demands of creating an appealing, resilient district come into sharper focus. This gives all parties the opportunity to shape Phase 1A in light of the developed masterplan scheme and vice versa. In this context, we make the following points about the key moves that will underpin the success of the development.

## CONFIDENTIAL

### *Sustainability*

- The scheme appears to be missing a world-class ambition for sustainability. The proposed energy sharing loop system for heating, cooling and the provision of hot water is very positive but we would expect the scheme to take an even bolder strategic approach to the management of carbon, energy and water. We encourage TWO to establish a sustainability strategy with the aim of enabling the district to function independently – to be as ‘off-grid’ as possible – in relation to resources. The elements of the strategy should be developed and incorporated into the drawings to make sure that sustainability helps drive decision-making on the physical form of the development.
- We suggest devising a range of environmental indicators, benchmarking current performance, setting targets for the future and reporting on those indicators at regular intervals over time.

### *Spatial identity*

The historic environment of central Oxford generates many questions about the characteristics of the new innovation district, and the way in which those characteristics are informed by, and how they are distinct from, existing ‘Oxfordness’. Taking on board TWO’s vision for the development and the City Council’s position on ‘Oxfordness’, we make the following points about identity, as a fundamental aspect of the new innovation district.

- The masterplan and the Phase 1A proposals currently appear to mix urban, suburban, campus and business park characteristics and thus lack a clear spatial identity. The applicant team have set out to create an integrated urban environment and the City Council is seeking an ‘Oxfordness’ based on streets and spaces but the drawings do not show a clear typology of built form and external spaces.
- The blurred spatial identity means that the streets, plots and blocks are not yet working together well enough to create a coherent place. The blurring is also causing many issues in Phase 1A, as set out ahead.
- It is essential to define the identity of the innovation district – in terms of routes, density, layout and character – and apply it from the vision through to the drawings. We think that either an urban or a campus-like environment could work well; useful reference points may be found in edge-of-town university campuses such as that at Lancaster University.
- In our view, the ‘Oxfordness’ of the new district could be a new embodiment of existing characteristics of the city. We recommend not making literal references to Oxford’s historic environment in the new architecture.
- To realise the intended spatial identity, a stronger urban design proposal is needed. This should be informed by daylight and sunlight studies, which will help ensure that the buildings shape external spaces that provide suitable comfort, warmth, shade, shelter and appeal.
- We recommend exploring greater diversity in building heights and density across the masterplan area, potentially with some taller buildings and a finer urban grain, to enhance the district’s character and sense of place. At present, the built form appears rather homogenous and bland in terms of height and grain. The development could create a more impressive first impression of Oxford as drivers approach the city from the A34 with some taller buildings and a more interesting profile of roofs.

## CONFIDENTIAL

- We welcome the efforts to respond to the surrounding context but think the scheme could build on and respond to the character of the adjacent areas to a greater extent. Given the scale and significance of the development, we recommend exploring what could be achieved to transform this part of Oxford in partnership with neighbouring landowners and in relation to Oxford Parkway rail station. At present, the proposals show signs of having been developed too strictly within the boundary of the outline planning application and to a rapid timetable, limiting the development's ability to respond to future opportunities on the land around the site.

### *Infrastructure*

- We suggest reviewing some ways in which infrastructure is being invested in. We strongly support 'humanising' the A40 and A44 by reducing vehicular speeds and improving the character of these roads. We wonder whether sustainability mechanisms and the 'humanity' of the new Thomas White Street should also be prioritised as part of the investment in infrastructure.
- The innovation district will evolve over time, both during its planning and design, and as a dynamic place once built. With the growth of the district and the anticipated shift away from car-based travel, we recommend planning for future densification – for example by re-purposing proposed car parking areas – which could help make the district feel more like existing parts of Oxford.

### *Landscape*

- We recommend establishing a stronger vision for the landscape across the masterplan area. This should identify landscape-related outcomes as part of the sustainability strategy and provide the foundations for character areas, a rich urban ecology, seasonal change and landscape management – these are not yet evident in the drawings.
- The maintenance and management of the landscape will be crucial to the long-term appeal of the district; careful planning in relation to S106 contributions, ownership, access and responsibilities will be needed. For areas of external space that are managed by the landowner, we would advocate providing public access as far as possible.
- Landscape could be part of design codes and indicators that ensure that each delivery phase plays its part in creating an appealing and environmentally harmonious environment.
- We suggest exploring ways in which the open spaces and landscape could feel 'wilder', to connect the new district with its natural surroundings.

### *Meanwhile uses, arts and play*

- Given the project's long-term timeframe, we strongly suggest deploying temporary ('meanwhile') uses across the masterplan area, as the phases of development evolve and are implemented. Meanwhile interventions and activities would bring life to parts of the site not yet being developed in a permanent way, and enable a range of uses and physical forms to be tested for success. Installing long-term vegetation and nursery planting for future use across the district will also make effective use of the site.

## CONFIDENTIAL

- We strongly recommend establishing an arts strategy for the innovation district, through which residents and workers can enjoy a range of artworks and activities.
- Given the number of homes in the scheme and the anticipated blurring of home and work life, we also recommend developing a play strategy.

Committing to the above approaches would, in our view, both enable TWO's ambitions to be realised and be important in selling the innovation district to its international audience of investors, researchers and innovators.

### Phase 1A

In principle, the part of the site indicated for Phase 1A appears to be suitable to develop first. Humanising the A40, installing the new link road (Thomas White Street) and providing the red hall, a flexible workspace building, a residential building and new outdoor spaces make for a sound set of components to be delivered as Phase 1A. We would question the viability of retail provision in the first phase, unless greater vitality and footfall can be achieved through other modifications to the proposals.

#### *Movement, streets, spaces and parking*

- The humanisation of the A40 appears not to go far enough and we suggest reviewing the highways proposals and the workspace building to create a route that feels and operates more like a 30mph street.
- To achieve a strong and intuitive sense of place, we recommend creating a stronger hierarchy of routes and spaces within Phase 1A and providing more visual material to illustrate each street, square, courtyard or garden.
- We welcome the aim to support modal shift to active and sustainable travel through this project and the intention to minimise the effects of cars on the public realm. We suggest exploring ways to further reduce reliance on cars in the detailed proposals for Phase 1A.
- Accommodating necessary cars at basement level is positive; to help ensure that the public realm is sufficiently activated we recommend establishing outdoor pedestrian routes to the car park rather than internal circulation routes in buildings.
- The proposals for the Thomas White Street do not yet fully contribute to the ambitions of the project. We question the principle of building out only the south-east side of this street at this stage, as this dilutes the physical form, character and vitality of the new district's principal route and destination.
- We also recommend reviewing the way that Thomas White Street is contained and activated by building frontages along it, its width and accessibility for vehicles. Becoming pedestrian-only during working hours could support the goals of the innovation district.
- The temporary car park on the north-west side of the street makes a statement that is not in line with the intended environmental aspirations or shift away from car-based travel. We suggest that there should be greater emphasis on creating a more complete street by activating both sides of the street in Phase 1A to establish this important part of the new district's identity from the outset.



## CONFIDENTIAL

- The other open spaces in Phase 1A have the potential to be enjoyable although there is a risk that they detract from the primary routes, which are key to the district's character and vitality. While we welcome the location of the proposed public square, its location adjacent to the residential buildings is unlikely to be successful without more spatial containment, at least by a building on its east side.
- The courtyards proposed on the north-east side of the workspace building could be charming but we worry that their orientation, shaded by the building, will limit their appeal.

### *Landscape*

- Across Phase 1A, the landscape proposals could go further to create a more ecological environment and a more distinctive, dramatic sense of place.
- More information on the proposed landscape is needed – for example to show that this quantum of tree canopies will create spaces below that work for plants and/or people throughout the year. We would remind the team that planting trees over a basement car park will require a minimum a tree pit depth of 1.5 metres.
- We strongly recommend expanding what is delivered in Phase 1A to include structure planting, including the proposed buffer to the A34.

### *Buildings*

- In principle, a series of carefully designed buildings with a humane industrial feel appears appropriate for Oxford North.
- The concept of the red hall, as a hub for business and social activity with a distinctive form and appearance, is positive. The building's proposed colour is enlivening although we worry about the building's north-east elevation, where the lack of activity and articulation at ground floor level do not support the building's purpose.
- The workspace building is set to provide good accommodation for emerging knowledge-based businesses but its contribution to the wider urban form is more limited. This building does not yet play its part in the efforts to transform the A40 into a more humane street; one or more entrances, activity and a more 'open' architecture on its south-west side would make the A40 more inhabited and less hostile. We also recommend creating greater clarity on what is the 'front' and the 'back' of this building, and strengthening the building's corner at the junction of the A40 and Thomas White Street.
- In terms of the proposed envelope materials for these buildings, departing from traditional materials may well be successful here. However, both metal and glass are problematic because they lend themselves poorly to human-scale articulation at ground floor level or to adaptation – essential for the activities in the buildings to remain relevant and successful over time. We welcome the clay bricks proposed for the workspace building but are concerned that elevations that are primarily glass promote division, between 'inside' and 'outside', and potentially between 'insiders' and 'outsiders'.
- We would welcome the opportunity to comment further on the residential buildings and to see floor plans for the new homes. Given the project's ambitions, the residential buildings' contribution to the spaces around them and the quality of the internal and external spaces for residents ought to be of the highest standard.



## CONFIDENTIAL

### Next steps

In addition to the points above, we offer the following advice to take the project forward and to de-risk the planning process.

- Creating a successful new district will be dependent on open dialogue and collaboration between TWO and the City Council. This will need to tackle the apparent tensions between some of the aspirations of the developer and the local authority, recognise that Area Action Plan was prepared before this scheme was developed, and address the issues that we have identified in this report. Drawing ideas and options that are not constrained by planning application requirements may aid the process of dialogue.
- We recommend establishing robust governing principles, for example by strengthening the parameter plans and/or through design codes. These principles should define and commit to the nature of routes, other external spaces and built form across the masterplan. They should provide clarity on what is required of new buildings and spaces, and on what can flex as the district is designed, built and adapted over time.
- We would like to see the scheme again before a hybrid planning application is submitted, to see how the issues identified have been addressed and to review the proposals for the residential buildings in more detail.

We have confidence that the applicant team and the local authority can tackle the issues we have raised and deliver a world-class innovation district at Oxford North.

### Attendees

#### *Design Workshop Panel*

Keith Bradley – Chair  
Jo van Heyningen  
Alan Berman  
Noel Farrer  
Tom Holbrook

#### *Scheme presenters*

Julian Barwick	Thomas White Oxford
Keith Priest	Fletcher Priest Architects
Joe Sweeney	Fletcher Priest Architects
Jonathan Kendall	Fletcher Priest Architects
Stina Hokby	Fletcher Priest Architects
Robert Townshend	Townshend Landscape Architects
Gary Alden	Townshend Landscape Architects
Jerry Hargreaves	Peter Brett Associates

## CONFIDENTIAL

Tony Russell	Peter Brett Associates
Rob Linnell	Savills
Olivia Lane-Nott	Spacecraft Consulting

### *Local Authority*

Andrew Murdoch	Oxford City Council
Nadia Robinson	Oxford City Council
Adrian Arnold	Oxford City Council
Maura Cordell	Oxford City Council

### *Design Council Cabe staff*

Rachel Toms  
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](mailto:cabe@designcouncil.org.uk).

## 3. 24 May 2018

### CONFIDENTIAL



Julian Barwick  
c/o Rob Linnell  
Savills  
33 Margaret Street  
London  
W1G 0JD

13 June 2018

Our reference: DCC0605

#### Oxford City Council: Oxford North (Northern Gateway)

Dear Julian Barwick,

Thank you for attending the Oxford Design Review Panel (ODRP) Design Workshop on 24 May 2018. Having advised on the masterplan in October and December 2014, and again in April 2016 and June 2017, we welcome the opportunity to comment on the proposal as it progresses towards a planning application. This report is our formal advice following the Design Review of 24 May 2018.

#### Introduction

The intention to develop Oxford North, formerly known as Oxford Northern Gateway, as an innovation district at the forefront of international practice, supports Oxford's and the UK's role as a global leader for innovation and research. The narrative for the project - a place for creating and making - and the industrial references for the architecture are sound concepts that have the potential to create a place that is full of character. Whilst we understand the historic environment of central Oxford generates many questions about how the characteristics of the new innovation district are informed by the city, we think that the new neighbourhood need not make literal references to Oxford's historic environment and can create its own bespoke local character in its design.

We recognise and welcome the significant amount of work that has gone into developing both the masterplan and the proposals for Phase 1A since the last design workshop, and the helpful presentation at this design review. We think that the urban design and landscape for the overall masterplan have progressed alongside the concepts for the principal spaces and buildings. To further refine the proposals for the masterplan, the neighbourhood might benefit from further enhancement of the focal point for activity, routes and spaces and more ecological connectivity between the key green spaces.

However, we have some strong concerns regarding the quality of the internal and external residential environment being proposed in Phase 1A. The configuration of the residential building results in too many single aspect north facing units and long, dark corridors, whilst the site layout creates issues with the use and ownership of outdoor space (e.g. public pathways through semi-private amenity space). We also have concerns regarding the proposed approach whereby the residential building is excluded from the detailed planning application. We do not support the principle of a hybrid application which excludes the residential accommodation as it would set limits and constraints for this building before the wider design issues are resolved.



## CONFIDENTIAL

We think there are potentially two options in terms of the planning approach: either the residential building in Phase 1A is further developed and incorporated in the detailed application, or an outline application with robust parameters and guiding principles for the site is submitted prior to submitting detailed plans at a later stage.

### Masterplan

This new neighbourhood will act as an introduction to Oxford City from the north and therefore its identity, strategic connectivity with the wider network of movement routes and amenity spaces and links with neighbouring areas will be important. The proposed density works well on this site and translates into a spacious neighbourhood. We believe there is scope to increase the proposed heights and densities across parts of the site. The proposal would benefit from some more work on the experience for the people that will live there (how will older people use the site as an example).

### Streets and infrastructure

We welcome the aim to support modal shift to active and sustainable travel through this project and the intention to minimise the effects of cars on the public realm. The development would benefit from further prioritisation of sustainable modes of transport, including walking and cycling. The ambitions to carry out works to humanise the A40 and A44 by reducing vehicular speeds and improving the character of these roads is commendable but we think there are too many lanes proposed for the vehicular routes prioritising vehicles and constricting movement for people. The temporary car park could reinforce parking demand in the area. More thought could be given to how the bus and cycle lanes will work in practice and whether they will be pedestrian friendly, particularly around bus stops. We would however advise against excessively demarcating different routes, as an example, blue painted cycle lanes can give the impression that cyclists have priority over pedestrians.

The new link road connecting the A40 and A44 has an important role in this new neighbourhood, concentrating commercial activity along this street would make it feel vibrant and therefore it would benefit from more activation.

### Landscape

Overall the landscape has been well-developed since the last review. The concepts for connecting the existing and proposed open spaces to the east and west of the masterplan with the Green at its heart, and the role and function of these open spaces within this development is promising but they would benefit from further work to provide a clear hierarchy of spaces with individual characteristics. We wonder whether there may be merit in designing the principal square and the green to work as one space that have a clear relationship with each other to enhance the heart of the site. Whilst the three key open areas provide amenity space for people, the neighbourhood would benefit from smaller, more intimate spaces and medium-sized spaces for respite and relaxation that can play a role in providing visible greenery throughout the development and opportunities for contact with nature as well as connecting the larger spaces. The edge of the site is likely to experience noise from cars and consequently may be less frequented by people. However, these edge spaces could be designed as a wilder, more biodiverse space to connect the new district with its natural surroundings.

At the next stage of the design process we would advise considering overshadowing of the open spaces within the site, identifying key desire lines to inform movement routes within the

## CONFIDENTIAL

larger amenity spaces (the green as an example) and exploring the selection of tree species in terms of size and type to reinforce the hierarchy of public space. In addition, management of the landscape and how adopted and non-adopted roads will be treated and maintained in the long term will be crucial to delivering quality; careful planning in relation to S106 contributions, ownership, access and responsibilities will be needed. A landscape phasing plan will ensure public benefits and providing good quality amenity spaces for recreation, social interaction and relaxation are delivered from the outset of this project.

### Uses and buildings

In terms of the architectural identity, the visuals for the commercial buildings appear promising, the repeated gables will create a memorable form whilst also making reference to Oxford's skyline. Drawing upon Oxford's industrial heritage is a sound approach which will create a district that has its own distinct character within Oxford. However, we would recommend exploring a greater diversity in building heights across the masterplan area. We think that the 'towers' proposed for the northern part of the site may appear squat due to the height restrictions. There may be scope in some areas to increase the height beyond the limits of the Northern Gateway Area Action Plan (AAP) which could be explored with Oxford City Council.

The distribution of uses across the site appears appropriate but we would recommend exploring how flexibility for the commercial uses could be accommodated in the plan and configuration of the buildings in order to accommodate a wide variety of businesses (including 'anchor' clients) – in the event an occupier wanted a larger floorplate for their premises. Given the project's long-term timeframe, the phasing and curation of meanwhile interventions and activities would bring life and vibrancy to the site at an early stage and will be important.

### Phase 1A

In principle, the part of the site indicated for Phase 1A appears to be suitable to develop first as it would include principal green spaces and a vibrant mix of uses. Humanising the A40, installing the new link road and providing the red hall, flexible workspaces, a residential building and new outdoor spaces make for a sound set of components to be delivered as Phase 1A.

While we understand the need for a car park in Phase 1A, we think that if possible the proposed car parking in Phase 1A should be located in its future permanent location. This will help to reduce disruptions to users across phases. Also, we think that the total amount of car parking across the site should be consistent in the short and longer term to help manage car usage on the site in the future. We support the ambition to incorporate trees in the car parks at the earliest possible stage, and to retain these trees in their original location across phases. It is evident there are good ambitions for carbon neutrality and these interventions have been well considered – by avoiding on-site clutter. The environmental credentials for the scheme could be much stronger and we would recommend exploring potential for greens roofs and renewable energy etc in this phase.

In terms of the architecture, we think there are potentially too many competing buildings with a strong identity/architectural character and we think the development might benefit from fewer special buildings that stand out and have a clear role.

However, we are concerned by the proposed omission of the residential block from the detailed planning application as this building will be important to the urban design of Phase 1A

## CONFIDENTIAL

and the living accommodation for the first residents. The current configuration of the residential building results in too many compromised units, whilst there are conflicts between private, public and semi-private routes and spaces potentially resulting in safety and privacy issues. We would advise that these issues are resolved before a planning application is submitted.

### Red hub building

The concept of the red hall, as a hub for business and social activity with a distinctive form and appearance, is positive and the building's proposed colour is enlivening. This building will stand out within the new neighbourhood and could potentially be perceived as a marker building that defines the centre and will be used for way-finding - due to its unique identity. There is concern over its location and relationship with the outdoor space as it is not visible from the principal public square and felt it would be better positioned adjacent to this key space. It would therefore be worth continuing to explore its relationship with the key principal open space and the public square proposed to the east of the residential building within the site.

### Commercial buildings

The design for the workspace buildings is promising and the language of the gabled roofs is a good interpretation of the character of the City of Oxford.

### Residential building

The proposed typology and design for the residential building creates poor quality accommodation and is therefore not an appropriate precedent for the rest of the masterplan area – with some single aspect north facing units and long corridors. We recommend considering alternative configurations.

- We are not convinced by the form and choice of materials for this building and would advise reviewing alternatives. We think the dark façade treatment, curved form of the building and projecting balconies creates a building that appears austere in appearance.
- The form and configuration could potentially create ambiguity over the fronts and backs of the building and this should be clarified to inform the location of the entrances.
- It will be important to consider mixture of tenure at an early stage and how to distribute the affordable units appropriately across the site.
- Full-length glazing would allow clutter to be visible from outside the building due to the storage of items by the window and might make the occupiers feel exposed.

### Movement, streets, spaces and parking

The significant amount of public spaces and movement routes in this phase create ambiguity over their role which can create confusion over public and private spaces. This may result in some routes feeling under-used and over-use of other spaces impacting the residents' quiet enjoyment of their amenity space being compromised. These spaces should be either public or private but not both. In particular, we are not convinced that the route between the two buildings will be well used as it is not clear if it is for public use and where it leads to. We question the necessity of the public route through the communal residential garden which will disperse footfall from the principal streets and routes and compromise the usability of this space for residents due to its lack of privacy.

## CONFIDENTIAL

### Landscape

Overall this phase would benefit from enhancement of the distinct spaces and emphasis of the centre/focal point to make it clear where the heart of the neighbourhood is. As an example, there is a duplication of the two squares and it is not clear the role and function these spaces will separately play in the neighbourhood. It would also be worth clarifying the function of the key spaces in terms of whether they will be active or passive spaces and if they will be urban or suburban in character.

### Conclusion

We hope the advice contained in this letter provides useful guidance at this stage of the design and planning process. We strongly encourage the design team to continue the positive work delivered in the masterplan into the design and planning approach to Phase 1A. Should you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact us.

### **Oxford Design Review Panel**

Keith Bradley  
Jo van Heyningen  
Karl Fitzgerald  
Noel Farrer  
Jon Rowland  
Mark Swenarton

### **Attendees**

Jonathan Kendall	Fletcher Priest Architects
Stina Hokby	Fletcher Priest Architects
Philip Pryke	Fletcher Priest Architects
Robert Townsend	Townsend's Landscape Architects
Martha Alka	Townsend's Landscape Architects
Olivia Lane-Nott	Space Craft Consulting
Jeremy Hargraves	PBA – highways
Phil Kelly	Hoare Lea - sustainability issues
Robert Linnell	Savills – planning
Adrian Arnold	Oxford City Council
Gill Butter	Oxford City Council
Andrew Murdoch	Oxford City Council
Nadia Robinson	Oxford City Council
Mai Jarvis	Oxford City Council
Victoria Lee	Design Council
Annabel Osborne	Design Council

### ***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](mailto:cabe@designcouncil.org.uk).*