

Appendix 2c

Report of the Oxford Design Review Panel

Littlemore House and Plot 18, Oxford Science Park

27th October 2022

Introduction

This report reflects the third design review session for this development proposal held in Oxford on 13 October 2022, following a presentation by the design team. All of the panel members have visited the site at previous sessions.

The proposal is for the development of two separate plots – Littlemore House and Plot 18 of Oxford Science Park – to provide R&D and healthcare facilities.

A summary of the Panel discussion is provided below, highlighting the main items raised. We then provide the key recommendations aimed at improving the design quality of the proposal. Detailed comments are presented under headings covering the main attributes of the scheme and we close with the details of the meeting (appendix A) and the scheme (appendix B).

Paragraph 133 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2021) states that *“local planning authorities should ensure that they have access to, and make appropriate use of, tools and processes for assessing and improving the design of development. These include workshops to engage the local community, design advice and review arrangements, and assessment frameworks such as Building for a Healthy Life. These are of most benefit if used as early as possible in the evolution of schemes and are particularly important for significant projects such as large scale housing and mixed use developments. In assessing applications, planning authorities should have regard to the outcome from these processes, including any recommendations made by design review panels.”*

Summary

The Ellison Institute for Transformative Medicine (EITM) has an ambitious development programme for its two Oxford sites. It offers the prospect of creating a world-class facility for cancer research in partnership with other organisations in the city and deserves buildings and complementary public/ private realm of the highest order. The aim is for Institute's spirit of innovation and collaborative working to be carried into the built form, site design and connections.

The Panel first reviewed the design proposal in May, with a follow-up workshop in August. The design team has made some useful modifications, including a reduction in size of the basement at Littlemore House, and the south elevation has a less overbearing and rigid form. There have been design shifts to the appearance and setting of the Plot 18 (Littlemore Brook) building, which now stands over a shallow pond. The raised walkway ("Sky Walk") between the two buildings remains an unconvincing proposition, but its structural design is now more considered in relation to site impacts.

The Panel was not shown a full set of plans and elevations, making it hard to understand circulation patterns or the way the buildings will work when in use. We welcome several of the new moves, but challenge others, particularly the appearance of the Littlemore Brook building, which seems ill-fitted to its location. The programme for a planning submission by December is ambitious and the team should be given more time to refine the proposal and apply attention to details. A whole-life carbon assessment would also help to raise the proposal to a new level in relation to its sustainability.

Key recommendations

1. The Panel continues to stress that sustainable design and low carbon footprint should be at the heart of the project. Calculating the whole life carbon consumption – construction, operation and demolition – would be a valuable way of testing and delivering good intentions.
2. Revisit the form and appearance of the Littlemore Brook building, with the aim of making it more visually appropriate to its setting, aspect and the climate, whilst also establishing a strong relationship with Littlemore House.
3. Reconsider the treatment in plan and elevation of the south-west corner of the Littlemore House building, and its relationship to the surrounding external spaces.

4. Deepen the landscape design proposals, both the courtyard garden and the spaces around the building, so that they serve all its users and complement the architecture. This work should be driven by principles of nurturing health and wellbeing.
5. Use the landscape and visual impact appraisal to test the roofline proposals for their scope to accommodate some of the essential plant at Littlemore House, thereby enabling the potential for further reduction in the size of the basement.
6. Ensure that the proposed building at Littlemore Brook sits comfortably in its tree'd setting and does not prejudice the amenity of the public footpath at the edge of the site.
7. Ensure that the proposals support and promote low carbon travel, minimising car journeys and encouraging active travel.

Detailed comments and recommendations

1. Design strategy and sustainability

- 1.1. The mass, siting and circulation between the two buildings has not changed greatly since the last workshop, but the south-east elevation of Littlemore House has been manipulated to make a somewhat more varied frontage. We welcome this move. We also acknowledge the reduction in car parking numbers and a more efficient arrangement of the underground areas, including the car park grid and the rotation of the auditorium. The measures will reduce the amount of excavation needed and save carbon in the construction phase. It is also understood that the structure of both buildings has been lightened.
- 1.2. Although the team has done some work to measure the amount of embodied carbon in the construction phase, it was not evident how the figures had been calculated. In the case of Littlemore House, the embodied carbon had been split between the basement and the superstructure, but it was not clear which elements were included and what areas had been used.
- 1.3. It would be valuable to calculate the whole life carbon cost, from construction and operation through to demolition, with particular consideration given to the building façade. This should help to inform the environmental strategy and encourage further energy savings.
- 1.4. The intention is to give up some or all of the surface parking as demand lessens. Whilst this is a desirable strategy, a more dynamic approach to promoting other forms of transport should be pursued. Initiatives could include incentives for using public transport, and simple measures like ensuring that cycle parking is plentiful, convenient and attractive. This should include cycle parking for visitors at the main entrances.
- 1.5. The Panel remains unpersuaded by the need for a meandering, high level walkway, segregated from any public footpath below. We acknowledge that the walkway's appearance is improved, and its impacts reduced: we are told there will be no undue disturbance to human remains in the burial ground, or to any significant or healthy trees.
- 1.6. The design team is on a tight programme for a planning submission. More time will be needed if the design team is to achieve a fully mature, comprehensive, integrated design with the necessary resolution of detail.

2. Open spaces, landscape and biodiversity

- 2.1. Since the last workshop the tree and ecology surveys have been completed. These have been used to determine the positioning of the Y columns for the overhead walkway and the relationship with the tree canopies. This survey information, together with the landscape and visual analysis, should continue to be used to inform the design and not simply to mitigate impacts and losses.
- 2.2. Fernando Caruncho, landscape artist, has been appointed to configure the Littlemore House courtyard (the “Rose Garden”) and the space around Littlemore Brook (“The Iris Garden”). These designs are at an early diagrammatic stage. The new courtyard garden aims to provide a single unified space with spiral paths threading through greenery. The sunken auditorium will be topped with a round pond. This concept now needs to be taken further, interrogating the ways different users will enjoy the space, whether through circulation or sensory experience. The potential for the garden to support patient healing and general wellbeing seems crucial. The interplay between the surrounding buildings and the garden should also be exploited, considering the views from each window. We recommend that this emphasis on health drives the design development, rather than relying on purely artistic considerations. The concept for the Iris Garden at Littlemore Brook requires similar testing.
- 2.3. The landscape around the main entrance at Littlemore House is unresolved and we have doubts about the value of the grassy slope at the southern corner, or the way the slope of the site is being accommodated. The whole pedestrian sequence, from its visibility on approach to its detail, needs considerable development.

3. Character, architecture and placemaking

- 3.1. Some useful work has been done on landscape and visual impact. These studies should be used iteratively, for example to show how the chimney elements contribute positively to views, and to test whether some of the plant might be hidden on the roof. By the same token, knowledge of the history of the hospital and of the ecology, topography and landscape could help reinforce the distinctiveness of the two buildings and their particular settings.

- 3.2. At Littlemore House, we support the work that has been done to break up a very long south-eastern elevation. The result is more effective architecturally and relates better both to the retained hospital buildings and the new Catalyst housing. The large blades across the facades are potentially an interesting device, particularly if they have a structural role and can lighten the building, but as part of the overall composition they need refinement.
- 3.3. Panel members were shown little of the plans or elevations, making it hard to judge the integrity of the design or its details. We are however disconcerted by the glazed corner staircase drum, which seems an ill-fitting and even unfriendly gesture. We advise that it is reconsidered, with a simpler, more unified treatment in mind.
- 3.4. The articulation of the entrance needs to present a clearer visual hierarchy to assist visitors. The existing problems with the entrance to the building have not been solved and the floating canopy appears at odds with the building elevation. The angled blades present a 'closed' façade to a visitor approaching from the west.
- 3.5. The appearance of the Littlemore Brook building at Plot 18 has been radically changed since the last review. It now picks up on the colours and materiality of the Littlemore House building, but the overhanging upper floors and strong horizontality seem ill-fitted to the sensitivities of the site. We continue to recommend a closer relationship between the two sites, whilst also responding to the very different, enclosed meadow setting of Littlemore Brook with its woodland edge.
- 3.6. The shallow ponds beneath the Littlemore Brook building could be attractive, particularly with the increased headroom, but thought should be given to practical considerations such as the need for safety railings and the avoidance of algae build-up.
- 3.7. The proposed ancillary building at Littlemore Brook avoids putting plant and other functions into the main building, but its design and siting will call for careful thought, particularly if it is to preserve the amenity of the adjacent footpath.
- 3.8. The cladding materials for both buildings have yet to be determined, with a number of options still being considered. They need to be chosen carefully to ensure a successful architecture that fits within the landscape and heritage context.
- 3.9. The Panel recommends that a landscape management plan is submitted alongside the design proposal to ensure that future maintenance protects the biodiversity benefits and environmental intent of the scheme.

Reference number	1867/221013
Date	13 October 2022
Meeting location	Littlemore Park, Armstrong Road, Oxford OX4 4FY
Panel members attending	Lindsey Wilkinson (Chair), landscape architecture and historic environment Alice Brown, architecture and historic environment Joanna Van Heyningen, architecture and public realm (including street design) Camilla Ween, urban design and transport planning
Panel manager	Geoff Noble, Design South East
Presenting team	Guy Wakefield, Ridge and Partners LLP John Blythe, Foster + Partners Ross Palmer, Foster + Partners Ronald Schuurmans, Foster + Partners Nick Haddock, Foster + Partners Filippo Foschi, Fernando Caruncho Garden and Architecture
Other attendees	Lisa Flashner, EITM (Client) Matt Abney, EITM (Client) Tom Myers, EITM (Client) Paul Marrinelli EITM (Client) Claudia Jones, Ridge and Partners LLP Georgie Murray Threipland, Ridge and Partners LLP Oliver Bannister, Ridge and Partners LLP Will Hines, Ridge and Partners LLP John Blythe, Foster + Partners John McLoughlin, Foster + Partners Hugh Mulcahey, CoLab

Alberto De Basio CoLab,
Paul Lishman, LDA Design

James Newton, Oxford City Council
Jennifer Coppock, Oxford City Council
Gill Butter, Oxford City Council

Agata Olszewska, panel mentee
Tahima Rahman, panel mentee

Site visit	Panel members visited the site before the meeting, accompanied by the client, design team and City Council officers
Scope of the review	As an independent design review panel, the scope of this workshop was not restricted. The local planning authority has asked us to look at the following topics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes to the design since the August workshop, and in particular: • the legibility of the main entrance, the articulation of the eastern façade and the proposed materials
Panel interests	No interests were declared.
Confidentiality	This report is confidential as the scheme is not yet the subject of a planning application. Full details on our confidentiality policy can be found at the end of this report.
Previous reviews	The proposal was reviewed at design workshops on 19 May and 18 August 2022. All panel members have visited the site.

Appendix B: Scheme details

Name	Littlemore House and Plot 18 Oxford Science Park
Site location	SAE Institute, Littlemore Park, Armstrong Road, Oxford OX4 4FY and Plot 18, Oxford Science Park, Grenoble Road, Oxford OX4 4GB

Site details	<p>The subject site consists of two separate plots: Littlemore House and Plot 18 of the Oxford Science Park.</p> <p>Plot 18 is located immediately north of Littlemore Brook extending approximately 1.3ha. The plot is characterised by rough grassland with dense trees located to the southern and western boundaries. An existing access road runs along the eastern and north eastern boundaries. The site lies within flood zones 2 and 3.</p> <p>Littlemore House was formerly part of the wider Littlemore Hospital site and converted in the late 1980s for research purposes. It was then acquired and occupied by SAE Institute for a media college and office space. The site comprises the Littlemore House building and an expanse of grassed landscape. The primary access to the site is from Armstrong Road and runs through the centre of the site, characterised by an avenue of 12 lime trees. The site slopes to the south east by approximately 6m. Littlemore Park, a housing development of 270 homes, wraps around the Littlemore House part of the site to the east and south.</p>
Proposal	<p>The vision for the scheme is to bring a patient clinic, research laboratories, and wellness centre under one roof to drive innovation in cancer treatment with the University of Oxford within close proximity. Full planning permission will be sought for the erection of new buildings within Plot 18 of the Oxford Science Park and the site of Littlemore House/ SAE Institute.</p>
Planning stage	<p>The scheme is at pre-application stage.</p>
Local planning authority	<p>Oxford City Council</p>
Planning context	<p>The SAE Institute part of the site is not allocated for development under the current Local Plan, but it is prudent to note that the site was allocated in the former 2001-2016 Local Plan for research and development. The site allocation was not rolled forward as the site was not promoted for allocation by the landowner. The planning history of the site for employment space is a material consideration,</p>

as well as the surrounding employment context of the site (The Oxford Science Park).

The Oxford Science Park (TOSP) is a category 1 employment site and as such is a key site for delivering the Council's aim of managed economic growth to 2036. The site has been allocated, under policy SP10, for employment uses that directly relate to Oxford's key sectors of research led employment at the Science Park. The policy requires that development should be designed to enhance the external appearance of the park and to optimise opportunities to enhance the park's landscape and public realm.

Planning history

Littlemore House: 20/02672/FUL Erection of two 2-storey buildings to provide 3,500 sqm (GIA) of flexible commercial floorspace (Use Class E) with associated car and cycle parking; hard and soft landscaping and public realm works; ancillary structures including refuse stores, substation building and vehicular access via existing entrance from Armstrong Road.

Confidentiality

If the scheme was not the subject of a planning application when it came to the panel, this report is offered in confidence to those who attended the review meeting. There is no objection to the report being shared within the recipients' organisations provided that the content of the report is treated in the strictest confidence. Neither the content of the report, nor the report itself can be shared with anyone outside the recipients' organisations. Design South East reserves the right to make the content of this report known should the views contained in this report be made public in whole or in part (either accurately or inaccurately). Unless previously agreed, pre-application reports will be made publicly available if the scheme becomes the subject of a planning application or public inquiry. Design South East also reserves the right to make this report available to another design review panel should the scheme go before them. If you do not require this report to be kept confidential, please inform us.

If the scheme is the subject of a planning application the report will be made publicly available, and we expect the local authority to include it in the case documents.

Role of design review

This is the report of a design review panel, forum or workshop. Design review is endorsed by the National Planning Policy Framework and the opinions and recommendations of properly conducted, independent design review panels should be given weight in planning decisions including appeals. The panel does not take planning decisions. Its role is advisory. The panel's advice is only one of a number of considerations that local planning authorities have to take into account in making their decisions.

The role of design review is to provide independent expert advice to both the applicant and the local planning authority. We will try to make sure that the panel are informed about the views of local residents and businesses to inform their understanding of the context of the proposal. However, design review is a separate process to community engagement and consultation.

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