



Oxford Design
Review Panel

Design
South East

Appendix 3

Report of the Oxford Design Review Panel

Oxford North, Phase 2

25th November 2022

Introduction

A design workshop was held in Oxford on 10th November 2022, preceded by a site visit and presentations by the design teams.

The proposal is for phase 2 of Oxford North, a mixed-use urban district. The proposals reviewed comprised of the Red Hall; plots A, B, and C; and the car parking proposal as well as amendments to the consented outline masterplan.

A summary of the Panel discussion is provided, highlighting the main items raised, followed by a set of key recommendations aimed at improving the design quality of the proposal. Detailed comments are presented under headings covering the main attributes of the scheme.

Appendix A contains a set of sustainability related comments from Kat Scott, architecture and sustainability expert, who was unable to attend the meeting but was due to be part of the review panel. The document closes with the details of the meeting (appendix B) and the scheme (appendix C).

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 51. 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 buildings are developing positively in architectural terms. However, it is important that as the design development progresses, the focus on the creation of a cohesive place drives the decision-making to avoid a dilution of the overall vision. This approach must foreground the quality of the in-between spaces and landscape rather than just focusing on the individual buildings and plots. Outstanding architecture will only create a successful place if the spaces in-between are treated equally sensitively, in an integrated manner.

The experience of working, living and visiting Oxford North must be considered inclusively, designing for a range of users, needs and scenarios in the day and night. To achieve a successful inclusive place, the teams should continually test the design, from site-wide principles through to architectural details, against diverse perspectives and experiences.

Key recommendations

1. Develop and rigorously apply a site-wide landscape strategy considering incidental landscape, edges, and interfaces.
2. Develop the pavilion building to an equivalent stage to the Red Hall and town square proposals and clarify its role within the scheme.
3. Demonstrate that the scheme is inclusive and designed for a diversity of users and experiences to successfully foster community.
4. Design the Red Hall and associated external spaces for likely specific use settings, to avoid an overly generic design.
5. Test movement scenarios across the site, consider where the front door for each building is and how one would travel there at different times of day and using different transport modes.
6. Define external spaces, in relation to the buildings and set out their role and purpose. Identify opportunities for social interaction spaces at all scales.
7. Set out the long-term strategy for the dismantlable car park. Describe how people will be incentivised not to use cars and to transfer to zero carbon travel options; how the car park material, once dismantled, will be reused; and how landscape will encroach over time.

Detailed comments and recommendations

1. Vision and landscape

- 1.1. Typical science parks risk being clinical, developed as a series of building plots rather than a cohesive place. Whilst we welcome the vision that this place will be different and the concept of building community in phases, we are not yet convinced that Oxford North can build a collaborative mixed-use community, that seamlessly links residential, commercial, and innovation. A convincing narrative should describe how people across the site relate to one another, linked by public spaces where collaboration and interactions can occur, fostering a diverse and inclusive community. There must be a holistic approach to ensure this is a genuinely innovative place tied together with an applied sitewide landscape strategy.
- 1.2. Although the landscape proposals for the central park are largely convincing, the incidental landscape around the scheme's edges and interfaces is underdeveloped and not contributing as strongly to character of place as the buildings.
- 1.3. Beyond spill-out landscape within plot boundaries, a sitewide strategic approach to landscape and biodiversity corridors is required to avoid isolated pockets of landscape. This is proposed to be an innovative place, yet it is not clear how innovation is permeating throughout the public realm and landscape. There should be common agreement about the definition, identity and purpose of each external space and how they reinforce the defined character of the area. Incidental landscape needs to integrate the functional uses of these spaces (bike parking, waste streams, specialist services such as cafes etc), these uses cannot be left to eat away at these spaces.
- 1.4. Two residential communities will form part of Oxford North, to the west of the A40 and east of the A44. Each one has its own amenity spaces, but these communities should also be invited into the heart of the scheme to use areas such as the town square and central park. Locating the children's play space away from the town square to the southern edge does not encourage a mix of people and uses, and this should be reviewed.

2. Masterplan and movement

- 2.1. Repositioning the town square adjacent to the Red Hall is a positive move. This space is developing positively as a social hub. The pavilion building will be key to wayfinding, programming activity, cycle storage and defining the north-western edge of the town square, but its design is at a diagrammatic stage and consequently underdeveloped. This should be progressed as the pavilion design will impact the relationship between buildings and the town square – primarily plot C.
- 2.2. Movement scenarios should be tested considering different journeys. The location of front doors and arrival at each plot needs to be considered so that all users and modes are equally welcome by including appropriate access and provision for short-stay visitors to leave their transport such as bikes, e-scooters, mobility scooters and wheelchairs. It is not clear how deliveries and couriers will be accommodated.
- 2.3. Although the shuttle bus is promising, its implementation is not certain. Public transport provision and options need to be progressed rapidly to the same level of detail as the carparking. Cycle storage across the site should be developed further to ensure cycling is celebrated and bikes are integrated into site-wide design. This should include provision for cargo bikes.
- 2.4. The team should consider the routes someone would take when on a work break, the location of quiet spaces, where one would one roam or meet a friend and how strategic approaches to security, landscape, movement, and public realm will shape these experiences.
- 2.5. The Red Hall will provide a marker for those navigating the site but will not be visible everywhere. Legibility and wayfinding must be built into the scheme through distinctive characters, so people understand which area of the site they are in.
- 2.6. The loop road has been brought into the site. This could be a pleasant evening walk that works better than the original road, provided the experience is designed to ensure this is a safe and pleasant route.

3. Red Hall

- 3.1. The Red Hall's architecture is developing positively. The bold design and striking colour work well, and this building will create a heart to the scheme and legibility through the masterplan. The split roof and flues are positive and aid distinctiveness.

- 3.2. An overly flexible approach to the design may lead to the building being generally suitable for everything and specifically suitable for nothing. If the building is fully flexible there will be nothing for the landscape to relate to. A similar approach to the programming of the town square could be taken, by anticipating the most likely configurations of the space.
- 3.3. As the building has evolved, the canopies have lost their sense of hierarchy and this should be refined to establish where the 'front door' of the building is, and how it relates to internal uses and the natural meeting point for people who gather here.
- 3.4. This building has a community focus and provides unique uses that will encourage people to gather from across the site as well as incubation spaces above the ground floor. Whilst recognising child safeguarding concerns, we would encourage the team to explore whether the nursery could be located here to strengthen the concept of this building as a community anchor.
- 3.5. The south-western elevation, facing onto the phase 1a buildings, is a glazed flat façade. Although there will be a sense of activity within the building, more could be done to encourage a sense of connection and articulate a specific connection.
- 3.6. The town hall studio faces the link road and would perhaps be better located off the square where the activity will be focused. The facilities office sits on the corner of the square, but this use will not activate the corner adequately and a more community focused use should be explored here.
- 3.7. The fire escapes should be relocated, as their positioning fixes the size of the retail space onto the square and significantly reduces the flexibility of the ground floor.

4. Plot A

- 4.1. The building's façade and proportions have developed sensitively, and the stepping is interesting. The experimental service pavilion is conceptually strong and presents an opportunity to be genuinely experimental. By offsetting the two forms there is an opportunity to be seized regarding the relationship between the inside and outside, considering building and landscape together.
- 4.2. The experience of the secondary street and of the approach to this building should be defined.

4.3. The depth of the plan is concerning, and the lack of natural light to some areas restricts future flexibility. The plan's adaptability and environment for users should be tested to ensure flexibility, and the insertion of natural daylight in the future should be designed for, in the event that some areas become office space.

4.4. The red fire escapes have a strong synergy with the red hall and are reminiscent of Parc de la Villette. To ensure they are both joyful and useful, their use, security arrangements and how they relate to the inside and outside should be defined.

5. Plot B

5.1. Unlike other plots, much of plot B is given over to landscape rather than building, which presents interesting opportunities to create a variety of landscape spaces. Care should be taken to avoid the north-western space appearing as an afterthought rather than a structured piece of landscape that enhances the topography and introduces the site for those approaching the A40 from the north. We are unconvinced that the cycle storage should be located around the back of the building, as cycling should be celebrated and cycle storage easily accessible.

5.2. We are not concerned about the chimneys breaching the height parameters; they enhance the building and views from the road. The long-distance views of the building are positive.

5.3. The visuals of the A40 appear green and softened in comparison to the existing condition. However, the road may not be like this and could instead be noisy. Measures should be taken to either mitigate or celebrate this condition.

5.4. The landscaped forecourt and entrance lobby require further work to successfully achieve a sense of arrival, perhaps as an external foyer space. The balcony could be used to activate the façade further and the core pushed westwards to help resolve the geometry.

5.5. Transporting wet lab material from certain areas to the loading bay may be challenging and should be tested.

6. Plot C

- 6.1. This building will play a civic role and partially address the town square. It has a heavier quality in comparison to the other buildings reviewed. As the design develops, the team could explore introducing further delight to the building, for example through some asymmetry in response to the offset of the town square. The changes to the southwest corner of the building, facing plot B, are subtle and could be celebrated further.
- 6.2. This building comes up to the edge of the plot, therefore more thought has to be given to how landscape will be integrated using innovative planting, and to the building's response to surrounding spaces, particularly the entrance to plot B, perhaps through a recess on the southwestern corner.
- 6.3. The design process for plot C is largely positive. We welcome that the landscape and visual impact assessment (LVIA) has been used as a tool to inform design development and that sustainability considerations have been embedded. However, the experience for those using a wheelchair is unacceptable, as users will have to take a small platform lift and then go to the back of the building to access the main lifts.
- 6.4. The shift from a vertical emphasis on the front façade to a horizontal one along the sides of the building is compelling. Further work is needed to describe how the back relates to the carpark and where the front and back begin and end.

7. Car park

- 7.1. We welcome that the carpark will be dismantlable and that undercroft parking to individual buildings has been removed. It is not clear how people will be encouraged not to use cars. As part of a long-term strategy, we encourage the team to consider how this material could subsequently be re-cycled on or off-site and consider how landscape could encroach along this biodiversity corridor. The team should demonstrate that the number of spaces needed is accurate. Due to increased wet laboratories being accommodated across the district, there will potentially be a dropped occupancy from the original masterplan calculations.
- 7.2. A clear strategy for car use reduction should be included, with clear phases and triggers for reduction (such as improved public transport services).

- 7.3. The carpark extends along the north-western edge of the site, from the balancing ponds to plot B, bordering the A34. Many people experiencing the development will be driving past, and the car park will, in the early years, foreground and frame the rest of the site (although it is low enough to avoid dominating the view). The films depicting this journey reiterate the importance of these views and they should be referred to when developing the design.
- 7.4. Alternative approaches to the car park cores were discussed, and their design, detailing and treatment require further development to fully understand their impact on the views and whether they enhance or detract from the scheme's identity. They could be designed as a strong visual marker to the development when viewed from the A34.
- 7.5. The roof could be utilised for biodiversity, for example by including beehives or insect habitats, and to support bird watching or similar activities. Facilities (include wcs and access) for a rooftop summer space could also be incorporated into the design.
- 7.6. With the introduction of a single car park and the relocation of the square, the pedestrian route between the two becomes critical for access and legibility of the site. The design of this route should reflect this and the entrance to the car park ~~also~~ should relate to this. Approximately 900 vehicles could be entering and exiting the site at peak times. When developing the detailed landscape design, careful consideration needs to be given to the design and character of these routes, considering the experience at busy times of day.

Appendix A: Sustainability comments

9. Sustainable design

- 9.1. We welcome that whole life carbon and nature is playing a role in the masterplan. However, for this typology of buildings, given their probable higher unregulated and regulated energy loads, clear targets should be set out in regard to operational and embodied energy. Biodiversity targets should be clearly defined.
- 9.2. The architectural proposals should now be tested against sustainability targets. The team must demonstrate how the designs are addressing and meeting sustainability targets and how these are shaping design development. We are concerned that the proposals have been overly shaped by aesthetic drivers without considering sustainability and responding to environmental conditions, which would offer new tensions and parameters to drive the architectural design forward and embed it within place.
- 9.3. The individual plots lack robust environmental analysis and therefore lack robust strategies to address the environmental conditions their building is sited in. All assumptions should be tested and analysed for the panel to have confidence that the buildings are efficient, responding to environmental conditions, and pursuing optimum carbon solutions.
- 9.4. The buildings are proposed to be adaptable and could be used as workspaces, whilst designed for commercial services. We question if there is therefore a risk of over-provision of commercial services in Oxford (hence the need for adaptability). If this is the case the team should evidence how the servicing strategy can be designed to anticipate adaptability so that the architecture does not become overly engineered and significantly impactful in carbon terms based on hypothetical scenarios that may not come into being in the future.
- 9.5. The façade design, orientation and massing for all buildings should be shaped by environmental conditions, to maximise energy performance and achieve an optimal internal environment for users.
- 9.6. As part of a site-wide water strategy, the team should set out how greywater will be reused within buildings and how water consumption will be reduced.

10. Red Hall: sustainability

- 10.1. The red hall's façade strategy should be reviewed. The northwest façade is glazed which will lead to significant heat loss, and heating gain will be limited in the winter due to orientation. Glazing should only be applied when needed and be justified beyond aesthetic reasons. A varied and articulated façade could engage with external spaces without excessive glazing. The east and west facades will also require vertical shading devices such as fins. However, the fins are depicted inside the building, they will be least effective here and, if required, should ideally be outside the building's thermal line.
- 10.2. Consideration of the internal environmental performance of the red hall is limited. A robust analysis is required, setting out how the revised red hall is performing and how the facades and forms will need to be mitigated within the building, whether through servicing or otherwise.

11. Plot A: Sustainability

- 11.1. Plot A describes an 'optimum structural grid'. The team should evidence how the grid has been tested with inhabitation in various arrangements showing how it functions.
- 11.2. Plot A includes a significant amount of plant. The team should evidence the environmental strategy is informing efficiencies in the mechanical, electrical, and plumbing (MEP) servicing.
- 11.3. The energy capture performance of the photo voltaic panels on Plot A should be optimised to justify their whole-life carbon cost. We are not convinced that their inclines and east-facing orientation is the most efficient arrangement available. Their positioning seems arbitrary and should be justified.

12. Carparking: sustainability

- 12.1. The whole life carbon impact of the car park should be assessed. The mobility hub and cycle parking experience should be clarified to understand how the opportunity to create an optimal experience for those using active travel.

Appendix B: Meeting details

Reference number	Ref: 1869/221110
Date	10 th November 2022
Meeting location	Jurys Inn (Leonardo Royal Hotel), Godstow Rd, Oxford OX2 8AL
Panel members attending	Joanne Cave (Chair), urban design and planning Camilla Ween, urban design and transport planning Dan Jones, architecture and education, arts & public buildings Justin Nicholls, architecture and regeneration Lindsey Wilkinson, landscape architecture and historic environment
Panel manager	Lizzie Atherton, Design South East
Presenting teams	Iulia Fratila, Fletcher Priest Keith Priest, Fletcher Priest Phil Pryke, Fletcher Priest Stina Hokby, Fletcher Priest Neil Porter, Gustafson Porter, and Bowman Nat Keast, Wilkinson Eyre Stafford Critchlow, Wilkinson Eyre Chris Neve, Gort Scott Jay Gort, Gort Scott
Other attendees	Robert Linnell, Savills Adam Smith, Stanhope Gary Taylor, Stanhope Kel Ross, Hoare Lea Victoria Collett, Thomas White Oxford Mike Kemp, Oxford City Council Gill Butter, Oxford City Council Joseph Sorrel, Oxford City Council Natalie Dobraszcyk, Oxford City Council
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.
Panel interests	Joanne Cave is currently working with Stina Hokby of Fletcher Priest Architects on an unrelated project. This was not deemed a conflict of interest
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	Oxford North Phase 1 was reviewed by the ODRP twice on the 20 th May and 29 th September 2021.

Appendix B: Scheme details

Name	Oxford North Phase 2
Site location	Oxford North (Northern Gateway) Land Adjacent To A44, A40, A34 And Wolvercote Roundabout.
Site details	<p>Oxford North comprises approximately 30 hectares of land at the northern edge of the city, adjacent to the A34. The land is split into three parcels by the A40 and A44 roads. Phase 2 is the central parcel bordered by the A34 on the north-west boundary, A44 on the north-east boundary, and the A40 along the south-west boundary.</p> <p>Development has commenced on site works that have commenced include: the formation of a link road between the A40 and the A44; earthworks to form development platforms on central and Canalside parcels of site; A40 improvement works including addition of bus lanes, bus stops, formation of junctions to A40, and cycle infrastructure.</p>
Proposal	<p>The proposals relate to ‘phase 2’ of the Oxford North works, comprising:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - three new life sciences buildings on plots A,B, and C; parking provision;

- revisions to the design of the 'Red Hall' building approved under the full element of the hybrid planning permission;
- revisions to landscape and public open spaces approved under the full element of the hybrid planning permission including the central park.

Phase 2 is the next major reserved matters phase related to planning application (18/02065/OUTFUL), changes are also proposed for phase 1a, which benefits from full planning permission.

Planning stage	The scheme is at pre-application stage with intention to submit a reserve matters application.
Local planning authority	Oxford City Council
Planning context	<p>The Northern Gateway development area was first allocated in the Oxford Core Strategy document adopted in 2011. This was later taken forward in the Northern Gateway Area Action Plan (AAP) adopted in July 2015 which fixed the overall parameters for the whole area as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Up to 90,000sqm of B1 employment - Up to 500 dwellings - Up to 2,500 sqm of local retail uses - 180 bed hotel <p>Both of these documents were subject to independent Inspector's deliberations and ultimate approvals. The recent Oxford City Local Plan 2036 amended the area to the north-east of the Park and Ride to a housing allocation.</p>
Planning history	<p>The proposals would be a reserved matters application relating to planning application 18/02065/OUTFUL. Hybrid outline planning permission was granted for the following uses in March 2021:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Outline application (with all matters reserved save for "access"), for the erection of up to 87,300sqm(GIA) of employment space (Use Class B1), up to 550sqm(GIA) of community space (Use Class D1), up to 2,500sqm(GIA) of Use Classes A1, A2, A3, A4 and A5 floorspace, up to a 180 bedroom hotel (Use Class C1) and up to 480 residential units (Use Class C3), installation of an energy sharing loop, main vehicle access points from A40 and

A44, link road between A40 and A44 through the site, pedestrian and cycle access points and routes, car and cycle parking, open space, landscaping and associated infrastructure works. Works to the A40 and A44 in the vicinity of the site.

- (ii) Full application for part of Phase 1A comprising 15,850sqm(GIA) of employment space (Use Class B1), installation of an energy sharing loop, access junctions from the A40 and A44 (temporary junction design on A44), construction of a link road between the A40 and A44, open space, landscaping, temporary car parking (for limited period), installation of cycle parking (some temporary for limited period), foul and surface water drainage, pedestrian and cycle links (some temporary for limited period) along with associated infrastructure works. Works to the A40 and A44 in the vicinity of the site. (Amended plans and additional information received 19.06.2019).

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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