



Report of the Oxford Design Review Panel

Unit One, Ozone  
Leisure Park  
(second review)

12 May 2023

## Introduction

A design review was held online via Zoom on the 26<sup>th</sup> April 2023, preceded by presentations by the local authority and design team.

The proposal is to demolish the former Bingo Hall within the Ozone Leisure Park and redevelop the site to provide new life sciences accommodation.

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. The document closes 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.”*

## Key recommendations from previous review (02/03/23)

1. Carry out further analysis of the historic environment, strategic landscape context, and local material palette to inform and drive a contextually responsive proposal that is of this place.
2. Draw a wider high-level concept plan that describes the emerging and possible context to demonstrate how the proposals will contribute to it.
3. Present a vision for how this development will fit this wider place and describe the role this building will play in setting the tone for the expansion of life sciences, beyond the Oxford Science Park.
4. Ensure that the architecture - including but not limited to form, orientation, façade design and materials - achieves a sustainable design that reflects best practice.
5. Design the building considering how it will be adapted, repaired and deconstructed in the long term.
6. Review the landscape character proposed and consider how the borrowed landscape character of Minchery Lane and Littlemore Brook can be brought into the proposals.
7. Reconsider the orientation of the building, the location of the entrance and the journey to the front door from Minchery Lane, particularly when using sustainable transport modes rather than driving.
8. Explore how Minchery Lane can be celebrated and enjoyed by users whilst retaining a semi-rural character. Reconsider the proposed hard landscape design to achieve somewhere that is more appropriate to the character of Minchery Lane.

## Summary

Positive progress has been made on this scheme, informed by detailed analysis of its wider context. However, we are concerned that the commercial drivers of the project are overriding important placemaking principles which are vital for its success.

Further work is required to ensure that the design of both the building and landscape responds sensitively to the context, and that the scheme represents the best use of this important site.

We would welcome a further review of this scheme once the design team and council have had the opportunity to address the comments and recommendations set out in this report.

## Key recommendations

1. Provide clear and robust evidence of what has informed the design approach to justify design decisions such as the building's height, scale, orientation, and entrance location.
2. Carry out a heritage impact assessment (HIA) of the draft proposal with particular regard to the former Priory. The findings of the assessment should inform the ongoing design of the building, ensuring that it is not detrimental to the character or setting of the Priory.
3. Conduct further research into the sustainable laboratory design and continue to explore how the building's sustainability might be optimised in terms of orientation, passive solar gain, and renewable energy systems.
4. Develop a more informal landscape design character that better responds to the underlying landscape signature of the area and enhances the biodiversity of the scheme.
5. Continue to develop the design of communal amenities such as the bike shelters and 'collaboration dens', balancing function with sustainability and aesthetic contribution to the setting of the new building.
6. Continue to develop the façade and fenestration design, informed by speculative building use, daylighting principles, and views out of the building.
7. Provide full details of the rooftop plant design, including chimneys. Minimise the quantum of visible plant required, rather than relying on screening.

## Detailed comments and recommendations

### 1. Context and analysis

- 1.1. An objective assessment of the Grade II\* listed Priory's historic significance must be carried out to demonstrate how this has informed the massing and design approach. This is important to alleviate any concerns over the height of the building, particularly in terms of its impact on the Priory. The recently provided rendered landscape visual impact assessment (LVIA) images may go some way to achieving this, but do not fulfil the role of a formal HIA.
- 1.2. We do not consider the proposal to be "landscape-led", as this implies that the design of the building has been driven by its location within the wider landscape setting. If being "landscape-led" is a key driver of the scheme, this must be much more strongly communicated through the project narrative.
- 1.3. Based on the further contextual analysis presented, we maintain our previous position that the building entrance should be relocated towards Minchery Lane, and that the building orientation could be improved. The design team should provide evidence of having tested alternative locations and orientations, as well as robust reasoning to justify their design decisions.
- 1.4. It would be helpful to see an extended ground floor plan that encompasses the adjacent proposed planning applications, to give both the council and design team a better understanding of how the proposal sits in its emerging context, as well as helping to inform design decisions.

### 2. Sustainable design

- 2.1. It is positive that the energy strategy has evolved from the previous review. However, some aspects remain generic – for example, references are made to office buildings, whereas the proposal primarily comprises laboratory space which will have significantly greater energy demand.
- 2.2. Due to its northerly orientation, the atrium, which is important for environmental control and circulation, is likely to be dark, cold, and receive little sunlight. Solar gain is a major driver for natural ventilation, which should be encouraged within the atrium, and has aesthetic and amenity value. Further work should be carried out to resolve these issues, however we do not recommend orientating the atrium towards the service yard.

- 2.3. A heavily serviced laboratory building is likely to have high unregulated electrical demand (potentially 50-60% of total energy consumption). If carbon neutrality is a target, the design team should be conscious that the building will be heavily dependent on renewable energy. We are encouraged by the intent to cover the roof area with photovoltaic (PV) panels and suggest that provision should be made for battery storage to extend the period during which the electricity produced is available.
- 2.4. We recommend further reading into sustainable laboratory design, for example: Passipedia article 'Passive House Laboratories'; the Smart Labs Toolkit; JLL's 'Life Sciences Sustainability Series: Embracing Sustainability'; Better Buildings' 'Reduce Laboratory Energy Use' toolkit; BDP article 'Achieving Net-Zero Labs'; and HOK's 'Pathway to Net Zero Carbon Labs'.
- 2.5. It is positive that an ecologist has been appointed. We encourage the design team to consider utilising a 'green' PV roof to optimise both its biodiversity and energy generating potential.
- 2.6. The applicant team claim a "conservative" approach to the credits they may achieve under the BREEAM assessment. However, we encourage targeting BREEAM 'Excellent' by a greater margin, to allow room for error in later stages.
- 2.7. The standing advice from Design South East is that at a subsequent design review and at planning application stage the proposal must produce a clear strategy that details how the development will minimise embodied, operational, and transport-related carbon emissions, and optimise the use of renewable energy to align with the Government's legal commitment to Net Zero Carbon by 2050. The proposal should demonstrate its compliance to a respected zero carbon pathway, for example as set out by the UKGBC Net Zero Whole Life Carbon Roadmap for the Built Environment. The sustainability strategy should be tied to measurable targets and detailed modelling work informed by respected calculation methods (as applicable), and also address water use, biodiversity net gain, waste reduction and circular economy principles alongside climate resilience and overheating.

### **3. Landscape design and public realm**

- 3.1. We welcome the production of the wider indicative strategic landscape masterplan. This helps to situate the proposed building in its wider context and presents an opportunity to consider how blue and green infrastructure can create key connections between and within future developments.

- 3.2. We have concerns about the emerging character and identity of the public realm. Since the previous review, this has evolved from a linear structure to an equally formal grid layout, which still lacks a relationship to the building design or its context. We strongly recommend that a landscape architect is appointed to assist with the landscape design, drainage strategy, and ecological aspects of the scheme, which are all weak points of the current design.
- 3.3. Some aspects of the detailed landscape design have improved since the previous review – for example, a more open relationship has been made with Minchery Lane, which begins to create more permeability with the site and forges a stronger relationship with Plot 27 to the west. This work should be taken further by reworking the northern edge to better respond to the brook and pull elements of this green infrastructure into the site in a less formal manner.
- 3.4. More emphasis should be placed on responding to the brook and water meadow, which are strong landscape features, and/or the history of the Priory and Minchery Lane. This could help the design team to further demonstrate their appreciation of the context and to ground the setting of the building further using a design language derived from the underlying natural signature.
- 3.5. More work is required to better understand the biodiversity of the area and respond to this appropriately. This could include incorporating both native and non-native habitats, which would help with biodiversity net gain, should an assessment be required in the future.
- 3.6. Whilst the integration of SuDS elements within planted areas is a significant improvement to the landscape design, a stronger overall drainage strategy – incorporating further details on where water will infiltrate into the ground or flow back to the brook – would be beneficial.
- 3.7. The new location of the cycle stands is positive, but the layout appears cramped. Redistributing the shelters – so that users enter the site through a more celebratory ‘bike park’ – would integrate the cycle facilities better with the public realm.
- 3.8. We commend the sustainable design of the bicycle shelters (integrating green roofs and a bug hotel), however they appear “clunky” and unattractive; something more lightweight may be better. The team should continue exploring design options for these shelters and ensure they are drawn to the same level of detail as the main building, as precedent images alone are not sufficient to communicate their design.

- 3.9. The ‘collaboration dens’ are a peculiar addition to the public realm strategy. Further details should be provided to communicate how these will function for building users.
- 3.10. We do not recommend that Marshalls Perfecta paving slabs (as shown) are specified for the hard landscaping, as this product is carbon-heavy and is of low aesthetic quality. This product would not achieve a high-quality, sustainable finish in-keeping with the character of Minchery Lane. A light-coloured and locally sourced permeable resin-bound gravel would be a better option.

#### **4. Architecture, materials, and detailing**

- 4.1. The panel remains comfortable with the height and scale of the building, based on what was presented at the design review and subject to any refinements as informed by a HIA. However, before we can comment further, more detail is required on aspects of the rooftop plant design – such as extent of screening and the potential addition of 4- to 5-metre-high fume extraction chimneys.
- 4.2. Rather than relying on screening to hide the rooftop plant, we encourage the design team to take a more creative approach that both minimises the extent of plant required and consolidates it into what could potentially be an interesting design feature.
- 4.3. The updated plans show better use of the building’s internal corners. We encourage further testing of the window design at these points to ensure that a successful balance between reducing heat gain/loss, glare, daylighting, and views out is achieved.
- 4.4. Progress has been made on the façade design, although we encourage the design team to explore more creative construction methods than limestone cladding on a concrete frame. Further details – such as the colour of limestone specified – will be welcomed when they are available.



- 4.5. Paragraph 135 of the National Planning Policy Framework (2021) states: ‘Local planning authorities should seek to ensure that the quality of approved development is not materially diminished between permission and completion, as a result of changes being made to the permitted scheme (for example through changes to approved details such as the materials used).’ In order to be consistent with this national policy, the applicant team and local authority should note Design South East’s general guidance on material quality and detail. At planning application stage, the quality of the detailing should be demonstrated through large scale drawings at 1:20 and 1:5 of key elements of the building/landscape and should be accompanied by actual material samples which should be secured by condition as part of any planning approval.

## Appendix A: Meeting details

<b>Reference number</b>	Ref: 1947/230426
<b>Date</b>	26 <sup>th</sup> April 2023
<b>Meeting location</b>	Online via Zoom
<b>Panel members attending</b>	Joanne Cave (Chair), urban design and planning Fenella Griffin, landscape architecture Paul Appleby, sustainability, energy, and environmental engineering Steven Bee, historic environment and urban design Stina Hokby, urban design and public realm (including street design)
<b>Panel manager</b>	Lizzie Atherton, Design South East
<b>Presenting teams</b>	Eddie Fell, Fairhursts Design Group Mark Adey, Fairhursts Design Group
<b>Other attendees</b>	Agata Maluchnik, Fairhursts Design Group Mia Deaville, Fairhursts Design Group Feroza Kassam, Firoka (Oxford Leisure) Ltd Firoz Kassam, Firoka (Oxford Leisure) Ltd Nilu Kanani, Firoka (Oxford Leisure) Ltd Raisa Kassam, Firoka (Oxford Leisure) Ltd Ashley Collins, JLL Matt Fitter, JLL Rachel Streeter, JLL Rob Lindberg, JLL Paul Lishman, LDA John Nisbet, Ramboll Natalie Aldrich, Savills Emma Winder, Oxford City Council Clare Golden, Oxford City Council James Newton, Oxford City Council Michael Kemp, Oxford City Council Nia George, Oxford City Council Helen Quinn, Design South East
<b>Site visit</b>	Panel members visited the site at a previous design review, held on the 2 <sup>nd</sup> March 2023.

<b>Scope of the review</b>	As an independent design review panel, the scope of this review was not restricted.
<b>Panel interests</b>	The panel did not indicate any conflicts of interest.
<b>Confidentiality</b>	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.

## Appendix B: Scheme details

<b>Name</b>	Unit 1 Ozone Leisure Park
<b>Site location</b>	Unit 1, Ozone Leisure Park, Grenoble Road, Oxford, OX4 4XP
<b>Site details</b>	<p>Unit 1 is a purpose-built commercial unit. The unit forms part of the attached Ozone Leisure complex, The unit is vacant, having been formerly used as a bingo hall. A service yard is located to the rear of the building which serves the former bingo hall and all other buildings at the Ozone complex.</p> <p>The building lies to the north of the Hampton by Hilton Hotel, which lies between the site and Minchery Farmhouse, a Grade II* listed building and former site of the Littlemore Priory. The Oxford Science Park lies to the west beyond Minchery Lane (a public right of way), and this includes Plot 16, to the north-west of the site, which consists of a pair of large, interlinked employment buildings housing laboratory and R&amp;D space. To the north is Littlemore Brook and (over a bridge is an overflow car park) to the east is the Kassam Stadium and surrounding car parking.</p> <p>The Ozone Leisure Park and the adjoining Kassam Stadium is served by extensive car parking areas to the north and east.</p>
<b>Proposal</b>	Proposal to redevelop the former bingo hall and construct a new building housing 13,764sqm of employment space falling under a research and development use. The proposals include the provision of surrounding hard and soft landscaping in the position of the existing service access road. A new servicing road would be provided

to the east of the building, between the new building and the retained Ozone buildings in the Ozone complex.

<b>Planning stage</b>	Pre-application
<b>Local planning authority</b>	Oxford City Council
<b>Planning context</b>	<p>The site is located within the ‘Cowley Branch Line Area of Change’ (Policy AOC7). The site is unallocated; however, it is included in the draft Local Plan 2040 together with the Kassam Stadium site for redevelopment. The draft allocation identified the potential for “redevelopment of the Ozone Leisure Complex within Use Class E”. To the west of the site lies the Oxford Science Park allocation (Policy SP9). To the north and east lies the Kassam Stadium site which is allocated under policy SP14 for residential-led development, with a minimum number of 150 homes.</p> <p>Land to the north of the site, including the Littlemore Brook, is designated as an Oxford City Wildlife Site. The Grade II* listed Minchery Farmhouse (also known as The Priory) is located to the south of the site, south of the Hampton by Hilton hotel.</p>
<b>Planning history</b>	<p>The Ozone Leisure Park was originally the subject of the outline planning permission (ref: 94/1754/NOY), which included the adjoining Kassam Stadium development. A variation was secured (ref: 03/01533/VAR) on 19 September 2003 to both permissions to secure mixed D2 (leisure) and A3 (food and drink) including 6 restaurants for the complex.</p> <p>After the building was completed, Unit 1 came to be occupied as a bingo hall – at the time a “Class D2 - Assembly and leisure” use. Changes at the national level to the Use Class Order, in September 2020 resulted in the bingo hall being reclassified as a sui generis use.</p> <p>To restore the now vacant property to active use, planning permission (ref: 21/02519/FUL) was granted to Class E (Commercial, Business and Service) use on 4 November 2021. Although the scope of the permitted Class E use was initially restricted to indoor sport and leisure use a variation of condition (ref: 22/00138/VAR) was secured</p>

on 12 May 2022 to broaden the scope of the permitted Class E use to includes Class E(b), (d), (e), (f), and (g) (i, ii or iii) uses.

Use as a life sciences facility is accepted in principle as this is within Class E(g) (iii).

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#### **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.

The North Kent Architecture Centre Limited  
trading as Design South East  
Admirals Office  
The Historic Dockyard  
Chatham, Kent  
ME4 4TZ

T 01634 401166

E [info@designsoutheast.org](mailto:info@designsoutheast.org)

