

2 Walton Lane
Oxford
OX1 2JN

Your Ref: 13/00832/FUL

My Ref: 36129.1

Ms A Fettiplace, Planning Services
Oxford city Council
109 St Aldate's
Oxford
OX1 1DS

15 May 2013

Dear Ms Fettiplace

Exeter Redevelopment of Ruskin College

I wish to comment on the above as follows:

- 1 The site
 - 1.1 The site is rectangular with the long dimension running East-West and can be broken down into three parts, the original stone and brick building with slate roof ("Zone A"), the rectangular concrete structure and the thin building linking it to Zone A with the access and stairs down to Worcester Place ("Zone B") and the brick buildings adjoining Zone B ("Zone C").
 - 1.2 The site is already heavily developed.
 - 1.3 Worcester Place is a relatively narrow road.
 - 1.4 The buildings on both sides of the relevant part of Worcester Place abut the public highway and do not have front gardens.
 - 1.5 The existing buildings in Zone A and Zone B are high. Because of their height and bulk they would probably not be granted planning consent today in an area where the buildings are domestic in scale.
 - 1.6 The buildings directly opposite on Worcester Place are low built; much lower than those on Zone A and Zone B.
 - 1.7 The site is within a conservation area
 - 1.8 The comments and submissions made by me are focused on the effect of the proposed development on nearby dwellings to the North. In particular I have not sought to comment on the effect on neighbours to the South and West, i.e. Worcester College or

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the houses to the East in Walton Street.

2 Submissions - Zone A

Conservation Area and Design

- 2.1 The slate roof is to be demolished but the brick and stone facade of Zone A is to be retained so no particular conservation issues arise here in relation to demolition. However, the design of the replacement roof with (a) the use of textured stainless steel cladding over large areas, (b) minimal detailing to break up the large new surfaces to be created, (c) the amorphous and disproportionately large roof structures, and (d) the emphasis on curves in place of angles and straight lines, does not respect the characteristics of this part of the conservation area.
- 2.2 The proposals are for a striking building which might be a worthy addition in an appropriate setting but Ruskin College with its neighbouring Georgian, Victorian and Medieval buildings is not such an area. I am not suggesting that the new buildings should copy old ones or that they should not be modern in style. However, they should respect their context. You may recall the building designed by Zaha Hadid on the Woodstock Road. A signature building but in the wrong place and properly refused planning consent. The new modern style buildings constructed by St Antony's College on the Woodstock Road fit in and make a positive contribution. I really do not like the textured stainless steel finish which will remain shiny and jarring as it will not oxidise.

Height - Overlooking

- 2.3 Zones A is already too high and has a significant adverse impact on the domestic properties on the other side of Worcester Place. Having lived for over ten years in 25 and 28 Worcester Place I am fully aware of the oppressive and over-bearing nature of the buildings. This is a consequence not only of the height of the buildings but also their proximity to the houses on the other side of Worcester Place. When I recently redeveloped 28 Worcester Place I attempted to mitigate this by moving the bedrooms to the rear on the first floor putting and the bathrooms on the front.
- 2.4 In Zone A not only is the height and size of the existing windows increased, but the new windows are pushed forward. Furthermore two large dormers are added to the additional floor in the roof which would act as viewing platforms into the properties of many neighbours. As Zone A is already too high these changes to the existing windows and the new windows are not acceptable.

Height - Sunlight and Daylight

- 2.5 The starting point is that the existing buildings already have an adverse effect in terms

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of sunlight and daylight on the land and buildings to the North and nothing should be permitted that makes this worse. The nearby land and buildings to the North are in shadow for much of the year. Even though the roof is swept back the angle of elevation of the roof surface will result in more land and buildings being deprived of sunlight over the winter months.

Height - Views and Skyline

- 2.6 The buildings on Zone A as proposed would be so high that they will have an adverse impact far beyond the immediate locality, especially when one has regard to the textured stainless steel surface. They or this will extend way above the nearby building and this together with the design bulk and materials used will introduce an unattractive feature to the skyline, not unlike the new buildings in Roger Dudman Way.

Conclusion

- 2.7 Consequently the proposal in relation to Zone A should be refused on account of inappropriate design, overlooking/overbearing, the effect on sunlight and daylight and the effect on long views and the skyline. Removal of the additional floor would significantly improve matters.

3 Submissions - Zone B

Conservation Area and Design

- 3.1 All or most of the buildings are to be demolished. This is a positive step as the existing buildings are of poor quality. In conservation terms the problem is not the demolition but the replacement building and all of the comments in paragraphs 2.1 and 2.2 apply but more so because of the significant increase in height and the significantly lower eaves line and thus increase in the textured stainless steel surface.

Height - Overlooking

- 3.2 Again Zone B is already too high and has a significant adverse impact on the domestic properties on the other side of Worcester Place. The proposal here is much worse than in relation to Zone A because of the *[large]* extent of the height increase, the additional and higher windows and the absence of the parapet wall. The residents of the top level of rooms will be able to observe their neighbours to the North very closely. As Zone B is already too high these changes to the existing windows and the new windows are not acceptable.

Height - Sunlight and Daylight

- 3.3 Again the starting point is that the existing buildings already have an adverse effect in terms of sunlight and daylight on the land and buildings to the North and nothing should be permitted that makes this worse. If you follow the line of the parapet wall of Zone A as existing from East to West you will see that it is higher than the top of the existing Zone B buildings. When you carry out the same exercise on the plans for the new building that you begin to appreciate quite how much higher the new buildings on Zone B will be. One also needs to take into account the fall in ground level along Worcester Place, which means that the buildings on Zone B are even higher than the roof might suggest. The proposals would result in a complete transformation. The new buildings would be so much higher and would make a situation that is already bad much worse. The existing building already has a significant effect and means that the nearby land and buildings to the North are in shadow and receive no sunlight for much of the year.
- 3.4 The height and proximity of the existing Zone B buildings means that at noon the sun never reaches any of the main windows on the South facing elevation of 28 Worcester Place for about 3 months of the year and in mid winter sunlight only just reaches part of the Velux windows in the roof of no 28. If the proposed new buildings in Zone B are permitted the impact in terms of sunlight and daylight for number 28 and adjoining houses would be quite extreme and would mean that they would not get any sunlight whatsoever through their windows for a significant part of the year.

Height - Views and Skyline

- 3.5 The buildings on Zone B as proposed would be so high that they will have an adverse impact far beyond the immediate locality and my comments in 2.6 above apply.

Conclusion

- 3.6 Consequently the proposal in relation to Zone A should be refused on account of inappropriate design, overlooking/overbearing, the effect on sunlight and daylight and the effect on long views and the skyline. The height of this element needs to be reduced significantly so as not to exceed the height of the existing buildings.

4 Submissions - Zone C

Conservation Area and Design

- 4.1 The existing buildings reduce in height down to that of the adjoining Worcester College Georgian building. Although they are domestic in scale and their appearance is not unpleasant these buildings do not make a contribution that is sufficient to require preservation. In relation to the replacement buildings in Zone C my comments in 2.1 and 2.2 above apply.

Height - Overlooking

- 4.2 No comment. The new building is much higher but this is mitigated by the building being set well back from Worcester Place. Without a more detailed analysis it is difficult to visualise quite what the impact of the new buildings will be on the Northern neighbours.

Height - Sunlight and Daylight

- 4.3 Ditto with regard to sunlight and daylight.

Conclusion

- 4.4 The proposal in relation to Zone C should be refused on account of inappropriate design.

5 Cycle Park on Highway

As I understand it the applicant justifies this because (a) there is no net loss of on street parking and (b) the cycle parking will be available to the general public. In relation to (a) I disagree. As cities evolve there is always an ebb and flow in relation to access requirements and other factors that affect the availability of on street parking on the adjacent highway. The justification put forward implies that the existence of off street parking confers some sort of proprietary right over the adjoining highway which cannot be correct. In relation to (b) unlike other centre areas this is not a destination and there is no public requirement for a public cycle park at this location. Furthermore this is not a good location for student cycles as they are sure to attract the attention of late night revellers walking back to Jericho along Worcester Place.

6 Public Comment

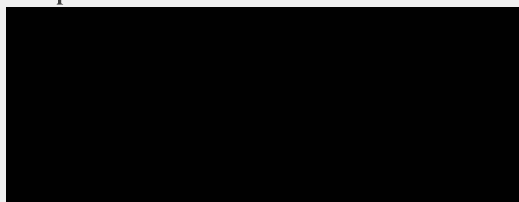
I see in the Oxford Times Thursday 25th April the headline "Exeter's proposals for former Ruskin site in Walton Street are welcomed by the local community". This conclusion appears to be justified by comments made by Paul Hornby on behalf of the Jericho Community Association but they do not speak for me or my neighbours who have very little to do with this Association and do not support the proposals.

The Jericho & Osney Ward Rose March 2013 states "They are proposing to raise the roof slightly,but most of the changes are internal". This is spin and not fact.

7 Conclusion

The design defects can be corrected but Exeter is trying to get too much accommodation on this relatively small site. Exeter should consider retaining all of their student accommodation

buildings on the Iffley Road as this site cannot provide all of the accommodation that they require.



Mark Johnson-Watts