

OXFORD
CIVIC
SOCIETY

8th December 2013

Business Manager, Planning Services, Oxford City Council

Dear Mr Crofton Briggs,

Application No. 13/00832/FUL & 13/01075/LBD. Former Ruskin College site, Walton Street, Oxford. *Redevelopment of existing student accommodation and teaching site comprising the demolition of all buildings, with exception of the 1913 Ruskin College façade to Walton Street and Worcester Place, and erection of 90 student study rooms, 3 Fellows/Staff residential rooms, teaching facilities, library archive social space, landscaping and associated works.*

In our previous letter of 8th May 2013, we expressed concern at the lack of details of the stainless steel cladding proposed for many elements of the buildings comprising this application. As a result of this and other continuing concerns over the design and impact of the proposals, we have re-examined the application, particularly in the light of the officer's report and the objections raised by English Heritage, the Victorian Society and others. Whilst we have much sympathy for the needs of Exeter College, we have concluded that the present application is not an acceptable solution, and should be **rejected**, for the following reasons:

(1). Harm to Listed Building. This building is of outstanding significance historically in terms of the growth of workers' education during the twentieth century. As such, it deserves very special care in conservation to preserve its iconic status and reflect the aspirations and struggles of its early promoters, and its subsequent role in the continuity of educational development.

Whilst it is accepted that very considerable demolition of the interior of the listed building will be necessary if remodelling is to be possible (and much of the interior is beyond effective restoration), this places even more weight on the need to conserve the form and appearance of the 1913 exterior. The increased height of the new roof as seen both ways from Walton Street unbalances the facades, and the high dormer windows are particularly out of keeping with the existing style and proportions. The use of an alien roofing material here reinforces the impression that a modern and inappropriate upper capping is being imposed on the integrity of the original design. The changes are not consistent with the Core Strategy's policy HE3 or CS18.

(2). Impact on the Conservation Area. The continuing of the heightened roof line down Worcester Place constitutes an increase in the overbearing nature of the development, particularly as the street drops considerably to the west. Again, the very prominent use of steel tiling on lower parts of the new building introduces an at present undefined but certainly discordant feature to the street scene, in a way which will be out of keeping with the character of the conservation area here. It is not satisfactory to attempt to deal with this, as suggested in the officer's report, by condition, when the outcome is so uncertain. The form of the development here is also quite out of keeping with the character of the surrounding area, to which other recent developments locally have been careful to conform. It is in conflict with Core Policy CP8 and HE7.

(3). We do not agree that the benefits of this development (which would certainly be very welcome) outweigh the combined negative effects of the damage to the Listed Building and the unacceptable impact on the Conservation Area. A more considerate design might achieve this, but the present proposals fall far short.

Yours sincerely,

Tony Joyce.

Vice President, Oxford Civic Society, 68 Blenheim Drive, OX2 8DQ