



# EXETER COLLEGE OXFORD

## A New Quad at Walton Street Planning Application Summary Document

March 2013

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## **Introduction**

Since it was founded in 1314, Exeter College has been located in the heart of the old city. Over time its historic Turl Street campus, which consists of two quadrangles and a beautiful and famous garden, has become a hub of bustling student activity; yet it now offers few opportunities for evolution to meet the modern needs of a world-class College.

Exeter College consists of seven sites, the majority of which are outside the City Centre. Only one accessible residential room is available at Turl Street. The Ruskin College site therefore provides an excellent opportunity for Exeter to consolidate its accommodation and teaching facilities, whilst simultaneously delivering modern, accessible and fit-for-purpose student and staff facilities.

The College's vision for its new Walton Street Quad is to combine the best of the Exeter, Oxford and indeed Ruskin collegiate tradition with modern architectural solutions to form a distinctive new site. The guiding principles for the project are to:

- i. Consolidate the College's facilities within the city centre;
- ii. Meet scholastic, residential and social needs in modern facilities for all our communities;
- iii. Improve accessibility across the College Estate;
- iv. Deliver a rare book archive to house the College's important collections;
- v. Maintain the presence of Ruskin College at Walton Street through the provision of a dedicated Ruskin Room, for use by Ruskin College for teaching and learning purposes; and
- vi. Deliver a low carbon, adaptable and sustainable building;
- vii. Ensure amenity spaces and other supporting facilities, such as the multi-purpose hall, are the focus of the building and where appropriate, can be accessed by the community, Ruskin College, researchers and other visitors; and
- viii. Build on the history of modern architecture in Oxford to deliver an exciting new layer in the history of the site.

The College appointed Alison Brooks Architects in late 2011 to develop a scheme for the Walton Street site. Following extensive consultation with the future users of the building, the local community and stakeholders, the plans have been developed to the planning application stage. This document summarises the scheme and documentation which make up the planning and conservation area consent application.

## **The Site**

The site extends to 0.186ha and is almost fully developed with buildings formerly occupied by Ruskin College. Ruskin vacated the site in Autumn 2012 having consolidated its facilities at a new Campus in Headington. The numerous buildings, ranging in age and scale epitomises the periodic and unplanned nature of Ruskin College's growth since completion of the first phase of the original 1913 competition scheme.

In its approach to the site, Exeter College has been keen to understand and celebrate the significance of Ruskin College and the building's contribution and interface with the local area, whilst also delivering a scheme which will meet its needs and incorporates and expresses its own intrinsic values.

The wider context of the site is provided by the rows of two and three storey houses and cottages that once dominated the area, but even these are greatly varied: some painted, some stone, and some brick.

Seen in views along the street, the skyline is distinctive for the silhouette of the chimney stacks and dormer windows against the sky. At intervals along the street are larger institutional buildings: Worcester College, St Paul's Church, Oxford University Press, the Institute of Chinese Studies and Somerville College. This collection of institutional buildings covers a range of architectural styles and histories.

### **Planning Context**

The site is located within the Central Conservation Area and is in close proximity to the Jericho Conservation Area. The Ruskin College building is not statutorily listed, though it is identified as a building of local interest in the Local Plan. It is also currently being considered by English Heritage for inclusion on the National Heritage List for England. To the south of the site lie the listed buildings and Registered Park of Worcester College. The western portion of the site lies within Flood Zone 2, while the majority of the site sits in Zone 1.

Redevelopment of the site for University use is supported by Policy HP5 of the Sites and Housing DPD, which states that new student accommodation should be located on or adjacent to an existing University or college academic site. The site was also identified in the adopted Local Plan 2001-2016 by Policy DS.72 which sought development for uses related to the University, including teaching/research/university administration uses, and student accommodation. The proposals also find support in the Core Strategy, which is supportive of the redevelopment of sites already in use for higher-education, increasing density whilst being respectful to the character and setting of Oxford's historic core (Policy CS29: The Universities).

The proposals are also in accordance with the aims of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). In particular, the scheme will adhere to the principles of sustainable development, seeking to deliver good quality design which makes a positive contribution to the surrounding area, whilst conserving significant aspects of the buildings heritage, in an appropriate manner.

### **Community Engagement**

The project brief and design principles of the development have been subject to extensive public and stakeholder consultation. As such, the plans have gradually evolved in response to comments expressed by students, staff, local residents and key stakeholders. The consultation process has comprised two public exhibitions as well as numerous stakeholder meetings with Oxford City

Council, English Heritage, Worcester College, Oxford Civic Society, Oxford Preservation Trust and Jericho Community Association.

## Proposals

The proposals comprise redevelopment of the site for use by Exeter College for modern and fully accessible student accommodation and teaching facilities. As such, the uses remain predominately the same. However, in order to facilitate a fully accessible and efficient design the scheme proposes the demolition of the majority of the existing buildings, with the exception of the original 1913 façade, which will be retained to preserve the site’s historic relationship with Walton Street.

Following thorough investigation of the building structure, the Design Team concluded that the existing internal fabric of the various buildings was unable to meet modern demands in terms of accessibility, sustainability, services and student experience. An assessment of the building’s heritage significance was undertaken in parallel and identified that the historical significance of this building is largely intangible, relating more to memory and meaning than physical structures.

Nonetheless, the proposed scheme reaffirms the site’s social significance by not only retaining its historic use, as an institution of academic learning, but by also preserving its association with Ruskin College, through the provision of a dedicated Ruskin Room and retention of the original 1913 Walton Street façade and the memorial plaques. In this way, the proposals seek to retain the most significant historical layers of the site, whilst adding a new layer to represent Exeter College.

The proposals will provide Exeter College with a new Quadrangle which will house 90 student rooms, seminar and teaching rooms, Fellows’ accommodation, a rare book archive, lecture hall, Porter’s Lodge, Ruskin Room, a café and communal social spaces such as a games room, north and south quadrangles and a learning commons.

An application for full planning permission and conservation area consent has been submitted to the City Council on this basis and with the following description of development:

*“Redevelopment of existing student accommodation and teaching site, comprising: demolition of all buildings; retention of the 1913 Ruskin Building façade; erection of new student accommodation and teaching building to provide 93 bedrooms, teaching facilities, library archive, social space, servicing, landscaping and associated works at the former Ruskin College Site, Walton Street Oxford.”*

A comparison between the existing and proposed use of the site is provided in the following table:

	Existing	Proposed
Site area	0.186ha	0.186ha
Residential floorspace	1,068m <sup>2</sup>	1,412m <sup>2</sup>
Teaching and ancillary floorspace	2,608m <sup>2</sup>	3,706m <sup>2</sup>
Study bedrooms	80	90

Staff bedrooms	0	3
Non-residential students (onsite at any one time)	250 (not known)	284 (84 daytime, 90 night time)
Non-residential staff (onsite at any one time)	32	45
Vehicular parking spaces	5	0
Cycle spaces	0	77

## Environmental Considerations

This section outlines the individual environmental reports which were commissioned in order to provide the Design Team with a clear understanding of the site and subsequently to analyse the potential impact of the scheme on the local environment.

### *Archaeology*

A desk-based archaeological assessment was undertaken by Oxford Archaeology in order to evaluate the site's potential for below ground archaeology. The assessment confirmed that, although the site has potential to contain part of an outer Civil War defensive ditch running through the western edge of the site, beneath the existing 1980s building, there are unlikely to be any significant remains which would be impacted by the proposed development. Indeed, the majority of the archaeological deposits present within the footprint of the development are likely to have been totally removed during the construction of the former college buildings (in particular excavation of the basements) in the twentieth century.

The need for further investigations or a watching brief during construction will be discussed with the City Archaeologist.

### *Building Appraisal and Structural Interventions to the Ruskin Building*

These reports should be read in conjunction. The Building Appraisal provides a factual description of the building structure, a condition survey, and a description of the changes required to this building in order to achieve current Building Regulations compliance for its intended use.

The Structural Interventions Report considers the structural implications of the proposals to remodel the 1913 Ruskin Building. The report considers retaining the existing 1913 Ruskin Building, and summarises the structural works needed to this building in order to provide the intended uses. It also describes an alternative approach, which is to retain just the front facades of the 1913 Ruskin Building and re-construct the internal structure and rear facades. The environmental impacts of each option are also considered.

The report concludes that the structural implications of retaining and adapting the existing 1913 Ruskin Building are significant and very intrusive, and would result in a compromised scheme which does not comply with Building Regulations. In addition, the environmental appraisal of Ruskin

Building refurbishment versus re-construction concludes that the reconstruction solution is the more sustainable solution in the long-term.

#### *Heritage Impact Assessment*

The Heritage Impact Assessment assesses the proposals against the significance of the building as assessed in the Ruskin College Buildings Walton Street Oxford Statement of Significance dated March 2013 and in accordance with the NPPF. The report assesses the proposals in the context of the building's historical, architectural, evidential and communal significance. It then goes on to assess the impact of the scheme on the Central Conservation Area and the adjacent listed buildings and Registered Gardens of Worcester College.

The assessment concludes that the design proposals have evolved in the light of continuing research into the significance of the buildings, and in response to comments and feedback from the City Council and English Heritage. It finds that the new buildings will continue and enrich the social and educational significance of the site and the memory of Ruskin College through Ruskin's continued presence on the site and through the retention of the familiar street elevations. The architectural design is considered to combine the retention of the best of the old – the elevations of the 1913 building – together with the best of the new – the innovative new College parti for Exeter College, providing a rich layering of history and significance on the site. The conclusion of the report is that the proposals will sustain or enhance the significance of the site, and that where demolition is intended, the interior of the 1913 building will be preserved by record, for deposit in the local HER archive.

#### *Sustainability, Energy and Noise Statements, including NRIA*

This report outlines the approach taken to energy conservation and sustainability; external lighting and noise control. The report describes the passive measures, such as building orientation, window sizes, solar control, insulation and ventilation which have been specified to reduce energy consumption, as well as an air source heat pump and solar thermal system to further enhance the building's sustainable credentials; thus providing 32% of the total annual energy demand through sustainable measures.

Noise levels have been carefully considered, both in terms of minimising noise break-out and managing noise levels when the building is in use; although it should be noted that uses accommodated on the site will be predominately the same as the historic uses, and as such noise levels should not vary greatly.

Nonetheless, noise levels will be carefully managed, with reverberation control provided in the main spaces, including the Lecture Hall – which will also be acoustically lined. Plant noise will also be controlled across the site.

Noise and vibration from construction and demolition will also be controlled, with the Contractor being required to provide a Method Statement for minimising noise, including controlling the hours of operation for particular activities and considering the types of tools being used.

#### *Flood Risk and Drainage Strategy, including Hydrology*

The site sits to the north east of the River Thames and Castle Mill Stream. The eastern half of the site sits within Flood Zone 1, which gives it a less than 0.1% annual probability of flooding, whilst the western half of the site sits within Flood Zone 2, meaning it has a 0.1% annual probability of

flooding. In response to this, the ground floor level of the proposed buildings will be set at the threshold level at Walton Street (+60.485m AOD), thus ensuring safe access.

The redevelopment is not anticipated to cause any adverse effects to surrounding or downstream sites and a new SUDs drainage system will reduce peak water flows from the site, thus reducing the risk of flooding from sewers and flash flooding in the locality of the site.

A hydrological assessment, consisting of on-site investigations and analysis of nearby development schemes, has been undertaken to evaluate the potential for the proposed basement extension to obstruct local groundwater flows. At present groundwater levels drop by some 2.5m across the site and it is considered that the existing ground conditions will naturally control groundwater flow rates, with the deep gravels in the west of the site providing suitable under-drainage to remediate any groundwater rises that may occur.

A Drainage Strategy has also been prepared, which outlines plans for a target reduction of 30% of existing peak flows through the implementation of numerous mitigation measures, including attenuation tanks, rainwater harvesting and a Hydrobrake manhole. At present there is no provision for attenuation or any form of SUDs system on the site.

#### *Arboriculture*

Although there are no trees on the site itself, there are 14 Holm Oaks located along the Ruskin Lane boundary, within Worcester College's grounds; the canopies of which overhang the existing Ruskin quads. An Arboricultural Impact Assessment was therefore undertaken by Sylva Consulting in order to determine the potential impact any development may have on them.

Root investigations indicate that the roots of these trees do not extend into the Ruskin site, as they are impeded by the existing boundary wall. Root protection areas have therefore been plotted to reflect the constraint of the boundary wall.

Although the development is unlikely to impact on the roots, pruning of some of the canopies may be necessary in order to facilitate construction. It is also acknowledged that certain rooms are in close proximity to the existing canopies of 3 trees, although this is not considered wholly undesirable and mitigation measures, such as skylights within the senior common room, are proposed where possible to negate any perceived reduction in light levels.

To manage this situation a long-term Tree Management Strategy is proposed in partnership with Worcester College.

#### *Transport Statement*

In order to inform the potential impact of the proposed scheme on the existing transportation network, Stockley were commissioned to produce a Transport Statement.

This report concluded that the following interventions would have positive impacts:

- Highways: removal of the existing 5 on-site staff parking spaces will result in fewer daily vehicle movements to the site, whilst the number of service deliveries is expected to remain the same. Increasing the width of the footpath on Walton Street will displace 2 short-term parking bays. The new proposals compensate for this through the provision of an additional permit parking space on Worcester Place and a dedicated loading bay.

- Parking: as above, the removal of the existing 5 staff parking spaces will reduce vehicle flow to the site and encourage the use of more sustainable forms of transport, whilst a dedicated delivery bay will alleviate congestion.
- Pedestrians: extension of the existing footway outside the main entrance of the College.
- Cycle Parking: at present there is no cycle parking provision on-site. As such, the proposals for 50 internal and 27 external cycle parking spaces for use by residents and visitors will have a positive impact.

As such, there will be no negative effect on traffic or parking locally. The new Quad will also be incorporated within Exeter College's existing Travel Plan and a detailed Construction Transport Plan will also be prepared.

#### *Travel Plan*

The Travel Plan was prepared by Stockley to identify the envisaged methods of travel for students and staff and to suggest measures to encourage sustainable travel options. The report highlights that the existing students and staff all use public transport, cycle or walk to lectures. This trend is expected to continue, although it is anticipated that the site's proximity to the Turl Street campus will in fact increase the percentage of students and staff walking between the sites during the day.

The College will continue to operate its Bus Pass Scheme and Cycle Purchase Scheme and the decision to not provide any on-site staff parking reaffirms the College's commitment to sustainable travel.

#### *Ground Conditions*

A Ground Investigation Report was undertaken by Geotechnical and Environmental Associates in order to determine the ground conditions, including investigating any historic contaminative site uses and assessing the extent of any contamination to inform the design of foundations and suitable retaining walls.

The report concluded that there would be no foreseeable implications.

#### *Bat Survey*

In general the site is considered to have low habitat potential, although certain areas were identified at an early stage as having the potential to accommodate bat foraging/roosts. A preliminary investigation of the site has identified that this may be unlikely, though a further survey may be required before development works commence.

### **Summary**

This document provides only a brief summary of the proposals and the context within which they are brought forward. It should be read in conjunction with the Planning, Design and Access Statement and the suite of supporting documents which comprise the planning application.