
THE VICTORIAN SOCIETY
The champion for Victorian and Edwardian architecture

Michael Crofton-Briggs
Planning Department
Oxford City Council
Town Hall
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Your reference: 13/01075/LBD and
13/00832/FUL

Our reference: 2013/04/010

22 November 2013

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Dear Mr Crofton-Briggs

RE: REVISED PLANS for the former Ruskin College, Walton Street (Grade II, 1913, *Joseph and Smith*): Demolition of buildings on site, excluding 1913 façades to Walton St and Worcester Pl. Erection of accommodation, teaching and library facilities.

Thank you for consulting the Victorian Society on the above revised application. We confirm that the Society continues to **object** to the application, due to the substantial harm the proposed development would cause to the listed 1913 building. Although the proposed changes to the fenestration in the listed building, which was one of our grounds for objection, have been moderated, the most significant and harmful aspects of the proposal are essentially unchanged.

The most damaging aspect of the proposals was, and remains, the treatment of the main envelope of the building, particularly with regards to the roof. Removing and rebuilding the roof to the listed 1913 building, making it a continuation of the new curvilinear steel roof to the rebuilt structure to the rear, would cause serious harm to its character. As we stated in our previous objection, the attempt to draw together the old and new parts of the building is a flawed concept. The continuation of the roof from the new block to the old would not only look incongruous on top of the listed building façades due to its materials and shape, but it would also completely change the building's status, and force its walls to form a part of the new structure to the rear. Overall this treatment would cause significant harm to the listed building, reducing it to two panels of historical material, rather than retaining any sense of a complete building. The 1913 college should remain a distinct building, comprehensible in itself.

The revised plans propose retaining the current timber and aluminium window designs. This is undoubtedly an improvement on the original suggestion of replacing them with bronze framed units without glazing bars, which we strongly opposed. However, the windows should be repaired, rather than being replaced, wherever they have not deteriorated entirely beyond repair. Replacement with double-glazed units, even in a similar style, would alter the appearance of the building and mean the loss of original material. It is still intended to drop the window sills on the ground floor of both the Walton Street and Worcester Place façades, creating elongated window openings, though the extent of this has been reduced. The alteration, to drop the window

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openings only to the level of the top of the plinth, is, again, an improvement. However, this is still a regrettable level of intervention to a well-composed elevation, as it will irrevocably alter its proportions.

As the central aspects of the proposal to which we objected are materially unchanged, we continue to recommend that the application should be **refused**. The proposals would unequivocally constitute substantial harm to a designated heritage asset. The external envelope to the 1913 block should be retained in its entirety, which would allow the listed and new buildings to keep their very different characters and retain their integrity.

Yours sincerely

Kathy Clark
Conservation Adviser