

# Comments for Planning Application 13/00832/FUL

## Application Summary

Application Number: 13/00832/FUL

Address: Former Ruskin College Site Walton Street Oxford Oxfordshire

Proposal: Redevelopment of existing student accommodation and teaching site comprising the demolition of all buildings, with exception of the 1913 Ruskin College facade 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.

Case Officer: Angela Fettiplace

## Customer Details

Name: Mr Gabriel Roberts

Address: Worcester College Oxford

## Comment Details

Commenter Type: Members of the Public

Stance: Customer objects to the Planning Application

Comment Reasons:

- Effect on adjoining properties
- Effect on character of area
- Effect on privacy
- General dislike or support for proposal
- Height of proposal
- Light - daylight/sunlight

Comment: Dear Sir/Madam,

I wish to object to the proposed development of the Ruskin College site by Exeter College. Whilst the site has obvious development potential and Exeter have a clear need to accommodate their students, I believe that the proposed development would involve unnecessary damage to the area and particularly to Worcester College. I propose therefore that the designs should be amended in several respects (outlined below)

I have two main arguments:

The first is that the proposed development is too tall. The land from the front of the Ruskin College site slopes down towards Worcester's Sainsbury building (on a bank which stretches right through Jericho). The roof heights in the area reflect this, with the large buildings (Worcester College, Ruskin College, the OUP) all at the top of the bank and lower ones at the bottom. The proposed building, rather than mirroring this change in level, will jut out, disrupting the character of the area. Viewed from Jericho, it will stick up relative to the heights of the adjacent buildings and will stand

out because of its use of metallic-finish materials on its upper levels. Viewed from inside Worcester, it will loom over the orchard, significantly damaging the aesthetic appeal of a cherished and historically significant site, which is used not only by members of the college, but also by numerous visitors and alumni. It was clear from the architectural images of the building that it would be grossly out of proportion with its surroundings and ill-designed for the available space.

The second argument is that the building is totally out of character with the area. In the first place, it is simply on a larger scale to most of the buildings in Jericho and, unlike Worcester College and the OUP, which are not adjacent to any smaller buildings, its size will be exacerbated by its proximity to the small terraced houses which cover much of the area. The proposed materials, moreover, are not those which are used in the area (principally local ashlar limestone and red or dark blue brick). Instead, they are a yellow-ish metallic substance and generic stone-effect facing. The attempt, moreover, to mirror the chequerboard brickwork found in Jericho with a chequered pattern on the metal roof is a weak attempt to make the building fit in with its surroundings. It also reflects a wider trend in contemporary architecture in which superficial details are added to buildings which have obviously been designed with little regard for their surroundings in order to allow their constructors to argue that they have been sensitively designed. The addition of pre-cast stone slabs to the outside of the buildings currently being built on the Radcliffe Observatory site (which otherwise consist of glass and metal boxes) on the grounds that this makes them resemble Georgian terraces is a case in point. Another example can be found in the alleged allusion to the shape of the Sheldonian Theatre in the designs for the Blavatnik School of Government, which in all other respects could hardly have less to do with the rest of Oxford. The chequerboarding on the Ruskin College development would produce a pastiche of Jericho rather than accommodation to it. Underneath this risible patina, the building will be yet another faceless modern development which could have been built just about anywhere.

I also have three smaller arguments. The first is that the building will block light to Worcester Place, making it darker and more cramped. The second is that it will invade the privacy of students in Worcester College, since it overlooks the Ruskin Lane building and the orchard. Thirdly, the designs seem substantially to overestimate the amount of light which will reach the proposed courtyard. I doubt very much whether it will be as light and airy as it is depicted in the plans.

I believe, therefore, that the plan for the development should be amended in the following respects: it should be lower across the site (no higher than the current height of Ruskin College); the roof height should change to reflect the change in ground level and the height of the surrounding buildings; and the materials used on the upper levels should be inconspicuous as possible. Additional space may perhaps be created by filling in the proposed courtyard.

I would be very grateful if you could take these considerations and suggestions into account in your judgement about whether the development should go ahead.

Many thanks,

Gabriel Roberts