

**Cambridge City Council
Design & Conservation Panel**

Notes of the meeting Wednesday 14th September 2016

Attendees:

Di Haigh	RIBA (Chair)
Terry Gilbert	RTPI
David Grech	Co-opted member (formerly Historic England)
Ashley Courtney	RIBA
Ian Steen	Co-opted member
Stacey Weiser	Cambridge PPF
Jo Morrison	Landscape Institute
Jon Harris	Co-opted member

Officers:

Lorraine Casey	City Council
Christian Brady	City Council

1. Apologies – Tony Nix, Helen Thompson and Chris Davis

2. Presentation - 6-18 King Street (16/0904/FUL)

The erection of 68 student rooms, 8 student kitchens, 4 college flats, 3 college offices, music practice room and seminar rooms, commercial unit (420 sqm) including the provision of a connection to the Todd Building and associated landscaping and cycle parking (following demolition of existing buildings).

Presentation by Alan Berman and James Roach of Berman Guedes Stretton Architects, with John Burgess of Beacon Planning and Bursar of Christ's College David Ball.

The Panel's comments were as follows:

• **The existing streetscape of 6-18 King Street.**

The Panel challenged the profoundly negative evaluation of the existing King Street facades provided during the presentation. Although the existing buildings have suffered from neglect and the ravages of 1960s alterations, the elevations still have character and richness in their mix of forms and detailing. With their historic references to the Miller's Arms at Nos 12-16, and to the courtyards of the former Scales Brewery, the fragments that remain make a positive contribution to the historic streetscene. The Panel questioned whether the new proposals could not weave in a mix of old and new buildings to retain the variety of forms at this end of King Street.

• **Replacement façade.**

The existing street scene is complex with new developments adjacent to and opposite the site. The Panel felt the superficial reference to the arcaded elevations on the opposite side of King Street did not add to the context. In contrast to the earlier scheme, the monotonous treatment of the street frontage in the proposals and lack of animation at street level miss the opportunity to give something back to the streetscape.

The new taller staircase element as shown makes a crude juxtaposition with the Lasdun building.

- **Public realm.**

The Panel would encourage greater enhancement of the public realm on King Street, with more thought given to the design of the building frontages and spaces at pavement level.

- **Views of the cupola of the Stevenson Building.**

The cupola, designed by Sir Albert Richardson, is currently visible from Malcolm Street above the roofs of the existing buildings. It is regarded as having particular character and delicacy. The Panel felt that every effort should be made to retain the more distant as well as the courtyard views of this small element of delight, as its loss would be widely noticed.

- **Scale and height.**

Within the College context, the Panel were concerned about the juxtapositions between this scheme and the neighbouring Todd Building and the 1960s Lasdun building. Its close proximity to the Stevenson Building was also questioned, with concerns that the treatment of the return could create a dark and gloomy space. The Panel would advise the architects to place less emphasis on being in keeping with all these various surrounding design styles resulting in something incongruous; instead they imagined a new building of real design quality that could hold its own in this varied architectural context.

Within this context, the scale of the new building seemed simply too big in plan and section. The Panel questioned whether too much development was being squeezed into the space; for example, a reduction in height of one storey would also help to restore views of the cupola.

- **Staircase towers.**

The Panel questioned the scale and treatment of the new staircase towers. Their height does not relate to a collegiate context and the crude design was described as “visually embarrassing”.

- **Roofscape**

The Panel felt that the proposed roofscape lacked any sculptural quality with its repetitive saw-toothed dormers and powder-coated metal parapet. The architects should look to the variety of the existing college roofscape for inspiration.

Conclusion.

Although the basic proposition behind the disposition of rooms to create and define new College courts is appreciated, the proposed new block fits awkwardly both in the College and the street context.

The Panel were not convinced that this replacement scheme was of sufficient quality to justify the removal of the existing facades. King Street should continue to have a distinctive architectural character with elements that respect the context in terms of scale, height and massing.

There is a question over the quantum of development proposed for the site and whether the context is capable of accommodating the resulting scale of the new building.

In terms both of the overall massing and the quality of its architectural detailing, it is the Panel’s view that this scheme requires a fundamental redesign. As it stands, the scheme is not a worthy addition either to Christ’s College or to its King Street context.

VERDICT – RED (unanimous)

3. Minutes of the last meeting – Wednesday 10th August 2016.

Agreed.

4. Date of next meeting – Wednesday 12th October 2016

Reminder

CABE 'traffic light' definitions:

GREEN: a good scheme, or one that is acceptable subject to minor improvements

AMBER: in need of *significant* improvements to make it acceptable, but not a matter of starting from scratch

RED: the scheme is fundamentally flawed and a fresh start is needed.