

**Cambridge City Council
Design & Conservation Panel**

Notes of the meeting Wednesday 11th October 2017

Attendees:

Di Haigh	RIBA (Chair)
Mark Richards	RIBA
Russell Davies	RTPI
Robert Myers	Landscape Institute
David Grech	Co-opted member (formerly Historic England)
Jon Harris	Co-opted member (architectural historian)
Ian Steen	Co-opted member (retired architect)

Officers:

Christian Brady	City Council (Item 1)
Jonathan Hurst	City Council (Item 1 & 2)
Nigel Blazeby	City Council (Item 2)

Apologies – Tony Nix and Stacey Weiser

A change in meeting format:

The Chair announced that following a recent meeting with City Council officers, more time would be given for presenters to hear the Panel's feedback first hand, with only 10 minutes at the end of each item devoted to an *in camera* summary discussion and vote.

1. Presentation - Christ's College, 6-18 King Street (17/1497/FUL)

Erection of 64 student rooms, 7 student kitchens, 4 college offices, music practice room and seminar rooms, commercial unit (386 sqm) provision of a connection to the Todd Building and associated landscaping and cycle parking (includes demolition of later structure of 6-10 with facade retention, demolition of numbers 12 to 16 and alterations to No18.

Today's presentation focussed on the revisions made since this scheme was last brought before the Panel in September 2016 (unanimous RED verdict). Application 16/0904/FUL was subsequently withdrawn.

Presentation by Jon Burgess of Beacon Planning with James Roache of BGS Architects accompanied by David Ball, Christ's College Bursar.

The Panel's comments were as follows:

- **The revised King Street frontage.**

Generally the Panel felt that the new proposals for the King Street elevation were more comfortable, with an architecturally better fit achieved between the proposed new and the existing elements.

- **6-10 King Street.**

Retention of the upper part of the existing façade is welcomed as this contributes to the mixture of old and new buildings that is a key characteristic of this street.

- **Replacement building for Nos. 12-16.**

Although the existing 1830s façade is of low architectural quality, the Panel would encourage further refinement of the new elevation to ensure that it fits well into the streetscene. The uncomfortable rhythm of the seven first floor windows could be partially modified by, say, the

inclusion of a rainwater downpipe located to highlight the change in rhythm. The detailed design of the shop fronts needs to be revisited in terms of their size, the base walls up to sill level, and the cornice detailing. It is hoped that the client would retain control of these important street elements.

- On the choice of brick to fit well in King Street, the Panel would strongly urge the designers to select a colour on the yellow end of the gault brick spectrum, instead of the dull grey brick depicted in the illustrations.

- **The view down Malcolm Street.**

The retention of the views of the Stevenson Building cupola in direct response to the Panel's comments from last time is very much appreciated. Questions were raised about whether the highly visible staircase should be played down to reduce its impact on the views from Malcolm Street and beyond.

- **New Court Building.**

The Panel understood the design development of additional accommodation in the New Court Building to compensate for rooms lost on King Street. However, they were not convinced that the new block was yet an eloquent solution to this complex site surrounded by buildings in competing architectural languages.

Some aspects that were highlighted for additional consideration included:

- Clarity of entrances could be improved to aid way-finding, most being shown as deeply recessed.
- The new arcade needs to be outward-looking to relate to the landscaping beyond.
- Some of the elevations, such as the staircase corner facing the Stevenson Building, could benefit from further design consideration.
- The elaborate profile of the saw-tooth roof and its juxtaposition with the flat roofed blocks seemed unresolved.

- **Landscaping.**

The creation of a new fourth court within Christ's College grounds poses an exciting challenge. The Panel however felt there was a lack of clarity and aspiration in the landscaping design as proposed. Further thought needs to be given to how pedestrians and cyclists will move through the space so that clear routes can be delineated. The cycle parking areas appear to be quite low key for such a formal space.

The choice of species for the central tree will be a key decision. Doubts were voiced about the appropriateness of the proposed line of silver birch.

It was suggested that inspiration could be drawn from the existing gardens of Christ's College - and also perhaps from Darwin's own garden at Down House in Kent. A more convincing narrative could yet be established for the overall development of the gardens in the new Court.

Conclusion.

This scheme has improved considerably since the last review and the response to the previous comments is appreciated. However, there are still significant architectural issues with this scheme that the Panel feel should be addressed. Both the landscape setting and building form could be developed further to be in keeping with the quality of the setting in Christ's College. The Panel would encourage the design team to keep going!

VERDICT – AMBER (unanimous)

2. Presentation - 14 & 14A Market Hill, 17 & 18 Market Street, Cambridge (17/1286/FUL).

The change of use of 3 no commercial units from Classes A1, Sui Generis and A3 uses to a flexible use falling alternatively within Classes A1/A3 and associated external works comprising a new shopfront and new plant to roof of building.

Presentation by Jason Zaccaria of Brooker Flynn Architects accompanied by Mark McVicar of Sovereign Centros (asset managers) and Justin Bainton of Carter Jonas.

The Panel's comments were as follows:

- **The existing building.**

As one of the best surviving examples of Brutalist street architecture in Cambridge, the Panel would urge the team to approach the scheme from this starting point rather than trying to downplay its significance. The carefully composed façade looks in onto Market Square, whilst the final bay leads the eye into Market Street. The different elevation of the right hand bay reflects the presence of the original entrance. Even though observing the rhythm of the original fenestration, it was the Panel's view that this building could offer a range of possibilities for refurbishment. All options should be explored.

- **Impact on the street.**

The Panel discussed the impact of this scheme on an active street frontage at ground level. It was felt that the shopfront could be brought forward to the back of pavement line, but the new glazed frontage needed to be given a greater degree of articulation than had been shown.

- **Façade treatment.**

The Panel would encourage greater coherence, particularly between ground and first floor levels, so it will still read as a single architectural composition that acknowledges the original design. As the building currently has constraints that deter many retail tenants, it was felt that there was an opportunity to create more distinctive flexible spaces at first floor level that could attract a variety of users.

- **Rooftop plant.**

It is noted that the mitigation report on noise and odour from the kitchen extract fans is yet to be released. Subject to its findings, the Panel would strongly encourage exploration of alternative plant options that would possibly see it spread lower and set back to significantly reduce its visual impact from the market square. The challenges involved in achieving this in the context of the rooftop residential units are understood.

Conclusion

Although the Panel are not unsympathetic to the issues surrounding this commercially problematic building, the architectural solution proposed was regarded as poor and simplistic. There are possibilities here for a deliverable solution but further work is needed into alternative options that echo more of the original design.

VERDICT – AMBER (2), RED (5)

3. Notes of the last meeting Wednesday 6th September 2017.

Notes agreed.

4. Date of next meeting – Wednesday 8th November 2017

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.