

Cambridge City Council
Design & Conservation Panel
Notes of the meeting Wednesday 7th October 2015

Attendees:

Di Haigh	RIBA (Chair)
Mart Barrass	RIBA
Russell Davies	RTPI (item 1)
Terry Gilbert	RTPI (item 2)
Ian Steen	Co-opted member
Jon Harris	Co-opted member
Carolin Gohler	Cambridge PPF
Jo Morrison	Landscape Institute
Tony Nix	RICS

Officers:

Tony Collins	City Council (item 2)
Matthew Paul	City Council (item 2)
Jonathan Hurst	City Council (item 2)

Apologies – David Grech, Helen Thompson and Chris Davis

2. Presentation – Chemistry of Health Building, Department of Chemistry, Lensfield Road (15/1683/FUL)

This follows a previous presentation to the Panel in June (verdict RED -5, AMBER-3) and proposes the construction of a new building for academic research into the chemistry of neurodegenerative diseases. The proposed building will be constructed on the car park fronting onto Union Road adjacent to the main Chemistry building, the Unilever building and Crystallography. The scheme also includes associated landscaping, infrastructure and other works.

Presentation by John Bailey and Peter Haley of RHP Architects accompanied by Mike Osbourn of the University of Cambridge Estate Management team.

The changes made since last time were explained with the aid of a model and broadly welcomed by the Panel. Detailed comments made were as follows:

- **Union Road façade scale and massing.**

The Panel expressed particular concern about the experience of the pedestrian walking along past this façade. Although the stepping back of the elevation to align with the CMI is an important improvement, this is still a large building on a relatively narrow street. Future development on the Perse Foundation site opposite is likely to contribute even further to an oppressive ‘canyon’ effect, particularly during the winter months. Street views into the building and an active façade at street level would be encouraged. Better street lighting is also suggested to help enliven the elevation and improve safety.

- **Perforated copper screen.**

The Panel questioned the impact of the metal screen on the streetscape. In oblique views from street level, the patterning and sense of it as a shading screen would currently be lost as it is an integrated plane to the solid form of the building. If the screen is to be appreciated as transparent, the clearer expression of its function would be, for example, to continue the perforations around the return corners. It was generally felt that this was potentially an element that could be seen as an empty gesture. The Panel would encourage the design team to reconsider both its environmental function and impact on the street frontage. A more

modest solution to shading this south-facing fenestration might also mean that the new façade would better reflect the simplicity of the neighbouring buildings.

- **Clarity of expression.**

Seen as a relatively low key building positioned between the more demonstrative CMI and Crystallography buildings, the Panel felt the multiplicity of textures and shapes and the use of various materials to define volumes jarred with the coherence of its neighbours along Union Road. The Panel would like to call for greater clarity of architectural expression of the various elements, as it was felt that the various parts of the building struggled to tie together as a coherent single entity. The Panel also queried how dominant some of the plant elements at roof level might be when seen from the street.

- **Courtyard and cycle parking.**

The importance of the courtyard is central to the scheme. It will act as valuable sunlit breakout space and a welcome green insertion in a tight street environment. Further detail is needed with the emphasis on high quality, robust landscaping with minimal cycle storage.

- **Future adaptability.**

Particularly in the context of the potential future redevelopment of the Chemistry Faculty, this building should be designed now for adaptive reuse.

Conclusion.

The designers have responded well to the comments made last time with considerable improvements made despite the constraints of the site. Concerns remain regarding the expression and detailing of the copper screen and the clear architectural articulation of the different volumes.

Within the presentation material, the two neighbouring buildings attributed to Sorenson are described as neither listed nor noted as ‘of interest’ in the Conservation Area. The designers are reminded that this position could change in the future and should include this among their considerations.

Qualitative improvements that need to be made that at this stage could be subject to planning conditions.

VERDICT – GREEN (4), AMBER (4)

3. Notes of the last meeting – Wednesday 9th September 2015

Notes agreed.

4. Any Other Business.

Carolin Gohler will be stepping down from the Panel after seven years. The Panel would like to thank her for her contribution over the years and wish her well for her new life in Surrey. A new representative from Cambridge PPF will be announced soon.

5. Date of next meeting – Panel training/feedback session Wednesday 14th October with the next formal meeting 11th November.

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.