

27 September 2004

Michael Crofton-Briggs
Oxford City Council
Planning Services
Ramsay House
10 St Ebbe's Street
Oxford OX1 1PT

DR/D/187/0258

Dear Mr Crofton-Briggs

OXFORD: **WESTGATE CENTRE**
Your ref: 04/01780/PREAPP

Thank you for consulting CABE about this project. The masterplan has been considered by a CABE Commissioner and Design Review staff, and our views, based on knowledge of the site and the material supplied are as follows.

We welcome the continued thoughtfulness that is being given to this project, both in terms of the process and the necessary quality of the finished product. The design of this scheme has progressed since the presentation to the Design Review Committee on 1 April 2004, and has addressed many of the points we raised in our letter of 21 April 2004:

- the status of the vertical circulation core at the southern end of the main spine has been downgraded as this is no longer the main link with the car park. The previous underground car parking is now located in a multi-storey car park which the department store has been reorientated to face. This better reflects, in our view, the circulation diagram.
- the multi-storey car park replaces the possible office development over the entrance to the below ground parking in the earlier scheme. This addresses our concern over the certainty of development on this site to shield the car parking entrance ramps. The multi-storey car park will have to be of the highest design quality.
- the "cartoons" clearly establish the principles, raised in our letter, which will be key in ensuring the success of the project - fronts and backs, building lines, the skyline, ground levels and the need for 'real' 24 hour streets. However, we suggest the addition of a further one to deal with celebrating the changes in level along the central spine.

We would like to stress the aspects of the masterplan which we feel will need to be given particular attention as the detailed design proposals emerge:

- we do not necessarily accept that the department store should not be a special building. It is important that it is designed to reflect its status as a major retail anchor and acknowledges that it must contribute positively to the area. There are precedents where this has been achieved while still being in context with the local area, for example Peter Jones on Sloane Square or Selfridges in Oxford Street.
- the new pavilion building on the site of the existing library will be an important element in marking the new development from within Queen Street and the city centre.
- the book-ends of the residential 'crust' to the multi storey car park and department store facing Oxpens Road will need to be handled with care.
- the landscaping of the open spaces and public realm holds promise and will need to be given as much attention as the architecture. The uncovered river to the rear of the car park, if detailed well, could become an impressive feature.

We were pleased to see that the master plan has looked at the wider area of Oxford City Centre and, for example, has the flexibility to accommodate possible future changes to the bus circulation routes. The provision of the additional residential in the south western corner of the masterplan area is also welcomed.

We welcome the detail and effort that has been put into this project to date and wish the project well; its success will depend on the continued commitment to design quality as the detailed designs emerge.

Yours sincerely



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