

# Comments on Planning Application 22/03042/RES from Wolvercote Neighbourhood Forum

## Context

This application seeks approval to change the design of the Red Hall part of Phase 1A of Oxford North, for which planning consent was given earlier.

We first note some requirements of the UK's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) that we consider are particularly pertinent to any decisions on this application. They are especially relevant to our comments below. From Chapter 12 of the NPPF:

§126: 'The creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings is fundamental...'.  
'Good design...helps make development acceptable to communities'.

§127: 'Neighbourhood planning groups can play an important role in identifying the special qualities of each area and explaining how this should be reflected in development...'.

§130: 'Planning ...decisions should ensure that developments: ...are visually attractive...are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting...'.

§134: 'Development that is not well designed should be refused...'.

The Planning Committee will be familiar already with how unpopular the design of the proposed Red Hall is with Wolvercote residents, who live near the Oxford North site. Its design as originally proposed was heavily criticised in comments on the original planning application and the applicant's public consultation in November 2022, which included the Red Hall in its revised design, produced many similar criticisms (see P.9 of the PS<sup>1</sup>).

The Wolvercote Neighbourhood Forum (WNF) seeks to represent the views (in relation to planning matters) of residents in the Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan Area, that includes the Oxford North site and all residents living nearby. The Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan (WNP) was approved overwhelmingly by our residents in a referendum in May 2021 and was subsequently 'made' by Oxford City Council. The WNF Steering Committee has considered application 22/03042/RES in detail, and urges the Planning Committee to take account of the following comments in making its decision.

## Comments from Wolvercote Neighbourhood Forum

1. We note that the revised Red Hall design now accommodates the approximately 550m<sup>2</sup> of community space, in the form of retail space, café, and a 'Town Hall' space, all within its expanded ground floor (see 22/03042/RES Ground Floor Plan). We welcome the inclusion of these facilities (consistent with WNP policy COS1), and consider the ground floor of the Red Hall to be a suitable location for them.
2. We are, however, disappointed that the enlarged ground floor space does not include a community storage room accessible by the public, to facilitate community

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<sup>1</sup> PS refers to the 22/03042/RES Planning Statement.

activities on the adjacent 'Market Square'<sup>2</sup>. We are concerned that, without the capacity to store equipment onsite, e.g. market tables and suitable seating, and in view of the lack of convenient parking nearby, this public space will not be able to fulfil its potential as a community space for markets, events etc. We understand that a 'Market Square' intended for these sorts of activities will feature in upcoming planning applications.

3. In line with what we believe to be the prevailing opinion among our residents, we strongly object to aspects of the proposed design of the Red Hall building.

We fully understand the intention for this building to form an iconic heart of Oxford North. But in our view the Red Hall design proposed is badly misjudged. The desire for it to be iconic (by giving it the shape of an enormously over-sized barn) seems to have clouded the common sense need for it to be a building that local people and employees on the site can relate comfortably to, in its character, scale and visual impact. In that respect it is totally inconsistent with the NPPF's requirements noted above. Moreover the scale of it is grossly inconsistent with the current Oxford City Local Plan (P.90) guideline that no building should have an unbroken ridge length of more than 25 m: the proposed Red Hall roof has an unbroken ridge length of 60 m (see 22/03042/RES North East Elevation).

The proposed revised design is a little less brutal than the original, approved, version. But the new shape is still bulky and crude, lacking features on a human scale. This is not appropriate<sup>3</sup> in a setting where it will be a workplace for many, and it is intended to be a focal point for residential developments nearby. Specifically, we object to the following aspects of the application.

- (a) The huge cantilever extension to the roof (with its lowest point 4 floors up, 17m above ground level – e.g. see DAS<sup>4</sup>, P.31) is crude and with little purpose. Its only useful function will be to provide some shade to the south-east facing windows on the upper floors in mid-summer. But this could easily be provided by whatever means (blinds etc?) will be used to protect from excessive sunlight all the other windows on that face and on the south-west face. It will be far too high to provide significant protection from sun or rain to people at ground level beneath it. It is very obviously there as a gimmick and, being such a prominent feature, we fear it will blight the whole ON Central site.
- (b) The red cladding (see DAS, P.39) proposed for the roof and south-west face of the building is especially ugly and unnecessary. There is ambiguity over the exact shade of red it will have. Images in the DAS show it as bright red in colour, whereas the DAS (P.39) describes it as being 'red oxide in colour'. This term is

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<sup>2</sup> We assume the storage cupboard along one wall of the Town Hall space would not be made available for this purpose.

<sup>3</sup> It is inconsistent with the ambition of the WNP (see P.9) which says "It is important to attend to the scale of buildings and the density of development to ensure that any new building is appropriate in design, scale and character to its immediate neighbours".

<sup>4</sup> DAS refers to the 22/03042/RES Design and Access Statement.

usually used to indicate a darker shade of red. Its colour will be such a stand-out feature of the Red Hall, planning consent should not be given until the exact proposed colour is clarified. Since the exterior of the building as proposed would have a uniform red colour over such an exceptionally large area, the applicant should be required to provide convincing evidence that, over time, it will not become non-uniform. This will happen if there is *any* loss of colour caused by long exposure to sunlight<sup>5</sup>, or if there is any adhesion of dust, moss or bird droppings etc to the roof, assisted by the matt finish that it will have (P.39 of DAS). If the colour becomes nonuniform at all, the Red Hall will become a highly visible scruffy eyesore, unworthy of its prominent position within Oxford North.

- (c) An important new feature of the revised design is the much enlarged sloping roof on the north-east side of the Red Hall. It will be facing many existing residential properties on that side of the site, and all travellers on the A44. From that direction it will appear as a huge ugly wall of over 800m<sup>2</sup> in area, coloured red (see 22/03042/RES North East Elevation). This will be such an obviously ill-conceived, but dominant, feature of the approach to Oxford along the A44, it will be damaging to Oxford City's reputation for sound planning, and to St John's College's reputation for having proposed it.

We urge the Planning Committee not to make the mistake of approving the design in the form currently proposed. A re-design is necessary. At the very least, a means of making its visual impact less harsh would be to use a lighter and less aggressive colour for the cladding.

From Wolvercote Neighbourhood Forum Steering Committee

Paul Buckley (Acting Chair)  
John Bleach  
Mary Brown  
Tony Dale  
Suzy Donald  
Katherine Kaye  
Richard Lawrence-Wilson  
Cllr Jo Sandelson  
Andrew Siantonas  
Tamsin Smith  
David Stone

27 January, 2023

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<sup>5</sup> Different portions of the roof, even within the corrugations the cladding will have (p.39 of DAS), will be exposed to different intensities of sunlight.