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Comments on Planning Application 23/01412/RES

This is a Reserved matters application for the approval of scale, layout, landscaping and appearance for the erection of commercial building, erection freestanding service pavilion for storage of associated waste and gas bottle storage and provision of landscaping (Plot C). A part of the Oxford North development.

The Wolvercote Neighbourhood Forum (WNF) seeks to represent the views (in relation to planning matters) of residents in the Wolvercote Neighbourhood Plan area, which includes Oxford North. 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 the application concerning Plot C, and considers that in a number of respects the application is unacceptable. **WNF therefore objects to permission being granted.**

Reason for objecting

The reason for our objection to this application is the proposed height and bulk of the building.

In the original Hybrid planning application (18/02065/OUTFUL), the Design and Access Statement contains quite specific height limits on the various buildings. In Volume 1, Part 2, page 21 -Section 9.4 there is a diagram of building heights. The overall maximum height of any building in this part of the development is restricted to 95mAOD. The difficulty is that Plot C overlaps into several agreed height limits, all of which are less than 95mAOD. The plan for this part of the site, as outlined in 2018, was for a graduated reduction in building height towards the west, from a peak at the height of the Red Hall's ridge. Instead, the proposed design for this building has a completely different and more brutal character: a uniform height at the permitted maximum, accommodating 5 floors plus plant screen. The building will dominate its neighbour at Plot B, which has only 3 floors plus plant screen planned.

The patch of plot C has approved height parameters +86m, +92m and +95m. It is proposed that the top of the plant screen will be at +94.2m for the whole building, which means that what is now being proposed will NOT comply with the Permission given. The flues are even higher than that - the tops of flues will be at +96.5AOD,

which exceeds the maximum height for the whole of Oxford North as previously approved.

Such a deviation from the previously approved progression of heights must be resisted. It would significantly change the character and appearance of the building, and especially its relationship to its neighbour on plot B. For consistency with the approved heights, the plot C building needs to be only 3 floors plus plant screen (to be uniform in height) or it needs to be stepped in height, some at 4 floors plus plant screen and some at 3 floors plus plant screen, to maximise the building capacity.

Furthermore, the Design Code in the proposed submission document for the Area Action Plan in 2014 defined the maximum storey height for this area of the site as 'Maximum 5 storeys'. The proposed plant screen, at 4m in height above the top level of accommodation, adds an additional storey, and therefore goes against one of the original principles of the Oxford North plan.

Regarding the bulk of the proposed building, the splitting of the layout in plan (referred to the architect's response to the Oxford Design Review Panel item 6.1 – page 10 of the DAS) does very little in 'reducing the perceived bulk' of the building. Indeed this 'splitting and off-setting' makes the overall height of the building in the west corner even more intrusive than it might have been had the floor plan been a simple square in shape.

What is proposed is therefore not acceptable.

From Wolvercote Neighbourhood Forum Steering Committee

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

31 July 2023