

**Report Title:** Craigie Estate – Campus Building for the University of the West of Scotland  
**Issue Date:** 27 February 2009  
**Client/Developer:** University of the West of Scotland  
**Lead Designer:** RMJM  
**Local Authority:** South Ayrshire Council  
**Location:** Ayr  
**Planning Ref:** 09/00007/REM  
**Details:** Campus building for the University of the West of Scotland and accompanying Masterplan



## **Introduction**

This report relates to a reserved matters planning application for a new university campus building and associated masterplan for redevelopment of the Craigie Estate. The designs were presented to an A+DS Design Review panel on 24 February 2009.

The outline planning application was presented at Design Review on 11 September 2007 and subsequent report issued on 04 October 2007.

The project was presented by representatives of RMJM, Gardiner & Theobald; and the University of the West of Scotland.

The meeting was also attended by representatives of South Ayrshire Council planning authority and Historic Scotland.

No A+DS Advisory Board Members other than those who sat on the Panel have taken any part in formulating A+DS' views.

## **A+DS Views**

### **1. General comments**

1.1 Commenting on the proposals that accompanied the outline application, we supported the project team in their aspiration to create a high quality campus environment in a mature landscape setting, to improve pedestrian and public transport links, and to engage the local community. However, we were concerned that the Masterplan for the entire site, covering land to be occupied by student housing and a residential development as well as the university building, was undeveloped, lacking analysis and depth. The designs for the campus building, which were well advanced, appeared to be leading the development of the Masterplan, rather than a response to the site and its unique landscape setting.

1.2 We understand that outline consent has now been granted for this development, but note that a Masterplan, design brief incorporating a design vision, and landscaping scheme were to be submitted to the Council along with any detailed designs for individual building developments as part of the first reserved matters application. Our comments below relate primarily to the masterplan and the detailed designs of the campus building, which are the main focus of this application. Although we have not commented in detail on the designs for the student residences and housing, which will be the subject of forthcoming reserved matters applications, the general comments made with regard to the masterplan apply.

### **2. Masterplan**

2.1 Our earlier report commented on a lack of clarity within the Masterplan with regard to the linkages and connections made between elements, both within and beyond the Masterplan area, which made it impossible to express a view on the location of the various building types and usages. We acknowledge that work has been carried out which attempts to address this, with conceptual drawings provided which relate to a proposed landscape structure, and describe a relationship between the existing Craigie House and new buildings. These drawings show some promise, but remain very diagrammatic, and it is difficult to see how they been translated into the detailed Masterplan.

2.2 We have already stressed the importance of using the landscape as a key driver for the development of the masterplan. We remain concerned that insufficient attention has been given to this aspect of the designs, and that the current proposals do not exploit the topography and other landscape features to their best advantage. Connections to and from the surrounding town might also have been used as a stronger foundation for circulation routes within the site.

2.3 The site slopes steeply in some areas, and it is clear that a considerable amount of cut and fill will be required if the Masterplan is to be delivered. The extent and location of this cut and fill, and the difference between the existing and proposed topography of the site, has not been made clear. We suggest that detailed site sections and plans showing contour lines should be provided, and that such drawings would begin to demonstrate the very radical transformation of the existing landscape that would be required to deliver the Masterplan as currently presented.

2.4 We find the circulation routes lack clarity, are convoluted and in several areas give too much priority to the car. We are particularly concerned with the arrival zone and bus stop and turning circle, and its tenuous relationship with the pedestrian promenade and bridge leading to the main point of entry to the university building. The boulevard, though potentially a strong idea, is weakened by the fact that it comes from and goes nowhere, and does not appear to link to other circulation routes in a legible manner. We suggest that the relationship between the boulevard, the bus stop and car parks be re-considered, and that a greater use of shared surfaces be applied, to promote a more user friendly and enjoyable pedestrian experience,

2.5 The way in which parking spaces have been distributed seems very ad-hoc, and we cannot accept the argument that they are in areas currently occupied by dead trees as being a sound one. We understand the attempt that has been made to shield large expanses of parked cars from view, but the result of this approach is for car parks to be located at some distance from occupied buildings and places of activity, with consequent lack of supervision leading to significant security risk, especially on a site that is described as currently unsafe.

2.6 We are very concerned about the amount of tree loss on site, particularly to make room for parking. We are unsure about the assertion that the only trees being lost are already dead, and are also concerned about the effect on the remaining trees of the significant level changes proposed.

2.4 We accept that parking is required on site, but suggest that it could be handled in a more sympathetic and practical way, and spread more widely across the site to acknowledge user needs and address security issues. The extensive cut and fill required to form the large areas could be avoided were an approach adopted that responded more closely to the existing contours of the site.

### **3. Pedestrian movement**

3.1 We acknowledge that attempts are being made to improve pedestrian connectivity to the town centre and rail station, and along the river. We question how links are made with the opposite bank of the river, and whether an additional bridge could be provided to enable a circular walk to be enjoyed along the riverbank. Such a connection might also provide a continuation of the pedestrian boulevard, and assist in resolving the problem of its undetermined the southern end.

3.2 Public access to and within the campus will require to be managed, and we suggest that site security could be assisted through the placement of residential and other accommodation to overlook and provide passive supervision of circulation areas.

#### **4. Building Design**

4.1 We are concerned at the fortified nature of the building, particularly at the way in which it has been designed at ground level. The opportunity for interaction between internal and external spaces has been intentionally limited, with large expanses of impervious walling faced in black bricks on the river frontage, and little consideration given to the potential use of the space directly around the building. We accept that security is a concern on this site, but by designing the ground floor level exterior as a barrier is likely to exacerbate the current situation, rather than improve it. More consideration needs to be given to the way in which the design of the building and the spaces immediately adjacent to it can promote activity and surveillance, and improve security on the site, for the benefit both of users of the university building and the public using the riverside walkway and other parts of the site.

4.2 The entrance to the campus building does not fulfill the promise of the diagram, and lacks a joyous sense of arrival. The way in which the grand pedestrian boulevard is handled once it bisects the building is disappointing – the lack of a view beyond the entrance courtyard, the potentially dismal quality of the undercroft at the foot of the grand staircase, and the way in which it comes to an abrupt stop at that point, all undermine the potential of the original concept.

4.3 Although the building type and its location in a parkland setting suggests that it should be considered as an object in the round, we do not feel that it is being considered as such. This building is not one with a front and a back elevation - it has entrances from north and south and all four elevations need to be designed in that context. We would encourage you to pursue a more intimate engagement between the contoured landscape, mature trees and the ground floor of the new building.

#### **Conclusion**

We thank the project team for their presentation. We acknowledge that some areas of the masterplan have been developed since we last saw the designs and that the designs for the building are very well advanced. However, many of our earlier concerns still stand. How the masterplan proposals relate to the listed Craigie House and its spectacular landscape setting remains unclear, and we suggest that more work is required to clarify this, particularly in relation to the topography of the site and existing trees. We would also like to see a clearer explanation of the way in which the potentially promising conceptual diagrams have been translated into the proposals, and the designs developed to address this. Pedestrian connections through the site, location of car parking and entry sequences also require more work, and we suggest that more consideration needs to be given to the way in which the designs for the new development can promote the safety of people traversing the site, rather than increase the danger of doing so.

We acknowledge that the designs for the university campus building are at an advanced stage, but stress that this spectacular landscape setting provides enormous opportunities for those who will live and learn on the campus and accompanying residential area, and for the people of Ayr as a leisure amenity. A masterplan that acknowledges and releases this potential is critical to the success of any future development. We look forward to seeing a masterplan that addresses the issues raised above.

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