

Report Title: Aberdeen University Library
Issue Date: 1st November 2007
Client/Developer: University of Aberdeen
Lead Designer: Schmidt Hammer Lassen
Local Authority: Aberdeen City Council
Location: Aberdeen
Planning Ref.: A7/1705
Details: Proposals for a new library for the University of Aberdeen



INTRODUCTION

This report relates to a planning application for a new library for the University of Aberdeen reviewed at an internal design review meeting on 9th October 2007. Preliminary designs had been presented at an A+DS Design Review meeting held on 22nd August 2006 in Aberdeen, and a report was issued on 8th September 2006. This report is based on the earlier report, revised to take account of amendments to the designs since previously reviewed.

A+DS VIEWS

1 Background

At the earlier review we welcomed this exciting scheme and supported the ambitions of the University of Aberdeen and the City for this prestigious project. We congratulated the design team on the originality and clarity of their design concept, but felt that there were a few issues that needed to be addressed if the full potential of the concept was to be realised. Contextual information was also lacking.

2 Context

In the earlier review we felt that a more comprehensive analysis of the designs could have been made if additional information had been provided to show how the building related to its context and contributed to creating a quality place. A Design Statement has now been submitted with the planning application, which provides us with a greater understanding of the building context.

3 Layout

The proposed building layouts are generally well developed. We observed at the previous review that the position of the service cores could detract from the initial simplicity of the plan and their expression on the external elevations. We note that these have been repositioned in the current designs, resulting in a clearer organisation. However, there is still some ambiguity between the plans and the elevations with regards to how the service cores relate to the external glass façade. We suggest that this relationship could be made richer and developed further. The simplicity of the design requires both a quality façade specification and a detailing regime that satisfies the local climate and the University's maintenance requirements.

4 Scale and impact

We note that the building has been reduced in height by two stories and that the overall building floorplate has subsequently been reduced in size. This reduced scheme appears more successful in relation to its context, and our previous concerns about the scale of the building have been alleviated. We note the visual impact studies included within the Design Statement, which help demonstrate the impact of the building when viewed from a distance. We acknowledge the way in which the designs have been developed to better relate to human scale and encourage the project team to follow this approach through into the detailed designs.

5 Lighting

The building will be very prominent on the Aberdeen skyline and care will have to be taken so that it is not seen as a source of light pollution. We note the description of the proposed lighting strategy for the building, and understand that external lighting will not be used to light

the building at night. However, we feel the proposal would benefit from more detailed proposals to demonstrate a lighting strategy more clearly.

6 Public realm

The proposed Academic Square could be a significant and exciting space for the University and the surrounding areas of Aberdeen. We support the project team in their aspirations for this space to be open to all members of the community and welcome the opportunity for the square to act as a potential catalyst for economic regeneration of the adjoining areas.

7 Sustainability and future proofing

We support the design team in their aspiration to achieve an excellent BREEAM rating for the building. This will be a prominent building in the area and as such could act as exemplar for the rest of the University and the City. It is important that the project team's aspirations are achieved, in this respect.

Inevitably, libraries of this nature have a history of continual growth and expansion and a need for flexibility. We note that a proportion of the accommodation has been set aside for future expansion. However, we are concerned that the scheme has been designed as a finite object that leaves no room for expansion.

CONCLUSION

We support the University in their ambition for this prestigious project and congratulate the design team on the quality of the designs. Whilst most of the points raised in our previous report have been addressed through the development of the designs, a few aspects require further clarity. We encourage the project team to maintain their vision and ambition for this exciting project as it progresses.

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