INTRODUCTION

“I sallied out of the railway station on foot to find either a lodging-house or a cheap hotel; all agog for dreaming spires and last enchantments. My first disappointment at what I saw could be dealt with. Towns always show their worst face to the railway.

But as I walked on and on I became more bewildered. Could this succession of mean shops really be Oxford?”


C.S. Lewis was once one of the members of the informal literary society in Oxford called The Inklings who met to discuss whatever they were currently writing – J.R.R. Tolkien was also another member. The quote above shows his rather underwhelming arrival to Oxford via train and little has changed since 1955.

The key principles of our submission seek to rectify this through carefully considered architectural, infrastructural and landscaping responses which further enhance the design of the masterplan whilst adhering to the outline strategy already in place.

KEY PRINCIPLES

The functionality of the station and transport interchange are of paramount importance to the design. Strongly coupled with this is passenger experience and safety. We have also attempted to bring the disparate elements of the masterplan into an overall composition responding to the varying conditions on this elongated and challenging site.

The key principles of the masterplan are:
- Strengthening the north/south connections across the site through a holistic approach to both landscaping and building design.
- Enhancing the design of the station square
- Enhancing the passenger experience, on both arrival and departure from Oxford
- Creating a ‘gateway’ building that acts as a marker for the site on the corner of Beckett Street and Botley Road
- Removing unnecessary undercrofts and covered parking drop-offs beneath the ‘gateway building’
- Preserving the green, residential character of Beckett Street, including a sensitive response to The Church of St Thomas the Martyr
- Strengthening the identity of the transport interchange
- Enhancing the design of the pedestrian bridge linking the northern and southern sites
- Developing the design of the underpass
- Developing an approach to cycle store future-proofing
- Reducing the impact of the multi-storey car park.

These key principles are explained in further detail in the following sections.

Enhanced north/south connections

A strong spatial connection between the northern and southern parts of the site is emphasised by a colonnade of varying forms which runs the length of the site. This connection supports a holistic approach to public realm landscaping across the site, including tree planting and surface materials.

Repositioning buildings in response to context

The new station and ‘gateway’ buildings are located so as to terminate the approach view looking west from Frideswide Square. We have consolidated the base of both buildings to further unify the space and station approach. Creating a unified ‘gateway’ to the station.

In urban terms, the station and ‘gateway’ buildings are seen as complimenting each other to create a strong civic presence and “front door” to the site. They both address the public realm, are linked by the colonnade and have a common approach to landscaping and materials.
Removing transport from beneath gateway building

We have re-organised the transport interchange to reduce its impact on the site, enhance connectivity and minimise crossovers of pedestrian flows.

As part of this design strategy, we have also removed the taxi, drop-off and short stay from beneath the ‘gateway’ building. This enhances its integration with the public realm, removes unwelcoming spaces and creates a clear front door to the building.

Enhancing underpass design

We have developed the design of the underpass to create a safe, well-lit environment for pedestrians, drivers and cyclists alike.

We are proposing the use of high quality materials to line the underpass, such as brickwork in the spirit of railway engineering.

We are also proposing a high level of illumination to the space, supported by up-lighting to soffit and down-lights to wash the walls with a warm glow.

Enhancing passenger experience

We have set ourselves key objectives to enhance the passenger’s arrival, waiting and departure experience and these have influenced the design of both the transport interchange and the train station.

- We have maximised natural light and key views out towards the city to magnifying the sense of arrival.
- We have considered views of the new station from key approaches to ensure the entrances are clearly articulated and inviting to passengers arriving from the local context via different modes of transport.
- We are proposing high quality external and internal materials to enhance the strong civic presence of the station.
- We have integrated the station layout with other modes of transport to provide a seamless and integrated passenger experience enhanced through architectural means.
- We have arranged the pedestrian flows to enable clear, simple, direct and intuitive wayfinding.
- We have developed environmental strategies to create a comfortable environment to wait and shelter during every season.

Station Square

The station square is an important contribution to the open spaces available for public use within Oxford. We have kept this open to the south to allow for maximum sunlight penetration and to avoid overshadowing from proposed buildings.

The square is divided into two zones: the first is a formal space directly opposite the station with a more informal, semi-private space beyond. This is enlivened by catering outlets on the ground floor which spill into the square. The design of the landscape, including tree planting, will be appropriate to the use of the square.

Vehicles are prohibited from entering the square, apart from potentially those required to service the commercial buildings. These vehicles will use the carefully integrated shared surfaces running along the perimeter of the square. There is also a future opportunity to utilise the change in level across the site and provide cycle parking at the lower level with a raised, landscaped roof with public access above in the semi-private area of the station square. This could also be used as an alternative to the basement cycle stores or as a method of providing increased parking facilities in the future should the demand increase.

Pedestrian Bridge

The pedestrian bridge which crosses Botley Road and connects the northern and southern parts of the site plays a critical part in the success of the masterplan. Rather than creating a free-standing object, we propose treating the bridge as an extension of the buildings on either side. The colonnade that forms one of the central themes of the
masterplan is carried across the bridge and links it to the public realm.

The colonnade is expressed as a series of deep vertical fins. These will reduce the amount of glass and provide controlled views towards the city centre. The wall facing the railway lines will be left blank and lined with high quality materials matching the wider site.

Transport Interchange
The coach/bus station is enclosed by the ‘gateway’ building to the north and the multi-storey car park to the south. We have divided this interchange longitudinally to provide both car and taxi drop-off and pick-up alongside the bus and coach station. This enables the drop off to adequately service both the station and coach station in a simple, intuitive manner. This also frees up the space below the ‘gateway’ building to be used for other commercial/retail purposes and create a defined ‘front door’.

All modes of transport enter the site in segmented lanes below the multi-storey car park. As in the existing masterplan, this restricts the use of buses entering the site. However, it is felt that this could be revisited at a later stage if required.

The western and eastern boundaries of the bus and coach station are defined by the shelter to the car and taxi drop-off and the enclosed coach waiting shelter respectively. The additional, central shelter for those waiting for taxis further subdivides the space. In combination, this provides sheltered spaces for passengers using all modes of transport within the interchange.

Beckett Street & Church of St Thomas the Martyr
Beckett Street has a distinct character usually associated with market towns. This is accentuated by the listed church of St Thomas the Martyr in its romantic woodland setting on the eastern side of the street.

In order to preserve the unique character of the street we propose setting the bus shelter back from the site boundary. This will preserve the line of existing trees and allow them to be reinforced with additional planting. This planting will link with the existing planting surrounding the church and extend the landscape theme into the development site.

It is also proposed to unify the paving on the street opposite the church as a way of enhancing its presence, and also act as a traffic calming measure.

Multi-storey Car Park (MSCP)
The MSCP is retained in its current location; however we have set it back from the eastern site boundary in order to improve the rights-of-light to the existing residential buildings on the opposite side of Beckett Street.

This also allows a substantial planting screen to be provided between the MSCP and the road. We envisage that this planting would be extended up the façade of the car park as a ‘green wall’.

TRAIN STATION DESIGN
The station building is the central piece of the development and we have endeavoured to propose a design that is functional and efficient, yet fits within the sensitive context of the overall masterplan. Principally, it should be appropriate in scale to the use of the building but instantly recognisable as a significant point of entry to, and departure from, Oxford.

The station is entered at ground level at both east and west entrances via a double-height space spanning the full width of the building.

Staircases and escalators rise from ground floor to the passenger concourse at first floor. The concourse is treated as a single volume with support facilities at either end. The primary, top-lit circulation route runs down the centre of the concourse with operational facilities on one side and...
catering/retail outlets on the other. These are assumed to be provided in an open plan arrangement served by kiosks operated by each franchise. The external wall to the operational facilities will be fully glazed with views looking north along the platforms. The catering facilities look south and will be provided with more controlled views.

The double height spaces at each end of the station are provided at some expense to the amount of retail accommodation. If this proves to be critical then further mezzanine levels could be provided within the main station building to compensate.

We have avoided providing retail accommodation at second floor level as we question whether the cost of providing the necessary infrastructure justifies the relatively small area of accommodation originally proposed.

**Constructability**

We fully recognise the role of engineering disciplines in transport design. Consequently we would work closely with the engineers to develop the principles of an efficient and coherent structural solution capable of implementation within the constraints of an operational railway station. With this in mind we would explore opportunities for off-site assembly and pre-fabrication.

The station design is based on a bridge deck spanning over the tracks, supported at intermediate points corresponding with the location of the platforms below. It would be advantageous if the transfer structure was erected before the new track layout was implemented, but this is not critical to the design.

The lighter superstructure above the transfer deck can be carried out in a more conventional way but with great emphasis placed on off-site manufacture and prefabrication.

**Environmental Control**

Environmental control of the train station is based on a low energy model. This will enable seasonal operation as follows:

**Winter Mode**
- All doors on automatic close
- Localised radiant heating to the retail areas

**Mid-season Mode**
- Some street level doors held open
- Roof lights opened incrementally to moderate internal temperature

**Summer Mode**
- All doors and rooflights held open
- No mechanical cooling

**MATERIALS & COLOUR PALETTE**

We have carefully analysed the context of the masterplan to ensure that the proposed buildings have a material and colour palette that is appropriate for the local site, and also connect seamlessly with the wider context of Oxford.

Articulation of the façades and choice of materials has been a highly important consideration in the design process of each building. Based on thorough analysis of the local Oxford context, we are proposing an elegant but rational palette that would relate to the size, scale and location of the buildings. The depth and detail visible in key local precedents would play a key role in the final façade design. We are proposing that the materials chosen for the main elevations are high-quality, long lasting and help to enhance the strong civic presence of the station and its neighbouring buildings. We propose this is through the use of masonry materials, such as stone or brickwork, or perhaps sculpted reconstituted stone panels.

Further to this, careful analysis of how the buildings meet the ground and finish at the top has been thoroughly considered. These key spatial moves are reinforced through the materials used. We believe the bases of the building should be glazed behind the colonnade to increase permeability and views through to the internal spaces beyond. The materials for the roofs, and set-back upper
floors, would be articulated with lighter-weight materials, such as metal or timber, to reduce the impact and set them apart from the heavier materials proposed elsewhere across the scheme.

ENHANCING THE CITY SKYLINE

In order to comply with policy HE.9 of the adopted Oxford Local Plan 2001-2016, we have generally kept the proposals beneath the notional 18.2m height limit.

We have also considered views from the wider context, such as from South Park, Headington Hill, to ensure the masterplan proposals have a low impact on the Oxford View Cones.

The one exception to the 18.2m height is the ‘gateway’ building on the corner of the southern site. We feel this building would benefit the site by being taller and acting as a marker in the wider city context. This building also has a strong connection with the station at ground floor and we feel its appearance would complement that of the station to further reinforce the gateway to the city that this site creates. Given this, its size and location would provide the opportunity to create a landmark building that symbolises the importance of the site and possibly ignite regeneration of the local area.

LANDSCAPING

The project has the capacity to provide an enhanced, more characterful image for this part of Oxford and strengthen the city as a whole. Proposals have been set out to create a series of spaces that are distinct, while complementing each other to link through the city. The new spaces connect existing and new uses and communities and create links right into to the landscape and riverside environs through extensive greening and tree planting.

New buildings will shape the spaces and the new public realm will bring the pieces together; connect east and west into the old as well as expanding city and north and south into the broader landscape. This new green piece of city is where the civic ambition of the project can flourish; where Oxford can get its much needed new public spaces for all to connect to and use.

New and improved uses - buildings and public realm have been designed as an ensemble - shaped to knit into the place as found while providing a step change in quality and public relevance through openness and new active edges. A diverse and rich series of carefully curated and designed interventions build on the rich history of Oxford, its courts and urban landscapes.

The streets, green and public spaces around the station sit like a series of puzzle pieces in the city; each distinct while part of an overall picture. As with a puzzle, these proposals explore how these city pieces can sit seamlessly together to form a meaningful whole as well as connect to the places around.

A focus on the particularity of places, or ‘moments’ such as the Station Square, offer particular opportunities to enhance and make more present what is special about Oxford. A high quality ‘background’ – a common ground – is proposed, complemented by special intervention to the main spaces and edge spaces where varied conditions offer opportunities for people to use the city in a wide range of ways.

We have made place specific design judgements about the extent of materials such as natural stone, public art, street furniture, trees and lighting to create a texturally rich quality to the spaces in and around the station. These elements will both make the most of the particular qualities of each space and unify them as a whole. This approach will enhance the presence and identity of this ‘new’ piece of city as a key ‘piece’ to Oxford.