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Your ref: For the attention of Kay Mitchell
Our ref: DR042/Mick Downs (t:01782 790595; e: mickdowns@uvns.org)

Dear Kay

**DESIGN REVIEW PANEL
RECONSIDERATION OF PROPOSED NEW CAMPUS BUILDING
STOKE-ON-TRENT COLLEGE, STOKE ROAD, STOKE-ON-TRENT**

I refer to your recent request for comments on the amended plans and accompanying documentation in relation to the above proposal from Urban Vision's Design Review Panel.

On 20 July 2006 the Panel commented on a full planning application for the erection of a new campus building for Stoke-on-Trent College on land along the north side of Cauldon Park. On 16 November 2006 the Panel considered the College's amended proposals informally and made further comments, which are itemised below under the five headings of the Panel's original recommendations.

- 1 The proposed Campus Development Plan should be reviewed in the light of an urban design analysis in order to demonstrate how the new Campus layout integrates with its environmental context.*

The revised Architect's Design Statement (October 2006) provides an explanation of the proposed design, setting the proposal in the context of a master plan previously prepared for the redevelopment of the college and emphasising the relationship between the proposed new building (one of a symmetrical pair) and the axial planning of Cauldon Park. In other respects however, the Design Statement does not extend beyond the boundaries of the existing college site and fails to provide the wider urban design analysis that ought to accompany a scheme of this significance on a such sensitive site. The way the redeveloped college integrates with its setting, especially the relationship between the college site and the canal, and the way in which the site layout integrates with the pedestrian movement network in the locality through its connections with the historic Hanley park to the east, and with Hanley Cemetery to the west, are significant factors which have not yet been satisfactorily dealt with.

- 2 *The ground floor layout of the building should be revised in order to improve significantly its connectivity with the terrace and the park. The scope for extending the terrace westwards and for enlarging the outdoor café area and integrating it with the terrace should be thoroughly investigated.*

The internal ground floor layout has been amended to provide steps to the level of the south terrace, although the amended plans show no paving between the base of the steps and the terrace making the functionality of this connection questionable. A “feature” wall along the front of the building has been removed. Otherwise, the Panel's previous recommendation for significant improvements in connectivity between the building and the terrace have not been acted upon. In fact additional opaque glazing to this elevation is proposed, which would reduce its transparency and the scope for interaction between the building and the terrace. Whilst these changes amount to a slight net improvement, the proposal still fails to realise the opportunities provided by the presence of the terrace for making strong active linkages between the important south-facing elevation of the building and the historic park.

- 3 *The main entrance to the building should be re-sited and given greater visual prominence, in order to improve its legibility.*

A minor amendment to the orientation of the main access door at the western end of the building so that it faces the drop off point has improved legibility for visitors.

- 4 *The proposed materials for the development should be revised to include one or more materials of genuine local distinctiveness, in order to integrate better with the historic setting.*

In the revised Architect's Design Statement it is claimed that the proposed materials “are drawn from characteristics of the earlier building”. Photographs reproduced in the Historic Research paper on the Cauldon Grounds' Terrace produced by Anthony Short and Partners (October 2006) show the former conservatory to be a timber, iron and glass structure set on a brick plinth. The extensive use of white composite panels and white render proposed for the new college building clearly has no historic precedent, and it is misleading at least to state otherwise. The use of glazed masonry on the rear (north) elevation has a notional connection with the pottery industry, but no precedent in the external surfacing of traditional buildings in the area, other than as a minor decorative element. The Panel welcomed the proposed reinstatement of the terracotta balustrade to the southern edge of the terrace, but thought that further consideration should be given to the palette of facing materials, with a view to including one or more materials which are genuinely traditional to the area (i.e. materials based on clay, iron or structural timber).

- 5 *The applicant should be asked to demonstrate how the principles of environmental sustainability have been taken into account in the design of the proposal.*

From the information available to the Panel it was not apparent that any further thought had gone into the environmental sustainability of the proposal.

I hope that these comments will be helpful. If you need any further clarification, please get in touch.

Yours sincerely,

Manager
Urban Vision North Staffordshire