

## **Background information on Castle Mill for members of Congregation**

Castle Mill provides accommodation for postgraduate students at the University. It is located on Roger Dudman Way, on the site of former railway sidings and on the edge of Port Meadow.

Castle Mill was developed in two phases: the first phase was completed for occupation in 2004; the second phase in September 2013. It is the second phase to which the Congregation resolution relates.

### **Planning process**

1. The former railway sidings lying between Cripsey Meadow allotments and the railway lines north of Oxford station were purchased from British Rail Property Ltd in December 2000 with outline planning permission for the development of the whole site.
2. During 2001-2, proposals were drawn up for the development of the site (named the "Castle Mill" site). The plans comprised six buildings of three and four storeys, containing a combination of study bedrooms and one- and two- bedroom flats. The site was to be developed in two phases due to constraints on the funding available for the works: a first phase of 125 units of accommodation, and a second phase of 229 units. 'Reserved matters' approval was granted in July 2002 for both phases (02/00989/RES). The first phase was completed and occupied in 2004.
3. In 2009, the Property Working Group, set up by the General Purposes Committee of Council, reviewed the need for further graduate accommodation in light of the policy in the City Council's local development framework that no more than 3000 students should live in private rented accommodation. In 2010, the group recommended to Council that the development opportunities at Castle Mill be re-appraised. A Project Sponsor Group was subsequently established to develop a revised proposal for phase two of the development. Council approved the revised proposals for phase two in July 2011.
4. Detailed designs were drawn up during the 2011 Long Vacation. The revised scheme comprised eight buildings. Six were designed as pairs connected by 'gatehouses' leading to shared foyers. Two blocks, at the northern end and in the centre of the site, were four storeys high, whilst the six other blocks were five storeys high, with three-storey gatehouses. The 312 units of accommodation consisted of 208 study bedrooms, 90 one-bedroom flats and 14 two-bedroom flats. The revised proposals and the associated planning submission were approved by the Property Management Subcommittee in September 2011. The revised proposals were also noted by the Buildings and Estates Subcommittee.
5. The University held a public exhibition in October 2011.
6. The planning application was submitted to the City Council in November 2011. City Council planning officers screened the application to determine whether the development needed to be accompanied by an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). The City Council concluded that an EIA was not required.
7. The City Council's consultation process was carried out, including the consulting of statutory bodies, the erection of site notices and the placement of an advertisement in the local press.
8. In February 2012, the West Area Planning Committee of the City Council resolved to grant planning permission for the development on a vote of 8 to 1.
9. Planning permission was granted in August 2012 (11/02881/FUL) subject to a number of conditions, including conditions relating to landscaping and the approval of external materials to be used on the building. During the process for seeking discharge of the condition relating to external materials, City Council officers requested changes to the cladding and roofing materials proposed by the University. The requested changes have been implemented by the University.
10. A petition relating to the development was submitted to the City Council in December 2012. The petition requested (among others) that a retrospective EIA be carried out.

11. In light of the petition, the City Council commissioned an independent review of the planning process from Vincent Goodstadt, a former President of the Royal Town Planning Institute. The report concluded that the City Council had fulfilled its statutory and legal requirements in all areas covered by the review, but that the planning process could have been improved by using the more extensive consultation processes found in best practice elsewhere. The City Council also instructed their Head of City Development to negotiate with the University to ameliorate the size and impact of the development. In response, the University offered to commission a voluntary retrospective EIA.

12. The phase two development was made available to students for occupation in late September 2013. It is now at 98% occupancy.

### **Environmental Statement**

13. The University instructed Nicholas Pearson Associates, an independent consultancy, to carry out an EIA in respect of the phase two development. They, in turn, instructed a number of consultants to undertake specific assessments.

14. The findings of the EIA were set out in the Environmental Statement. The Environmental Statement was submitted to the City Council in October 2014. It proposed three indicative options which could be implemented, subject to obtaining planning permission. Each would mitigate the look of the eight buildings in phase two to varying degrees. The estimated costs of each option, as set out in the Environmental Statement, are provided in brackets:

**Option 1:** Building façade treatment (design mitigation measure 1) and tree planting (measure 2) (£6,000,000);

**Option 2:** Building façade treatment (measure 1), tree planting (measure 2) and modification of roof forms to hip and low level roofs (measure 5) (£13,500,000);

**Option 3:** Building façade treatment (measure 1), tree planting (measure 2), removal of a floor from six buildings and replacement of all roofs with low level roofs (measure 6). A total of 33 student residence units (38 bedrooms) would be removed (£30,000,000).

15. The Environmental Statement considered the socio-economic and the landscape and visual impacts of all three options. The Environmental Statement concluded on balance that both options 2 and 3 would have adverse social and economic impacts. Both options would require the closure of all 312 units for at least one full academic year, resulting in the students having to find alternative accommodation during the period of the building works; and option 3 would also involve the permanent loss of 33 units (38 bedrooms) on the top floor of the development, which comprise mainly one- and two- bedroom flats for small families and older students (Chapter 15, Environmental Statement).

16. Considering the landscape and visual impacts, the Environmental Statement stated that Option 1 would reduce the effect on a limited number of landscape and visual impacts from 'substantial adverse' to 'moderate adverse'. Option 2 would reduce the effect on the majority of landscape and visual impacts to 'moderate adverse'. Option 3 would reduce the effect on the majority of landscape and visual impacts to 'slight to moderate adverse', and to 'slight adverse' when vegetation was in leaf (Chapter 7, Environmental Statement).

17. The Environmental Statement further concluded that, with the improvements proposed in Option 1, the advantages of the development would outweigh any residual harm. It would be consistent with the development plan allocation and would pay proper regard to all other material planning considerations (Chapter 6, Environmental Statement).

18. The City Council ran a public consultation on issues raised in the Environmental Statement from 30 October to 19 December 2014. The University held two public exhibition events for members of the local community to view the Environmental Statement and mitigation proposals on 5 and 6 December 2014.

19. The City Council appointed SLR Consulting Ltd to undertake an independent review of the Environmental Statement. Their report was published on 24 December 2014. The University's consultants are currently preparing their responses to the SLR report.

20. It is expected that the City Council will take its decision on the final form of any mitigation later this year.

### **Congregation resolution**

21. On 19 December 2014, a resolution signed by 64 members of Congregation was submitted to the Registrar. It stated:

*'Congregation welcomes the conclusions of the EIA [Environmental Statement], resolves that of the three options that it offers for mitigation of the environmental damage caused by the Castle Mill Development, Option 3 is the only one that offers substantial mitigation, and therefore instructs Council to proceed with mitigation work according to the recommendations of Option 3.'*

22. At its meeting on 19 January 2015, Council deemed the resolution unacceptable. The following notice was published in the Gazette on 22 January 2015:

*'At its meeting on 19 January, Council gave careful consideration to the resolution first published on 15 January. Council welcomes the conclusions of the Environmental Statement on the Castle Mill development that: 'with the improvements proposed in the Design Mitigation Strategy (Option 1), the advantages of the development would outweigh any residual harm'; and that: '...for economic and social reasons anything more than the minimum required to achieve a measure of environmental improvements would have a disproportionate effect and should not be pursued on these grounds'. Council proposes, subject to local authority planning processes, to proceed with mitigation work consistent with Option 1 and deems unacceptable the demand for the implementation of Option 3, which the Environmental Statement independently costs at £30 million, five times the estimate for Option 1.'*

23. A debate on the Congregation resolution will take place at the Congregation meeting on 10 February 2015. Following the speeches, a vote will be taken.

### **Further information**

[Environmental Statement: Non-Technical Summary](#) (PDF)

[Environmental Statement \(full\)](#) (please note that, as the Statement consists of more than 100 documents, it is accessible via Dropbox, but you do **not** need to sign in or create a Dropbox account to access it)

[Roger Dudman Way review by Vincent Goodstadt: independent report and recommendations](#) (PDF)

[Castle Mill student accommodation: information for the local community](#)