

Design Review:
**Alder Hey
Children's
Hospital**

Cabe's Design Review ensured Alder Hey Children's Hospital offers world-class design as well as a 'next-generation' medical experience



Designed by BDP

Liverpool City Council

Planning reference: 12RM/1621

25 July 2012

We are impressed by the great care that has gone into the scheme both in terms of defining the brief and developing the design for the new Alder Hey Children's Hospital. We applaud the client for the commitment to an ambitious architectural approach. This scheme promises to provide a new kind of hospital experience, to create an uplifting environment and to become a truly exciting addition to this part of Liverpool. However, we think that some aspects of the design require further work. In summary, both the landscape design and the architectural treatment would benefit from clarifying and strengthening the original design idea, namely, the vision of a hospital rising out of the park. We feel that the scheme has become over-complex and suggest simplifying some of the elements.

Masterplan and park design

The masterplan strategy for the site is in our view sound; the location of the new hospital at the south-eastern corner of the site, giving most of the space to the park, is well chosen. We applaud the connections to the wider neighbourhood around the hospital, the cycle routes and the improved access for local residents to the park. However, we question whether the relationship with Eaton Road is equally successful and whether the eastern site boundary could be made more accessible and perhaps more accommodating for future developments on adjacent sites. In principle, we support the design ambitions for the hospital garden and the public park. Liverpool City Council must ensure that the quality of the whole park as illustrated in the submission material can be achieved and maintained over a long-term period. It would be disappointing if the public part of the park fell short of the ambitions of Alder Hey. We think that some elements of the park design should be improved, for example the swathe of hard landscape on either side of the building to form a softer transition between the park and the hospital. A more detailed landscape plan to illustrate the design would be helpful.

Courtyard gardens

The courtyard gardens are a key element of the proposal to connect the architecture and the landscape and to offer pleasant views from the wards. We feel, however, that the proposed design for the courtyards distracts from the strength of the architectural concept. The small-scale, almost ornamental, complexity of their layout is at odds with the underlying qualities of the conceptual strategy for the hospital based on the geological layering

of Liverpool, and the scale of the park. We recommend simplifying the landscape design and to use a clearer design language for the courtyards that works better with the dramatic architecture. Simplifying and creating a more child-oriented, robust design for the courtyards might be beneficial for the proposal as a whole.

Bereavement garden

We find that the treatment and arrangement of the bereavement garden are not commensurate with its significance. To achieve the intended quality and to create a place of tranquillity, the garden should be better protected from the activity generated by the access to the A&E department and the proximity of car parking spaces. Currently, the garden appears to be a residual space dictated by the needs of highway engineering. We suggest developing a more compelling design rationale for the garden, perhaps as a proper walled garden, successfully screened from the surrounding noise.

Building design

While we welcome the architectural approach for the new Alder Hey Children's Hospital and support the powerful idea of the building emerging from the park, we think that the resolution of the design requires further work to make the most of its potential. Currently, the overly complex elevational treatment undermines the clarity of the original design concept; for example the mixture of faceted and rectilinear colourful pods protruding from the façades distract from the cliff-like elevation rising out of the ground. We urge the design team to have another look at the detailing, particularly the joints between the concrete panels, the repetition and colour patterns of the panels and the metal capped parapet. The wide silver band of the capping diminishes the strength of the cliff edge against the sky whereas a simple concrete edge would be more convincing, and most importantly, truer to the concept. The joints and gaps between each metal sheet further compromise the idea of the cliff and weaken the monolithic expression of the building. We think that the design team should reassess the composition and relationship of the different building parts that form the elevation onto East Prescott Road; using the metal capping to connect the wards and the out-patients department appears somewhat inelegant. Rethinking this elevation and the junction of the wings also offers the opportunity to strengthen the architectural clarity of the main entrance which may be stronger if expressed as an independent element resolving the in-patient 'finger' on one side and the outpatients department on the other.

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