## An Introduction to the Ratan Tata Building

# Somerville College is proud to announce its proposals for a flagship building at the heart of the University of Oxford's new Radcliffe Observatory Quarter.

The Ratan Tata Building represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to expand Somerville's teaching and learning space, support research with global impact and articulate our College's vision of a sustainable and forward-looking academic community.

True to Somerville's founding principles, the plans envisage a space that is both inclusive and equitable. New seminar rooms and offices will exist alongside spaces for shared study, events and interdisciplinary collaboration. The interchange of ideas and model of collegiate working will be facilitated by the space itself.

The Ratan Tata Building is made possible by the largest philanthropic gift in our College's history. The donation was made by The Tata Group in honour of the decade-long friendship between Somerville College and Chairman Emeritus of the Tata Group, Mr Ratan Tata (1937-2024).

### Location

The location of the Ratan Tata Building is unrivalled. Standing opposite the internationally renowned Blavatnik School of Government, Somerville's new building will occupy the last remaining plot of land available for development on the prestigious Radcliffe Observatory Quarter site, directly opposite the new Schwarzman Centre for the Humanities.

### The Oxford India Centre for Sustainable Development



The transformational generosity of the Tata Group will also enable the creation of a permanent home for the Oxford India Centre for Sustainable Development (OICSD) within the new building. The values of Mr Tata and The Tata Group align closely with the work of the OICSD, which you can read more about on Board No 8.



MORRIS+COMPANY

#### THE RATAN TATA BUILDING

ndicative landscape design

# The Design Philosophy

### **Design Brief & Vision**

**Morris+Company were commissioned to** design a new academic building within the historic Radcliffe Observatory Quarter (ROQ) of Somerville College, Oxford, following an invited design competition.

Inspired by Somerville College's core values of Resilience, Inclusion, Sustainability and Excellence (RISE), Morris+Company have envisioned an "interpretive and extrospective" architectural solution. Balancing contemporary design with both the historical and academic context of the site, the proposed 700m2 building will enhance academic provision and amenity through a series of key programmatic building elements. These include:

### **The Design Team**



Planning, Townscape and Project Management



Engineering (M&E) and Sustainability





- 8 tutor offices/teaching rooms
- 2 seminar rooms
- Shared study space
- Flexible lobby + Flexible event space
- An internal link connecting back to the existing College buildings within the campus
- A new permanent home for the Oxford India Centre, including offices and break-out spaces

IOWNSHEND Landscape Architects

Structural Engineers

Landscape Architect

### MORRIS+COMPANY

Architecture

### **Nestling into the Site** Context

The building is located on the boundary of Somerville college. There is an opportunity to transform the site from a 'Wall' condition to a 'Node' - an outwardly-facing, welcoming place which reflects the progressive, inclusive values of Somerville College.

The proposal will be a hub of activity and interaction bringing together people through a public face as well as a College face.



**Drawing on Oxford's Rich Architectural Legacy** 







We undertook a broad 'architectural taxonomy' of Oxford buildings old and new to determine the architectural language of the ROQ3 building. Distinctive features commonly seen include stone stringers providing strong horizontal datums; vertical fluting and columns providing rhythm and relief to façades; and circular window apertures as well as circles in plan, seen in the shape of prominent buildings such as the Radcliffe Camera and more recently the Blavatnik Building.

The stone detailing of the Divinity School provided inspiration for the proposed facade: the tapering profile of stone vertical fins combine with elegant proportions, resulting in a proposal which is fine and light.

### Architecture to 'Hold its Own' in the Local Context

The new building allows the College to address the ROQ site with prominence and poise. With large and highprofile contemporary neighbours, this proposal is designed to hold its own, whilst responding sensitively to neighbours and the wider context of historic Oxford.

# External Design

### **Site Constraints**

The site includes challenging constraints such as abutting college buildings to the South and adjacent buildings ROQ West and St Paul's Nursery. The massing is sculpted to maintain views of both ROQ West and St Paul's Nursery from longer East and West views respectively, in-line with the original ROQ masterplan. The height of the building has been determined to maintain sensitivity towards these views - as a result, typical floor-to-floor heights are limited between 2.5m to 3m.

### Massing

A significant number of massing iterations have been tested to inform the final building shape. The form-making moves are derived from observations of buildings in the locality and in the centre of Oxford, including 'stepped' massing, chamfered corners, 'scooped-out' recesses and gentle crescents.

The final sequence of form-finding is as follows:

- 1. Step away from the ROQ West and push out North to maximise area.
- 2. 'Scoop out' an area of the North facade to denote a public entrance.
- Angle the geometry of the Eastern corner to harmonise with orientation of the Schwarzman Centre and Blavatnik School of Government.
- Carve away the massing to allow breathing room in long views towards ROQ West and St Paul's Nursery.





### **Building Design**

The building form draws inspiration from Oxford's curved façades, particularly the Blavatnik Centre directly opposite. Its gently undulating design creates a distinctive silhouette and identity, while softening the street edge. The form is inviting, leaning outward to highlight a new entrance and subtly curving to enclose a landscaped area adjacent to St Paul's Nursery.

The vertical articulation of the mullions echoes the neighbouring buildings of ROQ West and the Blavatnik School, ensuring the public-facing elevation harmonises with its surroundings. Stone is employed to reflect Oxford's rich architectural context, emphasizing the building's robustness and timelessness.



An oculus window acts as a focal point, marking the building's entrance and offering a view into its core, a ribbon stair connecting the various floors. The entrance doors, aligned with the ROQ, establish a prominent gateway to the public realm and introduce a new public face for Somerville College within the Quarter.

The west-facing façade, the primary elevation along Walton Street, offers an initial glimpse of the building. An oriel window provides a playful and distinctive feature, adding a unique moment to the streetscape.

# Inside the Building

### **Building Flow**

The building entrance from the Radcliffe Observatory Quarter (ROQ) is clearly announced by the façade design. Visitors and members of the public are likely to enter from the ROQ side and college users are likely to enter via the Park building through an internal link. There is a symmetry between the two entrances and clear visual communication between them. Both sets of users arrive at a central node, celebrated by a feature staircase and a quadruple-height space. The feature stair takes users up through the three storeys above, connecting to a series of areas as described below:

- 1. Events Space
- 2. Teaching Rooms
- 3. Seminar Rooms
- 4. Chai Ideas Room (Shared Study Space)





Indicative Ground Floor Layout

### **Building Function**

ROQ3 maximises Somerville's perimeter to the ROQ and enhances the educational provisions within the College. The building's uses are logically laid out across four storeys, with functions which become more private as the storeys ascend.



#### **Ground Floor**

The ground floor hosts an events space, which is physically and visually connected to the public domain, designed to be a transparent and welcoming street frontage, physically enhancing ties to the local community.

#### **1st and 2nd Floors**

The first and second floors host a variety of teaching and shared study spaces. Teaching rooms are designed to be flexible for personalisation, providing private space for





Precedent example (Morris+Company Studio)



Visual or events space

tutors with the ability to accommodate up to six students for a tutorial. Seminar rooms host up to ten students. These are also designed with flexibility in mind: a multi-use space with fantastic views across the ROQ.

#### **3rd Floor**

The top floor contains a meeting room, ideal for group work and seminars. Window desks are also provided to maximise on views out and to provide variety in work settings. The external terrace space is designed to be accessed by all building users from the staircore. The terrace offers attractive views out over the ROQ towards the Observatory and alongside opportunities to boost local ecology, provides users with a pleasant outdoor environment, to work and socialise. First floor



Second floor



Third floor

## The Landscape

Early concept presently under review with the Blavatnik School of Government, The Schwarzman Centre for the Humanities, the Radcliffe Observatory Quarter, The University of Oxford and Oxford City Council

The landscape design concept is rooted in the idea of creating a "green connection" that extends from the Somerville Quad, through the Ratan Tata Building, and into the public realm at its front.

Given the site's predominantly hardscaped condition, our proposal aims to soften the environment and introduce a landscape at a more human scale.

An intimate terrace, adorned with lush planting, provides a peaceful retreat for rest or private and small group study. Elsewhere, we have drawn inspiration from the existing circular geometries present in both the natural and built surroundings to create a proposed landscape design currently under discussion.



1. Stone edging to provide robust area next to cycle parking



2. Low level flowerbeds to soften theedges of the building



By integrating these geometries with key pedestrian routes, we hope to craft a series of "outdoor rooms" that echo the transitional experience of moving between quads in the traditional college gardens of Oxford.

The curved forms invite users to meander through the space, fostering a sense of being enveloped by nature. The small scale of the building is mirrored in the landscape, with the creation of intimate pocket spaces that offer a garden experience and promote a seamless flow between indoor and outdoor areas.





ROQ WestFlowerbedsNew cycleExisting trees andand plantingparkingbench retained

## Sustainability

Skelly & Couch have been appointed to ensure that the proposed building contributes towards a sustainable built environment for future generations.

Key design objectives for the College and the Design Team include:

- To incorporate flexibility into the buildings to meet the client's future operational needs;
- To provide an attractive, high quality internal and external appearance;
- To produce a building that is environmentally sensitive and responsive;

### **Proposed Targets**

The following energy and carbon targets are proposed:

- Heating energy demand target: 20 kWh/m2/yr ٠
- The project scheme will avoid the direct use of fossil fuels ٠

The following measures are proposed for incorporation in the building to aid with achieving the proposed targets and contribute towards a sustainable and healthy building for users:

- Water efficiency measures e.g. low flow water fittings
- Energy efficiency measures e.g. low energy LED lighting • technology
- To maximise passive design where possible;
- To achieve carbon reduction targets in accordance with the adopted Oxford Local Plan 2036;
- To achieve a bespoke solution with a high level of sustainability.
- Heat Pumps
- Passive Design Measures aimed at optimising the ٠ building envelope, maximising daylight and limiting overheating.



## Initial Site Logistic Ideas

#### **Traffic Management Plan**

### **Site Compound**





Almost all construction traffic will enter the site via Woodstock Road Entrance (A) and follow the service road around the Humanities Building to the ROQ 3 (B) site compound.

All deliveries will be escorted by a Banksman through the service road into the site compound.

The site compound will only be able to accommodate one delivery at a time and deliveries will need to be booked in to manage this.

The site compound will have solid 2.4m high hoardings with large 3.5m traffic gates to the east side of the site for construction traffic. A full-time gateman will be located in a gateman hut during construction working hours.

A tower crane will be situated to the west of the site behind St Paul's Nursery. We propose a shallow base where the attenuation tank will be formed. We would propose to anchor the crane with a ballast base to avoid any deep excavations. The tower crane will be a luffing Jib to avoid oversailing any neighbouring properties (A full crane plan will be required).

There will be ample room to the north of the site for main cycle and pedestrian access. The only time this may be affected is during the crane installation. A wheel wash will be provided for the groundworks phase.

We judge that the compound is the safest way to segregate vehicles being off-loaded and keep all site activities behind the hoarding line.

There is a possibility that the larger wagons for CLT, groundwork and crane erecting may need to enter via Walton Street (C). (By arrangement with a detailed methodology for specific deliveries. i.e Crane installation).

Pedestrian access will be maintained at all times from Woodstock Road through Loverose Way, past the ROQ Building onto Walton Street. Signage will be used to help direct the public.

Vehicle route is based on the completed ROQ master plan.

The initial site logistic ideas set out here are indicative and will be developed with the county council, city council and the University of Oxford.

All activities after this phase of works will be conducted on hard standings.

The building super structure is a CLT timber frame which will be shroud in a scaffold. To comply with the joint Fire Code, the scaffold will need to be lined with fire-retardant Monoflex and heat-detection fire alarms linked to the Somerville College Lodge. The scaffold sheeting will remain in place until the building façade is completed.

All site welfare and offices will be located within Somerville College grounds. Site operatives will be required to walk between the site compound and site welfare facilities accessed via Walton Street. The site compound will have 24-hour CCTV security and anticlimb measures for the crane.

### A Unique Oxford-India Partnership

Founded in 2013 through a historic partnership between Somerville College and the Indian government, the Oxford India Centre for Sustainable Development is today the largest scholarship-granting body for Indian students in the UK. Under these plans, the OICSD will gain a permanent home in the Ratan Tata Building to support its community of scholars and empower cutting-edge research.



### **Somerville and India**

Somerville College's ties with India can be traced back to the college's early years. Cornelia Sorabji from Pune was the first woman to study law at the University of Oxford and many brilliant Indian scholars have studied at Somerville since then, including the country's first female Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Mrs Gandhi's speech at the UN Conference on Human Environment in 1972 is still one of the first to highlight the need for sustainable development: *"It is clear that the environmental crisis which is confronting the world, will profoundly alter the future destiny or our planet. No one among us, whatever our status, strength or circumstance can remain unaffected".* The OICSD roots its objectives in the same ethos.





Dr Aavika Dhanda studies how climate change affects birds in the Himalayas, with farreaching insights into how local communities engage with nature and various ecological factors interact.



The OICSD comprises a community of more than 70 scholars, 21 of whom are current students. Together, OICSD scholars are driving interdisciplinary research on some of the the most pressing issues facing India and the world.

PIONEERING A MULTI- AND INTER-DISCIPLINARY APPROACH





**Gabriella D'Cruz** is pioneering a model of seaweed harvesting in her native Goa that is boosting sustainable food production, marine biodiversity and the economic livelihood of local women, winning her a BBC R4 Global Youth Champion Award.



Dr Aradhana Cherupara
Vadekkethil studies the
adjudication of sexual
violence in India, South
Africa and the UK, and her
work has informed two UN
Special Reports on Sexual
Violence and Academic
Freedom.



**Dr Divya Choudhary** works on anti-microbial resistance. Her research on how bacteria evolves under antibiotic stress is

inspiring new departures in both biochemistry and medicine.



#### **New Horizons**

The OICSD's new home within the Ratan Tata building will provide a space for the OICSD scholars to think, collaborate and share their research on a wider stage. The creation of this exciting, interactive hub will also launch the next stage in the OICSD's evolution, attracting future generations of scholars and securing our place as the recognised home of Oxford-India research on sustainable development for years to come.

