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NEX WINS SELECTION PROCESS FOR EXETER COLLEGE, OXFORD'S CELEBRATED LIBRARY



Winner praised for demonstrating flair and pragmatism in an engagement-focused process

Exeter College, Oxford and Malcolm Reading Consultants (MRC) today [29 May 2019] announced that Nex has won the invited competitive selection process for an architectural team to renew the College's Grade II listed Library.



Nex's proposal convinced the College's Selection Committee with a top-scoring combination of innovative ideas, user understanding, outstanding team dynamics and construction strategy.

Designed by the celebrated Victorian architect Sir George Gilbert Scott in the 1850s, the Neo-Gothic Library is still beloved today for its architectural quality, atmosphere and idiosyncratic charm. During the early twentieth century, it supplied J.R.R. Tolkien, Exeter College's most famous alumnus, with Finnish grammars and other reference works.

However, a recent MRC feasibility study on the Library for the College identified essential repairs to the building's fabric and upgrades to its services, as well as the need for a sensitive and holistic re-think to increase the number and quality of reader spaces and improve user comfort, accessibility, connectivity and sustainability, whilst respecting the building's significance and preserving its architectural identity and integrity.

This led to the College commissioning a selection process run by MRC that centred on six leading studios' understanding of and approach to the project, through site visits, client workshops, final submissions and interviews.

Professor Sir Rick Trainor, Rector of Exeter College, said:

“This is such a vital project for the College: it was essential for us to identify the best team, who most connected with the challenge. We were very fortunate to attract a stellar shortlist, and we have enjoyed meeting and getting to know each of the finalist teams over the past weeks.

“Ultimately however, Nex won us over with a combination of talent, insight and rigour, and we look forward to working with them as we repair, restore and renew the Library for future generations.

“On behalf of the College I would like to thank all the shortlisted teams, each of whom gave it their all.”

Malcolm Reading, MRC Chairman, said:

“Nex rose to the challenges of this intricate project with great aplomb. They connected deeply with the College's ethos and the unique character of Sir George Gilbert Scott's wonderful Library.

“The winner's approach was elegant and imaginative while remaining firmly rooted in reality. This combination of flair and pragmatism resonated strongly with the College's Selection Committee, who reached a unanimous decision to select Nex.”



Alan Dempsey, Director of Nex, said:

“There are some projects that have an extra-special aura, and this was one we absolutely loved.

“We are so thrilled to win, and to take care of this building and refresh it for the next fifty to a hundred years is a great privilege.”

Recent high-profile projects by Nex, who are known for their diverse portfolio, include the AA Bookshop, the soon-to-open Duke of York restaurant on the King’s Road for Cadogan Estate, and a public pier on the Thames.

The winning team was praised by the Selection Committee for a proposal that offered innovative ideas, a practical and realistic response to the project, and an integrated team. Other strengths were Nex’s considered approach to construction and logistics and a strong understanding of the Library’s context and how it is managed and used.

Additionally, the team’s proposal for a new mezzanine in the Library’s annexe was admired, with the Selection Committee finding it light, elegant, simple and feasible. It offered something that would be both respectful of the current building and a confident, contemporary statement.

At the first stage of the selection process, teams were invited to submit an entry detailing their practice profile, relevant experience and an initial response to the project. The College selected a shortlist of six teams to proceed to the second stage; the other five finalists were (in alphabetical order):

- **Carmody Groarke**
- **Coffey Architects**
- **Gort Scott**
- **Jonathan Tuckey Design**
- **Lee/Fitzgerald**

Directly adjacent to the Bodleian, Exeter College Library is distinctive for the bold and inventive blind arcade of its main wing, timber-vaulted ceiling at the upper level and oak bookcases with decorative mouldings of fruit and foliage to Scott’s original designs. These have been little altered since the nineteenth century.

Nex will now work with the College to achieve planning in 2020, with works commencing shortly thereafter.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

About Exeter College, Oxford

Exeter College is located in the heart of Oxford, adjoining the Bodleian Library. The College, the fourth oldest at the University, has occupied its current site on Turl Street since 1315, one year after it was founded. Today Exeter is home to a diverse community of fellows and students from across the world.

In 2017 Exeter College opened its new premises, Cohen Quad. Located in Walton Street, Jericho, it offers state-of-the-art facilities including en-suite bedrooms, an auditorium for lectures and live performances, large seminar rooms and smaller break-out session rooms, a bright and open learning space, the Learning Commons, a student common room, an archive and reading room, and a cafe, all in a stunning site designed by award-winning architect Alison Brooks.

The relocation of the College archive created additional space for readers in the College's historic Library on the Turl Street site, and has presented a broader opportunity to upgrade and renew the building.

exeter.ox.ac.uk

About Nex

Nex create buildings and spaces defined by place, people and atmosphere.

We connect people to place through distinctive, engaging design and specialise in integrating transformational projects into sensitive historic and cultural settings. We create value by intimately connecting our architecture to the city, creating long-term adaptability and enhancing the public realm.



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Our projects bring people together through flexibly programmed spaces that are platforms for social interaction. We enjoy creating dynamic places that change through time and accommodate different uses.

Our buildings and spaces are distinguished by their atmosphere. We prioritise sensory experience and our sensitivity to volume, material, texture, light and sound is perceived through meticulous design and beautiful craftsmanship.

Our work has been published and exhibited internationally and has received numerous awards and commendations.

Nex are a RIBA / RIAI Chartered Architects, Urban Designers and Client Advisors, working on projects around the world from our base in central London.

Our diverse portfolio includes culture, leisure, workplace, education, infrastructure and residential buildings. All share a focus on their relationship with the city and landscape, and our record of securing challenging consents and approvals is exemplary.

We have collaborated with ambitious clients including the Architectural Association, British Land, Ballymore, RAF Museum, Cadogan Estates, Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, The Times, Facebook, Mercedes Formula 1, the University of Cambridge, and U+I. Many have returned to work with us repeatedly.

nex-architecture.com

About MRC

Malcolm Reading Consultants (MRC) is a strategic architectural consultancy that helps clients to imagine and define contemporary environments; MRC is the leading global specialist in devising and managing international design competitions.

Since 1996, we have developed an extensive global network of contacts, an outstanding portfolio of completed projects, and an international reputation for fairness and transparency. MRC believes in the power of design to act as an inspiration.

We are currently running international design competitions for the Powerhouse Precinct at Parramatta in Sydney, Australia, a new university in Milton Keynes, United Kingdom, and preparing the launch of a contest for Houston Endowment in the US.

The consultancy advises the Royal Household of the United Kingdom, the British Library and Transport for London.

malcolmreading.com