

# British High Commission

Earnscliffe  
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

## Site Plan Approval Planning Rationale

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Prepared for:

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Project No. 18.32318.00

## Table of Contents

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Project Background.....</b>	<b>2</b>
1.1	The Purpose of the Project.....	2
1.2	Site Context and Existing Land Use.....	2
1.3	Planning Context.....	3
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Area of Work .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Architectural Concept.....</b>	<b>5</b>
3.1	Architecture.....	5
3.2	Design Principles.....	5
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Landscape Concept.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>5.0</b>	<b>Civil Concept.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>6.0</b>	<b>Summary .....</b>	<b>11</b>

## 1.0 PROJECT BACKGROUND

### 1.1 THE PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT

The United Kingdom Government's Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) is modernizing their ongoing commitment of maintaining the British High Commission (BHC) in Canada.

The current High Commission building, at 80 Elgin Street, does not suit the needs of the FCO and does not reflect their way of working.

The proposed new British High Commission at 140 Sussex Drive will provide a modern work environment for Ottawa based FCO staff and will recognize the United Kingdom's relationship with Canada.

### 1.2 SITE CONTEXT AND EXISTING LAND USE

The subject property is located at 140 Sussex Drive. It is the location of the official residence of the British High Commissioner in Canada.

The property is neighbored to the north by National Research Council of Canada (100 Sussex Drive), to the east by Global Affairs Canada (125 Sussex Drive), and to the south by an undeveloped property owned by the National Capital Commission.

The NCC's lands effectively separates the subject property from Sussex Drive. The property boundary partially follows old residential plots in the area, and so is not parallel to Sussex and includes two 90-degree changes in direction.

The site is also bound to the West by the Ottawa River, which in this area is several meters below the site with a wooded embankment to the river, in some areas quite steep.

A Geotechnical survey has located a 'top of stable slope' line above the river, which itself carries a setback of 9 meters.

The existing site laneway, historically a public street, is proposed to separate the area of development from the existing residence. This laneway will be required for construction access and will help maintain the original property boundaries of the Earnscliffe residence.

The property contains four existing buildings;

- The Residence of the High Commissioner,
- An ancillary pool house building,
- An abandoned office building (commonly referred to as the Carriage House),
- a small shed.

The shed and abandoned office building will be demolished as part of the proposed development. The residence and pool house buildings do not form part of the proposed work.

## 1.3 PLANNING CONTEXT

### CITY OF OTTAWA OFFICIAL PLAN

The property is designated as a *General Urban Area* in accordance with Schedule B of the City of Ottawa Official Plan.

### ZONING BY-LAW 2008-250

The subject property is zoned O1L [342]. The O1 zone:

1. *permit parks, open space and related and compatible uses to locate in areas designated as **General Urban Area, General Rural Area, Major Open Space, Mixed Use Centre, Village, Greenbelt Rural and Central Area** as well as in **Major Recreational Pathway areas** and along **River Corridors** as identified in the Official Plan, and*
2. *ensure that the range of permitted uses and applicable regulations is in keeping with the low scale, low intensity open space nature of these lands.*

The O1L subzone permits marine facilities.

Exception 342 permits the additional land uses of diplomatic missions and offices associated with an embassy.

The project proposes to submit for setback and height variances;

- relaxing the 7.5 metre side yard setback based on the history of having an existing building close to the property lines (to be demolished), and
- a height relaxation to allow a building more than 11 m in height.

## 2.0 AREA OF WORK

The proposed development will provide functional spaces for the FCO's requirements. The proposed design solution will meet both physical and operational requirements defined in the approved High Commission's Schedule of Requirements.

The new HC building will be developed in the defined area indicated in image 1.



Image 1 – Green area shows approximate proposed building area superimposed on existing plan

## 3.0 ARCHITECTURAL CONCEPT

### 3.1 ARCHITECTURE

The new British High Commission will be three stories in height and will feature a volumetric composition of cantilevered floors providing shade and protection to levels below. The building's design and layout has resulted in a Gross Floor Area of 1,658 m<sup>2</sup>.

With regards to its massing and elevational treatment, the north side of the proposed building responds to the existing Earnsliffe residence and, as such, is capped at two stories in deference to the older building.

The southern volume is capped at three stories. This strategy helps to minimize the building's footprint with the additional floor space at a distance from the residence and partially concealed in the tree canopy along Sussex Drive. The proposed building is intended to have a discreet presence on Sussex Drive in keeping with its neighbours.

### 3.2 DESIGN PRINCIPLES

#### EXPRESSION

The design proposes a modern building, built with contemporary means and materials. It will be carefully detailed and refined, without momentary trendiness but with a more timeless appeal as a dignified response to site, purpose, and climate. It makes its own statement of a refined and sophisticated, innovative and forward looking British presence in Canada, while enhancing the deep history of the site and the longstanding UK-Canada relationship.

The building takes cues from its natural context, with the stone anchor blocks acting like a promontory or base on which the lighter elements perch to look toward the river and beyond. Multiple ways to connect with both distant and intimate views of nature are incorporated. It also looks to its urban edge, with the highest façade and core operational floor oriented and glazed toward Sussex, participating in the ceremonial route with other important embassies and residences.

Within the site, the building seeks to impart a strong and simple foil for the Earnsliffe residential building. As a low, long building it reinforces the laneway

edge against the more picturesque house and gardens. It helps mediate between the urban/public/ceremonial edge of Sussex with the natural grounds of Earncliffe, enhancing and protecting the intimate feel of being on the site. The two buildings will complement one another, one lending import and the activity of international presence, the other allowing a more relaxed connection with nature and the personal and human aspect of the residence.

## BUILDING AND SITE ORIENTATION

The Earncliffe residence is not oriented toward Sussex or other nearby roads, or even the former McKay street that the original site was bound by. It is primarily oriented toward views over the Ottawa River. Given the curve of the River edge in this location, Earncliffe, the pool and pool-house, and the new building take on a “splayed” or radial orientation on the site. The new building does align with the old McKay street/by-town geometry, which is driven more by convenient alignment along the existing internal access lane and property lines, but which nonetheless supports the more perceptible notion of splayed buildings along the Ottawa River’s edge.

In terms of ideal solar and wind orientation, both are mediated by microclimate conditions on the site, particularly the heavy tree cover on the site. Most winds experienced on site should be from the west and north. Solar orientation in Ottawa would ideally be just east of south for a long façade, and the building is about 40 degrees from that orientation. However, this is again mediated by heavy deciduous/coniferous tree cover to the south which will help with solar control.

## BUILDING MASSING

The massing has been broken up into several discernable blocks, keeping the perception of each as closer in size to the nearby residence. The ground floor features two stone blocks that house automobile garages. The larger one is placed toward Sussex and forms a strong anchor block. The topography varies by as much as a floor height on the Sussex side, and this block negotiates that condition by allowing the site topography to follow the adjacent land along the back wall. The second smaller block is split from the larger by an access driveway, and is oriented along the internal laneway. The larger stone block also allows an exterior amenity deck, as a kind of ‘promontory’ and viewpoint, and anchor for the lighter blocks

above. The lighter main building masses are mounted above these blocks, accessed through a glazed lobby.

The third storey is kept to the Sussex edge of the site in order to present a 2 storey façade on the Earnscliffe side, to minimize overlook. The 2 storey block does stretch out along the interior lane, aligning as a strong foil to the Earnscliffe orientation and reinforcing the original siting of the residence as on a promontory and looking out toward the water. We have placed the level of the ground floor of the new building below that of Earnscliffe, further supporting this effect, and in deference to the older building.

The massing also includes strong overhangs, which serve several purposes. The overhang above the walkway along the building allows for a covered route between the guardhouse and the main lobby entrance and helps break up the amount of mass facing Earnscliffe. The same block cantilevers toward the river to express that orientation and help provide separation of outdoor amenities both at grade and at the second floor of the new build from Earnscliffe. The third storey also dramatically overhangs the lower levels, again as a bold lookout point similar to the Earnscliffe view orientation and as a contemplative view toward and within nature. The overhangs also help considerably with solar protection of glazed portions of the façade, both on the ground and second floors.

## MATERIALITY

The materials make reference to Earnscliffe: the garage blocks are clad in dressed limestone similar in colour to the Earnscliffe stone, but more honed than the cleft stone of Earnscliffe.

On the upper floors, a crisp white cladding panel echoes the white trims, soffits, details and fascia of Earnscliffe, keeping the palette of materials in harmony.

Other materials include aluminum framed glazed curtain walls, intended to introduce natural light, but also to connect the outdoors to interior spaces, enhancing connectivity to the vegetated surroundings and the wellbeing of building users and visitors.

Exterior solar control devices are also used to protect some areas of the glazing. To the south, horizontal extensions help exclude glare and solar gain, and light shelves

help bounce reflected light deeper into the space for daylight harvesting. In some area on the western façade, vertical fins help reduce direct western light and glare. Glass frit patterns also contribute to solar control.

## ACCESSIBILITY AND ACCESS

The new facility will be guided by the principles of universal barrier-free accessibility, the minimum standards for which are defined by the Ontario Building Code.

The location of the existing main entry will be retained for accessing the site. A new guard house will be constructed here and will facilitate the screening of staff and visitors to the site.

A second vehicle egress road is proposed at the north site of the property. This is subject to ongoing negotiation with the National Research Council. The requirement for this egress route is standard operating procedure for the FCO. It would be used only on the rarest of occasions.

## SUSTAINABILITY

The new facility will seek LEED certification. All sustainability principles and best practices will be pursued wherever feasible and practical. The LEED Certification target will be used to assess and to determine appropriate strategies to achieve energy efficiency, sustainable design and a healthy work /play environment. The new building will be designed to conform to the OBC SB10 energy compliance metrics or better.

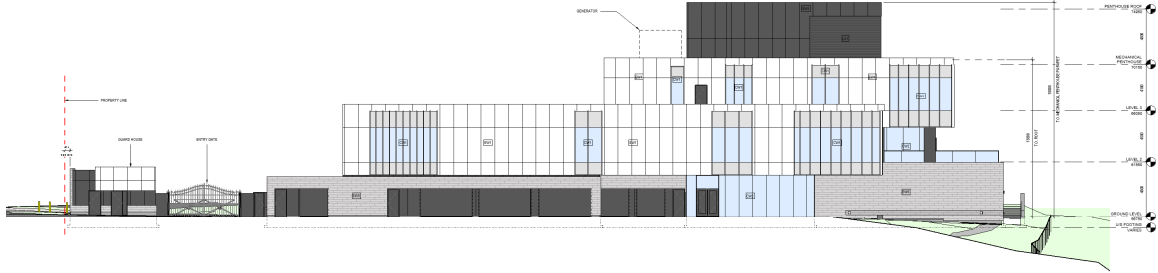
## INTERIOR MATERIALS

The new facility is primarily an office environment with special function areas that will require attention to high quality, durable, long-lasting materials.

The principles that will inform interior materials include;

- Durability
- Life-cycle analysis and longevity
- Sustainability
- Health and well-being

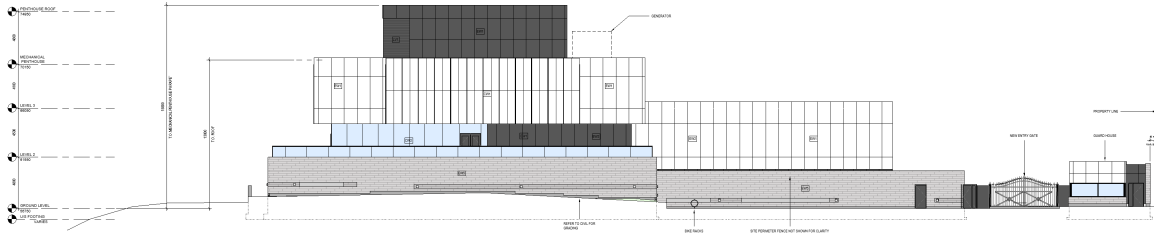
## BUILDING ELEVATION - NORTH



## BUILDING ELEVATION - EAST



## BUILDING ELEVATION - SOUTH



## BUILDING ELEVATION - WEST



## 4.0 LANDSCAPE CONCEPT

Refer to the landscape plan submitted as part of this application.

## 5.0 CIVIL CONCEPT

Refer to the Storm Water Management and Site Servicing Report submitted as part of this application.

## 6.0 SUMMARY

Through consultations with the City of Ottawa's planners, the application for Site Plan Control Approval for the proposed development has been reviewed from a land use planning perspective.

The proposal is in conformity with the City of Ottawa Official Plan and City of Ottawa Zoning By-law.

Submitted by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Knight', is written over a light gray rectangular background.

Christopher Knight, OAA  
Project Architect