

## **Comisiwn Dylunio Cymru Design Commission for Wales**

<b>Design Review Report:</b>	<b>13 May 2004</b>
<b>Meeting Date / Material Submitted:</b>	<b>6 May 2004</b>
<b>Location:</b>	<b>Meridian Gate, junction of Bute Street and Bute Terrace, Cardiff</b>
<b>Architects:</b>	<b>Wigley Fox Peter Morgan, Gareth Brown</b>
<b>Client/Developer:</b>	<b>JR Smart (Builders) Ltd</b>
<b>Scheme Description:</b>	<b>Mixed use development comprising retail, office and residential</b>
<b>Planning Status:</b>	<b>Pre-planning</b>
<b>Design Review Panel Members:</b>	<b>John Punter, Cindy Harris, Ed Colgan, Alan Francis, Paul Vanner, Lyn Owen</b>
<b>Observing Blayney,</b>	<b>Carole-Anne Davies, Marcus Nigel Crates (SW Police)</b>

### **Presentation**

Peter Morgan began by describing the intense and ongoing consultations that Wigley Fox are conducting with the client and the Local Authority concerning this proposal. They are aiming to submit a planning application in approximately five weeks time.

The owner and developer, J.R. Smart, acquired the site, including the old AXA building, two years ago, but failed to re-let despite extensive marketing. In discussions, Cardiff County Council agreed in principle to the idea of demolition and rebuild for a mixed use development. With the adjacent developments of Altolusso and St Davids II imminent, it was felt that this was a good opportunity to redefine this important corner site.

Small retail outlets will be located on the ground floor around a public square, and the first floor will comprise office accommodation of 20,000 sq ft, at the request of the County Council and to avoid a net decrease in office space in the city centre. The floors above will be residential units, of varying sizes and in three separate blocks: one fronting Bute Terrace (block A); one fronting Bute Street (Block C); and the third within the site (Block B). There will be a total of 164 apartments and 118 car parking spaces, the latter provided in two decks at ground floor and basement level.

The developer has proposed transferring the affordable housing component (assumed 25%) from the Meridian Gate site to Sanquahar Street, Adamsdown. The

British Rail club will be demolished and a three storey block erected, comprising 39 one- and two- bedroom flats.

The design approach has been heavily influenced by the setting and the nature of adjacent developments. The scheme is recognised as being at an important position which closes a key view south along The Hayes, as well as being a major component in views along Bute Terrace and from further afield. It has been decided that the height of the development should defer to the landmark Altolusso complex to the east, although the frontages to Bute Terrace will be higher than the present building, to reflect an emerging streetscape of tall blocks along that road. A taller block will front the top of Bute Street in recognition of the importance of that junction. It is proposed that the materials should be in contrast to the solid, largely concrete and render, bulk of the Altolusso scheme. A style of angular roofscapes, angular metallic elements, glazing and tiling is proposed. High quality materials will be specified for external facades. The sustainability agenda will be addressed by encouraging pedestrian links and providing cycle racks, as well as exploring the benefits of off-site prefabrication for the construction process.

### **Panel's Response**

The Panel supported the mixed use nature of this development. The exact mix of uses had evolved through discussions with the County Council, leading to the inclusion of office space, which had been absent from earlier designs, and retail outlets to lend vibrancy and animation to the public square. The developer was reasonably confident that there would be demand for small (500 sq ft) retail units, although they may not let immediately, and also confident that the residential units would sell, based on the success of Altolusso.

There was discussion on the scale and form of the buildings, the complex multi-plane design, and how well the scheme integrated with the streetscape and in longer views. The thin, taller Bute Street block was recognised as marking a key location and its appearance was generally endorsed, other than the need for a more lively façade facing The Hayes. The other two blocks were considered to have a very complex and somewhat confusing structure and their design impact could be increased if they were merged and simplified. Alternatively, if two blocks are retained, their relationship should be simplified, especially by improving the consistency of the angular rooflines. The forms should maximise the amount of light from the south able to penetrate through to the private open deck and to the public open space.

The strategy of deferring in height to Altolusso was also discussed. The elegant thin 'needle' effect of Block B facing Bute Street would be a positive contrast to Altolusso and would reflect schemes in other parts of the city centre. Its impact would be enhanced by the effect of the roofline and the perspective involved in viewing a corner site. The Panel considered that it would be acceptable in design terms to heighten that block, if that were needed to maintain the overall number of residential units, if that figure was affected by a redesign of the two lower blocks.

The Panel expressed a view that further thought was needed, as to how to make the retained and reconfigured public open space successful. The form of the buildings should maximise sunlight while wrapping around the space with interesting facades. It was noted that a feature of interest was proposed, possibly the existing sculpture. Maximising an attractive microclimate and securing lively

uses was viewed as essential to encourage footfall from the proposed shopping area to the north and from pedestrian flows up Bute Street and along Bute Terrace. There was some discussion, but no consensus, as to the desirability of retaining the present 'Barcelona style' lights. The concept of a deck of private open space was supported and its form should be used to help define the character of the public open space at the lower level.

The pedestrian emphasis appears to be along Bute Terrace to the north of the site, the carriageway of which is to be made 1.5 metres narrower, and incorporate an avenue of trees. There is also a strong 'desire line' to the north and the Panel considered that a pedestrian crossing should be provided, linking to the main corner entrance to the planned new John Lewis store.

## **Summary**

The Panel was pleased to be presented with the details of this scheme at an early stage. The strategic importance of the site itself and the mix of uses presents a difficult challenge to the designers.

The Panel remains concerned about the proposed massing and recommends the stronger statement of a two block solution, possibly with a consequent increase in height. There is certainly the potential for a taller corner tower and for the two lower blocks (A and B) to become one stronger element. To achieve this a greater clarity of form and roofline is necessary. The important northern façade of the taller block (Block C), facing The Hayes, requires added detailing and interest.

In support of the desire for a mixed use development that functions well, the Panel hoped there would be a measure of flexibility in the possible division of units, and that adequate time would be allowed to ensure the office and retail uses become established. Providing attractive office entries and retail frontages from the beginning was considered important, both to achieve a lively appearance and to encourage users.

Pedestrian routes should be protected and enhanced, and street crossings provided to support the link with St Davids II and the rest of the city. There is a strong need for lively public open space within this scheme, enhanced by maximum penetration of daylight throughout the year, and interesting shop facades and features.

End