

Comisiwn Dylunio Cymru	Design Commission for Wales
Design Review Report:	8 September 2004
Meeting Date / Material Submitted:	2 September 2004
Location:	Cambrian Centre, Newport
Architects / Design Team:	Holder Mathias [Stephen Hill, Peter Gamble]
Consultants:	Horstonbridge Ltd [David Griffiths]
Client:	Goldtique Investments [Graham Roth]
Scheme Description:	Residential, hotel, retail, carpark.
Public/Other Body:	Newport City Council [Wyn Mitchell, Neil Boardman Wendy Hall] Newport Unlimited [David Ward, Jenny Heal]
Planning Status:	Full planning application submitted
Panel Members:	
John Punter (chair)	Mike Biddulph
Cindy Harris (officer)	Alan Francis
Geraint John	Richard Parnaby
Ann-Marie Smale	Jonathan Adams
Paul Vanner (part)	

Presentation

The proposed scheme incorporates a variety of different uses, and occupies a key transition site within Newport City Centre, between the railway station, the Civic Centre and the main shopping quarter. The design has developed alongside the masterplan for Newport, which recommends this site for the proposed uses with the potential of a landmark building at the western end of the site.

Currently the site consists of a car park with a mix of retail and leisure units. The initial intention was to retain the car park, but this proved impractical. The existing retail units fronting Cambrian Road will be retained and will continue to trade during construction of the new scheme.

A major feature of these proposals is the creation of a new street (New Railway Street) which extends Railway Street through to Cambrian Road, to form an urban block to the north, and to improve permeability and accessibility. The site to the south of New Railway Street will be used for a stand-alone office development with retail units at street level. Two wide, raised pedestrian crossings are planned

across Queensway at either end of this development, as part of the boulevarding of Queensway.

The frontage to Queensway is framed by two important corner sites, one intended as the entrance to the hotel, the other as a 24 storey residential block, with car park and hotel in between. The hotel is intended to support an active frontage onto Queensway, animated by a protruding pod and sculptural stairway element. The residential block of 188 mixed size units has a curved façade to the west and a rectilinear block which addresses the rest of the development to the east. The office building on an island site to the south has a rectilinear plan which allows for natural ventilation and maximum daylight penetration.

The new car park adds to the current number of spaces by 250 and is on six levels. New retail opportunities will be created on the north side of New Railway Street.

Panel's Response

Whilst the panel welcomes a dense redevelopment on this key city centre site, and is happy with the principle of demolition of the greater part of the existing building, we find the massing of the Queensway façade to be the most problematic issue with this scheme, and suggest an alternative architectural treatment be considered which avoids the overbearing horizontality and heaviness of the composition and its comparison with mid 20th century brutalism. We think the design of the residential tower should also be re-worked into a new architectural statement for Newport.

The ventilation panels for the car park framed by columns appear to have a deadening effect on the streetscape, an effect echoed by the lower ground floor of the residential block being dedicated to storage. A proposed long layby in front of the car park seems inappropriate in the context of a boulevard. The new pedestrian crossings will deflect footfall away from Queensway, but there will be bus stops along the road opposite the railway station, and the Panel suggest the inclusion of small kiosks to enliven this long frontage, if they can be made economically viable.

The panel understands there to be a general level difference between Queensway and Cambrian St of about 2m but how this transition is handled, once the underpass has been blocked, has not yet been addressed. The drawings we saw, being so small scale, are difficult to interpret. There is however, an opportunity to make something of this, especially as it will become the most important and busiest link between the railway station and retail centre. The proposed introduction of a sloping connection, with a new retail corner unit relating only at one level, might not be the most successful solution.

We were told that the predominant materials on the Queensway façade are likely to be acrylic render with masonry embellishments where appropriate and affordable. The Panel stressed the importance of using high quality, stain resistant, durable materials in such a visible location.

Newport Unlimited is strongly supportive of all the functions included in this scheme. Newport City Council is also very supportive of the principle of regeneration on this site and the wide mix of uses, but has some doubts about the architectural treatment. They favour a contemporary solution which respects its context, and the location of the office building next to a listed building was

questioned. The newly created pedestrian access round the back of the residential block needs to be made stronger and more obvious.

Summary

The Panel find the design convincing in terms of the floor plan, but less so in terms of its architectural expression, especially in the façade along Queensway. We agree with the need for a corner landmark building to the west and think the proposed height appropriate, but the articulation of the tower is awkward and could take more account of surrounding views. The question of materiality and its eventual resolution was felt to be crucial to the ultimate success or otherwise of this development.

We would encourage a contemporary treatment to the façade of the new office building. Although the height and massing of this might be questioned, the streetscape views showing large format north glazing and precast concrete, or similar, expressed structural bays which pick up on the rhythm of the adjacent listed building, are welcome.

The scheme works well in relation to Cambrian Road, and the amount and scale of development and mix of uses is welcome. In urban design terms, this is an attractive package which will contribute strongly to the regeneration of Newport. The permeability of the site is hugely improved and the creation of a new street and intimate streetscape is very positive. We agree that greater emphasis should be given to the new pedestrian route linking Queensway and New Railway Street.

There remains a potential difficulty at the corner of Queensway with Cambrian Road, where the difference in levels needs to be handled carefully. Doubts were expressed about the oppressive effect of the deep square soffit over the curved glazed entrance to the hotel. The office building should acknowledge its neighbours more explicitly.

The design team expressed interest in attending another session of Design Review as soon as possible, to present more material details, and larger scale (1:50) representations of the main elevations.

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