



Design Review Report:	24 January 2005
Meeting Date / Material Submitted:	12 January 2005
Location:	Wood Street, Cardiff
Scheme Description:	Residential/mixed use development
Architects:	Charter Architects: Chris Littlemore, Vesna Bostawdzic
Consultants:	Arup: Tim Bennett
Client:	Urban Solutions: Richard Selby
Planning Authority:	Cardiff City Council
Planning Status:	Outline permission granted
Date for detailed application (if known)	Not known
Design Review Panel:	
Alan Francis (chair)	Nick Davies
Cindy Harris (officer)	Douglas Hogg
Richard Parnaby	Kieren Morgan
Phil Roberts	
Observers:	Gillian Wulff Peter Roberts

Presentation

The design development has progressed since the Design Panel considered the proposals at the time that outline approval was being sought. The present scheme is the basis of a full planning application to be submitted shortly. A total of 201 apartments are arranged in a glass 'needle' focal building, and in stepped blocks surrounding the needle in a 'boomerang' shape. 122 car park spaces are provided below ground level. The solid planes of the outer envelope of the smaller blocks respond to the urban context, while the light and transparent inner envelope faces the 'Green Heart' of the development - an elevated residents' garden with river views. The 'needle' has a secondary glazed skin in two sections, with louvres opening from a winter garden area. The central core of the facade between the two glazed skin sections has a random punched pattern of fenestration running the full height of the tower.

This is a dense residential development on a city centre site with good public transport connections, making full use of solar access and views. An active street frontage incorporates retail and restaurant use. Retail units of varying sizes are sited on a podium, 600-700mm above ground level and under cover of an overhang, giving a semi-secure area. A new public open space will be provided to the west, as an extension to the Millennium Plaza. Existing and proposed key views from five previously identified vantage points around the site have been provided.

Panel's Response

The Panel expressed appreciation for the high quality of the presentation. The elegant massing of the scheme works particularly well from the main viewpoints to the south and west. We are pleased to see that the architectural quality evident in the earlier proposal is being maintained, and the client is evidently committed to achieving a high quality outcome. The developer expressed confidence that the secondary glazed skin, an extremely important element in the design, is financially achievable.

The retail units should ideally be at ground level and, while accepting the logic of the design team, we fear that introducing a small podium, especially beneath an overhang, might affect their viability. The servicing arrangement for the larger units from the street is likely to lead to problems of congestion and again may affect their viability.

We note that the finishes specification is yet to be finalised. We question the appropriateness of the proposed western red cedar cladding. We note that the copper finish, proposed in the earlier scheme, has given way to render and terracotta rainscreen cladding - and accept that these finishes, if well detailed, are appropriate in this setting.

Panel members expressed concern about the nature of the triangular spaces formed by the stepped blocks on the south side. They will need careful handling if they are not to detract from the quality of the adjacent apartments.

We were encouraged to hear that the design team had undertaken wind studies of the site. However, the design team appeared to use the need to counteract negative wind effects to justify the over-complicated way in which the building meets the ground on the north side. The panel recommends that the design team re-examine this part of the scheme. Concern was expressed about possible overshadowing of the raised garden by the blocks to the south.

We are very disappointed at the use of electric heating in this scheme and urge that demand-reducing measures are maximised, but applaud the design team's investigation of the viability of the use of solar photovoltaic panels..

The affordable housing requirement is to be provided off-site at the request of the Council, and a capital sum for this purpose has been agreed as part of the section106 agreement accompanying the outline application. A pro rata adjustment will be made with the full application and arrangements have been made for the money to be dedicated to a specific social housing project.

Summary

The Panel greatly welcomes the latest development of this scheme, which fulfils the promise of the earlier presentation. In particular, the glazed skin on the 'needle' offers an innovative and exciting architectural solution to environmental control. There remain some outstanding issues in need of further resolution:

- We have concerns about the viability of the retail units, especially those on the north east corner, given the raised podium and the setback
- The nature and quality of the triangular spaces at garden deck level on the south side of the building need further resolution
- Servicing for the larger retail units, as currently envisaged, will be inconvenient and disruptive of the public realm
- The choice of electric heating and the possibility of using western red cedar cladding are at odds with a sustainable design approach and we suggest both options be reconsidered.

End

NB A Welsh language copy of this report is available upon request.