

Statws/Status:

Cyhoeddus / Public

DESIGN
COMMISSION
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CYMRU

**Adroddiad Adolygu Dylunio:
Design Review Report:**

18 May 2005

**Dyddiad Cyfarfod / Cyflwyno'r Deunydd:
Meeting Date / Material Submitted:**

5 May 2005

Lleoliad/Location:

**Plot E02, Callaghan Square,
Cardiff**

**Disgrifiad o'r Cynllun
Scheme Description:**

Office accommodation

**Ymgynghorwyr Cynllunio:
Planning Consultants:**

**Hepher Dixon
[Chris Potts; Anna Cheney]**

**Cleient/Asiant:
Client/Agent:**

**MEPC [Richard Shaw]
Rightacres Developments
[Paul McCarthy]**

Pensaer/Architect:

**Stubbs Rich
[John Hewitt, Simon Coles]**

**Awdurdod Cynllunio:
Planning Authority:**

Cardiff City Council

**Statws Cynllunio:
Planning Status:**

**Pre-planning
Application imminent**

Y Panel Adolygu Dylunio/Design Review Panel:

**Alan Francis (cadeirydd/chair)
Cindy Harris (swyddog/officer)
Geraint John
Kedrick Davies**

**Wendy Hall
Ewan Jones
Lyn Owen**

Cyflwyniad/Presentation

This is an important strategic site in the city centre, adjacent to the railway station and with connections to the Bay. It was purchased from the WDA by MEPC, one of the largest developers of business space in the UK. The whole of Callaghan Square was the subject of a masterplan in 1998, which received outline planning approval for 550,000 sq ft of office and other uses. It is recognised that the Eversheds building now sets the standard for future development around the Square. The current proposals will be progressed as a speculative development in one phase, once approval is given.

The site is split in two by the existing road that accesses Jacob's Antique Market, and while not part of this application, the road does determine the layout and creates a complex scenario of fronts and backs to the proposed buildings. Establishing pedestrian connectivity from the railway station through to Callaghan Square and St Mary Street is another major determinant of the site layout. These pedestrian routes meet in an enclosed central space which will also be used for parking at grade. This proposal shows three blocks of office accommodation with a cafe on the north east corner. Buildings 1 and 2 follow the edge of the site, behind a narrow planted setback, to the south and west respectively. Building 3 faces south but is set back behind a new public open space on the south east corner, which contains the principal building entrances and a retail kiosk and overlooks Callaghan Square.

The architectural language is a well mannered response to the Eversheds building on plot 1, showing a similar cantilevered eaves detail and respecting the vertical nature and proportion of the existing design guidelines. The elevational treatment round the entrances is more contemporary and lightweight. It is also economical given the rental market's sensitivity to cost. Large areas of glazing are avoided and the building's activity is highlighted with projecting bays and picture windows. Upper floor lanterns on Building 3 face north up St Mary Street providing a marker and connection with the city centre.

The principal elevational material will be reconstituted stone to match Eversheds, with prepatinated copper for cores and entrance features, and render in the internal courtyard. Building 3, because of its complex hierarchy of elevations, is clad in stone on all four facades.

The current scheme has been developed in close conjunction with the local authority, who have encouraged the creation of new public realm areas.

Ymateb y Panel/Panel's Response

The developer stated that, although not in their ownership, efforts have been made to upgrade the existing access/service road to form a stronger public realm, with areas of paving and planting, integrated art work, kiosks, and clear legible pedestrian routes taking priority over vehicular routes. However, this aspiration does not sit happily with the provision of car parking at grade which the developer considers necessary for commercial viability. The proposals appear to be an attempt to humanise vehicular access, rather than provide a genuinely necessary pedestrian route. The 'courtyard' is not really an enclosed space and only adds to the problem of how to treat the building elevations which overlook it - as fronts or

backs. Instead of creating a secondary square, the effort should perhaps go into promoting animated uses in the main square, while providing a reasonably pleasant service area to the rear of this plot by upgrading what is already there. The Panel thought that most people walking from the station towards Callaghan Square would continue to use the main road, and therefore urged that office use be located on the ground floor street frontage rather than car park grills.

The Panel thought that the current proposal, which shows a number of relatively small buildings set back from the street line, leads to a loss of a sense of enclosure and a lack of good connectivity with the Square and Eversheds. The developer pointed out that this setback is dictated by the plot boundary, and reflects the 7 metre strip in front of plot E04 on the south side of the square, which has been earmarked for a possible future monorail. The Panel were concerned about the effects of this reserved rail route. If this is no longer required, it is an important opportunity to move the buildings on this site closer to the square to match the relationship and sense of enclosure established by the Eversheds building to the north. Land ownership issues must be resolved to ensure that this happens.

The council's desire to maintain the line of the curve set up by the Eversheds frontage, and to create a new public open space, has also influenced the setback on the south east corner. Nevertheless, the Panel preferred a denser solution with greater height next to the roundabout and a stronger street presence for the buildings to the south and west. This would create clarity as to front and backs, with animated frontages especially on Tresillian Way, and a more clearly defined service area to the rear, preferably accessed from the north side of the site, and possibly more [decked] parking spaces.

The developers were not in favour of losing the public open space to the south east, and were not persuaded of the benefits of creating more parking spaces or ground floor offices. The latter is not popular with users, who dislike the 'goldfish' effect. The Panel's main interest, however, is with the quality of the public realm created intentionally or by default in the process of development, and with the question of future flexibility.

The Panel suggested that the facade treatments should be more ordered and restrained, with the more extravagant features concentrated in one building. They should reflect a sense of their particular location and respond differently to different solar orientations. The designer felt that one of the attractions of this scheme was in the lack of architectural hierarchy between buildings.

The questions of acoustic and solar control were discussed. There are no windows in the north elevation of building 2, which will be most vulnerable to railway noise. Solar control glass will be used in the public areas only, with dark glass in the main office areas hiding the inevitable blinds that will be used for shading and privacy. The Panel thought that a more integrated shading strategy should be employed, with solar control glazing installed on all southern elevations.

The materials to be used in the public realm will reflect the existing quality of Callaghan Square. The developers were confident that small A3 uses would be viable, although they do not wish to dilute the main uses any further on this prime office site.

Crynodeb/Summary

The Panel welcomes the presentation of this scheme and the principle of office development on this important city centre site. We recognise the constraints on the design that arise from the necessity of dealing with the existing access road, and the requirement for new public open space. However:

- We would prefer a different, denser site layout, with buildings addressing the streets and roundabout more directly.
- We strongly advocate that all ground floor frontages should be more animated, with active office uses. If this proves financially unviable, then animated uses at key locations, such as the corners facing Callaghan Square, should be a minimum requirement.
- The rear access road and service area should be treated in a simpler manner rather than attempting to develop a secondary square, provided that this allows more funds to be allocated to the principal public facades and, for instance, the use of some form of brise soleil.
- We doubt that the proposed new public open space to the south east will work well, given its proximity to a major road junction
- We think the elevations have on the whole been handled well, but we query the shading solution

Diwedd/End

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