

Statws/Status:

Cyhoeddus / Public

DESIGN
COMMISSION
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DYLUNIO
CYMRU

Adroddiad Adolygu Dylunio: Design Review Report:	23 January 2007
Dyddiad Cyfarfod / Cyflwyno'r Deunydd: Meeting Date / Material Submitted:	10 January 2006
Lleoliad/Location:	Junction 33, M4
Disgrifiad o'r Cynllun Scheme Description:	Commercial/leisure/retail
Cleient/Asiant: Client/Agent:	Savill Bird & Axon [Mike Axon] WAG/DIEN [Mike Cuddy]
Developer/Datblygwr:	Westgate Park Ltd [Phil Morgan]
Pensaer/Architect:	Aukett Fitzroy Robinson [Raul Curiel]
Ymgynghorwyr Cynllunio: Planning Consultants:	Savills Hepher Dixon [Chris Potts]
Cynllunio/Consultants:	Macfarlane Wilder [Glen Macfarlane]
Awdurdod Cynllunio: Planning Authority:	Cardiff CC [Phil Williams, Vicky Abraham]
Statws Cynllunio: Planning Status:	Outline application submitted October 06

Y Panel Adolygu Dylunio/Design Review Panel:

Wendy Richards (cadeirydd/chair)

Cindy Harris (swyddog/officer)

Charlie Deng (swyddog/officer)

Ben Sibert

Phil Roberts

Gerard Ryan

Richard Parnaby

Ashley Bateson

Lead Panellist:

Richard Parnaby

Cyflwyniad/Presentation

The idea of a “premier business park” for Wales has been discussed for some years and a suitable site has now been identified. The recent outline planning application was accompanied by a statement of support from the Minister for Economic Development. There has been close WAG involvement in all stages of the development of the proposals. The application is supported by a masterplan document, an environmental statement, transport assessment, and market analysis. The proposal comprises: 10 office buildings of an average floor area of 10,000 sq m, a hotel and conference centre (20,000 sq m), restaurants and shops (4,500 sq m), a “regional transport hub” (1 500 sq m) and 3,846 parking spaces.

The vision is one that aspires to a business park of exceptional quality that will attract international corporate businesses to establish offices in Wales. The client is committed to sustainable development and design excellence and has assembled a team with the appropriate skills to deliver such a vision. Buildings will be low-energy and low-impact, but the masterplan will not be prescriptive in design terms and will allow for variation as development proceeds. The proposed mix of uses is driven by an assessment of market demand.

The project is presented as a landscape-led masterplan, which bases the site layout around existing topographical features. Two high plateaux and two wooded areas [one outside the red line] together with riparian corridors, have helped to define three organically shaped development ‘cells’. Sustainable drainage is included, along with the incorporation of new habitats and topsoil conservation to promote biodiversity, and strong links with the surrounding environment.

There is a hierarchy of public spaces, each with a distinctive identity, the main one being to the north of the site and bordered by offices, a hotel and transport hub. The southwestern cell is divided into two clusters and shows 3-5 storey buildings, each with a shallow plan and central atrium. The south eastern cell is a 1000 space car park. The transport hub underneath the 3 storey hotel will incorporate conference facilities, retail

uses and a high quality waiting and relaxation space, with bus stops and taxi ranks at the lowest level.

The Local Authority is commissioning an independent assessment of the proposals, and of the basic principles why here? and why now? In terms of the application, everything is reserved apart from the principal access points.

Ymateb y Panel/Panel's Response

The design team suggested that the Panel should not address the principle and location of the proposal or the mix of uses (which, it was suggested, are fixed as matters of national policy and supported by commercial judgement) but concentrate on the masterplan and indicative building designs. However, given the size and nature of the proposal and the Design Commission's remit to advise on the delivery of sustainable development in Wales, the Panel considered it necessary to interrogate the principle of this proposal in the context of WAG's commitment to the promotion of sustainable development and the stated commitment of the developer and design team to sustainable development principles.

We consider that genuine mixed use is fundamental to the achievement of sustainable development, and this contrasts sharply with the essentially single use nature of this scheme, which has no residential element and very limited retail and leisure uses which are, in effect, ancillary to the offices. The scale of this proposal, at 1 million square feet, caused us real concern, although we were assured by the project team that this was a critical mass of space with which to attract the target investors and occupiers. We were informed that the developer controls additional land which might allow for future expansion and which might then include residential use. However, the Panel thought that, if such an expansion was a real possibility, residential areas could not simply be 'tacked on', but should be integrated into the proposals from the beginning and included in this masterplan (which is designed to allow for phased development)

The procurement would be a joint venture between DEIN and the private sector and the applicants stated that the time was right to attract investors in such a scheme. The Panel thought that if investor interest was strong, this put the developer in a better position to lay down certain parameters. We considered that the development of live/work units and the creation of a vibrant, sustainable neighbourhood with a green transport plan, as part of a wider development strategy for the area, could be deliverable and successful. The aspiration for low-energy buildings should be stronger and included in any design guidance as a minimum

standard. It was confirmed that the slip road on the M4 Junction 33 would be improved to cope with the additional traffic generated.

With regard to the choice of site and notwithstanding the transport strategy, the Panel thought that this led to a car dominated scheme which was confirmed by the large areas of the site covered in car parks. We would have much preferred to see these commercial facilities located and integrated within an existing urban area. However, we were informed that this was a regional project, designed to serve a catchment area including the Valleys, and would serve to reduce traffic journeys into Cardiff from the north. On further questioning the applicant admitted that the total of 3800 parking spaces provided would cater for new trips and would not in fact have an effect on the figure of 70,000 trips into Cardiff each day. The Panel also thought that if this facility was not intended to be Cardiff-centric, it should be located further away from the city. The applicants suggested that the transport hub, with its 5 star lounge and demand-responsive transport, would make public transport attractive to people who might not otherwise use it. It was confirmed that the interchange could be used by non-business park employees, eg for airport transfers. We were told that some precedents for such a strategy exist, but not at this scale.

The Panel considered that the site layout which claimed to be urban, was in fact anti-urban. The signature area of public open space was not at the heart of the site and the distances involved would discourage pedestrian movement between the 'cells'. We were dismayed by the quantity of 'at grade' car parking, although we were informed that there would be some basement parking under the buildings. (Current figures in the reviewed documentation reveal this to be minimal). However, from the eastern edge of the site's main car park, it would be a 1 kilometre walk to reach the transport hub, and this could necessitate another transport system serving different parts of the site. We would like to see a greater density of parking and consequently more green space. The anticipation of future housing in an expansion of this scheme should be considered at an early stage and should influence the site layout. We thought that the legibility of the concept drawings and the quality of the original site analysis had been lost and not followed through in the presented masterplan. The main problems we identified were ones of scale, quantity and location of parking, and the lack of any genuine urban spaces and connections.

The Panel urged that the developers should demonstrate their commitment to sustainability more tangibly, including the achievement of a BREEAM Very Good as a minimum requirement, and the aspiration to BREEAM Excellent. We urged that the infrastructure for a district heating system be installed at the groundworks stage, and space be allocated for a central boiler house and fuel storage. We advised that cooling demands in office buildings were now more significant than heating demands and

this should be reflected in the orientation of buildings, areas of fenestration and shading devices

Crynodeb/Summary

The Panel expressed grave concerns about the principle of such a massive, single use development on the outskirts of Cardiff city. We think that the nature of the proposal and its location are incompatible with basic principles of sustainable development. We consider these proposals to be an unacceptable response to the site and the brief to be fundamentally flawed. We would urge that the following observations and recommendations are used to inform future design proposals:

- The chosen site does not promote the city of Cardiff as an attractive business location, nor does it adequately serve the hinterland of the Valleys. It encourages the use of private transport, which would be the only viable option to access the Park.
- We consider that genuine mixed use is a basic requirement for any sustainable development, but especially for one of this scale and status. A live/work ethos should be clearly promoted. Any future expansion of the site to include residential use should be incorporated into the masterplan from the outset.
- While we support any development which makes public transport more attractive, we are not convinced by the transport strategy, and think that a significant number of extra car journeys would be generated by this development in this location.
- We support the landscape-led approach to the masterplan development, but think that it has been negated by a disfunctional plan. The site layout does not accord with good urban design principles in terms of legibility, accessibility, permeability or the creation of coherent public open spaces.
- Sustainability principles should more clearly drive the design and layout, and minimum performance standards should be built into the brief from the beginning.
- If office accommodation designed to attract international corporate clients is to be developed on this (or any other] site, it is essential that the promoters demonstrate that it is an integral part of a coherent sustainable development strategy for Wales as a whole. While the Panel accepts that it may be possible to demonstrate that this is the case, so far that evidence has not been forthcoming.

We would like to review these proposals again as they develop.

Diwedd/End

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