

Statws/Status:

Cyhoeddus / Public

DESIGN
COMMISSION
FOR WALES
COMISIWN
DYLUNIO
CYMRU

Adroddiad Adolygu Dylunio: Design Review Report:	9 February 2007
Dyddiad Cyfarfod / Cyflwyno'r Deunydd: Meeting Date / Material Submitted:	31 January 2007
Lleoliad/Location:	Usk Way Newport
Disgrifiad o'r Cynllun Scheme Description:	Residential [student accommodation]
Developer/Datblygwr:	Opal Property [Lisa Timberlake] Newport Unlimited [David Ward]
Pensaer/Architect:	Boyes Rees [Gary Loo]
Ymgynghorwyr Cynllunio: Planning Consultants:	Davies Landscape Architects [Miles Gray]
Awdurdod Cynllunio: Planning Authority:	Newport CC [Wendy Richards, Jon Wilks]
Statws Cynllunio: Planning Status:	Post application
Y Panel Adolygu Dylunio/ Design Review Panel: John Punter (cadeirydd/chair) Cindy Harris (swyddog/officer) Charlie Deng (swyddog/officer) Ed Colgan	Elfed Roberts Lyn Owen Roger Ayton Martin Knight
Lead Panellist:	Lyn Owen
Sylwedyddion/Observers:	Carole-Anne Davies DCFW Huw ap Rhys, DCFW

Cyflwyniad/Presentation

The site is well located for a student residence being within ten minutes of the city centre by foot. However, it is a constrained site of just less than one acre with the viaduct of the George Street Bridge to the north on the other side of a service road, the Usk River walkway and landscape corridor to the east, and the Usk Boulevard (with service trenches in the verge) to the west. To the south a new public realm corridor connects the new boulevard Usk Way to the river walkway, and on the south side of this street there are proposals for seven to eight storey apartments. On both of these service streets there are proposals for public car parking.

Minimal staff car parking is provided within an internal courtyard in the student residence accessed through the block on the south side, but no occupant parking is provided or allowed. Students will be told this as a condition of their tenancy. 112 secure cycle racks are provided. The four sided block rises to 6-7 storeys and the mass is broken up with a variety of facade treatments that have different glazed features and coloured panels.

The landscape strategy is being developed in conjunction with Macgregor Smith, who are working on the adjacent riverside park. The road to the south will be paved with small setts, and have a line of planting along its northern edge. The intention is to bring the natural vegetation of the river bank through the scheme. To the north a low wall defines the edge of the block with deterrent planting behind.

The team is investigating the use of biomass heating and rainwater harvesting.

The developer's policy is to retain ownership of their buildings, and they therefore require high quality, sustainable and easily maintainable structures.

A planning application was submitted in November 2006. The original proposal was for an 8 storey block, and the Local Authority is now more comfortable with the proposed design, scale and massing, although the materials specification may need further revision. Newport Unlimited's representative stated that this proposal should be seen in the context of the new city centre campus for the university.

Ymateb y Panel/Panel's Response

The Panel accepted that this was a suitable use for an urban location. We noted that the existing spur access off Usk Way on the northern edge of site was currently badly maintained with accumulated litter thrown from the bridge. We would like to see this incorporated into the riverside park and adopted, although we recognised this was not part of the developer's responsibility. The Panel was informed that this section of road that continues under the bridge viaduct will be reconstructed as a peak time egress for the bingo hall, who should control parking.

The Panel was concerned about the quality of the main access linking Usk Way to the river and thought it was likely to be unattractive and permanently shaded, with any possibility of pedestrianisation compromised by provision for public car parking. We were told that it is intended to landscape the access route, with a secondary avenue of trees, sedges and grasses.

The Panel was concerned that the public parking intended to the north and south of the scheme would prove particularly difficult to manage around a student residence with neither resident or visitor car parking and asked the local planning and highway authorities to look carefully at this problem. This is especially important given that the southern road will be a main route for students from this block to reach the riverside walk and proceed north to the campus. It was noted that parking along the southern access road, being provided by the Jacks Pill developer, is intended for visitors to the riverside park.

The Panel accepted the limited parking provision on site, especially because of the proximity to the proposed new campus and the provision of a free dedicated shuttle bus between all university zones. However, the limited number of disabled parking places was a concern, especially with 22 units designed for the needs of the disabled and some additional disabled parking provision should be considered.

The Panel noted that the large footprint of the building relative to the site leaves little room for public space. The design team stated that this was necessary because of the quantum of accommodation to be achieved on the site, and was deemed acceptable because of the proximity of the riverside park and the general scale of development proposed south of George Street. The building line on Usk Way is set relatively far back, to accommodate service runs, future boulevarding works and visibility splays. The thin strips of greenery around the building will include seating but the narrow buffer of security, notably on the river frontage, isolates this large occupied block from what will undoubtedly be the preferred open space of the public walkway and landscaped area on the riverside.

The Panel considered that the common room and recreation areas would provide better amenity if they were located on the river side of the building. The developer stated that they were located on the boulevard side for reasons of marketability, accessibility and to provide an active frontage. The Panel accepted the need for some activity such as a letting office on the road frontage but still thought more activity and presence should be achieved on the river side, perhaps through more generous windows and balconies.

The Panel thought that the dimensions of the 'courtyard' [or lightwell] were mean and the area would only be used for parking and access, rather than as an amenity in its own right. We were concerned at the aspect of the rooms that looked out on to this area, and the access of sunlight into this space.

The Panel noted that the elevations appeared to have no logical front/back, nor did they respond to their orientation. We thought that adding a variety of different treatments to the facades was not a good solution to the perceived need to break down the massing. There are currently several different types of fenestration, colours and textures, all screaming for attention, and the scheme would benefit from the number and variety of materials being reduced and made more coherent. Compared to a warehouse building type by its designers, we agreed that this was a sensible approach, but thought that it would require a more unified architectural treatment and a more recessive appearance. Floor to floor heights are 3.3m.

The Panel considered that the block profile could be varied with some increase in height to provide articulation of the mass, in view of its proximity to the bridge and its tight fit on the site. The Local Authority had previously judged the 8 storey version too high in relation to its mass, but was prepared to consider an increase in height, providing that the footprint was correspondingly reduced. The Panel

would prefer to see a major rethinking of the footprint and massing to respond more positively to the river and to create a better aspect and amenity for the residents. One way to do this would be to open the interior courtyard to the river. We were told that security considerations would make this impossible but we were not convinced that this was the case. The Panel emphasised how important it was that there should be no perceptible drop in design quality between this scheme and its neighbours. The proximity of the northern elevation to the bridge was a matter of concern and we were advised that this elevation would be sealed. We thought that this uncomfortable solution was a result of the very tight fit of the building on the site and the dominant scale of the bridge.

There is no firm commitment as yet to biomass heating, although boiler room and fuel storage are identified on the plans. Establishing security of fuel supply will be an important factor for the developer in arriving at a decision. Provision will be made for linking in to any future district heating scheme. The team is committed to achieving an EcoHomes Very Good rating, based on post-construction assessment.

Crynodeb/Summary

The Panel was content with the principle of use and the proposed scale of development, but we had major concerns over massing and orientation. We think that major revisions are necessary in order to achieve an acceptable proposal on this site:

- We accept the rationale for providing active uses on the Usk way frontage, but we are disappointed with the lack of similar active uses or connections on the riverside.
- We would like to see the facade treatment revised, with a calmer fenestration pattern and a reduced palette of materials. The articulation of the block should be more unified and coherent.
- We think the height of the block could be increased to allow a more spacious setting for the building, as long as the footprint is reduced, and we think this would allow more daylight into the courtyard.
- The general massing and orientation needs rethinking and we would like to see the courtyard redesigned to open out towards the river.
- We have concerns about the quality of the east/west routes to north and south of the site. These need refining to improve landscaping as part of the riverside park, and to separate pedestrian movement from car movement. This is a matter for the local planning authority to resolve with its various departments.
- We would welcome the provision of biomass heating and the potential for district heating. We note the commitment to achieve EcoHomes Very Good, although we would like to see an aspiration to Excellent given this is a brownfield site.
- The fact that the developer will retain ownership and operational control is likely to have a positive influence on achieving quality and energy efficiency
- We welcome the collaboration with MacGregor Smith in terms of landscape and public realm, and urge that this scheme is fully integrated into the wider public realm strategy.

Diwedd/End

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