

Design Review Report

Pier Pavilion Site, Llandudno

DCFW Ref: N111

Meeting of 30th June 2016



Declarations of Interest

Panel members, observers and other relevant parties are required to declare **in advance** any interests they may have in relation to the Design Review Agenda items. Any such declarations are recorded here and in DCFW's central records.

Review Status

Meeting date

Issue date

Scheme location

Scheme description

Scheme reference number

Planning status

PUBLIC

30th June 2016

15th July 2016

Llandudno

Mixed-use

111

Pre-application

Declarations of Interest

None declared.

Consultations to Date

Discussions between the developer, the local planning authority and Cadw are ongoing. The project has been publicised in local and national press.

The Proposals

The site of the former Pier Pavilion is in a prominent location at the west end of Llandudno promenade and the land end of the pier with the Great Orme behind it. The site is bounded to the south west by a single storey arcade, to the north by a road which runs up the Great Orme and to the north east by the listed Grand Hotel. Existing access to the site, which drops down below the level of the adjacent road and pier, is from a gate at the west end of the site.

The site is listed, although the previous pavilion building burned down in 1994. The only notable feature of the pavilion structure to remain is a row of columns along the edge of the pier. An application for a hotel on the site was refused in 2013.

A mixed use scheme over eight levels is proposed, comprising basement parking, commercial (kiosks and restaurants) and 45 apartments.

Main Points in Detail

Key points from the discussion are outlined below and should inform work prior to further review or making a planning application.

Overall approach

The Design Commission welcomes the developer's ambition and vision for this project, especially the desire to reuse and regenerate this derelict site in an important and prominent location in Llandudno, and to provide quality seaside living. The proposed mix of uses and overall massing seem appropriate.

The site for this project provides an excellent opportunity for quality development in Wales. Its outstanding location and heritage demand the very best in design quality which captures and maximises the value of the site. The developer has expressed responsibility and commitment to achieving quality, whilst tackling the challenge of delivering a viable and regenerative building. However, the proposals presented at the review are a long way from achieving the design excellence demanded by the site and setting. There are fundamental steps missing from the design process which are required to deliver the ambition and make the most of this opportunity.

This review provides an opportunity to take a step back and consider the overall vision and a strategic level response before any detail design decisions become fixed.

Project vision

It is not clear from the drawings or verbal presentation what the overall architectural idea or vision for the scheme is. A short vision statement (one sentence) or diagram, which is informed by analysis of the context and the brief, would help with clarity. If this clarity cannot be provided, it is doubtful that the right approach has been found.

Having a clear vision allows different options to be tested against it at all stages of the design process, providing a stronger scheme. The current proposal is seeking to achieve a compromise between lots of different ideas which are competing with and diluting each other. Given the context, prominence and size of this building, it is important that a clear vision is pursued and that it has its own identity. A decision must be made as to what that is. Simplification of the idea is required to achieve the level of quality necessary.

Simplify for quality

As well as simplifying the overall idea, the project would benefit from simplification at all levels and stages of design, including the material palette, articulation of form, detail design, access and circulation, and servicing.

Complexity increases the cost of delivery, so simplifying the design allows more to be invested in better quality materials. Good quality finishes and durable materials would deliver better long term value through reduced maintenance and replacement.

Removing unnecessary features which do not contribute to the overall vision, such as the small section of sloping roof halfway up the elevation, will help to simplify the scheme, refine it and reduce any costs which may not add value.

Evidence gathering, site analysis and response

The Design Commission expects all schemes to be developed on the basis of a thorough analysis of the site and context. Rather than being a 'tick-box' exercise, this analysis should inform a framework for design. *Site and Context Analysis Guide: Capturing the value of site*, was written by DCFW for Welsh Government, and provides a useful prompt

for designers, as well as planners and developers assessing how well the analysis and initial design process has been done:

<http://gov.wales/topics/planning/policy/guidanceandleaflets/site-and-context-analysis-guide/?lang=en>

The proposals presented at the review did not yet demonstrate a clear link between good site analysis and the design approach. For a scheme of this significance, we would expect to see clear evidence from the analysis of site and context to justify every design decision. A design framework, informed by analysis, should provide a good basis for initial design strategies. It is useful to draw the framework diagrammatically.

As design options are developed, the visual contribution to the townscape should be tested from key viewpoints, including views down onto the roof from the Great Orme. The building has no back elevation, so views of it from different angles are especially important.

Strategies and diagrams

The proposed scheme appears to be missing important strategic-level rationale. Attention has jumped from resolving the massing with viability, to detailed concern for the elevations without crucial consideration of key issues at a strategic level. This means that it is difficult to justify the proposal. It would benefit the scheme to consider the following issues strategically:

- Access, movement and way-finding
- Servicing (deliveries, refuse collection, maintenance)
- Environmental design (including energy)
- Structural design
- Approach to heritage and conservation
- Public realm enhancement

Each strategy can be tested against the project vision and other objectives and revised and refined to find the best solutions. Strategies can be drawn diagrammatically to communicate the rationale behind the scheme.

It is important that the different issues are not considered in isolation, but together as parts of the whole.

Integrated design and environmental strategy

Integrated design is essential to a good quality building which performs effectively and efficiently, and provides comfortable places for people to visit, move through and live in. Integrated design requires all members of the design team to work closely together from an early stage. The design team should include skills in architecture, structural engineering, environmental services design and landscape/highways design, which would usually be coordinated by the architect.

It is important not to think about the external appearance of the building separately to the inside, as the form and facade design will significantly affect the quality and conditions of the inside spaces. Environmental design and the spatial planning of the building will have an impact on how people use spaces and how comfortable they feel. For example, a dramatic, light-filled atrium space could be a selling point for the scheme, but more thought needs to be given to encouraging people to use the space, by

integrating a feature staircase, for example. If it is well designed, through collaboration between architects and environmental engineers, the atrium could also make a positive contribution to the daylighting and ventilation of the apartments and commercial units. These aspects have not been resolved in the current proposals.

It is especially important to have an integrated sustainability and environmental strategy, as this cannot be successfully 'bolted on' at a later stage. Low-energy and running costs would be selling points for the building if they can be built in cost effectively from the early design stages. Adding sustainable 'features' later in the process is likely to be costly and increase the complexity of operating and maintaining the building. The sustainability strategy should be part of the architectural vision.

Avoiding overheating of the east, west and south-facing units will be crucial to avoiding uncomfortable conditions for residents and visitors to the commercial units without the need for energy-intensive and costly air-conditioning. The north facing units will have very different conditions to deal with. Daylighting and glare must also be considered. It is critical that environmental analysis, including thermal modelling, informs the design of the elevations in this scheme. Therefore, modelling must be undertaken and repeated from an early stage, and well before a planning application is prepared, as it should have a significant effect on the appearance of the building. There is no evidence that this has taken place in the design process to date.

In order to create an energy efficient building envelope, the potential for thermal bridging at the balconies and terraces must be carefully considered and designed out. The proposals presented at the review indicated largely glazed facades which could be more costly to insulate to a high standard than non-glazed walls, and should be given further thought. Welsh Government's publication, *Practice Guidance: Planning for sustainable building*, gives useful guidance on integrating sustainability in the design and planning process. <http://gov.wales/topics/planning/policy/guidanceandleaflets/practice-guidance-planning-for-sustainable-buildings/?lang=en>

There is much more work to be done or revisited in order to properly integrate sustainability and environmental design. This scheme is of such importance that it deserves more time to get it right before a planning application is made.

Movement and public realm

It will be useful for the design team to draw a movement strategy for the scheme, showing how different people are expected to approach, arrive at, enter and move around the building. The movement strategy may be quite complex for a mixed-use scheme like this, but using diagrams to resolve the movement of different users will help to simplify the strategy.

The movement strategy should inform and integrate with the design of the layout of the building and the public realm. The proposed public route through the building from Happy Valley Road to the Pier has potential to add vitality to the streetscape along the road, but to be successful, the design will have to be carefully considered.

It must feel like a space which the public are meant to use. The following aspects will be important:

- Marking of entrances so they are easy to locate
- Material finishes which feel 'public', perhaps reflecting external finishes.
- Lighting (artificial and natural)
- Views at different points along the route in both directions (If people can see through to the sea/pier from the road entrance they will be more likely to use the route)
- Way finding – How do people know where the routes lead to?

There is potential for this scheme to make a significant positive impact on Llandudno. To maximise the benefits of the scheme, it would be good practice for the design team to consider integration with the public realm surrounding the site, even if it falls outside of the technical 'red-line' boundary. We would like to see suggestions for public realm improvements developed through discussion with the local authority's planning and highways teams.

Further review

The Design Commission welcomes the opportunity to review significant schemes a number of times as design work progresses. Given the high quality of design demanded by this exceptional site and the considerable distance the scheme is from achieving this, we strongly recommend that sufficient time be afforded the design team and that a further review takes place prior to a planning application being made. The Commission suggests that a July planning submission would be premature, and that best value will not be achieved without proper investment in a proficient, thorough, integrated early design process.

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

Attendees

Client/developer:	Alan Waldron, Owner/Developer
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Local Authority/Cadw:	Huw Davies, Senior Conservation Officer, Conwy CBC Paula Jones, Development Control, Conwy CBC Bryn Kyffin, Senior Planning Officer, Conwy CBC Nick Davies, Inspector of Historic Buildings, Cadw
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