

Design Review Report

Pier Pavilion Site,
Llandudno

DCFW Ref: N111

Meeting of 24th October 2017



Review Status

Meeting date
Issue date
Scheme location
Scheme description
Scheme reference number
Planning status

PUBLIC

24th October 2017
8th November 2017
Llandudno
Mixed-use
N111
Application submitted

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.

Elinor Gray-Williams is on the Board of DCFW and is an architect at Donald Insall Architects who have recently been asked to produce the Heritage Impact Assessment for this scheme which has been made available to the Commission, for the purposes of this review meeting. All present were content to proceed following this declaration.

Consultations to Date

Discussions between the developer, the local planning authority and Cadw have been ongoing. The project has been publicised in local and national press and underwent a period of formal public consultation during autumn 2016.

The Design Commission for Wales reviewed this scheme at a Design Review on 30th June 2016 and commented on the scheme presented for public consultation in October/November 2016. The comments given here should be read alongside our reports from the previous reviews which can be found online:

<http://cdn.dcfw.org.uk/111-Pier-Pavilion-Site-Llandudno-DR-Report-June-16.pdf> and <https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/dcfw-cdn/111-Pier-Pavilion-Site-Llandudno-DCFW-consultation-comments11.11.161.pdf>

Throughout these consultation periods the Commission has consistently expressed concern about the project based on objective assessment of its design quality and, therefore, its potential to be successfully realised.

The Proposals

The site of the former Pier Pavilion occupies a very 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 via 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 nine levels is proposed, comprising basement parking, commercial (kiosks and restaurants) and residential apartments.

Comments

Overall approach

Again, the Design Commission welcomes the developer's ambition for this project, especially the desire to reuse and regenerate this derelict site in an important and prominent location in Llandudno. The need for viability in order to achieve this is fully understood and the overall mix of uses and quantity of development seems appropriate.

The site, with its outstanding location, heritage and proximity to the Great Orme, is of national significance and demands the very best in design quality to capture and maximise the value of the site, minimise developer risk and ensure successful realisation. The proposals presented up to this point do not achieve the design excellence demanded by the site and setting.

Both of the Commission's previous reports highlighted significant problems in the proposals and design process which were falling short of both the developer's ambition and the quality demanded by the site.

Whilst some improvements have been made since we last reviewed the scheme, significant strategic design problems have not been addressed and the design is not of an appropriate standard for this site. There are gaps in the design process which cannot easily be justified without re-visiting early design stages. It is a matter of significant concern that a planning application has been made without these issues being resolved and properly communicated in the Design & Access Statement.

The Commission draws the team's attention to Welsh Government's guide: *Design and Access Statements in Wales*. <http://gov.wales/docs/desh/publications/171009design-and-access-statements-guidance-en.pdf>

The following points summarise key issues from the review:

Heritage Impact Assessment

The Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) prepared by Donald Insall Associates is a useful and essential element of this project. It reinforces the importance of the setting of the site and the need for excellent design quality which makes an appropriate and justified response to context.

The 'traffic light' system devised for testing the basic form of the proposals has been very helpful and has resulted in a revised building form which works better with the surrounding built environment and begins to take key views into consideration. The stepped massing is an important first step in designing for this site.

Articulation of form and facades

Discussion and assessment of how the building's form (and subsequently the façade) is articulated should be objective and should focus on the building's impact on its context (in light of the HIA), rather than 'style'. Where appropriate, the proposal should draw influence from the surroundings, but not seek to replicate it. The design and planning team must identify through proper analysis and testing, which are the useful elements of the surroundings to reflect. The way the building reads in its setting should also be appropriate to its mainly residential use. A contextual approach should be demonstrated through an objective, methodical and integrated design process.

In sensitive locations with a degree of uniformity in the grain and appearance of the buildings, the role and siting of prominent buildings that stand out as a strong contrast to their surroundings, is usually reserved for buildings with an important public or civic function. Whilst this building will have publicly accessible commercial functions at ground level, its primary use (apartments) does not support the notion of a design approach that shouts for attention and boldly contrasts with its surroundings.

The Commission is supportive of the inclusion of active uses at ground level and it is sensible to make the distinction between these and residential uses above in the articulation of the façade. This has some sympathy with the long horizontals of the sea and promenade at ground level.

The proposal presented at this review included a central mass clearly expressed with a solid border, with a variety of potential infill treatments explored. This approach emphasises the prominence and scale of the building, causing it to dominate views to much greater extent than the adjacent large hotel. In distant views, particularly, this reads as a very large horizontal volume, which is at odds with the broadly vertical articulation in the character of the surrounding residential buildings identified in the 'Design Development and Significance Assessment' document and heritage studies. Whilst the team stated that vertical emphases had been explored in the design process, this work was not presented or sufficiently evidenced in the material made available. The Commission considers that a proposal with greater vertical emphasis as the first layer of articulation of the stepped form is likely to be more successful and responsive to the context.

Further consideration also needs to be given to the colour, texture and surface quality of materials including the potential for shine and/or glare. The prevailing local character is of solid painted surfaces with individual windows 'punched' into those surfaces. Whilst understanding the desire for large windows to take advantage of sea views, the proportion of solid wall to window and the materials for the solid parts are a crucial design step. After the key decisions on massing, this is the next element that will influence how well this scheme sits within its context. Consideration should be given to individual windows rather than continuous bands of glazing and to the proportions of those windows. It may be possible to achieve a better balance by using smaller proportions of glazing for bedrooms compared to living rooms.

Central Route

It is positive that further consideration has been given to the proposed 'public' route through the scheme which would connect Happy Valley Road directly to the pier. There

are a number of aspects to this space which will need to be considered further to make this a pleasant and welcoming space:

- Location of restaurant access/entrance/servicing
- Active frontages on to the route
- Location and quality of residential entrances
- Management of space at night when pier is closed
- Integration with wider public realm
- Careful curation of art and landscape design
- Day to day and long term maintenance

Strategic Design

There was not scope within the review meeting to examine and discuss in detail the strategies which are crucial to the quality and success of this project. Such strategies include:

- Access, movement and way-finding
- Servicing (deliveries, refuse collection, maintenance)
- Mechanical and electrical services
- Environmental design (including energy)
- Structural design
- Public realm enhancement
- Inclusivity
- Fire safety and escape
- Acoustics
- Roof strategy, including water management, access and maintenance

There is little evidence in the material presented to date which demonstrates that these issues have been resolved to a level appropriate for the submission of a detailed planning application. The issues listed above will have an impact on the form, layout, appearance and viability of the scheme and should have been addressed prior to a planning application being submitted.

Comfort and living quality

There is still no evidence that the comfort and quality of life for residents has been properly considered. The north facing apartments, in particular, could be dark and undesirable, contributing to commercial risk. The balcony overhangs and more solid approach to the façade treatment do not assist in addressing this or in getting sufficient light into the deep plan.

The quality of bedrooms which have their only window onto the internal atrium is questionable, as mechanical ventilation would be required.

The planning of the individual apartments could be more efficient and better considered, and the residential entrances seem particularly small.

Clarity of visual communication

The lack of clarity in the plan drawings presented at the review, and the absence of any section drawings raises wider concerns about the feasibility of the proposal, especially at the stage where a planning application has already been submitted.

Whilst we recognise some further work had been done, based on the material available to us, we remain very concerned about this proposal and its potential for success. Whilst the ambition of the client is admirable, the current proposals do not do justice either to that ambition or to the importance of the site.

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

Attendees

Agent/Client/Developer:	Alan Waldron, Quay Developments
Architect/Planning Consultant:	Phil Hardwick (planning) Dan Gibson & Alwyn Rowlands, Creu Architects Matt Osmont, Donald Insall Associates
Local Planning Authority:	Huw Davies, Conwy CBC
Design Review Panel:	
Chair	Ewan Jones
Lead Panellist	Amanda Spence, Design Advisor, DCFW Mark Lawton Jen Heal, Design Advisor, DCFW Carole-Anne Davies, CE, DCFW
Observing:	Rhian Haf, Artist