



Design Review Report

Jockey Street, Swansea

DCFW Ref: 115

Meeting of 21st July 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	21 st July 2016
Issue date	2 nd August 2016
Scheme location	Swansea
Scheme description	Student Accommodation
Scheme reference number	115
Planning status	Pre-application

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Declarations of Interest

None declared.

Consultations to Date

Pre-application consultation with the local authority is ongoing.

The Proposals

The site is located to the north of Swansea city centre and in close proximity to Swansea Railway Station. The site does not occupy a prominent position due to being located at a lower level to most of the surrounding buildings which screen it from the busy High Street. The site is adjacent to the main railway line and is occupied by a low-rise building and associated car park. The site is opposite Swansea Business School, the University's Main Building, and shares a roughly square block of land with two other buildings (Friendship House and Demarco's Dance Studio) of little architectural merit that will remain in situ.

The proposal is for a block of private student accommodation. Three options were presented, ranging from 300 to 400 beds, with associated facilities. The most recent option includes an 18 storey tower element.

Main Points in Detail

The following points summarise key issues from the review and should be considered to inform work ahead of making a planning application or engaging in further review:

Overall Approach, Vision and Strategies

The review took place at an early stage in the design process when there is scope for discussion to add value and improve the quality of the scheme. It was useful for the

team to explain the development of the options that have been explored to date, especially using the working models to illustrate this.

The presenting team explained that the brief from their client is relatively flexible, which has allowed a variety of options to be explored in the early design stages. Whilst it is good practice to test options and for that process to inform the detailed brief, it is important that the brief starts to be pinned down before designs move to a more detailed stage. A key element of the brief which is currently missing is a clear 'vision' for the scheme. A short statement, which concisely describes the vision for what kind of place the team are aiming to create, will help to guide strategic and detailed design decisions. Ideally, the vision would integrate environmental and lifestyle ambitions.

Informative Site Analysis

The proposal and/or presentation of the design development would benefit from clear, informative site analysis. There was little information to explain how the site had been chosen or how analysis of the site conditions, including climate, topography, security, culture and ecology had informed the approach to design. It is good practice to demonstrate that thorough analysis of site and context has identified site constraints and opportunities and is being used to justifying design decisions. This should make a clear link between how the site and surrounding area is used now and ambitions for the ways in which the area will be used in the future.

A study of the context should also be used to identify key view points from which to test different form and massing options.

The application of the findings of good site analysis captures value and reference might usefully be made to the following DCFW/Welsh Government Publication: *Capturing the Value of a Site* <http://gov.wales/topics/planning/policy/guidanceandleaflets/site-and-context-analysis-guide/?lang=en>

Landscape Design and Public Realm

It is important that the spaces around the proposed building are as well considered as the building itself. Design of the landscape and public realm, and their interface with the ground floor will be important in dealing with the challenging aspects of this site and creating a welcoming and functional place for students.

It would be beneficial for a landscape architect to be appointed to the design team at an early stage so that design of the building and spaces around it can be developed in an integrated way to achieve the best value from the site.

A strategy for improving the surrounding public realm which is outside the 'red line' boundary is an opportunity that could be developed through discussion with the local authority, to maximise opportunities for the local neighbourhood, amenity and the wider cityscape.

The local authority suggested that there may be an opportunity to incorporate an adjacent piece of open space into the proposal. Integrating and positively managing this space offers the potential to improve amenity and reduce risks associated with anti-social behaviour which currently takes place there.

A site-wide landscape strategy should influence any strategy for parking to prevent parking dominating the scheme. The landscape strategy should take into account the ways in which people will use and move through external spaces and identify opportunities to improve amenity and biodiversity. It should address the following issues:

- Arrival, access and entrances
- Level changes across the site
- Courtyard/amenity space
- Parking and servicing
- How different external spaces will work together
- Biodiversity, ecology, drainage

The type of 'hard' surface materials used will have a significant impact on how spaces feel, their durability and drainage. Long term management of external spaces should also be considered.

The Design Commission would encourage a reduction to the standard number of parking spaces in this development to maximise the amount of green amenity space, given that it is intended for students and is close to the city centre and public transport. However, it is important that a sound strategy for alternative modes of transport, access, entrance, movement and servicing is fully considered.

There is a specific need for improvements to be made to the somewhat unwelcoming pedestrian route under the railway which is adjacent to the site and a key route to nearby student accommodation. Security and safety for students and other users, particularly at night, will be a consideration in the long term success of the development. Lighting and fully integrated public art, in addition to the improvements to the derelict land, could help deter anti-social behaviour and benefit the scheme.

Transport and Movement

The team would find it useful to develop a clear transport and movement strategy for the scheme which is informed by site analysis and a clear understanding of the operational brief. The strategy should take into account the following issues:

- Arrival and entrance sequences for different users
- Pedestrian routes and entrances
- Cycle storage, security, site access and movement through the site
- Minimum parking provision
- Contributions to active travel
- Access for servicing, refuse collection etc.
- Access for moving in/out of students
- Security
- Hierarchy of public/private spaces
- Horizontal and vertical circulation
- Peak movement times
- Visitor experience, including those cycling

Mapping routes and movement strategies through diagrammatic plans would help to communicate the ideas.

Cost and Viability

It is important that the costs and commercial viability of the scheme are carefully balanced, this will influence all stages of the design process from massing through to details design and material specification.

The viability of the proposed commercial unit should be properly researched. A shop in this location may struggle to compete with shops on High Street as it is not immediately visible from the busiest roads. There may be other 'active' communal student-related uses which would contribute vitality to the streetscape. Different options should be explored.

This student accommodation would be in competition with other student residential schemes in the city. Therefore, it must provide good value and stand out from other options to attract new students. There are a number of ways to do this including the variety/type of rooms, the design quality and finish and the amount and quality of amenity space provided. The selling point should be part of the brief and overall vision for the project. It may be useful to look at existing student residential schemes to learn lessons for this one.

There are a number of aspects of the design which will affect the overall costs and viability which should be tested against the budget. These include, but are not limited to:

- Massing and height
- Number/density of units accommodated on the site
- Level of repetition of room layouts, modules and components
- Internal planning, including horizontal and vertical circulation required
- Number of bedrooms per cluster
- Simplicity/complexity of form and detailing (each extra junction adds cost)
- Type and number of materials
- Servicing/energy strategy
- Structural strategy

The proposal presented at the review was very complex in plan and elevation, with little repetition. Simplifying the plan and detailing would allow more of the budget to be invested in better quality finishes or more rooms. It could also reduce the amount of unusable corner spaces internally and externally providing better overall value.

It would be good practice to demonstrate flexibility and adaptability by showing how the building could be reused or reconfigured for an alternative use, such as apartments or offices in the future if student accommodation became unviable.

Justification for Tall Building

Whilst we note Swansea Council's tall building policy and zoning, there is nevertheless a need for full justification for a tower on this site. The context for this site is different to that of the nearby Mariner Street site which has recently received planning permission for a tall building, a different argument is required. A convincing justification for a tall building as part of this scheme is currently absent. The Commission is not convinced that this site forms a significant gateway/arrival point within Swansea.

The scale, massing, form and composition of the building must be considered from an urban design perspective. Any tall building would need to be of exceptional quality as it would make a significant impact on views across the city as well as the immediate context. Long term durability and weathering will also be important.

It should be carefully considered whether a very good quality tall building can be achieved on the budget available – something that is a frequent constraint in relation to student residential projects. The city will inherit the legacy and careful consideration should be given to the quality and contribution that would be made by this project.

If high density is important for viability, there may be better ways in which a high density scheme can be achieved without a tower element, these should be properly explored as part of the design process. Affordable urban housing models may provide useful precedent for achieving this.

A different approach to the site layout may be more appropriate if a tower does not form part of the scheme.

Environmental Analysis and Design

Good environmental analysis and testing should be part of the early design process; external spaces should be included in this process. It is important that analysis and testing is integrated at an early stage and well before a planning application is made as it should influence the form, orientation and facade design. The students' experience and comfort should be the focus of the environmental design strategy.

The levels and distribution of daylight in student rooms will be especially important and will be significantly affected by the fenestration.

Ventilation and temperature will also be crucial to providing comfortable conditions for living and studying. North facing rooms will not benefit from solar gains, but there is potential for overheating of east, south and west facing rooms. If windows are on opening restrictors, it is important that sufficient levels of ventilation and purge cooling can still be achieved.

Operational Issues

It is important that the design team works to a sound operational brief so that all spatial and functional requirements of this complex type of building are met. These requirements include, but are not limited to:

- Refuse and recycling sorting, storage and collection
- Sprinkler water storage
- Laundry room
- Post room
- Cycle storage
- Maintenance and servicing
- Energy, heating and hot water use
- Plant room

Depending on the experience of the client team in developing this type or scale of building, it may be beneficial to seek advice and consultation with an experienced operator in order to firm up the brief. The proposals presented at the review suggest

that this scheme presents a complex design challenge and a tighter brief and more rigorous analysis and testing of options is required.

Further Review

The Design Commission would welcome the opportunity to review this scheme again, once designs have progressed, but well before a planning application is made. The team is urged to make early enquiries about future meeting dates due to high service demand.

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

Attendees

Agent/Client/Developer: (Not present)

Architect/Planning Consultant: Huw Griffiths, Architect
Michael Evans, Architectural Assistant
Ashley Davies, Architectural Assistant
Myles Chapman, Architectural Assistant
Graham Carlisle, CDN Planning

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