

Design Review Report

Lower Commercial Street, Newport

DCFW Ref: 116

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

Issue date

Scheme location

Scheme description

Scheme reference number

Planning status

PUBLIC

21st July 2016

2nd August 2016

Newport

Over 55s Affordable Residential

116

Pre-application

Declarations of Interest

None declared.

Consultations to Date

A pre-application meeting with the local authority took place in October 2015. Formal pre-application public consultation is planned.

The Proposals

The site is located in Newport city centre, opposite the entrance to the Kingsway Centre, within the existing street scene of Lower Commercial Street. The development entails the construction of 28 new apartments with on-site parking intended for occupation for over 55s. The proposal involves the retention and realignment of a pedestrian route to the existing multi-story car park to the rear of the site. The project is benefitting from VVP (Vibrant & Viable Places) funding.

Following a viability study, an additional two storeys had been added to the central block of the building to increase the number of units. This addition was not shown in the pre-review material submitted by the team but was presented at the review.

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

The review took place at a good early stage in the design process when there is scope for discussion to add value and improve the quality of the scheme. The Design Commission is supportive of the proposed use on this site and the desire to regenerate a forgotten and run down part of the city centre. The site strategy and plan form are

working well and the glimpsed views designed in relation to the context are good. The team's commitment to high quality materials is welcomed.

Streetscape and Ground Floor Uses

This scheme would slot into an existing streetscape and provides an opportunity to improve the vitality, safety and overall appearance of Lower Commercial Street. In order to make the most of this opportunity, the design of the ground floor and street facing elevation will be important.

The proposal presented at the review had a large stretch of street-facing ground floor taken up by the residents' car park entrance and service areas. It would be beneficial if the width of these 'dead' spaces could be reduced and more active ground floor uses introduced to animate the street. A larger or wider pedestrian entrance lobby could be considered.

The introduction of a commercial/retail space to provide surveillance at the corner of the proposed route to the existing car park is positive. However, this will only be effective during office hours. It would be useful for discussions to take place between the local authority and the car park operator over the management of opening times of this route so that it does not compromise the quality of the scheme by providing a place which encourages anti-social behaviour. If the night access through the development to the existing car park at the rear is retained it could have a detrimental impact on the success of the scheme due to the perception of safety risk to residents and visitors.

The extension of elevation and section drawings to include surrounding buildings will help to communicate the relationship between the proposed scheme and the existing streetscape and townscape.

Some simplification in the variety of materials used for the Lower Commercial Street elevation may be beneficial.

Access and Movement

The ground floor should be designed in line with an access and movement strategy. This strategy should consider the movement of residents travelling by car, foot or scooter and visitors and car park users into and through the site.

Diagrammatic plans would usefully explain the movement strategy and how it deals with level changes.

The design of the residents' car park will be an important part of this strategy and should be based on studies of likely frequency of comings and goings. Diagrams which show how cars could safely wait to get into the car park whilst occupying part of the street would support the argument for reducing the façade width needed for the car park entrance. Circulation within the building, including relationships between communal areas, should also be considered.

Environmental Design

The Commission would expect to see that environmental modelling and testing is informing the design process from this early stage.

The user experience should be analysed so that the design provides the best possible comfort conditions. In particular, it will be useful to test for daylight penetration into rooms, as the vertical window format shown could light the floor without providing useful daylight to spaces where people will be carrying out activities.

It is important that the ventilation strategy is carefully considered so that overheating is avoided. Special attention should be given to flats with openings near to the existing car park where air pollution may be a problem. The privacy and security of these flats should also be considered.

Landscape Design

The Commission welcomes the proposal for communal roof gardens and allotments which would contribute to residents' well-being, encourage social interaction and improve biodiversity. The team could consider whether it is viable to introduce an additional roof garden space on top of the main block.

Ensuring good quality in the courtyard spaces at the back of the scheme will be important, looking at precedent for similar spaces might be useful.

Viability, Costs and Massing

A recent option was presented at the review with an additional two floors on the tallest central block. The team explained that additional units were required to make the scheme viable.

Further testing of the new proposed massing is required to assess whether it is appropriate. Views taken from further away and sections through the immediate context would show the impact of the extra height more clearly.

Other options for achieving viability should also be further explored, not least as the schemes will benefit from public investment through VVP. There may be better ways to accommodate more units with different massing and these should be tested so that the team can demonstrate that the best solution has been found.

There may also be ways in which greater value can be achieved through making the scheme more cost effective. The following issues could be explored:

- Simplification of layout to minimise unusable corners
- Increase repetition of modules and components
- Refining/simplifying the material palette without diminishing quality
- Maximising the habitable space to circulation ratio
- Refine/simplify the street front elevation

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

Attendees

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