

Design Review Report

Hallinan's House, Newport Road
Cardiff

DCFW Ref: 120

Meeting of 18th August 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	18 th August 2016
Issue date	2 nd September 2016
Scheme location	Cardiff
Scheme description	Student Residential
Scheme reference number	120
Planning status	Pre-application

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Declarations of Interest

None Declared.

Consultations to Date

One pre-Application consultation with the local planning authority has already taken place.

The Proposals

The site, on the corner of Newport Road and Fitzalan Place, is currently occupied by Hallinans House, a four and five storey office building with a café at ground floor. The site occupies a prominent position on Newport Road - a major route into the city - and is bordered by an existing hotel and education building.

The proposal is to demolish to existing building and erect a tower to accommodate new purpose built student accommodation. Current proposals show a two-storey fully-glazed student hub on the ground floor and mezzanine level addressing both Newport Road and Fitzalan Place.

Main Points in Detail

The review took place at a good, early stage when there is scope for suggestions to be incorporated and for discussions to add value to design. 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.

Response to site and context

The Design Commission expects to see that thorough analysis of site and context are informing the design process. Good analysis ensures that opportunities for adding value are identified and constraints are addressed, and that the design is appropriate to its place.

Analysis of climate and environmental conditions, including noise and pollution, will be especially important for a tall building proposal, and should inform design of the form and facade to provide energy efficiency and comfortable conditions internally and in the public realm.

The relationship with and impact on adjacent buildings should be considered in detail, fully justified and explained through drawings/diagrams. The proposal presented at the review showed an approximately nine metre gap between the new building and existing hotel room windows. Although the service core of the new building has been positioned to minimise direct views between habitable rooms, the impacts on privacy and overshadowing need to be fully explored and demonstrated, together with the visual relationship between the two buildings from the verified viewpoints.

The relationship with Cromwell House presented at the review was not acceptable as the proposed building would block windows in the existing building. The developers expressed a desire to acquire the Cromwell House plot and incorporate it with this scheme. This would bring benefits in terms of access and servicing of the site, but would require the ground floor layout to be revised in response to new site constraints and opportunities.

Justification of height and massing

This project provides an opportunity for an international architect to take a mature approach to a tall building in Cardiff. In order to do this, the design team must fully understand the city's tall building context and history, despite the absence of up to date tall buildings guidance from the local authority.

Any new tall building will have a significant impact on its immediate surroundings and the wider cityscape and, therefore, must be fully justified. Tall buildings demand excellent quality which can be maintained over the life of the building. A clear and justified rationale for the scheme was not presented at the review. Further work is required to demonstrate how the proposals have been informed by site analysis, the context of the site and a vision for the proposed development.

It is important that the design team and developers are comfortable that the scheme is economically viable and that the level of quality demanded can be delivered. Viability is likely to play a significant role in determining the number of units and, therefore the height and massing of the building. However, it is also important that the scale and massing are appropriate to the site and wider city context.

It is good that verified viewpoints have already been established with the local planning authority. These, and other views of the scheme, will be important in testing different options for massing and articulation of form. The Commission would like to see that different options have been explored and evaluated in light of the context analysis and viability studies, so that the team can demonstrate that the best solution has been reached.

It would be good practice to demonstrate that alternative future uses, such as flats or offices, could be accommodated in the building if the demand for student accommodation was to change.

Environmental design

It is important that a clear environmental strategy is established at an early stage in the design process, as adding technologies to provide energy efficiency and comfort at a later stage will be difficult and costly. The strategy should be an integrated part of the design process, and should be informed by early analysis, modelling and testing of options.

In this scheme, the approach to environmental design will need to deal with complex external factors, such as wind, noise, sun paths and overshadowing, as well as providing comfortable conditions for students internally.

Steps will need to be taken to avoid overheating of rooms on the south, east and west facades. Addressing this issue early will minimise the risks of uncomfortable conditions and costly and energy intensive mechanical cooling.

Facade design

The design of the facade will be crucial to achieving a comfortable, low-energy building. The building skin will need to deal with daylight, ventilation, solar-gains/cooling, noise and privacy/views, all of which will vary depending on the side of the building and height above ground level.

The alternating L-shaped windows proposed at the review would provide light at floor level, rather at a useful desk level, in many cases. The rationale of this strategy should be given considerable thought, as currently it is unconvincing.

At the same time, the facade will play a significant role in how the building looks in its context, so quality of materials, finishes and details will be important. It will need to be durable and easy to maintain. The lifespan and maintenance of facade components must be carefully considered.

The scheme presented at the review showed a facade designed to articulate different blocks of the building, with a non-uniform window arrangement. The Commission would like to see the facade designed with an informed and rational response to the site and internal functions. The analysis of the context and testing of options should determine the extent to which the mass of the building needs to be visually broken up.

Student experience

The experience provided for students, including the layout of clusters and communal facilities, will be crucial to this project. Good design and quality should provide important selling points which make the accommodation attractive to new students.

For student well-being, it is important that rooms are comfortable, light and have views out; and that socialising and interaction are encouraged. The definition between private, communal and public spaces will play a key role, and security will need to be considered. It will be valuable to learn lessons from the developer's previous experience and from other private student accommodation schemes in UK and beyond. Further consideration could be given to the vision for type and feel of accommodation provided which will help to create a welcoming and comfortable development for students living away from home and in the city of Cardiff for the first time.

Ground floor and public realm

The ambition for active frontages to provide life street level is welcomed. It would be good to see this achieved along as much of the facades facing Newport Road and Fitzalan Place as possible. Entrances on both Newport Road and Fitzalan Place will also help to enliven the street.

A good understanding of the local market and environmental conditions will be essential to achieving a commercially and socially viable use or series of uses at the corner of the building and spilling out onto Newport Road. Currently, the conditions on Newport Road are not conducive to sitting outside due to the heavy traffic and lack of sunshine. The design will need to work hard to provide a good quality, usable outdoor environment in this location.

Although the local authority is currently implementing public realm improvement works in this location, we would like to see that the public realm is being considered in conjunction with access, arrival and movement strategies for this building. Discussion between the design team, developer and the local authority will be key to achieving good integration and a quality built environment.

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.

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

Attendees

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