



Design Review Report

YMCA Building, Bridgend

DCFW Ref: N164

Meeting of 12th April 2018

Review Status

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

PUBLIC

12th April 2018
18th April 2018
Bridgend
Residential
N164
Pre-application

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.

None.

Consultations to Date

This is the first time that the Design Commission for Wales has reviewed these proposals for this site.

The Proposals

The site is located within the Town centre of Bridgend and is currently occupied by the YMCA. The site is bounded to the west by an elevated dual carriageway and landscaped embankment, to the south by Angel Road alongside the Ogmore River, and to the north by office buildings rising from two to six/seven storeys; the buildings are still intact.

In close proximity there is a Conservation Area and Grade II listed buildings located on the opposite side of the river in an elevated position overlooking the development site. It also lies adjacent to an Archaeologically Sensitive Area, close to three Grade II Listed Buildings off Merthyr Mawr Road and sits between the Bridgend Town Centre and Merthyr Mawr Road Conservation Areas. The site is located within a C1 flood zone.

The proposal involves the demolition of the existing buildings, creation of a multi-deck parking area above which is proposed up to 170 residential units in a 9-12 storey building. The development will deliver private and affordable residential units.

Main Points

The Design Commission welcomed the opportunity to review early proposals for the redevelopment of this site, the opportunity for early review is helpful to explore initial ideas and concepts for the site and the feedback of the Commission can be taken on board as the proposals develop.

The ambition of the client to support regeneration of the town centre and invest in a significant residential development is positive and it is important that viability and deliverability are maintained. With the regeneration goals in mind, it is important that development of this site delivers maximum benefit to the town centre and improves the

quality of the townscape for all residents. Therefore, the impact on the immediate and wider urban environment is of concern to all. What is good for the town should also be good for this development.

Analysis and Design Development

For early discussions such as this it is most helpful to engage with and understand the site through analysis plans, concept diagrams and sketch ideas, material that was lacking in the pre-review information and presentation on the day. This material should not just be prepared for a Design and Access Statement at the end of design development, it should be part of the design process, informing the ideas and decisions that are being made. Evidence of design development and different concepts that are being explored would also be helpful as this can show how various considerations have been taken on board and how the proposal has evolved. Whilst the 3D model images can assist in conveying the proposals to a wide audience, drawings would be more helpful at this stage. Without this material or a clear story of how the proposals have emerged it was very difficult to answer the question 'why is it like that?' Adopting the guidance in the Welsh Government Site and Context Analysis Guide, prepared by DCFW, would be helpful in this process.

Building Height

The site and wider context analysis is particularly important in demonstrating whether a tall building in this location is appropriate. It is a large site where a tall building would be very prominent. However, it is not a gateway, junction or other important location and the proposed use is not an important civic public function, so no sound urban design justification was provided for a tall building in this location.

This location is sensitive due to its visual proximity to two conservation areas and several listed buildings. There was very limited analysis of the relationship of the site to these historic assets and how the design has responded to this, other than being hidden from some views by another tall building of very limited quality. The significance of the church spires, key views to the site and views from the conservation area all need to be taken into account.

Plans, sections and illustrations of the proposal in its context are also required to explain the relationship between the proposed development and the river, adjacent buildings and the conservation area. Consideration should be given to how future development of adjacent sites may change the context in the future. If this is to be a catalyst for further development, how should it relate to adjacent sites in the future and what sort of patterns and opportunities does it present? Working with the local authority planning and regeneration departments on this would be very beneficial.

It is difficult to see how the height and massing currently proposed could be justifiable. More analysis and design development, alongside justification of impact on and benefits for the town centre, are needed to establish an appropriate height for development on this site.

Placemaking

Flooding is a key consideration and significant challenge for this site. A potential solution has been identified by raising the residential accommodation above the flood level and connecting the development at the upper, dual carriageway, level. The

implications of this proposal need to be reviewed and resolved as the three levels of parking have a strongly negative impact. Using sections to show the level of flooding would help to show the extent of the challenge and by how much the residential accommodation actually needs to be raised.

Parking on the first three floors of the residential development creates a hostile environment at ground level and a poor entrance to the scheme which will have a significant negative impact on the town centre. The ground floor could be activated by mixed use development which would provide natural surveillance of the street and support activity throughout the day. This is a mixed-use area close to the town centre and it is entirely appropriate for a mixed-use development which would reinforce the role of the town centre.

As this site is located close to the town centre with relevant amenities and good public transport connections the conditions for reducing the required number of parking spaces are in place. The amount of parking currently proposed is excessive for this location and is having a negative impact on the proposals. A reduction in the number of car parking spaces and increasing the number of cycle parking spaces would be supported.

Building Arrangement and Appearance

The Commission has significant concerns regarding the emerging form of the building and key principles that should be established at an early stage. The layout of the proposed development results in 40% north-facing apartments which will have a negative impact on the quality of life for residents. The proposed communal open space is also north facing and will have very little sunlight making it an uninviting space. The day-to-day entrance to the apartments is through the car park which is not welcoming or very legible. These negative aspects should not be present, and more design consideration should be given to occupier needs and site strategy at this stage. Eliminating these issues will be a significant benefit for the value of the development, its residents and the wider public realm.

Reconfiguring the development would provide the opportunity for a better entrance from Angel Street, combined with a south-facing amenity space that may be much more welcoming for residents and visitors. If this should be combined with more active frontage at ground level it would also significantly improve the quality of the Angel Street frontage.

Whilst the immediate context may provide little inspiration for the character and appearance of this development, there must be a vision, rationale, quality and consistency to the proposals. Practical considerations of weathering, residents' privacy and an environmental strategy including solar shading must be taken into account. The use of precedents would be helpful to show that this development will be like. The aim should be to create a high-quality piece of townscape that is robust and long-lasting. It will set the tone for further development in this area.

Next Steps

Further design is required at this stage to develop a convincing proposal built upon a rigorous analysis and clear concept. The Commission would welcome the opportunity to

review the proposals again when this work has been undertaken and in advance of a planning application being submitted.

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

Attendees

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