



Design Review Report

71-72 The Kingsway, Swansea

DCFW Ref: N193

Meeting of 19th September 2019



Review Status

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

Public

19th September 2019
3rd October 2019
Swansea
Office/mixed use
N193
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 consultation with DCFW through its Design Review Service. Limited key stakeholder engagement has taken place and the project is in the public domain, being promoted via a website. Wider consultation is planned along with public consultation associated with the submission of a planning application. The public realm masterplan for Kingsway was previously reviewed by DCFW in 2017.

The Proposals

The proposal aims to achieve flexible, multi-functional spaces including a mix of office and lower floor commercial space and third party uses and public realm/landscape design. The proposals contribute to the 'Digital Village' project which seeks to deliver c100,000ft² of new workspace on the site of the former Oceana night club building, aiming to contribute to the regeneration aspirations for stimulation of employment and economic growth in the City Centre and surrounding areas. The ambition is for a project which acts as a catalyst for investment at the city level and growth of the digital cluster in Swansea. Key elements include office and studios, event spaces, communal, including bar/café, small retail, set within a buildings with 2 storeys below ground, 5 storeys above ground, roof top garden space and public realm. The project will benefit from a proportion of public sector investment via the Swansea City Deal. The project is policy compliant and aligned with the strategic aims of the Swansea City Area Regeneration Framework.

Main Points

The Commission welcomed the opportunity to review this proposal at this stage when the council as client and the design team are able to share the concept, test and consider wider input. The design team are to be credited for their desire to engage at this stage, the thoroughness of their presentation and materials submitted in advance as well as their openness toward the dialogue.

The team and the client are very clear about aspects of viability of the scheme as well as its potential given the significant public sector stimulus of c£13m of the total anticipated £30m needed. This is an ambitious commitment by Swansea Council, to stimulating the wider investment needed to achieve the stated regeneration aims.

The site area is relatively large and the building brief in relation to space requirements and resultant built envelope is significant including two storeys below ground. The architectural approach up to and including the current RIBA Stage 2 works, has included testing the flexibility and adaptability of the considerable area available against the desires of a number of potential users and stakeholders to date. The flexibility of use and resilience over time are fundamental including possible future uses.

Whilst it was understood that financial/viability issues were also being considered a number of areas including roofscape, the use of SUDS and wider green infrastructure were all still being considered and tested. Concerns were raised regarding aspects of the scale of aspiration reflected in by example, the design including tree planting on the building. The panel advised that there needs to be a balance of ambition and catalytic endeavour alongside functionality and reflection/expression of responsible investment especially given the public funding component.

The Commission noted some frustration that the proposal was communicated out of context and with very limited information about the wider Kingsway area, surface transport including public transport, servicing and movement generally, activation of the southern link, public realm and the Hacer proposals which are all relevant to the scheme proposed. The relationship to that emerging context is critical and it is vital that the proposals are shown in a manner that demonstrates how it responds to that context and how the public realm will be addressed. Currently, from the materials presented, it is possible only to perceive an object which is unrelated to its context. Given that the council control development plots in the immediate area it was felt that the principles of the adjoining plots could have been outlined and how these assumptions had informed the design.

For it to be fully understood by stakeholders, members of the public and decision makers it must be conceived in context. If it is to be the centre of activity aspired to, it is important to articulate the level of porosity and accessibility that will be achieved from the surrounding areas and within the building. It demonstrate this alongside its influence on others and how the relationship to surrounding developments and urban public realm will be established, controlled and safeguarded over time – perhaps through some appropriate form of coding/adopted principles for the whole area using development scenarios to test options.

The ambition for flexible 24/7 operation by multiple uses has considerable implications for maintenance, management and cost in use – both financial and in terms of energy/carbon cost. How space will be 'curated' and managed will need to be clearly established and implemented in a detailed operational and cost plan accompanying the design solutions.

Blue-green infrastructure and planting proposals for the structure itself need much more detailed design and structural work. Fuller energy and wider sustainability strategies are needed now and should inform the subsequent stages of design including a full and detailed modelling for energy strategies, management and the impact of their integration and cost implications over time.

Next Steps

The proposals have considerable potential to demonstrate the power of the public sector as a good client committed to quality and value as a means to stimulating wider activity and regeneration aims. Inherent in this potential is the critical risk of viability and of being able to meet the stated aims. The Commission recognises this ambition and associated risks and urges the council to consider the genuine, long-term public value that can be secured given the scale of public investment.

The Commission also welcomes this early engagement and the request for a timely second meeting in the autumn. In order to gain most value from the next review meeting, which is likely to be very close to a planning submission, the Commission would expect the following items to be addressed in the continuing design work and that they will be successfully resolved and explicitly demonstrated in all materials including how scenarios have been tested, eliminated or prioritised in the design approach:

- Placemaking and context – response to adjacent development and urban design considerations, public transport, movement and public realm
- Energy strategy, including full and building specific modelling
- Landscape, public realm
- Influence on/relationship to adjacent developments
- Influence on Kingsway at ground floor/public realm; relationships; porosity and accessibility
- Clearer understanding of management, operations, programming - how exactly it will work in practice and a demonstration that the costs are understood.

We look forward to the next meeting and to welcoming the landscape and urban designers alongside the architectural team. We encourage the team to secure an autumn meeting slot with DCFW quickly and demand is high.

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

Attendees

Design Team:	David Saxby, ØØ Architecture George Walker, WSP Ian Watkins, Gleeds
Planning Consultant:	Mark Farrar, The Urbanists
Agent/Client/Developer:	City & County of Swansea Council (CCS) Steven Smith, CCS David Owen, LPA, CCS Katy Evans, CCS
Design Review Panel:	
Chair	Andrew Linfoot
Lead Panellist	Alister Kratt
Panel	Martin Knight Neil Williamson John Lloyd Carole-Anne Davies, DCFW Jen Heal, DCFW