

Design Review Report

Westgate Plaza,
Cardiff

DCFW Ref: 64E

Meeting of 18th January 2018



Review Status

Meeting date
Issue date
Scheme location
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Scheme reference number
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PUBLIC

18th January 2018
30th January 2018
Cardiff
Hotel
64E
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 declared.

Consultations to Date

Formal pre-application public consultation is expected to commence in February 2018. A pre-application meeting with the local planning authority took place in November 2017.

The Proposals

The site, where the former Employment Office once stood, is 'left over' and incomplete in urban terms, bordering the north-east of Principality Stadium and neighbouring several heritage buildings, the scale of which are long since dwarfed by the stadium and several surrounding buildings. The older buildings are attractive, however, and sufficient in quality and quantity to demand a clear and sympathetic design response, notwithstanding a brutalist concrete NCP car park. The site is within the St Mary's Street Conservation Area.

A narrow, tall twelve storey, 200-room hotel with food and beverage facilities at ground and first floors is proposed. The proposed form has a narrow frontage to Westgate Street and overlooks the access ramps to the stadium.

Main Points

The following points should be considered to inform further design work prior to a planning application being submitted:

Addressing the streetscape and conservation area context

The building will be the first new building in the street for some years and, therefore, must set a high quality standard for future development, appropriate for the Conservation Area and an important entrance to the national stadium in the capital city. The project provides an important opportunity to start to 'mend' the broken streetscape at the south end of Westgate Street, improving the journey to and from Cardiff Central along this important route.

Through its architectural language, the building must moderate between old and new, street scale and city scale, whilst making a strong case for building in the Conservation Area.

Presenting an active, welcoming and attractive frontage to Westgate Street will be very important. The building must contribute positively to the appearance, natural surveillance and activation of the street and help to repair this frontage.

Access, movement and entrance experience

There are a number of site constraints, most notably the access ramps to the stadium, which make the need for a clear and logical access and entrance strategy crucial.

The two entrances presented at the review could dilute the strength of the main entrance from Westgate Street and it would seem contradictory that the everyday 'front door' faced the empty plaza when the plaza entrance is likely to be closed on event days. However, it is sensible to allow for the lounge/dining areas to open out onto the adjacent ramp/plaza. It is positive that accessibility and inclusive design are being given early consideration in dealing with the complex level changes.

The arrival experiences of guests travelling on foot (perhaps from nearby public transport stops) and by car should be carefully considered. Integrated drop-off points will help to avoid problems with cars pulling up onto pavements and blocking the pedestrian crossing.

Enhancing the public realm

Although the footprint of the site does not include any landscape or public realm, given the joint venture nature of the development, it would be positive for the developer and design team to suggest and present improvements which could be made to make the wider site more attractive and add value to the development and surrounding properties. In particular, proposals which activate the plaza during non-event days (the vast majority of the time) but which are compatible with the need to provide the necessary width and area for the security threshold and emergency exit will add significant amenity value to the hotel proposals and to Westgate Street in general. Such works might include consolidation of the stadium access ramps into a more coherent space, fencing to the service entrance, surface treatments to the ramps, improving accessibility, an impressive and welcoming 'gate' to the stadium plaza and a good quality landscape space for the hotel's lounge and dining areas to spill out on to. There may also be temporary, moveable solutions to creating and outside space for the hotel which can be stored away on match or event days so that the entire width of the ramp is usable. Demonstrating what could be achieved outside the building footprint will help to raise aspirations and ambitions.

The potential positive contributions that this development could make to improve the street and the relationship between the stadium and city are important considerations. Discussions with Millennium Stadium PLC may help to unlock opportunities for viable improvements to the visitor arrival experience and added public value.

Enabling the first floor dining area to open up and look over the ramp plaza would add life and activity to the space, both on match days and ordinary days.

Elevations, articulation and materials

A significant challenge for this project is to deliver a viable building within the constraints of a chain hotel operator whilst achieving the quality demanded of the city centre site in a Conservation Area. Costs will need to be focused effectively to achieve this. The historic buildings on Westgate Street provide a clear precedent for high quality materials and more elaborate facades facing onto the street, with 'quieter', simpler flanking sides and with a similar hierarchy, prioritising ground and first floor 'special treatment' with a more restrained order to the middle and top of the building. Following this historically-proven hierarchy of front and sides, ground, middle and top, could help with the cost-balancing and would be appropriate for the Conservation Area setting.

The quality of materials and detail design will be important, especially on the elevation facing Westgate Street and at street level. The inclusion of windows at the ends of upper floor corridors will help improve the internal hotel environment whilst activating the elevation.

The brick cladding and ordered elevational treatments being explored seem appropriate to the context although the use of subtle variety in texture, pattern and finish within the overall dark brick façade may help reinforce a clear architectural order. The architectural context sketches are attractive and full of character but may be misunderstood if the proposal for an essentially dark-clad building is presented in white.

The articulation at both the top and bottom of taller, simple buildings is especially important and needs to be given further consideration.

Solar access and sun-path testing will help to establish requirements for solar shading which will affect the articulation of the building. The solar shade shown on the north west elevation dilutes the 'sandwich' concept and should be considered further in light of testing and design development.

Environmental strategy

It would be positive to see an ambitious energy and environmental strategy proposed, which includes fabric-first and passive design approaches on top of the prescriptions set out by the hotel operator.

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

Attendees

Agent/Client/Developer:	Jason Hyett & John Evans, Rightacres Property
Architect/Planning Consultant:	Alan Francis, Romy Franke & Manuel Lago, Gaunt Francis Matthew Williams, McCann and Partners
Local Planning Authority:	
Design Review Panel:	
Chair	Jen Heal, Design Advisor, DCFW
Lead Panellist	Martin Knight Alister Kratt Mark Lawton Amanda Spence, Design Advisor, DCFW Carole-Anne Davies, CE, DCFW