

Statws/Status:
Cyfrinachol / Confidential



Adroddiad Adolygu Dylunio: Design Review Report:	14 December 2007
Dyddiad Cyfarfod / Meeting Date	5 December 2007
Lleoliad/Location:	Alexandra Rd Swansea
Disgrifiad o'r Cynllun Scheme Description:	Student accommodation + hotel
Developer/Datblygwr:	RDE Silex Ltd [David Edwards] Opal [Lisa Timberlake]
Pensaer/Architect:	Boyes Rees Architects [Gary Loo]
Awdurdod Cynllunio: Planning Authority:	City & Council of Swansea [David Gill, Huw Mowbray, Lee Richards]
Statws Cynllunio: Planning Status:	Pre-application
Y Panel Adolygu Dylunio/ Design Review Panel: Richard Parnaby (cadeirydd/chair) Cindy Harris (swyddog/officer) Charlie Deng (swyddog/officer) Ann-Marie Smale	Lyn Owen Michael Griffiths Phil Roberts
Lead Panellist:	Ann-Marie Smale
Sylwedyddion/Observers:	Alison Smith – WAG

Cyflwyniad/Presentation

The developer stated that this was an exciting development in city centre living, close to the main railway station and the proposed metro link. It was intended to be a model and catalyst for future regeneration in the area, would increase north/south traffic through the city, redressing the balance away from SA1, and provide a landmark structure to divert attention away from Alexandra House. The City Centre Strategic Framework was launched in March 07 and has been adopted as policy. This site was identified in the framework as suitable for commercial development and classed as a 'gateway' site. The Local Authority officer confirmed that these proposals meet the requirements of the framework and represent an 'early win' in the implementation of the framework.

The proposal is for a 153 bed, 3 or 4 star hotel with restaurant; a block of student accommodation [23 storeys at its highest] with 692 student rooms; 550 m² of retail space over two units; a central area of public open space and a north/south pedestrian route through the site.

The simple palette of materials includes glass, render and smooth metal cladding. Solar shading and wind investigations are due to be carried out. The team is considering a biomass heating system, following the example of their similar scheme in Newport, and grey water recycling. They stated that this was a sustainable site, close to public transport facilities, with substantial cycle parking provided and limited car parking.

The Local Authority have been working on this proposal for the last 12 months and recognise that it is a sensitive site in a key location. They support the scheme in principle and think that the proposed design solution is bold and mould-breaking, but also asserted that, with tall buildings in particular, the quality of the architecture has to be exceptional. Swansea's tall buildings policy shows this as an area where tall buildings will be considered [rather than encouraged]. The Authority think that progress on this scheme is encouraging, although the design needs further development and the exact form and height is still under discussion. The quantum of development and mix of uses are positive features, as is the comprehensive site treatment with active frontages and minimal car parking. A shadow analysis, wind and climatic studies will be important in their consideration.

Ymateb y Panel/Panel's Response

The Panel expressed our disappointment with the quality of the presentation documentation. We recognised that this is a significant site in the city, and deserves a much better consideration of the existing and proposed urban grain. The presentation material failed to show how this proposal relates to its

context and we were unable to elicit any rationale for some of the major design decisions. For example the location of the public square and the pedestrian route [which appears to end in a service layby] was not justified in terms of a clear analysis of the site in its context. We advised the team to produce a visual impact assessment and a physical model showing the scale of this development in its context.

The Panel was informed that the developer was negotiating for the site across Mariner Street and would like eventually to absorb Mariner Street into the new development, probably retaining it as a service road. This shed new light on the route through this site towards Mariner Street but the Panel considered that this information should have been provided with the presentation material. We were not convinced that pedestrian connectivity to a service street was desirable and thought that it was unnecessary to take footfall off New Orchard Street and High Street.

The Panel agreed that development on this site should include a significant public open space but was not convinced that the currently proposed location and form was appropriate. We queried whether the proposed public square would be an inviting outdoor space and noted that it reduced in width to 10 metres in places. We thought that wind tunnel studies would be critical to test the usability of this space and should have been done at the concept stage. If the square is retained in its present form, we do not see any advantage of a through route leading to Mariner Street.

The designer agreed to look at a self-contained solution for the public square, but stated that it would depend on the future use of Mariner Street. The Panel agreed that the future of the adjacent site to the north was very pertinent to this development. We stated clearly that a self-contained square in its current location would not be our preferred solution.

We disagreed that this was a scheme which dealt well with its edges. Indeed we thought that huge opportunities were being missed to create a vibrant public street. The main block entrances are recessed and access is convoluted. The student block shows a launderette on the street frontage while a smaller common room or office is located internally with no windows. Service functions are located on street frontages to the north and west. We did not think that retail unit 1 would be an attractive location for a coffee shop and suggested that, whatever form the public space eventually took, it was essential that as much of the ground floor as possible should be active frontage – retail, other publically accessible space or at the very least largely glazed frontages revealing activity within the buildings.

The proposal adds nothing to the existing public space outside the station and the tall tower will be overly dominant and oppressive. We would like to see the possibility explored of locating the hotel on this corner of the site, opposite the station, and merging the new public space with the existing to create a new station square with a genuine sense of arrival and excitement.

We think the tower is too tall for this location, could set an unfortunate precedent, and the proposal as a whole represents significant overdevelopment. The architecture is unambitious, given the scale of the opportunity, and the scheme desperately needs a much stronger urban design concept.

The Panel was informed that the site ownership was currently divided between the developer, the council, and Network Rail. It was confirmed that a needs assessment was carried out in conjunction with the university and Swansea Institute. The university were very positive as they are planning a strategic relocation of student accommodation, to enable other sites to be improved.

The Panel requested further details of parking arrangements. A drop off layby is located in front of the hotel entrance, and there will be spaces dedicated for hotel use in the multi-storey car park across the road, possibly with valet parking. The 15 on site spaces are provided for disabled, staff, and short stay parking. The possibility of basement or undercroft parking and service plant location was discounted as unaffordable. Servicing for the retail units will be from Mariner Street and the developer will aim for out of hours servicing. There are currently three pedestrian crossings linking to this site but the intention is to look at the whole area and extend the public realm design beyond the site boundaries, with funding from the city.

The Panel noted the commitment to a BREEAM Very Good rating, and the developer's involvement in helping to develop a BREEAM standard for hotels. We were encouraged by the proposed biomass heating system and noted that space had been allocated for fuel storage. We urged the team to avoid individual electric heating and to use a single centralised heating system.

Crynodeb/Summary

The Panel welcomed the principle of mixed use development on this site. However, the complete lack of site analysis has led to some unfortunate design decisions and we consider the current proposal is an unacceptable response to the site and context. In particular:

- The presentation materials were inadequate and unconvincing and lacked a clear analysis of the setting and justification of the proposal.
- We are not convinced by the proposed level of development and find the current scheme to be overscaled and oppressive in its massing.
- The architectural quality is disappointing and needs a much stronger design concept.
- The quality of urban design is poor. The connectivity and public square have no apparent rationale, entrances are not legible, there are too many dead street frontages, and the road network round the site is

hostile to pedestrians. The relationship to the existing public realm outside the station is dire.

- We are encouraged by the consideration of a biomass heating system but urge the team to install a single site-wide heating system irrespective of the fuel used. We would like to see a target of BREEAM Excellent adopted.
- We think the Local Authority has a major role to play in developing this site and achieving a successful design solution. We think the current proposal, if built, would come to blight this corner of Swansea.

Diwedd/End

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