

Design Review Report: 16 November 2004

Meeting Date / Material Submitted: 3 November 2004

Location: Brackla Centre Bridgend

Scheme Description: Residential / Retail

Architects / Design Team: Wigley Fox [Chris Young,
Martin Hayman, David Morley]

Client: Hawkstone Properties Ltd
[Andy Kirton]

Planning Authority: Bridgend County Borough Council
[Martin Hooke, Graeme Oram]

Planning Status: Full application lodged

Design Review Panel:

John Punter (chair)	Paul Vanner
Cindy Harris (officer)	Ed Colgan
Howard Wainwright	Douglas Hogg
Nigel Hansen	

Presentation

Hawkstone Properties, a specialist leisure and residential developer and owners of the site for the last two years, intend to redevelop the Brackla Shopping Centre into a vibrant and attractive mixed use scheme. New apartments [about 20 per cent of which will be affordable housing], will be built above a new large retail outlet and linked by a refurbished mall to the existing units on Brackla Street, the facades of which will be rebuilt to respond to the new retail/residential scheme on Cheapside. Hawkstone have identified substantial latent demand for residential units in the town centre and have a large retailer interested in the new large store unit operator.

Just over 200 one, two and three bedroom apartments will be accommodated in a 4-9 storey U-shaped block oriented to the south and built over the new two level retail unit. The

variation in height is seen as a positive feature, stepping down from the dominant corner adjacent to ASDA and seeking to respect the height and massing of adjacent buildings. 94 parking spaces are provided at the three lower levels. Additional car parking might be leased by residents in the upgraded multi-storey carpark opposite.

Existing retail units will be 're-branded' with a unified façade treatment above the shopfronts and new glazed canopy. Upgrading work will be carried out around ongoing retail operations with minimal disruption, and this is the dominant constraint on the design. The existing anchor store on the corner of Cheapside will be demolished and rebuilt, and a corner entrance feature will provide a focal point and direct pedestrians and shoppers into the store and downstairs to connect to the arcade.

It is hoped that with the completion of this scheme and the new ASDA store to the east, the open space in between will be upgraded by the local authority. The police station to the north east is likely to remain and possibly expand, although it was noted that the site is likely to increase in value as a result of the surrounding development.

Panel's response

The Panel appreciates that the advent of the new ASDA store will increase the footfall in this area and provide a shift in the economic activity of the town. In principle a large new retail unit with substantial residential space above in this edge-of-town-centre location is welcomed. However, the Panel's concern is with the bulk and height of the proposed development in a predominantly low-rise 18th and 19th century market town, and the precedent it will set for future high-rise residential development in the town. This concern is deepened by the relatively elevated site out of the valley bottom, which will make it especially visible, and by the height and blocky massing of the scheme.

Secondly, the panel is concerned with the failure to use this redevelopment opportunity to improve the environs of Cheapside and its connections with the town centre.

The major problem with the scheme is that only part of the site is to be redeveloped leaving the single storey Brackla Street frontages under-developed, the Cheapside façade blank at the street level over most of its length, the internal mall merely an unattractive covered walkway cutting off the corner, and the eastern half of the site grossly over-developed.

The cosmetic refacing of the Brackla Street façade will date very quickly, while the inclusion of mosaics and differentiating the materials on the Cheapside façade will do nothing to improve its safety or vitality.

The Panel considers that Cheapside needs to be improved as an active pedestrian link to the town centre, rather than just a service road. The Panel expressed concern that a main pedestrian route was being created through the shopping centre and one retail unit in particular, which would only be open during certain hours, especially as the ASDA store, at one end of this route, was likely to be open for 24 hours.

Servicing of this development will be via existing access routes to the north, although some changes will be necessary to incorporate the new vehicular access to the car park. The developer intends to make a contribution to improving the public realm between the retail unit and ASDA. While the proposals do improve this very unsafe area by removing the

underpasses they do not constitute the provision of a quality pedestrian space, bisected as it is by service and parking access to the retail and residential units.

There is currently no sustainable development strategy for this proposal and the developer agreed to give this aspect due consideration. It was agreed that arguments could be made for the under-provision of car parking in this location as part of that strategy.

The architectural treatment of the residential was considered to be good, but it could not obviate the problems of height, bulk and massing. The main entrance and tower are unconvincing.

Summary

The Panel welcomes the principle of reinforcing the retail offer of the town centre through mixed use development and supports the introduction of more residential uses. We recognise that these proposals are constrained by the existing layout of the shopping centre and the developer's need to keep the existing units trading while the redevelopment takes place. However, we do not consider that these proposals significantly improve the locality and set the right sort of precedent for retail refurbishment or residential development. Rather the proposals threaten to further blight this rather unpleasant extension of the town centre, while in the process disfiguring the skyline of the town and the residential area to the south.

In summary we would make the following points :

- The panel were disappointed at the passive attitude of the local authority to the future of this area and at the failure to develop a strategy for better linking this area with the town centre and providing a safe and pleasant public realm.
- The bulk and massing of these proposals is unacceptable. The panel would prefer to see three storeys of residential units wrapped around the entire perimeter of the scheme above the retail ground floors. This would restore some coherence and vitality to the area and provide more residential amenity space above the retail. Some additional height would be acceptable adjacent to ASDA but 6-7 storeys would be the maximum.
- The panel do not endorse the strategy of establishing a route through this shopping centre, and the new anchor store, as the main link between the town centre and the ASDA store. The 24 hour route through Cheapside must be made safe and surveilled and not be left as a blank façade, prejudicing any future redevelopment to the north or any improvements to the public realm.
- The comprehensive redevelopment of this site is required to significantly improve the retail functions of this southern edge of the town centre, and to give back to the residents of Bridgend an environment of some quality.
- The current proposals threaten to add insult to injury by keeping many of the worst features of the current obsolete development, albeit disguised by new facades, and then adding a massive apartment block that violates the town's low rise skyline and looms over adjacent terraced streets. The precedent established by such a decision

would be an open invitation to other developers to prepare proposals of similar insensitivity and overdevelopment.

End

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