

Addroddiad Adolygu Dylunio Design Review Report

Review Status: Confidential

Meeting date:	8th December 2010
Issue Date:	15th December 2010
Scheme Location:	Dumfries Place, Cardiff
Scheme Description:	Commercial
Planning Status:	Pre-application

Part1: Presentation

The proposal is for a new speculative office block, located to the north of Dumfries House and Marchmount House, and accessed via St Andrew’s Lane. The site is adjacent to the Windsor Place conservation area. The plot is currently a surface car park (with access to basement parking) serving Marchmount House, and includes an electricity sub-station. There is nearby access to the Dumfries Place multi storey car park.

The development team describe the site as a ‘frontage opportunity’ for St Andrew’s Lane, and are keen to develop Grade A commercial space for rent of a higher quality than is currently available in the city centre, to meet apparent demand for smaller, new commercial spaces that offer flexibility for sub-division. The team was keen to inform the Panel that there has been no new development in the core of the city centre for the last 15 years and this was an opportunity to build a high quality, highly visible building for commercial use, in response to a demand for smaller floorplate units identified by the agents.

Many options have been tested with different forms and massing. Although this building would be separated from Marchmount House by just 5.5 metres at its narrowest point, the team maintains that there are no ‘right to light’ issues. The ownership of Marchmount House and this site are in the same hands.

The proposed design commits to BREEAM Excellent with a building that is energy efficient and offers a presence in the context of this important commercial area of the city centre. The proposal includes the provision of active frontage to St Andrew’s Lane that would improve the area for pedestrians and provide a limited retail opportunity at street level.

The development team has held several pre-planning discussions with Cardiff City Council who consider this to be a backland site and have concerns about the relationship of the proposed building with the conservation area. The Local Authority is not yet in a position to support this scheme but is actively working with the team. The preferred option, which will be informally presented to the Planning Committee, has evolved from the need to maximise the floorplate on the site, respect the existing building to the south, and to announce its presence and establish its visibility within the city.

Summary of key points arising from discussion, to be read in conjunction with Part 2 of this report.

The Panel was pleased to review the proposal for this city centre site at an early stage. We think that major issues remain to be addressed. In summary:

- Given that this plot is part of a larger block in the same ownership, a more holistic approach should be taken to the redevelopment of the whole block over time, and evidence presented to show that this scheme forms an integral part of that redevelopment.
- While we recognise that there are site constraints which are an important part of the design, we are concerned that commercial pressures are driving the architectural response to the immediate context.
- The visual impact of this scheme when viewed from the conservation area has not been fully justified.
- The scheme should deliver positive benefits to the immediate public realm, over and above the creation of a small area of active frontage (although we welcome this).
- We welcome the commitment to BREEAM Excellent, but advise that the full height glazing to three of the four elevations should be re-assessed, in light of the overriding imperative for energy efficiency and conservation.

Part 2: Discussion and Panel Response in Full

The Panel identified the tension between the backland location and the desire for grade A office space as problematic, and questioned whether this was the right site for this development. The inherent lack of visibility afforded by the site has to be compensated for by an attempt to announce the building in a way which does not respond well to the adjacent conservation area. This adjacency requires a better response in terms of appropriate scale and character.

It was agreed that this is not a gateway site, and the team stated that the design development was driven by issues of viability rather than the desire to create a landmark building. Nevertheless, we thought that the constraints of the site were creating a commercial deficit which required a compensatory and overstated architectural response. In effect, commercial pressure appeared to be driving the architectural form.

The Panel would like to see the opportunity for active frontage onto St Andrew's Lane used to lift the spatial quality of the immediate area, which should include improvements to the public realm. The creation of an attraction at the end of the road would help to improve access and usability, and the input of the Local Authority in this regard would help to

deliver a positive contribution to the area. The Panel was concerned about the amount of space available at ground floor for servicing. We suggested that the small area of adjacent land could be used to provide servicing, storage and refuse, which would free up the rear of the building and maximise use of the site. The team explained that Network Rail required access to this area.

The Panel noted that this site was in the same ownership as the two blocks to the south and southeast. This would appear to present a unique opportunity to assess the long term future of the whole block, and plan for sympathetic and compatible redevelopment options covering the next decades. While we accept that this is an ambitious approach and it may not be economic to plan a wholesale redevelopment at the moment, at the very least this design should anticipate future development, rather than responding to an office building which on the advice of the agent is not what the market requires, and which may therefore become redundant sooner rather than later.

The Panel welcomed the commitment to BREEAM Excellent, but we questioned the compatibility of this aspiration with the loss of energy efficiency represented by full height glazing. The team pointed out that glazing was mostly to the north and west, and shading on the western elevation would be provided, probably in the form of vertical louvres. Thermal modelling is being carried out, and the designer appreciated the need to balance energy conservation with good daylight levels and delightful spaces, which would appeal to prospective clients. We doubted that full height glazing was the correct solution to this balancing exercise, and in particular we advised that the lower 800mm of glazed walls does not contribute at all to internal daylight levels.

The ventilation strategy will depend on low velocity, displacement ventilation with exposed concrete soffits, night time cooling and openable windows. The Panel questioned the feasibility of opening windows given the proximity of the railway line and the team agreed that additional acoustic protection may be necessary. We thought that the 5.5m gap at the pinch point with the adjacent building may involve losing some BREEAM credits.

The Design Commission for Wales Design Review Panel and staff welcome further consultation and will be happy to provide further feedback on this report and/or where appropriate, to receive further presentations. Thank you for consulting the Commission and please keep in touch with us about the progress of your project.

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

Appendix 1: Attendees

Asiant/Client/Datblygwr:
Agent/Client/Developer

Sydney and London Properties Ltd
[Richard Anning]

Pensaer/Architect:

Holder Mathias Architects [Stephen Hill]

Consultants:

BNP Paribas [Anthony Phillips]

AwdurdodCynllunio/
Planning Authority

Cardiff CC [Lawrence Dowdall]

Y Panel Adlygu Dylunio:
Design Review Panel:
Wendy Richards [Chair]
Cindy Harris [Officer]
Jonathan Hines

Toby Adam
Kieren Morgan
Ashley Bateson
Simon Carne

Lead Panellist:

Toby Adam

Sylwedyddion/Observers:

Sue Jones [DCFW]

Declaration of interest: Jonathan Hines declared that his cousin is a director of HMA