



Design Review Report

Mariner Street, Swansea

DCFW Ref: N59

Meeting of 28th January 2016



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.

Review Status

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

PUBLIC

28th January 2016
15th February 2016
Mariner Street, Swansea
Student Accommodation
N59
Pre-application

Declarations of Interest

None declared.

Consultations to Date

This was the third opportunity that DCFW had to review the proposals with previous review held in June 2015 and December 2014. The intention to develop student accommodation on this site was most recently reported in the South Wales Evening post on 20 January 2015.

The Proposals

This proposal is for full clearance of the site and the development of approximately 700 units of student accommodation with ground floor commercial use. It is proposed that Varsity Halls will develop and manage the property.

Main Points

This was the third time that the Design Commission for Wales had been consulted through its design review service on this significant project and we welcomed the positive improvements and advancements made since the last review.

Two options for the form and massing of the building were still being considered when the scheme was presented at review. DCFW supports the lower plinth, link and tower approach (this was the option that was presented at design review and referred to as Design Proposal January 2016) which has a stronger form and greater clarity than the other option presented. The following comments are made in relation to the proposals for this approach and should be considered as the design is moved forward.

Approach from the northeast

Consideration has been given to views of the development from the east, south and west but the view of the tower and the building's response to street from the northeast should also be considered. In particular, relocation of the escape stair and service area away from the north-east corner would enable this corner to be activated rather than blank. The location of entrances and windows along the east elevation needs to be very clear and the final use of this ground floor unit needs to ensure that a transparent 'active' frontage is maintained, rather than it being blocked up (as may be the case for an open A1 use)

Additionally, the sketches show a highly articulated south elevation to the tower but the north and east elevations are less developed. All of the facades need careful consideration and articulation, particularly given the height of the tower. The ideas for facade design presented in the options sketches have good potential but the detail is not yet known.

Retail units

The flexibility of the retail unit on the east side of the development is severely compromised by stairwell A. Options for revising the location of the stairwell or not bringing it down to the ground floor (through the retail unit) should be explored.

The parking spaces associated with the larger retail unit have the potential to create an unattractive and hostile environment at ground level, as it will lack natural daylight and natural surveillance and could feel very unsafe. We have concerns about what the space will be like between the car park and the entrance to the unit and how this space will be managed. We question whether the parking in this location is needed given the urban context, access challenges and location to the rear of the retail unit. Removing these parking spaces would provide more space for servicing, cycle parking and drop-off. Similarly removing the parking spaces for management staff would provide much needed room to the rear of the building.

The Design Commission for Wales support the proposal for greater storey height on the ground floor which will benefit the interior spaces as well as the presence of the building on the street. The height should be able to adequately accommodate the plant requirements in the northwest corner which may increase the ground floor storey height further than the 4.5 metres currently proposed. How this corner of the building will work, including location of service doors, louvers and ventilation outlets, needs further development and explanation.

Cycle parking

The 'cycle hub' could be a positive addition to the mix of uses at ground floor but much more space is also needed for cycle parking, which should be secure and easy to use.

Public realm

Now that the form of the building and location of entrances are close to being settled, the wider public realm plans should show the proposed scheme as well as the context of pedestrian crossings that are already in place. This will help the understanding of movement of people to and through the site and buildings.

The entrances to each of the different elements of the building need to be very clear and distinct. The main entrance to the accommodation is not currently clearly visible and offers no canopy or protection from the weather.

Microclimate

A wind study should be undertaken to test the impact of down-draft on the ground floor and in particular the entrance to the retail unit to the east of the site.

Solar modelling would also help in the design of the facades and whether brise-soleil are needed on the south and west windows.

Identity

DFCW supports the idea of each part of the development having a clear identity and consider that this can be achieved with the plinth, link and tower option through the use of materials. Given that this is now the supported option, some further clarity in the massing and roofscape of the 'plinth' element is needed and should be developed in conjunction with the materials and identity of this block.

Next Steps

Materials and elevation design were not addressed in detail at the review but will need to be developed to a high quality and in line with the design concept. Comments made in previous reviews regarding fenestration and detail still apply.

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

Attendees

Architect:	David Ogden, Day Architectural Ltd Tony Catherall, Day Architectural Ltd
Local Planning Authority:	Lee Richards, Regeneration, City & County of Swansea Council Steven Smith, Urban Designer City & County of Swansea Council
Design Review Panel:	
Chair	Alan Francis
Lead Panellist	Lynne Sullivan Simon Carne Jonathan Vernon Smith Maria Asenjo Jen Heal, Design Advisor, DCFW
Observers	David Owen, Andrew Ferguson, Tom Evans, Lucy Kelly, Liam Jones, Huw Jenkins – City & County of Swansea