

# Design Review Report

Mariner Street, Swansea

**DCFW Ref: 59**

Meeting of 9<sup>th</sup> December  
2014



## Declarations of Interest

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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

### CONFIDENTIAL

Meeting date	9 <sup>th</sup> December 2014
Issue date	14 <sup>th</sup> January 2015
Scheme location	Mariner Street, Swansea
Scheme description	Student Accommodation
Scheme reference number	59
Planning status	Pre-application

## Declarations of Interest

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None declared.

## Consultations to Date

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Pre-application consultation has been undertaken with both the planning and regeneration departments of the local authority.

## The Proposals

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This proposal is for development comprising a 700 unit student accommodation and ground floor commercial use, with some parking. It is proposed that Varsity Halls will develop and manage the property.

The current design presents three blocks, of six, nine and 16 storeys, with sculpted, faceted forms, finished in three different materials. Living room spaces for bedroom groups are to be located at the corners of the blocks, with shared common rooms at roof level.

The submission of a planning application is anticipated for March 2015.

## Main Points

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The Design Commission for Wales welcomed the opportunity to consider this significant development at this stage in the design, where there is still scope to add value and positively influence the proposals, enabling a constructive discussion.

The design team's presentation revealed more about the 'story' of the design than the submitted written material including the progression through vision, analysis and

emerging proposals. When preparing a Design and Access Statement (DAS) to support the future application these gaps should be addressed so that the narrative and visual material, clearly demonstrates the rationale underpinning the design approach.

The iterations explored in testing and arriving at a concept are fundamental to understanding the outcome and the proposal's strengths. The site analysis showed a depth that is not at this stage, reflected in the concept development.

The early concept sketches shown are not yet informed by consideration of the means of achieving any environmental/energy performance aspirations and targets or how they will influence design decisions. Orientation of the buildings, links between depth and height of the internal spaces, their mechanical systems and façade treatments will all be influenced and this needs to be better demonstrated.

Images tabled at the meeting, of previous similar developments, assisted an understanding of budgeting, materials and overall quality. However, we have not yet seen this understanding of costs brought into the illustrated ambitions for the façades, which will be crucial to success of the proposed scheme.

### **Height and roofscape**

A good analysis of the views into the site has been undertaken and recognition of the impact of the development on the skyline has highlighted the importance of the roofscape. The proposed 'carved/faceted' form of the roof seeks to address this but the impact on the internal layout and views out from the building also need to be considered to inform design decisions. Overshadowing and daylight studies would also assist in these decisions.

The Design Commission is open to a tall building(s) in this location but would like to see the reasoning for this proposal supported by analysis and a review of the options considered. The three blocks proposed result in overlooking issues that need greater consideration in order to be dealt with and there are similar challenges at ground level, in integrating the development into the fabric of the city. It is not clear what other options have been considered. For example a review of a perimeter block development and the required height to accommodate the required number of units could lead to a viable alternative option.

### **Gateway and placemaking**

The design team has focussed consideration on this site as a 'gateway' that greets those arriving by train, is visible from afar and marks the northern edge of the city centre. The Commission would also like to see urban design analysis at the street level to inform how the development relates to the public realm and creates a sense of place. There is potential to improve and/or make a positive contribution to the city with this development by increasing footfall, establishing active frontages and a creating comfortable public realm; restoring a city block that is currently broken.

The location and nature of any 'public' space created within the development needs clarity. If a truly public space is to be created it should be open and welcoming to all with private spaces separately and clearly defined. There is a strong argument that the focus of public space in this area should be at the front of the railway station and

therefore a public space is not appropriate on this site. It is also not clear what function a public space on this site would have.

If this is accepted, the focus should be on the width and quality of pavements to ensure they create a comfortable pedestrian environment. Sectional studies of the site edges and their relationship to the functions in the immediate environment might assist in developing the design. Current analysis and plans from Swansea Council for the pavements, barriers and streetscape in the area should be drawn into this work to provide an integrated design that will improve the ease of movement for pedestrians.

This site works as an urban block and, although there is potential for future development to the north, pedestrian links through the site from north to south are not considered necessary.

There is a view that Mariner Street would remain open at this time, with the potential of it being closed to become a service street. There is no obvious benefit from partial closure of Mariner Street, however if this is the local authority ambition and can be justified, then it must be allowed for and properly considered in the proposed design.

Located at the northern end of High Street, the site has the potential to accommodate some commercial ground floor uses and the Design Commission considers the eastern edges of the site to be the most appropriate location for this. The team should explore how ground floor uses could contribute to the regeneration proposals for High Street which has a more independent and 'quirky' nature. Some of the plans show an existing corner café building retained, however, in discussion this was described as being earmarked for removal. Clarification of this is important, there does not appear to be any merit in retaining one small part of what was a terrace of buildings.

The Design Commission is supportive of reduced parking provision for the development although mitigation measures may be required in the surrounding streets.

### **Next Steps**

As the design moves forward the Design Commission would like to see the vision for the development refined and used, along with practical and rational reasoning, to form the basis for design decisions in relation to the form of the building, roofscape and facade treatment as well as the surrounding public realm design. This reasoning should include environmental considerations (such as solar orientation and prevailing winds), the impact of views in and out, the functional layout of the internal and external spaces and overshadowing.

The Design Commission is fully supportive of the comprehensive approach to the redevelopment of this city block and the regeneration potential that this development could have through increased footfall in this location. The ambitions of the design team to create an interesting skyline need to extend down the building to the ground floor to ensure that this development becomes part of the fabric of the city that supports a high quality public realm.

We are keen to see this scheme again and encourage the team to return to the Commission approximately a month/six weeks before a planning application is to be submitted.

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

## Attendees

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Architectural Designer:	David Ogden, Day Architectural LTD Tony Catherall, Day Architectural LTD
Developer/Landowner:	David Edwards, RDE Silex
Local Authority:	Lee Richards, Regeneration Steve Smith, Urban Designer
Design Review Panel:	
Chair	Ewan Jones
Panel	Maria Asenjo Steven Smith Jen Heal, Design Advisor, DCFW