



DESIGN
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Design Review Report

Mariner Street, Swansea

DCFW Ref: 59

Meeting of 18th June 2015



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

CONFIDENTIAL

Meeting date	18 th June 2015
Issue date	6 th July 2015
Scheme location	Mariner Street, Swansea
Scheme description	Student Accommodation
Scheme reference number	59
Planning status	Pre-application

Declarations of Interest

None declared.

Consultations to Date

Pre-application consultation has been undertaken with both the planning and regeneration departments of the local authority. The Design Commission for Wales was consulted through its Design Review Service on this proposal in December 2014.

The Proposals

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

Main Points

The Design Commission for Wales welcomed the opportunity to review the proposals for this significant development a second time. The following key points resulted from the discussion.

Concept

The mix of uses proposed and the amount of development remains largely the same as at the previous review but the proposed form of the building has changed. As a result of the changes made the design has become confused and is missing many of the qualities and strength of the original concept sketches previously presented.

The earlier review highlighted the need to give further consideration to the ground floor and how the development addresses the streets and public realm to create a positive contribution to the urban grain of the city.

It is positive that the potential ground level benefits of a perimeter block approach are being explored in the current design iteration but, as a result of these changes, many of the qualities relating to the clarity of the original scheme have been lost. We would have liked to have seen the architectural intent of the previous scheme maintained and improved through the exploration of options for the ground floor, rather than wholesale change. Although some improvement has been made at the street level other aspects of the design are now less well resolved and lack coherence.

Public Realm

The current proposals have started to address the edges of the site and provide a clearer distinction between public and private space but some spaces remain ambiguous. Where there are spaces that appear to be left over around the building, the value and contribution that these make to the public realm need to be reviewed – do they improve the function of the building and contribute to the public realm or have they come about as a result of other design decisions? For example, the eastern edge of the building is set back from the existing building line, what will happen in this space and what value will this add to the scheme?

The introduction of one main entrance is welcomed and the provision of space around this entrance has a sound rationale. The corner closest to the railway station, however, requires further work as the colonnade is not currently convincing. Relocating the proposed gym from the top floor to the ground floor could help to activate this elevation and improve the relationship between the building and the street. The Commission still considers the eastern edge of the site to be the most appropriate location for ground floor commercial uses

The impact of wind and shade on the streets and 'private' external spaces needs to inform the nature and design of these spaces. Wind testing needs to be undertaken as it could have an impact on the form of the building particularly as the width of the proposed tall tower is facing the prevailing wind.

Sustainability

We would like to know more about the sustainability strategy for the building and how this is informing the design as sustainability targets have not yet been expressed. Integrated PV panels are indicated on the southern elevation but the treatment of this glazed elevation will also need careful consideration to avoid overheating. An integrated sustainability strategy at this stage would help to inform the design and improve the performance of the building.

Upper Storeys

Above the ground level the design could be freer in form. Given the scale of the building it must be a confident design and it can be bold as it will be viewed from a distance- a very clear architectural concept is needed. The initial analysis of distant views was helpful but the current design now needs to be checked against the analysis.

Inevitably this will be a large building so be honest and confident about the size of the building, additional height is not necessarily a concern if it is designed well. The current range of storey heights from seven, nine, eleven and then up to 19 reduces the clarity of the building. The taller elements are not reading as towers but as slabs and it is not clear whether this is a design intent. A choice needs to be made about the location of the tallest element of the building based on its overall composition, long distance views of the site and its impact on surrounding buildings.

Day lighting and views out have started to be considered and these need to continue to be tested to help inform the design.

A working physical model would be very helpful with the exploration of the massing of the building and the concept of carving into the facades. This will also help to appreciate the relationship of the building with the surrounding area and the resulting spaces.

Facades

Concern was expressed by the design team about repetition in the fenestration of the building. It is good that this has been identified as a risk as this can be a problem with student accommodation but there may also be value in exploring the elegance of repetition and how it could be used to create an interesting form.

The facade treatment may vary across the building and consideration should be given to where to focus investment. Any variation should clearly emerge from an overall architectural concept, reinforcing planning and massing ideas and avoiding apparently 'random' application of variety. The treatment of the ground floors, where people will be up close to the building, may be different to the treatment of the higher storeys where distant views will be more important. A realistic palette of facade materials needs to be presented given the indicative budget of £1600 per square metre.

Significance

This project is important as a gateway to the city, in repairing a city block and bringing more people to live in the city centre. It is also substantial in size and it is therefore important that it not only succeeds but is of the highest standard of design.

The Commission would like to see the design team rediscover the purity of the original vision whilst continuing to work on the form of the ground floor which has improved but still needs work. Going back to street level urban design analysis and using diagrams to clarify the design objectives for the site might help with this. Fundamentally the building needs to address the urban block, the skyline and provide the required number of bedrooms. Therefore a strong concept is required for each of these elements. Following this the character of the building needs to be developed.

Cross sections, skyline analysis, a physical model, and wind modelling should be used to test and refine the design. We are open to what the solution will be, it is up to the design team to test, review, refine, justify and present their proposals with confidence.

Next Steps

The Design Commission remains fully supportive of the comprehensive approach to the redevelopment of this city block and the regeneration potential that this development could have. Given the lack of clarity in the design presented at this review we are very

keen to see it again. The design team are to confirm whether August would be appropriate for a subsequent review.

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

Attendees

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
Lead Panellist	Maria Asenjo
Panel	Elfed Roberts Simon Carne Michael Griffiths Michael Gwyther-Jones Jen Heal, Design Advisor, DCFW