

# Design Review Report

Custom House Street Hotel,  
Cardiff

**DCFW Ref: N150**

Meeting of 6<sup>th</sup> July 2017



**Review Status**

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

**PUBLIC**

6<sup>th</sup> July 2017  
13<sup>th</sup> July 2017  
Cardiff  
Hotel  
N150  
Pre-application

## 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.

None declared.

## Consultations to Date

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A statutory public consultation process was completed at the end of June 2017.

## The Proposals

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The Custom House is Grade II listed, and has been empty for many years. It is one of the few remaining buildings in this area from a time when the Canal ran through the city. Now, this area is where more high-rise buildings have been located, along Custom House St/Bute Terrace and on the opposite corner (Clayton Hotel), and where more are planned. It is a strategic location where key routes run beneath the GWR line to London. It also forms part of the visual 'full stop' at the end of the commercial part of St Mary Street.

A new 248-bedroom hotel and bar/restaurant is proposed (Premier Inn). The bar/restaurant is to be located behind the retained façade of the Custom House, with the hotel in a 18-storey tower set behind the existing building. Servicing is proposed to the rear and side, with the constraint of the railway line and various easements and maintenance zones impacting on the proposals.

## Main Points

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The project presents an excellent opportunity to significantly improve a neglected corner of Cardiff city centre. The proposed development use as a hotel is appropriate in this location given the proximity to major public transport and the lack of hotel provision in the city. The location also appears to be appropriate for a tall building in line with the local authority's adopted Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) on the design of tall buildings. In general, there is scope to clarify conceptual approaches and strengthen their articulation, particularly in relation to:

- Listed building façade retention;
- Façade design;
- Entrance configuration.

The following points summarise key issues from the review and should be considered to inform any further work ahead of a planning application being submitted:

### **Approach to listed building**

A thorough analysis of the history of the site and the listed building has been carried out and was presented in pre-review material. It would be useful for the team to clearly set out in the planning application documentation the ways in which this analysis has informed and led to the façade retention approach and the demolition of the York Hotel and Custom House extension proposed.

The façade retention of the Custom House approach appears to be appropriate in this case, given the condition of the existing building and its limited architectural value described in the review. Demolition of the condemned York Hotel also seems justifiable for the same reason. The argument for demolishing the section of the Custom House which was a later extension needs further justification. If it is being demolished to give the new building greater presence at street level, this opportunity should be fully exploited.

The articulation of the junctions between the old and new will be particularly important to overall quality and will help to express the conceptual approach to retaining the façade. The proposed glazed elevation to replace the York Hotel frontage works well. However, constructing a replica return to the retained façade adjacent to the proposed Hotel entrance is less convincing and dilutes the clarity of the approach. A glazed 'slot' between the old and new might provide the required clarity and should as an option, be fully tested. There may be some useful lessons to be learned from the precedent studies cited by the design team (which should be fully referenced in the planning application documentation) in developing a design philosophy for the treatment of the façade.

### **Entrance design**

The configuration and articulation the hotel entrance is particularly important as this is where the new building addresses the streetscape. It needs to be legible and deal with the practicalities of threshold and climate control. The very prescriptive specification for the hotel and restaurant must be made to work alongside a good architectural and urban design strategy for the entrance.

Given recent changes to the entrance configuration requirements, and keeping the clarity of the façade retention in mind, now would be a useful time to take a step back and reassess the entrance strategy and to ensure that the best solution has been found. Once the best strategy is identified, articulation and detail design will be important as this is the part of the building which people will interact with most.

The gap between the yellow coloured entrance structure and the return on the existing façade is an area of concern, as it could collect litter, be hard to manage and maintain and diminish customer experience. An appropriate design solution should be explored to address these issues.

### **Public realm**

The city centre has seen recent improvements to the public realm at The Hayes and the upper end of St Mary Street, and the Central Square area is currently undergoing works. This corner of the city, which joins the above, has been neglected and subject to ad hoc additions over the years, resulting in a cluttered, unwelcoming public realm. This project presents an opportunity to take a coordinated approach to address the problems with the surrounding public realm, despite it being outside the redline boundary of the application site.

Good urban design and landscape design will add value by improving the entrance experience, making the scheme more welcoming and attractive and dealing with any problematic climatic conditions. It would be beneficial to test for adverse local wind conditions and overshadowing at an early stage so that mitigation measures can be built into design strategies. A drop off point and servicing/deliveries will also need to be fully integrated in the proposal. Integrating public realm/landscape design and building design will provide the best value and benefits.

Taking into account wider considerations, the public realm around the building should be designed to deal with the flow of a large volume of people arriving from Central Station and the proposed bus interchange as well as events taking place in the city. The city's longer term plans to provide for Active Travel (cycling and walking for everyday journeys) should also inform proposals, even if they are not likely to be implemented immediately.

The Commission strongly encourages collaboration between the local authority and the design/developer team to promote an integrated approach to the public realm, resulting in best value for public money and the contributions generated by this scheme. If the approach is not well coordinated, it is likely to result in more clutter and an awkward experience of the streetscape for pedestrians and cyclists.

### **Façade design and articulation**

Design of the façade is particularly important in this proposal as tall buildings have a significant visual impact, both locally and across the city. From a distance, the building will not have a 'back' elevation. Quality and durability will be crucial, and the team must be certain that the required quality, detail and vision can be achieved within the budget. The early work with the contractor to develop the specification is positive.

The proposed glazed façade to replace the York Hotel elevation offers the potential to activate the streetscape. Although the design team are not in control of the fit out, it

would be useful for them to suggest a layout with active uses (such as dining or cooking) directly behind the façade. The need for obscured glazing should be avoided, particularly if the end use is as a kitchen – typically a ‘back of house’ activity. The detail design of this element of the façade will be especially important to overall quality, and should not be compromised. Details which ensure that the mass of the tower block can be ‘read’ behind the glazed façade will also be important.

The concept for the tower block and stair cores lacks sufficient clarity in the way it has been articulated. The proposed dark cladding is a helpful contrast to the existing building façade and is very bold on the north elevation. If it is intended that the tower reads as a solid block with windows punched into it with a second volume for the main stair core, the expression of the secondary stair core currently weakens this concept. Clarifying the conceptual aim and further refinement of the articulation would benefit the scheme here.

The desire to add relief to the façade through the cladding system is interesting, but the team should be sure that the system and proposed use of it will be durable, will not weather badly and will meet all regulatory requirements. In further developing the window design, consideration should be given to how the size and shape of the windows might enhance the perceived proportions and verticality of the building with the aim of making it appear more slender.

Signage and lighting should also be considered prior to the planning application being submitted to ensure it can be appropriately integrated into the design.

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

## Attendees

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Agent/Client/Developer:	Ian Parfitt & Richard Johns, LEOM LLP
Architect/Planning Consultant:	Stephen Hill & Adam Wood, HMA Architects
Local Planning Authority:	Lawrence Dowdall & Ross Cannon, Cardiff Council

Design Review Panel:

Chair

Lead Panellist

Jen Heal, Design Advisor, DCFW

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