

Statws/Status:
Cyfrinachol / Confidential

DESIGN
COMMISSION
FOR WALES
COMISIWN
DYLUNIO
CYMRU

Adroddiad Adolygu Dylunio: Design Review Report:	21 June 2007
Dyddiad Cyfarfod / Meeting Date:	13 June 2007
Lleoliad/Location:	Unit Superheaters site, Swansea
Disgrifiad o'r Cynllun Scheme Description:	Residential
Cleient/Asiant: Client/Agent:	Kingsman Estates [L Clarke]
Developer/Datblygwr:	Deeley Freed [Mark Tyrrell]
Pensaer/Architect:	Holder Mathias Architects [Terry Morley, Alice Stewart] Rio Architects [H Jones]
Awdurdod Cynllunio: Planning Authority:	City and Council of Swansea [David Gill, Richard Jones]
Statws Cynllunio: Planning Status:	Pre-planning
Y Panel Adolygu Dylunio/ Design Review Panel: Wendy Richards (cadeirydd/chair) Cindy Harris (swyddog/officer) Charlie Deng (swyddog/officer) Ewan Jones	Martin Knight Gerard Ryan Roger Ayton Mike Biddulph
Lead Panellist:	Ewan Jones

Cyflwyniad/Presentation

The site is currently occupied by the engineering warehouses of Unit Superheaters (Holding) Ltd, which is to be relocated. The site is located to the north-east corner of the city centre, just outside the Swansea City Centre Strategic Framework boundary. It is bounded by the River Tawe to the east, and will be the first phase of the wider riverside development. The existing riverside walkway leading to the maritime quarter currently stops at the site boundary, and will be extended along the length of the site. The Morfa distributor road and an elevated railway line lie to the northwest and New Cut Road lies to the southwest of the site, both of which present an unpleasant environment. A new gyratory road is planned to the west, linking back to Morfa Road. An existing CCS depot yard with warehouses lies to the north and is subject to redevelopment. There is existing parkland to the south, which is currently overgrown and little used.

The proposal responds to the permeability issue identified in the Tawe river corridor SPG, by creating two new vehicular routes and two pedestrian routes, all running approximately east/west and linking Morfa Road and New Cut Road with the riverside walk. These new routes begin to define the block forms and the southernmost pedestrian route will link to a proposed pedestrian bridge across the Tawe. A commercial unit is included on the southern tip next to the proposed bridge.

Car parking spaces are located in rear courtyards at grade or 2 metres below according to the site level. Ground floor levels are raised 1 metre above grade which allows natural ventilation to car parks, provides privacy for residents and offers a degree of active frontage. Flooding issues have been dealt with, but no detailed information was provided.

The proposed scheme is to be submitted as a full planning application to demolish the existing factory and to construct: 300 residential units, 12% of which will be affordable and designed by HMA; and 1000 student accommodation units in the north west corner of the site, designed by Rio. The three blocks of student accommodation provide 944 bed spaces in 191 apartments with minimal parking provision [20 spaces]. The main pedestrian access is placed adjacent to the main reception, common room and gymnasium at the junction of Morfa Road and New Cut Road, along with a small retail unit. The form is articulated with glazed stairs to break up the building mass.

The Local Authority representative explained that the design has evolved and improved over the last 6 months. The key issue is to create successful streets, based on establishing a hierarchy of streets and a sense of enclosure. The development of the riverside frontage with a more formal edge matches the requirements of the Corridor SPG and the

City Centre framework. There will be a need for acoustic mitigation to the north and west, and monitoring of local air quality to ensure there are no additional negative impacts.

Ymateb y Panel/Panel's Response

The Panel considered that the presentation material was inadequate both for a Design Review assessment and for a detailed planning application. It appeared to be in draft form, many drawings were incomplete, and there was no information on construction materials or methods.

The Panel asked about the impact of construction on the industrial archaeology of the site. We were told that a desktop study has been done and the next stage of fieldwork has been agreed, although it is anticipated that there will have been a lot of disturbance already. It was confirmed that all the private apartments would be 1-2 bed, with some smaller affordable units.

There was little evidence that a landscape consultant had been involved in the design development, or that the design had been influenced by solar orientation. We thought that the riverfront was a key element and deserved particular attention. The architect agreed and emphasised the high degree of permeability created. The Panel thought that there was actually too much permeability and noted that the vehicular route was enhanced with building frontages and enclosure, rather than the pedestrian route which was bordered by open space and car parks. We thought the degree of permeability should be rationalised and justified, and we questioned the rationale for providing a new interior north/south route parallel to the river, which appeared to have no organising role or function in the layout. There was no connection with the adjacent public space to the south.

The Panel noted the lack of a public realm strategy. We did not agree that active frontages were provided, despite the positive contribution made by the two retail units, which might need special support at first. We thought that 1 metre high blank walls presented an aggressive element at street level. More imaginative ways should be found of dealing with residents' need for privacy, by creating clearly defined private outdoor space. Fronts and backs of blocks should be better defined. At present, large areas of car parks create awkward spaces between buildings and along the street. There is a need for more enclosure with fewer routes, stronger edges, and a clear hierarchy of streets and public squares.

This development will be seen as a precedent by future developers on adjacent sites and therefore should make a strong statement about the quality expected for the future. In an area with a high student population

where there is likely to be a lot of pedestrian activity, we thought it was important to ensure genuine active frontages and a high quality public realm. We support the inclusion of retail uses for this and future schemes.

The present links to the city centre are not well defined or attractive and it was agreed that until they are improved, the riverside walk will be the most direct and safest link. The Panel thought that the cycle racks located in front of the student blocks next to Morfa Road were not well sited or secure and would not be used. We questioned the indented entrances to the student blocks in terms of safety and legibility, but were informed that in practice the main entrance would be from the rear courtyards.

The Panel was not impressed by the intention to achieve a BREEAM [EcoHomes] rating of 'Good'. We strongly suggested that the design team should commit to a higher rating of 'Very Good' or 'Excellent'. The developer cited commercial considerations as a constraint, especially in the context of considerable extra costs involved in developing this site. Nevertheless, while we supported the single heating system for the student element, we would like to see this extended across the site and combined with CHP. A more detailed sustainability strategy should be developed which seeks to deliver more carbon savings than the statutory minimum.

The Panel expressed concern about the lack of distinctiveness in the architectural treatment. This area should not repeat the SA1 aesthetic or the standard student accommodation solutions. We thought that there was scope for more vertical articulation although it was pointed out that the 'Corridor study' specified a maximum height of 7 storeys for new developments.

Crynodeb/Summary

The Panel welcomed the opportunity to review this scheme and we support the intention to regenerate this area and enhance the riverfront. However, we think that on the basis of the material presented, a detailed planning application is premature and the proposal is an unacceptable response to the site. In particular:

- There is no sense of place apparent in this proposal. We would like to see a public realm strategy developed which provides more enclosure and definition of streets and, together with a strategy for private outdoor space, offers a clear distinction between public and private, front and back.
- We think the degree of permeability proposed is excessive and works against a good urban design solution

- Active frontages are not achieved in the scheme. We strongly recommend the design team reconsider the 1 metre podium, and find alternative ways of providing privacy.
- A landscape strategy should be developed which, together with the public realm strategy, should inform the built form, massing and orientation of the residential blocks
- A new and distinctive architectural approach is needed based on local context, and referring to the city centre.
- The location for cycle parking needs to be reconsidered.
- A BREEAM rating of Very Good or Excellent should be specified, and a sustainability strategy developed which improves on the statutory minimum environmental performance
- As the first site to be re-developed in the Tawe river corridor, this scheme should set a good precedent for later developments in terms of sustainability and a high quality public realm.

NB: While this review is concerned with strategic issues, many of the detailed aspects not covered here [eg access to below ground parking] appear to be flawed.

Diwedd/End

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