

# Design Review Report

Urban Quarter,  
Swansea

**DCFW Ref: 39**

Meeting of 20<sup>th</sup> November 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	20 <sup>th</sup> November 2014
Issue date	4 <sup>th</sup> December 2014
Scheme location	High Street, Swansea
Scheme description	Mixed-use regeneration
Scheme reference number	39
Planning status	Pre-application

## Declarations of Interest

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Steve Smith is an appointed member of the Design Commission for Wales Design Review Panel. On this occasion however, he attended on behalf on the Local Authority presenting to the Commission.

## Consultations to Date

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This scheme was previously reviewed by Design Commission for Wales on 10<sup>th</sup> April 2014. This report should be read in conjunction with our report from the previous review.

## The Proposals

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This scheme is the latest phase of regeneration programme for High Street proposed by Coastal Housing working with Holder Mathias Architects (HMA). The completed Urban Village project has been a catalyst for regeneration in the area, and has resulted in improvements to street frontages, increased footfall, new businesses and increased perceptions of safety.

Proposals are for affordable, general needs residential development with some commercial use. An element of the scheme, which aimed to attract creative industries, create a cycle hub and reinforce the route along Kings Lane, has been removed from this phase of development, although we were informed that it remains part of longer term plans. The brownfield site is within the city centre and is bounded by High Street to the west and The Strand to the east. The ground level at the Strand is approximately 9m lower than at High Street. The development along High Street aims to reflect the historic burgage plot widths. There is a desire to increase active frontage along The Strand. The former Grade II listed Bush Hotel formed part of the site but was demolished in 2013 as it was deemed structurally unsound. It has been agreed with Cadw that the facade will be replicated. Proposals show residential development around a private courtyard with car parking accessed from The Strand.

The team now expects to make a planning application in late December 2014.

## Main Points in Detail

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The Design Commission is supportive of several aspects of this scheme. However we have concerns about other elements which require further consideration. The following points summarise key issues from the review, and should be used to inform design work and discussion with Coastal Housing ahead of the submission of a planning application.

### **High Street**

Overall, the Design Commission is supportive of the approach taken by Coastal Housing in this part of Swansea. We commend the earlier phases and the impact they are having on the city, especially the regeneration of High Street. The proposals for High Street presented at this review appear to be a continuation of the successful approach to the Urban Village streetscape.

As a point of detail, the Commission is not overly concerned with the bin store access on High Street, although the entrance should be carefully detailed, and the space well managed to avoid unpleasant odours and unsightliness.

### **The Bush Hotel**

The Commission understands that the re-construction of the Bush Hotel's facade is not negotiable, although we would question the value of replicating an historic building which was already much altered and has already been demolished. The expert input from Graham Frecknell Architects in researching and designing the facade proportions is commendable.

We have concerns about the detailing of the front elevation windows, which, as proposed, do not match the original vertically sliding sash windows due to non-compliance (in building regulations terms), so it will be important that the proposed fenestration is visually appropriate. We also question the size, proportion and juxtaposition of the proposed ground floor windows, which copy clearly later additions, and whether they might be re-sized so as to better relate to the first floor windows, and provide more daylight for the intended use of the ground floor.

### **Strand Residential Block**

The positioning and massing of this large residential block is improved since the previous review. The current position now provides better potential for sunlight in the courtyard space and an opportunity for the block to better address The Strand. However, the Commission would have preferred to have seen the sunpath modelling and analysis of cityscape views which have informed the current proposal.

There is risk in the proposed elevation design of this block, as much of its detailing is so far unresolved. It would be disappointing if the quality of this phase did not live up to the standard of the earlier Urban Village phases. The Commission understands the cost pressures and the context of Welsh Government funding constraints, but believes that long-term value should be a priority.

At the moment, The Strand is not an attractive street for walking or cycling and it lacks active frontages. This new block presents an opportunity to improve The Strand by strengthening the street edge, creating active frontage and making the street a more attractive and safe place to walk. The proposed residential entrance off The Strand will help by adding some activity, but the Commission was not convinced that other opportunities for the scheme to act as a catalyst for improvement along The Strand had been fully explored. The detailing and materiality of the car park entrance and block at street level will be important, but there was insufficient detail in the proposals presented at the review to properly assess this. It would be useful to explore the impact of the block on views from different approach points along The Strand.

It is important that the use and quality of living in the residential blocks are well considered as part of the design process. Views, daylighting, access, privacy and overheating are all significant factors. Consideration should be given to creating dual aspect flats on the lower floors to improve the life quality of residents.

It has not yet been decided whether there will be windows in the end elevations of the block. This needs urgent further consideration as it could make a significant difference to perception of the block within the cityscape, and offer considerable improvement for occupants.

The current proposal shows a simple, repetitive elevation. This could be very successful if the detail design and execution is of exceptionally high quality. It would be good practice for the facade to be designed in response to environmental performance, orientation and control of solar gains. This may add some variation to the repetitive elevation, but should be tested using environmental modelling tools. However, boiler flues and other protrusions will compromise the elegance of a simple façade and should be avoided.

The detailing and material choices for the cladding, soffits and window reveals will be significant. The scale, proportions, colour, texture and arrangement of cladding panels need to be carefully considered. Any potential staining from rainwater run-off and at flue outlets should be designed out.

The design quality of the scheme should not be compromised by the imposition of unrealistic construction budgets, especially as there is a precedent for excellent architecture set in the earlier phases.

### **Sustainability Strategy**

The scheme still requires a clear and integrated energy and sustainability strategy. It is disappointing that there is no aspiration from Coastal Housing to achieve better than the minimum required standards. The Commission is concerned that opportunities for improvement and capturing long term value are being missed. A well-designed energy strategy, incorporating a centralised boiler plant, with input from expert professionals, should not cause the management or overheating problems suggested by the developers. Passive overheating (if this proves to be a problem) can be avoided by effective solar shading where this is seen to be required following analysis with modelling tools.

As noted at the previous review, an energy strategy should ideally be developed from the outset of a project and integrated with other aspects of design. The heating strategy, for example, will have an impact on layouts, and costs, and, by the provision of individual boiler flues on the Strand elevation, could seriously affect the quality of that façade. The Commission would strongly encourage Coastal Housing to reconsider their heating strategy for this reason. A central, shared boiler might also reduce energy use, building costs and carbon emissions if the system is properly designed.

The energy strategy should be informed by environmental modelling which takes into account solar gains, heat loss, thermal mass, facade design and heating strategies to give assurance that overheating will not be a problem. This is particularly important for single-aspect apartments. The facade design should also be informed by and tested using environmental modelling.

### **Landscape Design**

The concept of the semi-private shared courtyard garden is supported. However, the landscape design now needs to be considered in more detail to ensure that the space becomes a useful and pleasant place for the residents to use, especially as the flats have no private outside space. It is important that sufficient design time is invested in the spaces between and around the buildings.

In particular, the edges and boundaries of the landscaped spaces need careful consideration, as will the idea of a 'bridge' which could easily detrimentally impact the apartments below it. The choice of materials, detailing, planting and future maintenance plans will all be crucial to achieving good quality.

### **Future Engagement**

The Design Commission would welcome the opportunity to review future phases of the Urban Quarter/Village development as they are progressed.

Overall the Commission is supportive of many of the principles of these proposals. However, greater detailed analysis and consideration of the energy strategy, central landscape and elevational treatment may better inform realistic cost, quality and performance scenarios, and will strengthen potential for a successful scheme for occupiers and for the wider contribution to the city.

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

## Attendees

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Agent/Client/Developer:	Steve Yanek, Coastal Housing
Architectural/Urban Designer:	Terry Morley, Holder Mathias Architects Phil Stevenson, Holder Mathias Architects Graham Frecknall, Graham Frecknall Architects
Planning Consultant:	Richard Bowen, Asbri Planning
Local Authority:	Steve Smith, Swansea Council
Design Review Panel:	
Chair	Alan Francis
Lead Panellist	Phil Roberts Angela Williams Amanda Spence, Design Advisor, DCFW
Observing:	Rosie Brace, Welsh Government David Holmes, Welsh Government