

Addroddiad Adolygu Dylunio Design Review Report

Review Status: **Confidential**

Meeting date:	30th September 2009
Issue Date:	8th October 2009
Scheme Location:	East of High Street, Swansea
Scheme Description:	Mixed use, 'Urban Village'
Planning Status:	Pre-application

Part1: Presentation

This proposal seeks to re-establish Kings Lane as the primary east/west route linking the High Street with Parc Tawe. Kings Lane will be closed to cars and the wall to the south may be demolished to allow daylight into the narrow street, subject to discussions about its historic value. The scheme responds to the topography of the site, which has a 9m level difference from west to east, and is centered round two courtyards. The public courtyard is fronted by active uses, mainly in the form of a 'creative cluster' of small artisan workshops. The private courtyard is for the use of residents of the 75 affordable 2-bed apartments.

The High Street elevation will be rebuilt and retail/commercial uses reinstated. The scale will be 4-5 storeys with relatively narrow frontages, and individual elements will be defined by stepping back in places and by changes of materials and fenestration. Although designed to work as a single scheme, it may be delivered in phases.

The proposed mix of uses is supported by the Local Authority, and the development briefs for Parc Tawe and the City Centre, which are in preparation, will have a strong influence on the development of this project. It is envisaged that the High Street will be the area of highest north/south footfall and that the Strand will become primarily a traffic corridor, albeit with important east/west crossing points linking the city centre with Parc Tawe. For funding reasons, the planning application for this site needs to be submitted by the end of this year.

Summary of key points arising from discussion, to be read in conjunction with Part 2 of this report.

The Panel supports the principle of this development and welcomes the ambition of the proposal, coupled with a flexible and pragmatic approach to making it work. We could support this scheme provided that the following major recommendations are adopted:

- The High Street elevation needs calming, while still retaining its variety. A common architectural language should be apparent, and this could be developed in the treatment of the ground floor and control of signage. The quality of materials and detailing will be critical.
- There should be greater cohesion in the treatment of the roof forms on the central and rear blocks - namely the 'venue' block and residential block on the Strand where it links up with the 'creative cluster'.
- We have concerns about the viability of the 'creative cluster', but are somewhat reassured by the developer's flexible approach that would enable alternative commercial uses for this element of the site should the creative cluster not prove viable.
- We welcome the mix of public and private use, and the layout around well-oriented courtyards. However, the type and density of the proposed residential accommodation should be reviewed in the light of the current social mix and behavioural trends in the neighbourhood.
- Our main concern relates to the developing character of the Strand and the impact of the proposed development. The crossing points should be supported by active ground floor uses, although we accept the rationale for the proposed raised plaza at the bottom of Kings Lane.
- The scale of the residential tower block should be reduced and the building reoriented to present a more humane aspect to the Strand. The massing should also be reviewed to produce a more elegant and less overbearing profile.
- It is important that a site-wide integrated strategy is adopted for the provision of energy and the developer should consider the use of a community based ESCO as a delivery vehicle.

Part 2: Discussion and Panel Response in Full

The Panel supported the concept of an urban village in this location and welcomed proposals for the long overdue regeneration of this area. We think that the design development so far has the makings of a successful scheme.

The High Street frontage is of an appropriate scale, and we supported the varied elevational treatment using different heights, setbacks on different levels and variations in materials and colours. We also supported the vertical mix of uses, with A1/A3 on the ground floor and commercial or residential uses above. However, the elevation needs to have an identity and coherence which is currently lacking, and would benefit from some calming. The practicality of allowing varied use, will have an effect on both the plan and elevation that needs to be worked through in detail. The success of this frontage will depend greatly on the quality of materials and detailing.

While supporting the concept, the Panel sought reassurance on the viability of the 'creative cluster'. The developers have adopted an approach which maximises flexibility in terms of unit sizes and end uses, and which achieves the minimum critical mass of 40,000 sq ft.

They are confident that the spin-off from a vibrant working area, built around an attractive public space, will attract further uses, and they are committed to protecting the quality of the buildings and space as an essential element of success.

We were disappointed to learn of the City's lack of ambition for the Strand, although we accepted the strategy of concentrating activity around the crossing points. In this context the negative corner between the Strand and Kings Lane will not provide activity and surveillance at street level, although we appreciated the desire to expose the gable end of the warehouse and to protect the raised courtyard. However, the treatment of this corner contrasts unfavourably with the way in which phase 2 opens up to the Strand. The three storeys of car parking underneath the residential tower and accessed off the Strand, will serve to further sterilise this section of road. Given the current inhospitable nature of the Strand and the proposed high density of social housing, we think there could be serious management issues for the future in this location. We would be concerned if the ratio of housing were to increase significantly.

We understand that the Strand will be used to take traffic away from High Street and Wind Street, but it is important that it also functions as a civilised and usable space. We think the scale of the tower should be reduced, and the block itself re-oriented to present a less monolithic appearance from ground level. Development on this site will inevitably set a precedent for further development along the Strand and we would prefer to see an identifiable treatment of blocks located end-on to the Strand, with visual connections and open space in between.

We would strongly support a commitment to achieving Code Level 4 across the whole site, with the possibility of some Code 5 units in particular locations. A site-wide energy strategy should be developed, based on a district heating system. The flexible approach to this development, which we support, should not preclude the resolution of practical aspects such as fire escapes, signage and servicing.

The Design Commission for Wales Design Review Panel and staff welcome further consultation and will be happy to provide further feedback on this report and/or where appropriate, to receive further presentations. Thank you for consulting the Commission and please keep in touch with us about the progress of your project.

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

Appendix 1: Attendees

Asiant/Client/Datblygwr:
Agent/Client/Developer

Coastal Housing [Robin Blakley,
David Fry, Steve Griffiths]

Pensaer/Architect:

Holder Mathias Architects [Terry Morley,
Julian Morgan]

Consultants:

BDP [David Littler]
NLP Planning [Gareth Williams]

Awdurdod Cynllunio/
Planning Authority

City and Council of Swansea [David Gill,
Huw Mowbray, Steve Smith]

Y Panel Adlygu Dylunio:

Design review panel:

Alan Francis [Chair]

Cindy Harris [Officer]

Ann-Marie Smale

Roger Ayton

Phil Roberts

John Punter

Lead Panellist:

Phil Roberts

Sylwedyddion/Observers:

Simon Hartley [DCFW]

Gerard Ryan [DCFW]

Friedrich Ludewig [Acme Architects]