

Statws/Status:

Cyhoeddus / Public

DESIGN
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DYLUNIO
CYMRU

Adroddiad Adolygu Dylunio: Design Review Report:	09 March 2006
Dyddiad Cyfarfod / Cyflwyno'r Deunydd: Meeting Date / Material Submitted:	01 March 2006
Lleoliad/Location:	Wood Street, Cardiff
Disgrifiad o'r Cynllun Scheme Description:	Residential with some retail
Developer/Datblygwr:	Urban Solutions [Richard Selby]
Pensaer/Architect:	Charter Architects [Mark Amey, Cameron Buchan Vesna Bostandzic]
Cynllunio: Consultants:	Arup [Tim Bennett] Explore Investments [Graham Tyler]
Awdurdod Cynllunio: Planning Authority:	Cardiff CC [Nigel Hanson]
Statws Cynllunio: Planning Status:	Outline consent exists. Detailed application submitted Feb 06
Y Panel Adolygu Dylunio/Design Review Panel:	
John Punter (cadeirydd/chair)	Paul Vanner
Cindy Harris (swyddog/officer)	Ed Colgan
Lyn Owen	Douglas Hogg
Ewan Jones	

Lead Panellist:

Ewan Jones

Sylwedyddion/Observers:

**Charlie Deng
Design Review assistant**

Cyflwyniad/Presentation

This proposal was last seen at Design Review in January 2005. Since then detailed design work has progressed but a number of constraints have arisen. Network Rail objected to the proposal to build up to their boundary and wished to retain a 600mm gap for their boundary wall. In addition, wind tunnel testing indicated possible problems at ground level. Both these developments have had major design implications. The structural design of the 'glass needle' tower had to be revised, and this brought additional costs. The floor plate was enlarged slightly and the tower moved to the west, slightly closer to the river. The lower rise blocks of the previous scheme have been replaced by two larger towers of 20 and 22 storeys on the north eastern edge of site facing on to Station Square. These towers are in fact a single block joined by a common lift shaft.

The developer retained the design team while these issues were worked through and resolved. Laing O'Rourke had also been engaged at an early stage in a two stage tendering process. The second stage brought greater cost certainty, but identification of higher costs. The developer had to accommodate commercial considerations, but wished to retain the original design philosophy by finding a clever solution to the new constraints. The essentials of the scheme, such as the 'green heart' private amenity space and the glass needle, were protected. It was acknowledged, however, that the previous configuration of blocks did not give optimal daylighting, orientation and views, and could be improved.

The design of the main 32 storey tower has been modified following wind tunnel tests and floor plan adjustments and is no longer completely enclosed with glazing. Instead the solid 'inner tube' of the tower is revealed in two central shafts with pairs of punched windows and at the top, while the outer skin glazing on the north west and south east corners of the tower provides every apartment with a 'winter garden'. Much of the elegance of the original solution is retained.

The elevation of the smaller towers have been re-thought to provide a much more original design that avoids the repetitive fenestration and balconies on most high-rise apartments. The east and north east facing facades are wrapped with zinc cladding cut through in a series of rectangles to reveal a rendered frame underneath. On the south west facade there is less solid to void to take advantage of passive solar gain and the rendered facade is revealed by a series of extruded boxes, some as high as three storeys that include balconies and extruded bays and which 'randomize' the facade and create more variety of internal space and more visual interest.

The retail facilities provide two storeys of space on the north east perimeter of the scheme terminating at the glass needle. The podium is lowered somewhat and the two levels of car parking within remain invisible. A refuse bay has been added to the car park entrance on the most easterly part of the site closest to the station entrance. On Wood Street the shops are level with the pavement, but as the corner is turned back to the station the pavement is split into two levels with the shopping level three steps above the pavement proper.

The private raised gardens on top of the podium will have 400-600mm of soil and will thus be able to accommodate substantial planting which will be visible from the street. Apartments and gardens now benefit from maximum solar gain and better views. On the floor plan, only one 1 bed apartment has an exclusively northern orientation. For visual and acoustic reasons, the distance from the railway line has been maximised and a green buffer will be achieved through the landscaping..

The Local Authority support this scheme, as they have done throughout its development. Their priority is to retain the quality and integrity of the glass needle. They have concerns about the relationship of the current Block A to the tower and feel that the smaller block could become too tall. They would like to see a greater separation between the needle and the smaller tower. They do agree with the design team that the current proposals provide a better living environment for residents and that the public realm treatment is better and simpler.

Ymateb y Panel/Panel's Response

The Panel requested details of the proposed colour scheme and were told that, as currently envisaged, the tower would be a blue-grey 'Sto' render behind the glass, while the 20-22 storey blocks would have zinc cladding, peeling away in places to reveal a pale yellow / ochre rendered finish. An option for using the same colour throughout, on all blocks including the tower, was under consideration. It was confirmed that the presented sketches would be developed into computer generated images.

The revised massing and proportions of the blocks raised the question of why one of the buildings, in a cluster of tall buildings, should be treated differently. There are obvious historical reasons, but this needs to be justified in terms of the rationale of the present design. The design team felt that the elegance of the tower as a focal point remains and is actually reinforced by the new arrangement. The structural logic of the grid is also retained. The opening up of the site to the south has maximised views and solar access while any disruption from the railway line has been minimised.

The Panel would like to see greater differentiation between the two lower blocks. We thought that the elevations were rather too 'busy' and the developer confirmed that he wanted a slightly chaotic effect. We wondered whether there was another way of breaking down the scale of the metal facade without disrupting its integrity so much, such as overlapping planes or 'scales'. The random arrangement of the multi-storey balconies meant that no two apartments looked the same, and had much more varied floor plans, but all received good levels of daylighting. The enclosed balconies will be made from laminated timber. The open balconies will be self-draining and down pipes will be located at the end corners. With the Local Authority, we appreciated the variation on universal Sto render. We thought that the penthouses needed much more refinement and should be re-thought and there was general agreement on this matter.

The Panel considered that the lower blocks should be treated more clearly as part of the podium, rather than appearing to sit on top of it. The design team confirmed that the render would be carried down to retail level and to the ground, to give the tower and podium more unity. The Panel thought that this was the right approach, but that details remained to be resolved.

The function of the false doorway beyond the main entrance to the tower was unclear and we thought it should be omitted. The problem of rainwater runoff from the glazed tower hitting the pavement had been considered, and an investigation showed that there was not much water left by the time it hits the ground. The Panel stressed that the quality of detailing on the tower's glass skin was critical. Detailed sketches suggested relatively heavy mullions, but we were assured that the detailing would be identical to that of the Ian Simpson building in Deansgate, Manchester.

We were surprised and disappointed to learn that an initial environmental assessment showed an EcoHomes rating of only 'Good', although it was only two points away from 'Very Good'. It was felt that this higher rating could easily be achieved and the design team agreed to keep this as a target. There appeared to be no feasible alternative to individual electric heating systems, and this again was disappointing.

The retail units now extend to two full floors, and have a flexible layout. Uses will probably include a gym and possibly office type units. The way that the retail access has been raised above the pavement level will improve its relationship to the street particularly on match days at the Stadium. The way that the tower now meets the ground is much more satisfactory although there were questions raised about the 'gate' feature that protrudes out on to the pavement beyond the tower entrance. It was not clear how the tree planting in the pavement would work in terms of pedestrian movement, and there was a need to link the Council's plans for the public realm with the design of the tower's plaza.

The team confirmed that there will be an internal management system for the whole complex. A special bay is designated for refuse vehicles. There will be gated access to east of the site.

Crynodeb/Summary

The Panel was concerned at first that this scheme, which we had greatly applauded in the past, was suffering from a loss of quality in the revised design. However, following the presentation and discussion, we are substantially reassured by the rationale for the new design, and by the enthusiasm and commitment of the design team. We find this an acceptable solution to the site and its constraints, with only minor revisions required. In particular:

- The scheme should achieve an EcoHomes 'Very Good' as a minimum, with a higher rating if possible
- There should be greater differentiation between the two lower blocks, and between them and the needle. Using the same colour render would be a retrograde step. Although from some angles the lower block reads as two towers, their massing and elevational treatment might be more differentiated to maintain the illusion from all vantage points.
- The penthouses on top of the two lower towers should be redesigned, and the false gateway by the tower entrance removed.
- The overhang of the apartments over the retail gave some cause for concern but if the detailed drawings are to be believed this is minimal. The Panel wish to ensure that these towers relate well to the podium level.
- The promised quality of the detailing of the glazed skin of the tower should be maintained and protected

- We did not have a chance to examine the elevations of the podium to the west of the tower and these need to be carefully detailed to provide visual interest

Diwedd/End

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