

Design Review Report: 13 December 2004
Meeting Date / Material Submitted: 1 December 2004
Location: Cardiff city centre
Scheme Description: St Davids 2: retail / mixed use
Architects / Design Team: Benoy Architects [Graham Izzard]
 BDP [Adam Blacker, John Wakes]
Developer: Land Securities
 [Matt Holman, Andrew Dudley]
Consultants: Turley Associates Planning
 Consultants [Craig O'Brien]
 Hyland Edgar Driver, Landscape
 Architects [David O'Brien]
Planning Status: Outline planning exists
Date of detailed application (If known): January 2005
Planning Authority: Cardiff County Council
 [Helen Hodgson]

Design Review Panel:

Alan Francis (chair)	Phil Roberts
Cindy Harris (officer)	Robert Firth
John Punter	Wendy Hall
Howard Wainwright	Douglas Hogg

Observers:
Gillian Wulff **Peter Roberts**

The Main Scheme

Presentation

The underlying principles of this scheme remain unchanged since the last presentation in October. It was therefore decided to concentrate on the Panel's response of that date and the points raised therein.

With regard to the scale of the residential development above the retail on the Hayes, the massing has been reworked between Hills Street and the Bridge Street arcade. The two levels of car parking above the retail units along the length of the Hayes have been removed, a stronger corner treatment is given to the corner of the Hayes and Hills Street, and the residential development no longer spans the east-

west arcade. Additional massing to the south of the arcade now produces a better closure to the perspective up Mill Lane. Steel has replaced timber on the balconies of the residential units, and some individual glazed canopies have been added three metres above ground level for pedestrian weather protection.

The design of the west and south elevations of the JLP store, and its relation to the public realm, are being developed and refined. The aim is to achieve an active south frontage to the store.

The panel were updated on the progress of the landscape design. The new 'square' in front of the library and JLP store will be less cluttered, with a series of simple fountains rather than the multiple flaming torches previously suggested. Kiosks will be introduced into the central pedestrianised areas of the Hayes, and the top of Hayes Bridge Road will be narrowed to close the view south and enclose the southern end of the Hayes. Street lighting on the Hayes will be placed partly in the tree canopy, creating a diffuse 'moonlight' effect, and partly on buildings, in order to un-clutter the streetscape. Freestanding planters will soften Hill Street and the Barracks Lane market may be re-located into one of the units on the south side of Hill Street at the eastern end. In general, street finishes will probably be various types of granite paving imported from China. Colours and sizes of setts are currently the subject of debate between the City and the developer. The paving will extend into John and Working Streets.

The City supports the reduction of massing and greater variation of heights of the residential development on the Hayes, along with the introduction of the 1.5 metre setback above the retail. However, the maximum building heights of 18.8 metres on the Hayes and 25 metres overall would be enforced. The canopy is still under discussion and the desire for some kind of weather protection remains. The better closure of the vista up Mill Lane is welcomed. The new library should be an iconic building, with the JLP store relating to it but not dominating it. There is still more potential for the arcade design to demonstrate a unique Cardiff character. The bridge link across Hills Street needs to be treated lightly and the new shopping centre should not appear to coalesce with the old. The use of natural materials for paving is supported, as is the improved design of the car park to the east, although further details are awaited. The Tabernacle church on the Hayes wish to retain their 24 hour vehicular access on the Hayes, although this would prejudice the pedestrianisation of the area. The City are seeking a compromise including the offer of limited access. A reserved matters application has been deferred until 20th January 2005.

Panel's Response

The Panel supports all the design points raised by the City. However, we continue to have reservations about the massing of the residential blocks on the Hayes, and the dominance of the north west corner overlooking the Hills Street/Hayes junction and the important space to the north. The proportions are sometimes uncomfortable, especially where the residential elevation 'runs round' the corner at the southern end of the Hayes – not a common feature in Cardiff. The Panel was assured that the shadowing of the Hayes was still within the parameters stated in the original Environmental Impact Assessment, but that these analyses would be revised for the reserved matters application. The proposed glazed canopies on the Hayes facades need development and need to be both continuous and wide enough to create real shelter from the rain.

The Panel's greatest concern is with the footprint of the JLP store at its north western corner. We find its intrusion into the public realm, the constriction of the main north/south pedestrian axis of the city, and the blocking of the visual link to the Bay, completely unacceptable. This intrusion is compounded by the addition of a vertical pillar whose sole purpose is to place the John Lewis logo in the middle of the view corridor looking south from the Hayes. This crass piece of commercialism is at odds with the refinement of the rest of the scheme, will devalue the public library which should be the focus of the view, and is completely unnecessary because every shopper will know where John Lewis is (at the southern end of the main mall). Shoppers will be able to see JLP's glazed and illuminated corner from most of the Hayes and signage can be placed here.

The Panel would like to see a revised footprint for the department store which respects the historic street layout of Cardiff and maintains the full width of Hayes Bridge Road. The current proposal compromises the new library. We agree that this should be an iconic civic building enclosing the southern end of the Hayes, while addressing both Hayes Bridge Road and Mill Lane. The library footprint should be similarly redefined to respect historic street patterns and building lines .

The Panel have major reservations about the design of the mall bridge across Hills Street. They consider that it needs to be of a smaller scale, light and transparent, and not carry the full height of the southern arcade, so that the visual corridor of the street is maintained. The architects agree with this view.

The Panel remains concerned at the lack of arcade character in the Bridge Street arcade, particularly the disappointing eastern section. This is largely due to the fact that there are not enough small shop units opening on the arcade, and too much of the frontage is effectively the sides of larger units that open on to the main mall. We believe that the considerable historical research that has been undertaken, and the repeated promises that have been made to respect the city's Victorian arcade traditions, now need to be delivered here. The designers should also look at the eastern half of this arcade and consider whether they could get more daylight into it by creating light wells within the car park.

The proposed images of the Grand Arcade are considered to be a 'dulling down' of the proposals presented at the last meeting. The designers explained that these were indicative CAD images only. The key development since last time is the replacement of timber columns with more slender steel columns. An alternative option is being developed with no columns and the roof expressed as a structure between the two buildings. There was recognition that more design development was necessary.

The Panel expressed concern at the widening of the Grand Arcade as it crosses Tredegar Street. We are pleased that the intention is to pull the arcade back from the department store and end it at the north side of Tredegar Street, creating a lighter bridge structure. There remain issues of microclimate and wind turbulence in Tredegar Street and these are still being examined.

The extension of the granite paving throughout the ground floor of the arcades is supported. Attention is drawn to the siting of any plant located on the roofs of the shopping centre so that it is not visible through the roof glazing.

External materials for the JLP store are likely to be a mix of terracotta or buff tiled rainscreen and structural glazing, with natural stone cladding and insulated render. Natural stone would be used throughout for the street level elevations. It was agreed that the finish of the existing Habitat store would be an appropriate colour and texture to replicate.

The panel recommends that an integrated energy strategy for this development be adopted, including: passive measures to avoid overheating; reduced embodied energy of materials; active solar systems; natural ventilation; and low or zero carbon heating systems. The developer replied that these were not heavily serviced buildings and that natural ventilation and underfloor heating (if heating is necessary) are being considered for the arcades. The panel suggests that the arcade should be heated by passive means, by heat losses from adjoining buildings and by passive solar gains. We also suggest that a specific approach be made to suppliers of Welsh granite to see if this scale of project enables them to supply external paving at competitive rates. This should be done in conjunction with the development of a city centre wide strategy for the use of paving materials and street furniture in the public realm, taking the lead from the proposals set out for the Hayes.

There are concerns about the design of the public space on the eastern side of the scheme. The revised layout of the streets and car park access is an improvement but there are still problems. In particular, the cinema is now divorced from the rest of the scheme, with three lanes of queueing car park traffic in front of it. It is felt that the public realm on the east side, especially the new street, needs to be designed with as close an attention to detail as the rest of the scheme has received. Particular attention should be paid to calming traffic, civilising the bus stops and boulevarding the street.

Summary

- The Panel is extremely concerned about the intrusion of the NW corner of the JLP store into the public space and its effect on the historic street pattern of Cardiff. Even worse is the proposal to introduce a John Lewis sign on a four storey pillar placed towards the centre of the street
- While we are pleased with the Barracks Lane housing, the massing of the residential blocks on the Hayes needs refining to reduce its rather overbearing impact on the Hayes and to minimise its shading of the street. The introduction of a setback of the residential above the retail, and the removal of the two car park levels are applauded, as are the removal of the timber balconies and their redesign in steel.
- We understand that the design of the Grand Arcade has not been progressed since October, and we urge that more detailed design work is done to enable comment prior to a reserved matters application.
- The importance of east/west links needs to be fully recognised with amendments to the two glazed bridges to make them lighter and smaller structures that do not carry the full height arcade. This is especially important on Hills Street to preserve it as a visual corridor.
- Most important is the redesign of the Bridge Street Arcade to give it small scale shop units throughout and the intimacy of a Victorian arcade.
- We are concerned that the cinema is isolated by the road network, and will be difficult to access from its surrounding spaces.

- We would like to see the streets and spaces on the east side of the scheme given as much design attention as the Hayes, particularly with regard to traffic calming and a quality environment for public transport users.
- The development of an integrated energy and environmental strategy should inform the detailed design.
- Any plant located on rooftops should be sensitively sited and not visible from below.
- We are not convinced that the proposed relocation of the Barracks Lane markets is the best solution, or that it would retain the character of an open street market.
- While we recognise that the Tabernacle church requires vehicular access for services, we consider their demands for 24 hour vehicular access across the Hayes to be completely unreasonable.

The Library

Presentation

The designers began work on this project in March 2004, with an inspirational brief for an independent iconic library building. Unfortunately, there does not appear to have been any planning brief for the site.

The site is the existing car park of the Marriott hotel. The requirement from the user group was for 55,000 ft² of space, of which 5000 ft² was to be at ground floor. Initial studies have shown the need for 4 levels above the ground and mezzanine retail levels in order to accommodate the library. A children's library is provided at mezzanine level. Current proposals show a main entrance facing onto Hayes Place, and servicing will be from a bus lay-by to the south, designated as dual use. There is an active retail frontage on to Mill Lane.

The architects have adopted an open internal atrium arrangement that will offer exciting internal views up through the building as library users ascend the escalator up to the second floor. There will be diagonal bridges linking the east and west parts of the building at different levels. The eastern elevation, facing Hayes Bridge Road, will be more solid because it will express the core services located on the eastern side of the building, while the western section along Mill Lane will have a greater transparency subject to the constraints imposed by the fire officer. The building will be naturally ventilated and the roof will have strip roof lights, a sedum finish, and possibly some small wind turbines to power the lighting circuit.

Panel's Response

The Panel supports the aspiration for an iconic building, but questions the extent of likely public engagement with the library itself, given the extent of retail units on the first two floors and the fact that the library proper is confined to the second floor and above (the small children's library is included on the first floor mezzanine). There should be greater permeability and more library presence at ground floor level. The proposed disposition of space reflects commercial rather than civic priorities, and although it is claimed to also reflect the library's need for controlled access the panel disputed this, pointing to other new library buildings which have designed the 'controlled access' points above ground floor level (thereby increasing the permeability at ground floor level). A café would be highly desirable, but its inclusion

would be at the expense of existing allocated space and facilities. The Panel are inclined to the view that the café should occupy some of the retail space and become a more integral part of the library.

The Panel reaffirm their strong opposition to the current footprint of the building and the virtual closure of Hayes Bridge Road as a main thoroughfare, by the pincer movement achieved jointly with the John Lewis department store. The library should be moved back to the historic building line on this important corridor, and should respect the line of Hayes Bridge Road, the key pedestrian link to the Bay and the most important north-south axis in the city. Currently, the library and the signage of John Lewis compete for attention and the net result is totally unsatisfactory as a piece of townscape. The library needs pride of place as the civic building, and its importance should be expressed by adding an extra floor to provide more space on a smaller footprint, and to improve the views across the city and down to the Bay.

In particular, we find the current orientation of the internal street perverse, offering a nondescript view past the Marriott hotel towards the station and ignoring the historic view south down Bute Street. We urge that the building be reoriented to exploit the views to the south and the Bay.

The Panel also suggest that the core might be better placed centrally in the building or to the southern frontage facing the Marriott Hotel, in order to present a more animated façade to Hayes Bridge Road. The building should also be accessed from the bus stops on its south side, to create a public route through the ground floor and in this way attract more users.

A sustainability group is advising the designers, and issues such as natural ventilation and ground source heating/cooling have been discussed. The aim is to achieve a BREEAM 'Excellent' rating and the Panel strongly endorses this approach. External materials are likely to be copper cladding, opaque materials incorporating graphics, with timber on the west elevation and a more transparent north and south façade.

In general terms the panel found the concept for the building slightly outdated insofar as it appears to be designed solely as a 'library' in quite a traditional sense, with the vast bulk of its floorspace above ground level. This seems at odds with other notable new libraries throughout the UK which are aimed at becoming 'Information Centres' and where, for instance, tourist information points sit alongside public cybercafés in an open, very permeable, ground floor arrangement. This may well be a matter of the client brief, rather than the architect's proposal, but needs to be further addressed. As a minimum, we suggest opening the retail into the library ground floor - the 'Borders' concept - so as to encourage the permeability we are striving for.

Summary

The proposed interiors which the architects presented confirmed that they are well able to design a dynamic exciting building that would grace this important corner of the city. However, we urge that the building be redesigned with a footprint that respects the historic street pattern and building lines of the city, in a location that is adjacent to a conservation area. The following reservations should be addressed in the continuing development of the design.

- The Panel agrees that this should be an iconic, landmark building, but argues strongly that it should be built to accord with the building lines of Hayes Bridge Road and Mill Lane.
- The Panel is utterly opposed to the idea of constricting Hayes Bridge Road and blocking the north-south views to and from the Hayes.
- We question the amount of retail space provided, along with the relative lack of ground floor space for the library.
- The ground floor permeability needs to be significantly increased. Although the proposed entrance on the northern corner is vital, other entrances on Hayes Bridge Road and off the southern elevation should be encouraged. The predominant animation at ground floor level should be provided by the library, not the retail. The proposed location of the main core (stairs, lifts etc) on Hayes Bridge Road will mean that one of Cardiff's most important historic streets will effectively become a service alleyway. The core must be relocated.
- The concept of an 'internal street' could be very exciting, but if it is included it needs to relate to Hayes Bridge Street and be carried through to the redesign of the ground floor.
- The inclusion of a café and other social/meeting places within the library is essential.
- We suggest the position of the core service areas be reviewed, to enable the Hayes Bridge Road frontage to benefit from greater transparency.
- We consider that the design of the building would be improved if it had an extra storey. This would provide a better focus for the views from adjacent streets, particularly the Hayes, and give the architects a chance to more fully exploit the views across the city.

Conclusion

In view of the scale and importance of the St David's Two Scheme as a whole, and the relatively undeveloped state of some aspects of the design, we think it is very important that we review the scheme again before it proceeds to the next stage of the planning process [January 20th]. While we appreciate that the library is slightly separate, its relation to the rest of the scheme is critical, and we would like to be consulted on the revised designs as they proceed towards an initial planning application.

End

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