

Comisiwn Dylunio Cymru

Design Commission for Wales

Design Review Report:

14 July 2004

Meeting Date / Material Submitted: 8 July 2004

Location:

**Schooner Way
Bute East Dock**

Architects / Design Team:

**Holder Mathias Architects
(Peter Gamble, Stephen Hill,
Michael Chichester)**

Client:

**Town & District Property Group
(David Lederman)**

Scheme Description:

Residential, some mixed use

Public/Other Body:

Cardiff City Council

Planning Status:

Pre-planning

Design Review Panel Members Present:

John Punter (chair)

Mike Biddulph

Cindy Harris (officer)

Ed Colgan

Lyn Owen

Jonathan Adams

Nick Davies

Presentation

The brief for this scheme is for a landmark mixed use building, with a waterside restaurant and a convenience store. The site owner also owns the feeder canal for the dock, and has plans for its long term regeneration, including its use by a local angling club and children's educational activities.

The site includes an area of land under the water in the dock, and this allows the possibility of a building that sits partly out over the dock. Various different forms have been modelled. The preferred solution refers to nearby buildings such as City Wharf (David MacLean) and the Spillers warehouse in the development of its 3-D form. The intention is for the building to announce itself dramatically on the dockside rather than to blend in with its surroundings, to create a pause point on the west side of the dock where the building forms and materials are rather uniform, and to bridge the dockside taking the building out over the water.

The proposed building is sited axially at the head of Celerity Drive, and has been made as slender as possible to allow views past it from the buildings at the junction with Schooner Way. It comprises 23 living units in an eight storey tower with parking for 33 cars, as well as restaurant and retail outlet in a two storey podium that takes advantage of the change of level down to the dockside. Mainly semicircular in plan, the tower is oriented so that the curve of the building form and the main living spaces of the larger apartments face south.

Panel's Response

The Panel were very aware of the constraints on the site, the likely reaction of those living on the opposite side of Schooner Way, and the fact that another medium rise dockside building would block all their water views. They were also conscious of the relative uniformity of development on the west side of the dock, its largely undistinguished quality at the southern end, and the precedent set for a taller tower form by an appeal decision on the site just north of County Hall. For all these reasons they shared the architect and client's desire for a bolder statement and a rather taller tower that would respond better to the very large expanse of water and the length of the dock north to south. The proposed density is lower than that achieved on sites to the south, and as proposed the tower would fail to make a strong enough statement on the dockside. The width of the building north to south is the most important dimension as it is this which determines the level of view blockage for residents behind so the aim should be to produce a tall slim building that minimises overshadowing and view blockage of adjacent properties. Analysis of these aspects should accompany the development of the final form.

We would therefore encourage the developer and designers to explore the potential of increasing the scale of the scheme, provided that the location and massing of the tower and arrangements for additional servicing and car parking are treated sensitively.

The Panel advised the developer to openly approach local residents with his plans, emphasising how a more medium rise solution would have a far more negative effect on their amenity, and illustrating the elegance and quality of this development and its amenity value for the area as a whole. The developer could also emphasise his plans to improve the security of the car park to the north of the site, by installing gates and railings.

In terms of the architectural design, the building could relate better to the water's edge and is in some respects too tentative in its approach to the dockside. Borrowing of precedents from Spiller's warehouse or City Wharf was not felt to be the right approach. There is scope for more over-sailing of the water and greater height. The impact of the car park could be minimised, by having a more lightweight open structure, with some kind of roof garden or overhanging planting to improve amenity. The treatment of the podium could ensure a very attractive street with two valuable facilities for the local community.

The proposal ought to express its unusual setting much more clearly. The current proposal is almost indistinguishable from other recent projects in Cardiff: a building built half in water should not appear similar to any other building set entirely on solid ground. For this site, we should expect to see an architectural form that is new to the City, not a revisiting of a form that has become familiar. Consider thinking of the building as comprising two connected components – one on the dock side, and another on the water. It would make sense for the element in the water – given its unique setting – to be the 'dominant' element.

Summary

The panel is pleased to see this scheme at an early formative stage. We urge the design team to develop a more architecturally innovative and daring solution on this site.

The relation between the podium and the streetscape needs further attention, and the base also needs to be better integrated with the tower. The asymmetrical floorplan needs to be reviewed and the possibility of generating a larger floorplan within an equally slim building investigated. A rather taller tower would be more appropriate given the scale and north-south length of the dock, somewhere between ten and twelve storeys. Shadowing and view blocking should be analysed, and careful consideration given to the dockside walkway and its amenity and surveillance.

A blank car park wall at street level on the west elevation will not be acceptable. The scheme must provide a degree of permeability to views and pedestrian movement from the west. This is the minimum 'pay-back' for partially closing the view down Celerity Drive. The basic tower-and-plinth approach adopted in the initial proposal may not provide the degree of urban planning integration – or the architectural innovation – that the project merits.

End