

Design Review Report

St David's Area Proposals, Swansea

DCFW Ref: 119

Meeting of 20th October 2016



Declarations of Interest

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

Meeting date	20 th October 2016
Issue date	3 rd November 2016
Scheme location	Swansea City Centre
Scheme description	Mixed use development
Scheme reference number	119
Planning status	Pre-application

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Declarations of Interest

None Declared.

Consultations to Date

DCFW was consulted during the development of the City Centre Strategic Framework but this is the first time that consultation has taken place on the emerging specific proposals for this site.

The Proposals

Redevelopment of the former St David's site and land to the south of Oystermouth Road. The proposed development includes a mix of new retail, cinema, restaurants, arena and hotel with residential and/or student accommodation on upper storeys. The exact mix and quantum of development is yet to be finally determined.

Main Points in Detail

The Design Commission welcomed the opportunity to consider the emerging proposals for this site at a relatively early age and with the potential to influence the direction of the design approach and overall quality.

This is a very important scheme for Swansea city centre. Deliverability as well as design needs to be right to ensure a positive legacy of the project.

The pre-review material provided a good site analysis and demonstrated a thorough understanding of the history of the area which is informing the scale and density of development. In general, the current proposals for the northern part of the site are better resolved than the southern portion, where there is still uncertainty and there seems to be less confidence in the proposals.

The following key points should be carefully considered as proposals develop.

The fundamental principles

A stronger direction for the identity of the city centre is still needed as the current message is confused particularly regarding movement and retail.

The business/retail strategy to stimulate economic growth needs a clearer rationale along with supporting data. There are tangible opportunities to reinforce positive business trends and to mitigate aspects of the existing city centre which are suffering from declining activity.

The proposed scheme seeks to both encourage walking but also make significant provision for the car/vehicles. The amount and prominence of car parking in the current scheme should be considered within the context of the overall direction of the city centre and evidence is needed to justify the proposed quantum of parking. The stated intention is for the scale, form and appearance of the new development to feel more like a city centre which is very positive, but this needs to be supported by the functions and backed up by a clear commitment to public transport, walking and cycling and coordinated with the work that the local authority is undertaking in relation to their duties under the Active Travel Act.

A phased approach to parking may be appropriate informed by consideration of how parking numbers and locations will change over time across the city centre. Locations for cycle parking should be integrated into the public realm in addition to provision for specific elements of the development such as student accommodation.

The proposed development must support, and be supported by, consideration of a wider strategy for the future of retail in the city centre including potential contraction and concentration. This has been considered in the city centre strategy but needs to be reviewed as the project progresses and other changes take place in the city centre. It also needs to be reflected in the story of the design for this development.

The desire to reinforce the relationship of city centre to the seafront is understood and supported, but it is not yet clear how this will be achieved. It seems that there is insufficient demand to extend the retail offer of the city centre towards the seafront so the city centre core needs to have its own identity that relates to, but is not necessarily dependent on the waterside offer. Making all of the elements walkable and well-connected will support a thriving city centre. Although it is not yet clear how the connection to the seafront will finally be made, this should not hamper progress within the city centre.

The proposals would benefit from further consideration and explanation of how the scheme incorporates inclusive design, health & wellbeing and sustainability.

Streets and connections

New streets, defined by active frontages, in the north of the site and around the churches are positive in their scale, nature and contribution to repairing the city, particularly the retail-led scheme which is a little tighter. The proposed new connections into Quadrant are also positive and will help to connect the interior space to Swansea Market & the wider public realm. Active frontages are essential and the desire for a scale of three or more storeys is supported by the benefits that a vertical mix of uses will bring to the city centre including residential units and student accommodation.

The quality of the main north-south route diminishes where it runs alongside the proposed multi-storey car park. This is not an appropriate location for a car park, parking should be buried inside other uses, away from major thoroughfares. All development along Oystermouth Road should make a positive and transformational contribution to the streetscape and activity along this section of the road.

The north-south route is identified as a green link in the City Centre Strategic Framework but this is not reflected or articulated in the proposals.

South of Oystermouth Road

There is an opportunity to do something bold and unexpected in the part of the site to the south of Oystermouth Road.

The proposed leisure component has the potential to support the city centre and means that retail can be concentrated further to the north. A change in the character of development on this side of Oystermouth Road is appropriate and the development can break away from the finer city-centre street grain of the north, but the principles of active frontages, overlooked, animated and defined spaces still need to be applied.

The arena is a positive addition acting as a catalyst for further activity and life to the city centre, but that activity could be concentrated in short, intense periods during an event so consideration needs to be given to what happens in between events. Could other activities take place in the building to keep it active and how can the public realm be treated to accommodate spikes in activity as well as day-to-day activity? Considering the range and size of performance venues in the region, the business plan for the arena needs careful analysis as the proposed design is heavily dependent upon the arena.

The podium approach with parking underneath could work but further detail is needed to demonstrate how, including what happens at the edges and how pedestrians, cyclists, wheelchair users and others with mobility impairments would get down from the higher level. The idea of a contemporary version of the coal drops on the south side of the wall is an interesting one, but not yet a proven solution as it relies on land outside of council ownership.

A softer landscape in this area could provide interest and a contrast to the central core, with the potential to be extended to the west. However, further detail is needed on the conditions of the space and how this will be achieved.

Bridge link over Oystermouth Road

The objectives of connecting the city centre to the seafront and creating a successful urban piece of city conflict with the proposed bridge. The ramps and level changes needed to the north of Oystermouth Road and the spaces under the bridge make the creation of successful building frontages unnecessarily difficult. A clearer understanding of the elements needed to make the bridge successful is needed and is currently lacking. At this stage the right conditions do not appear to be in place for the bridge link to be successful and DCFW is therefore not supportive of this element. The additional cost is unlikely to bring significant benefit and the structure may present further design and movement issues, leading to future difficulties and potentially negative legacy.

A physical model would help to appreciate the level changes across the site as well as the impact of the raised levels of a bridge on the quality of the public realm and the surrounding environment on Oystermouth Road. The length of ramp required has not been clearly shown to demonstrate how it will be incorporated into the design.

Analysis, such as a serial vision study, of the experience of walking from the city centre to the sea front would be useful. This would help to highlight where the bridge will contribute to or detract from the quality of the pedestrian experience. A better understanding of how many people are likely to use the crossing, who are they, where are they going to and from would contribute to the analysis.

It is understood that the bridge is likely to be included in the outline planning application but may not be included in the final scheme. The Commission would support more thorough testing of this element now, whilst time allows.

Material palette

The proposed palette of copper, terracotta/porcelain and stained glass seems to be overly restrictive at this stage. There are benefits in limiting the material palette but it also needs to be practical and copper, porcelain and stained glass are decorative rather than structural. A more integral, robust and potentially wider palette may be needed to provide the long term cohesiveness that was highlighted in the precedent cities. To the south of Oystermouth Road, the scale and type of structures are likely to suggest a change of materials and forms.

Start by starting

A phasing plan is critical but it would also be helpful to identify smaller tasks that can be delivered immediately: 'quick wins.' A series of small actions that can be undertaken during the development and determination of the planning application could begin to build momentum and indicate change in the area. These could be smaller scale improvement works to the public realm, temporary works or events. A drawing that encapsulates and prioritises actions based on need, impact and deliverability would be helpful.

Further Review

The Design Commission would welcome the opportunity to review this scheme again, once design work has progressed, but well before a planning application is made. The Commission suggests that the structure for the next meeting addresses the key points above to allow focus on critical elements.

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

Attendees

Agent	Chris Potts, Director, Savills Nick Green, Director, Savills
Development Managers	Martin Ellis, Projects Director, Rivington Land David Lewis, Chief Executive, Rivington Land Guy Graham, Project Manager, Rivington Land
Design Team	Fredrick, Acme (via Skype) Andrea, Acme (via Skype) Marina, Acme (via Skype)
Local Authority	Huw Mowbray, Property Development Manager Lee Richards, Physical Regeneration Manager Katy Evans, Physical Regeneration Steve Smith, Conservation and Design Manager Liam Jones, Team Leader Planning Control David Owen, Principal Planning Officer
Design Review Panel Chair Lead Panellist	Ewan Jones Michael Gwyther-Jones Steve Smith Toby Adam Simon Richards Amanda Spence, Design Advisor, DCFW Jen Heal, Design Advisor, DCFW Carole-Anne Davies, CE, DCFW
Observing	Katie James Cath Davies