



DESIGN
COMMISSION
FOR WALES
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Design Review Report

Waterloo Hotel, Betws-y-Coed

DCFW Ref: N87

Meeting of 14th February 2019



Review Status

Review date
Issue date
Scheme location
Scheme description
Scheme reference number
Planning status

Confidential

14th February 2019
26th February 2019
Betws-y-Coed
Mixed use
N87
Pre-application

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.

None.

Consultations to Date

This is the fourth time that proposals for this site have been reviewed. Previous reviews were held in October 2015, March 2016 and January 2017. This is the first review meeting in which the client has been present.

The Proposals

The proposal is to establish a strategic masterplan for the redevelopment of the existing Waterloo Hotel along with the provision of a wide range of facilities to meet the needs of different users including new accommodation, a luxury spa, a restaurant, staff accommodation, parkland and re-modelling of some of the existing hotel.

Main Points

Vision and ambition

The Commission very much appreciated the background and context for the project being explained by Glen Evans as it provided the panel with a clearer idea of the ambitions of the owner/client and the commitment to contributing positively to the local area. The local focus and aim of extending tourism interest, as well as enhancing the local training and employment offer are all admirable and would be positive outcomes of the proposed development.

It is evident that there has been an evolving brief for the site in response to the planning context and as more land has been added. This review provided a good opportunity to step back and look at the overall masterplan for the site and the project ambitions together. The focus of the review was on the masterplan rather than individual buildings. Whilst the proposed uses appear to meet the needs of the brief, and it has been demonstrated that they can be accommodated within the site, there remains a concern that the design approach and overall concept is not yet fulfilling the ambition and potential, as well as it could.

Context and analysis

A thorough context and precedent analysis is still lacking to support and help justify the design decisions that are being made. This has been highlighted in all the previous reviews but has not been adequately addressed. This analysis, including both the local vernacular and high quality precedents from elsewhere relevant to the setting, is essential to inform the character of the new development and make a convincing justification that it is appropriate for the setting within the National Park. Whilst the architecture needs to respond to the local setting, there is the opportunity here, on the edge of the town, to be braver. The current proposals are domestic in some areas while the vision for the site is bold and ambitious. Please refer to previous design review reports for further guidance on this.

The proposals should be set in the context of the site through visuals (CGIs) from specific view points as well as cross sections through the site from the hill to the river.

Layout

The current masterplan has more order than in previous iterations but a review is now needed to ensure this is the best possible option. The TreeHAUS area is proposed to be redeveloped but a change to the layout of the buildings in this area has not been considered and tested to identify an optimum solution. For example, consideration could be given to relocating the car parking for this area enabling a more landscaped setting to be achieved.

The character of each element of the masterplan requires further consideration to determine whether they should be the same or different. Whilst the site must be a coherent whole, the different target markets for each element suggests that there should be more differentiation that reflects the desired nature of each component and the hierarchy across the site.

It was agreed that the space underneath the proposed restaurant could attract problems and this could be designed out to avoid it becoming a negative space.

Landscape

It is disappointing that, despite the need for a landscape architect to be engaged meaningfully at the masterplanning stage being raised at previous reviews, this has still not been undertaken. Many of the concerns regarding how the spaces between the buildings will work and add value to the site, its users and customers could be better resolved and the proposals significantly enhanced, with a strategic landscape plan for the site. A storyboard outlining the user experience, including navigation and the use of spaces and their qualities, will help with this. We reiterate that a professional landscape architect should be engaged.

Detail

Concerns were raised again regarding the complexity of the proposed buildings particularly the rooflines. Varying rooflines of atria and adjacent accommodation will be complex to detail and could harbour weak points that may present future problems. A simpler solution should be more thoroughly explored.

Accessibility

An access audit of the existing buildings and overall site would help to inform decisions that will affect accessibility and inclusion across the site and within the proposed buildings. Steps in the entrance foyer to HAUS were identified as a concern and the potential to design this out should be fully explored. An inclusive place for everyone to use should be reflected in the project objectives and ambition and realised in the design.

Next steps

Whilst we welcome the opportunity for multiple reviews of proposals as they evolve, it is disappointing and concerning that in this instance the same strategic design concerns arise. They have not been addressed, tested or resolved by the design team. Other professional consultants' input, especially from a landscape architect specialising in masterplanning schemes of this size, would be recommended at this stage. The absence of this expertise is frustrating the realisation of the full potential at a crucial stage at which to add value to the client's vision, ideas and ambition for the site. It is important at this stage to consider a detailed evaluation and prioritisation of the ambition of the project and the resources needed to realise it.

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

Attendees

Agent/Client/Developer:	Glenn Evans, Royal Oak & Waterloo Hotels
Architect/Consultants:	Andrew Kelly – Union Architecture
Design Review Panel:	
Chair	Cora Kwiatowski
Lead Panellist	Mike Gwyther-Jones
	Chris Jefford

Angela Williams
Mark Hallett
Jen Heal, Design Advisor, DCFW

Observers:

Jun Huang
Larissa Berquo, DCFW