

Design Review Report

Bridge Street, Cardiff

DCFW Ref: 79

Meeting of 12th August 2015



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	12 th August 2015
Issue date	28 th August 2015
Scheme location	Cardiff Centre
Scheme description	Student Accommodation/Mixed-Use
Scheme reference number	79
Planning status	Pre-application

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Declarations of Interest

None declared.

Consultations to Date

The team is in pre-application discussions with the local planning authority.

The Proposals

The proposed development site is situated in Cardiff city centre. The scheme involves the redevelopment of land bound by Bridge Street, Charles Street and Wesley Lane for a mixed-use development comprising purpose-built managed student accommodation and flexible commercial/retail units. An iterative process with the Local Planning Authority has resulted in a small terrace of Charles Street properties, considered to be making a positive contribution to the Conservation Area, to be retained in shell form. The proposed height of the tallest part of the new development is 17 storeys.

Main Points in Detail

This review took place at a good, early stage in the project where there is scope for design review to improve the scheme as the design process progresses. The following points summarise key issues from the review, and should be considered to inform work on this important scheme ahead of making a planning application:

Approach to site

The Design Commission for Wales is generally very supportive of this scheme which will make a positive contribution to the city centre. The design approach enables a large amount of accommodation to be accommodated on site in a sensitive way. The scheme would create opportunities for improving the fabric of this part of the city centre which has been somewhat neglected since the St David's 2 development.

Highways and public realm

The project provides opportunities to improve the highways and public realm around the site, and the Commission would encourage the local authority to give this good consideration and discuss possibilities with the design team from an early stage to achieve well-integrated solutions. In particular, there may be opportunities to reduce traffic and improve pedestrian navigation in this part of the city.

The design team recognises the importance of the Wesley Street elevation, but that nevertheless, many of the non- 'public-facing' elements of the scheme are likely to be sited here, including servicing bays and the Alcohol Treatment Centre ('ATC'). They are keen to make the Bridge Street and Charles Street frontages more active, and this is rightly informing the layout of the scheme and the relationships between building and streets. Treatment of the service yard entrance will be important for security and visual impact, and it is sensible to house the Alcohol Treatment Centre in a more discreet location. The student entrance on Bridge Street can help animate the façade, and should help ensure tenant interest in the retail units each side.

There are possibilities for Wesley Street to become more active and permeable, but this would be sensible only if it leads somewhere. However, the design should allow for future opening up of a route, even if this is not part of these initial proposals.

The gap between the proposed development and The Chapel needs careful consideration to avoid creating an unpleasant environment. It should be accessible only if the route is meaningful, but could be future proofed.

Discussions with the local highways authority should be used to help define the nature of the streets surrounding the plot. There are a number of servicing and vehicle access requirements which need to be sensitively resolved.

Mixed-use and flexibility

The dynamics of Cardiff's city centre have changed significantly over the past decade, and are likely to continue to change. The proposed development is mixed-use with a large amount of student accommodation. The structural design and layout of the proposal should be flexible enough to be capable of accommodating different uses in the future. It is encouraging that the design team have considered this, and that there is flexibility in the way the retail spaces can be divided up.

For the retained Charles Street properties, there is no one right approach, but the Commission would question the value of simply retaining the facades and roof of what are actually simple buildings to reinstate, particularly given that they may need considerable work to ensure their entrances operate at grade. The scale of those properties does add a granularity to the scheme which would be to its detriment if they were replaced by larger units.

Form and massing

The Design Commission is comfortable with the height of the building currently proposed, though would not rule out a taller building on this site. A taller 'tower' form might have more elegant proportions, and might increase the value and benefits gained from this location. One of the keys to this decision is a considered visual impact

assessment of the proposal from key public viewpoints around the city centre agreed with the Local Authority.

The Commission is not convinced that the alternative cladding treatment proposed for the top of the tower element is beneficial. It may have the unfortunate effect of appearing heavy against light skies, and may reduce the visual slenderness all tall buildings seek. We suggest further options are tested.

The proposed massing at the lower levels seems to work well organisationally and in relation to the immediate context, though we question the fully glazed podium component, and whether this might be too corporate, and might not be better handled in an alternative material.

The scheme needs to be wind-tunnel tested to ensure that pedestrian comfort at street level is not detrimentally affected by its height.

Facade and materials

The facade design and materials are crucial to the quality of a tall city centre building like this. The details and depth of facade are particularly important, and need to be retained through post-planning design stages. The design team are clearly conscious of the need for good quality daylight into the student rooms, including some full-height glazing, and this is helping produce an interesting cladding solution.

Previous student accommodation in the UK has generally not been of good quality, but there is emerging evidence of good work elsewhere that might form some useful comparables. The Design Commission would be happy to pass on details of these projects if needed.

Energy and services strategy

An integrated services and energy strategy which is considered from an early stage in the design process will be essential to achieving good quality development. The design team understands the importance of getting this right.

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

Attendees

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