



Design Review Report

One Central Square,
Cardiff

Meeting of 3rd February 2014



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

CONFIDENTIAL

Meeting date	3 rd February 2014
Issue date	18 th February 2014
Scheme location	Cardiff
Scheme description	Commercial/Office Building
Scheme reference number	36 (74A)
Planning status	Pre-application

Declarations of Interest

None declared.

Consultations to Date

Pre-application consultation with the Local Planning Authority has taken place.

The Proposals

This scheme is for a high quality office building which will be the first phase in the development of Central Square, the area to the north of Cardiff Central railway station. One Central Square occupies the western corner of the masterplan and aims to help attract high value employment to Cardiff's city centre. The building has a podium base with a raised ground floor level and entrance steps addressing the public realm. There is a semi-basement for car parking and other service facilities, and 9 floors of office accommodation above. There is a shared cafe/meeting space within the raised ground floor level.

Summary

- It is encouraging to see this first proposal developing from the emerging master plan, and the commitment to delivery is welcomed, given the history of the site.
- The overall response to the site and the massing seem comfortable, although it may benefit overall from being simplified.
- At a more detailed level, there are some concerns about how the form and massing are handled. The team should be comfortable that the raised ground floor level is the best response to the site. The treatment of the podium and how it extends around the perimeter should be given further consideration.

- The facade treatment should be considered in more detail, particularly at edges and corners where the stone cladding could be more refined.
- The ambition for BREEAM Excellent is welcomed and it is important that the required glass specification and façade detailing are properly researched, tested and realistically represented in the planning application.
- This building must be a success. It will set the benchmark standard for future development in the immediate surroundings. All parties must employ every effort to deliver a high quality building and public realm.

Main Points in Detail

Design Quality

This is likely to be the first element of the proposed master plan to be delivered, and it is therefore crucial to set a high quality standard for the rest of the development to follow. This quality should extend to any public realm which is constructed in this phase.

A Design and Build procurement route is proposed, with contractors expected to tender on the planning drawings plus a performance specification. It is strongly recommended that all of the building envelope and landscape / public realm are designed and specified in more detail (RIBA Plan of Work Stage 3 / 4, formerly Stage E) for tender. It is anticipated that the design team will be novated which should help with control and consistency of quality if the contract documents are sufficiently detailed.

Form and Massing

The working model was very useful in explaining the floor levels and form of the building.

The proposed ground floor level is around 1.5m above external ground level, with an area of steps and ramp in front of the entrance. The raised ground floor level effectively creates the top of a plinth/podium. The architects provided a number of valid reasons for the raised entrance level which are understandable; however, there are two issues for concern which should be considered: how the building addresses the street, and how the balustrades to the steps and ramp will be dealt with.

There may be a number of benefits gained by making more of the distinction between the podium form and the upper building. The podium form could be used to control and address the public realm, whilst the floors of office space above could be rational and efficient. The entrance steps, ramp and cafe should all be treated as part of the podium.

To reinforce the distinction between the podium and the rest of the building, the solidity of the podium could be strengthened. The nature of the windows set into the podium should be considered. 'Punched' openings in a masonry wall would help it appear more solid and distinguish it from the lighter framed structure above. A unifying material or colour to the podium would further separate the two elements.

The linear, orthogonal form of the building on a triangular site has created a number of corner spaces outside the building at ground level. The form of the podium should eliminate these as they are not useful and are likely to attract unwelcome activity.

There may be an option to lower the floor level of the foyer space so that it better addresses the street, and is separate from the lettable/commercial office space. This option should be explored, but may not be viable if it creates problems with levels in the basement.

Overall, the form of upper floors could be improved by simplification. This would strengthen the concepts behind it. There are two stone clad forms which sandwich a linear glazed strip. Making these appear the same height would clean up the roofline and should a roof terrace be required this could be set behind a continuation of the stone cladding framework. The team suggested that the glazed escape stair may not be required – it currently bisects the northern façade, blurring the distinction between the podium and the upper floors. Removing this element would be beneficial, further simplifying the building.

Facade Treatment

In general, the modelling of the building facade has been done well. The cladding system has been rationalised to make it economical enough for reconstituted stone to be used. However, it could be further refined to give a more elegant appearance. In particular, the treatment of the cladding at the corners could be refined to the level demonstrated by the precedent shown in the draft Design and Access Statement.

From a townscape point of view, the west elevation has not been considered as well as the others. The detailing of the cladding exaggerates the proportions of the building, making it appear bulky from this aspect. Opportunities for extending part/parts of the building towards the river, to create a stronger relationship with it should be explored. In particular, extending the podium perimeter over the access ramp would help to conceal this feature and further reinforce the concept that the podium is responding to local street level constraints whilst the upper floors have their own internal rationale.

Sustainability and Building Services

The target to reach BREEAM Excellent level is welcomed. The potential uses for the building, such as a call centre with many heat-emitting computers and people, make cooling and ventilation a particular challenge.

The building envelope will have low U-values, below those required by the current Building Regulations, and G-values for the glazing will be crucial. This will have an impact the appearance of the whole building which is largely glazed and should therefore be given careful consideration. Coating or tinting the glass will change its colour and reflectivity. Views out of the building and the appearance of the elevations need to be considered. If different types of glass are proposed for the different elevations there is potential for the overall appearance to be disjointed, making any treatment of the glazing more apparent. The team, and the local planning authority, should check large samples, and visit buildings where the proposed glazing specification has been used to establish a sound understanding of its appearance in use.

Energy saving technologies will also be used, such as LED lighting, manual occupant controls and turbo-core chillers. The team should be confident that the combination of high-performing building envelope and low-energy technologies will achieve BREEAM Excellent and provide an energy efficient and sustainable building. Again, this building should set an example for the future phases of development in this respect.

It is proposed that the exterior of the building will be cleaned and maintained by abseiling. It is a large building to clean in this way - a simpler roofline may make a cradle access system more effective. Deliveries and refuse collection need to be carefully planned to ensure smooth operation of the building without causing congestion to the surrounding streets.

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

Attendees

Agent/Client/Developer:	Paul McCarthy, Rightacres
Architectural/Urban Designer:	Richard Roberts, Rio Architects Hugh Lloyd Jones, Rio Architects McCann & Partners, Consulting Engineers
Local Authority:	Claire Moggridge, Cardiff Council Lawrence Dowdall, Cardiff Council
Design Review Panel:	
Chair	Ewan Jones
Lead Panellist	Alan Francis Michael Griffiths John Punter Amanda Spence, Design Advisor, DCFW
Observing:	Carole-Anne Davies, Chief Executive