



IHP Design Review Report

Biophilic Living, Swansea

DCFW Ref: 19AA

Meeting of 19th June 2019

Review Status

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

PUBLIC

19th June 2019
10th July 2019
Swansea
Housing/Commercial
19AA
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.

The panel Chair was advised that Gayna Jones, Chair of the Design Commission for Wales, chairs the IHP Group. Gayna was not present in the meeting.

The architect for this project, Andrew Nixon is the spouse of Fiona Nixon, a Director of the Design Commission for Wales.

The Proposals

The proposal is for a mixed-use development including alterations and extensions to the former Woolworths building and a new 11 storey building to the rear accommodating commercial, retail, office spaces and 40-44 residential units interacting with a new public space currently referred to as Picton Yard. The proposal aims to set a benchmark for future developments by achieving a net-positive energy building and introducing a community urban farm based on an Aquaponics system.

Main Points

This report is not a record of the full discussion that took place during the review, rather a summary of the key points that have been identified that would help to improve the project and any concerns regarding the funding of the project.

This is an ambitious project in scale and nature and will have a significant impact on the urban environment as it will be directly linked to both existing and proposed public realm. The proposal responds positively to the existing re-used building and to the immediate context by creating a series of terraces leading towards a new tower acting as a focal point and marker for the new yard public space.

The proposal to 'punch' into the form of the building to exploit natural light and the use of balconies is a sympathetic solution to the existing context and project ambition. The south facing terraces are then exploited to maximise a 'green' agenda culminating in the combination of accessible amenity spaces and a vertical farm. No car parking is provided as part of the proposal due to its location.

The following key points should be considered as the proposal develops:

Design Concerns

The environmental strategy to ensure the development is net-positive in terms of energy needs to be clear. This vision must be carried through the whole design process and expressed physically where relevant.

The urban farm concept must be fully embraced if it is to be a successful commercial enterprise. The scale at which this should be undertaken is not yet clear, but it must be large enough and well-integrated into the building to be successful. The distinction between the urban farm and areas that form the biophilic living approach must also be clear. The benefits for residents of access to green areas within the residential development should inform the extent of the biophilic living approach.

Further consideration of the scale of the wider development and the relationship of the new yard to the rear of the tower is needed. Materials choices and façade treatments, landscape and water feature opportunities will also benefit from further consideration.

Placemaking

Further consideration should be given to access and connectivity to the urban farm at all levels and how the spaces might connect people and promote social interaction. It is unclear at this stage whether it is an amenity space for residents or a commercial venture.

Access for residents needs careful consideration – a hierarchy of access routes and links need to be established and clearly articulated to be explicit about how the ground floor is accessed and by whom. Similarly, further analysis and testing of the resident's journey to the roof areas and how connections are made internally and externally are also necessary.

The scheme would benefit from further exploration of the relationship of this building to the wider development proposed for the area, including how the ground floor, retail and commercial office spaces relate to each other and to the streets, roads and public realm.

Integration of innovation

This is a potentially very interesting and ground-breaking development for Wales but in order to be convincing the integration of the urban farm into the functionality and management of the building needs further consideration. There are still some key questions regarding the biophilic living concept and urban farm including who will manage the farm, who will have access to it, what will their commitment be and how will this be maintained.

The benefits of the biophilic living approach for residents in terms of health and well-being need to be more fully explained to ensure that the investment results in benefits over and above a standard inner-city residential development.

Next Steps

The Commission would encourage further consultations through the design review service.

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

Attendees

Agent/Client/Developer	Carwyn Davies, Hacer Developments
Architect/Planning Consultant	Andrew Nixon, Powell Dobson Architects Marta Lopez, Powell Dobson Architects Geraint John, Geraint John Planning Luke Grattanela, Geraint John Planning
Local Planning Authority	Steve Smith, City & County of Swansea
Design Review Panel	
Chair	Jonathan Vernon-Smith
Panel	Maria Asenjo Christopher Jones Jen Heal, DCFW Larissa Berquó, DCFW