



DESIGN
COMMISSION
FOR WALES
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Design Review Report

Kings Road, Swansea

DCFW Ref: 109

Meeting of 23rd June 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

CONFIDENTIAL

Meeting date	23 rd June 2016
Issue date	7 th July 2016
Scheme location	Kings Road, Swansea
Scheme description	Student Accommodation
Scheme reference number	109
Planning status	Pre-application

Declarations of Interest

Panel member Mark Hallett has employed Steve Smith of Urban Narrative who has also advised the design team and Mark is also involved in a joint venture with Welsh Government. All parties were happy to proceed with the review following this declaration.

Consultations to Date

This was the first review of this scheme by the Design Commission for Wales.

The Proposals

The proposal is for the development of student accommodation totalling 500 units with associated communal facilities, landscape works and basement car park. The site forms part of the SA1 masterplan.

Main Points

The Design Commission for Wales welcomed the opportunity to review the proposals for this site. It is a key location within SA1 and on the approach into the city centre and therefore requires a high quality solution. The proposals presented at the review are heading in the right direction but there are still some areas that need to be addressed or resolved. Additionally some significant changes were recently made to the design which were yet to be fully worked through. The following points address the main issues raised at the review.

Analysis

It is important to undertake a thorough site analysis to help provide evidence and a rationale for the design approach. This should be clearly documented in a series of plans and used to inform the design approach rather than simply demonstrate compliance with policy.

In particular, movement to and through the site both now and in the future needs to be more clearly analysed to show how the design of the building has responded to the flow of pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles at different points in the day and year.

Vision

The proposed vision of a sense of 'home' is strong and valid but is not yet clearly reflected in the proposals which are currently typical of student accommodation layouts. The relevant elements of the precedents that are shown in the supporting material need to be identified and an explanation provided as to how they have been incorporated into the design. Following the vision through the design development within the Design and Access Statement will support the planning application.

Scale and massing

The emphasis of the material presented relating to scale and massing was on demonstrating compliance with tall buildings policy and guidance. While this is important, consideration should also be given to what is best for the site and proposed building. The analysis process should be used as a design tool rather than just to demonstrate compliance.

The alternative option that steps up towards the north is a positive development as it addresses the scale of the built context to the south and the north corner of the site where it seems to be an appropriate location for a taller element.

Recess and projection of the profile of the building could be further emphasised to reinforce the different elements of the building in addition to changes in height. The recessed areas at the roof level as presented are a small step rather than a terraced approach as described. This is a fundamental part of the design in order to address the massing concept and the relationship with the immediate surroundings. The use of diagrams to analyse and test the massing is encouraged.

Model

A physical model would be helpful for the design team in exploring the approach to scale and massing as well as presenting the final proposals within context.

Materials

The proposed materials are appropriate for this site but need to be worked through particularly in relation to the proposed budget. The use of brick reflects the history of the site and the developing palette of materials for the area of SA1 to be developed by University of Wales Trinity St David. The quality of brick and detailing will be important to the success of the realisation of the proposals.

The use of copper is also appropriate for this location but alternatives need to be considered if it is not financially viable. A clear rationale for material choice needs to be set out together with the parameters for selecting an alternative, should the first choice prove to be unaffordable.

Colonnade and roof

Both the colonnade and roof are key elements in the success of the proposed look and feel of the building and as a piece of the city. More detail on both of these elements is required to demonstrate that they will be well executed.

The double height of the colonnade is necessary for its success. Sections would help to test and demonstrate the quality of the spaces created beneath the colonnade. This should include consideration of the proposed soffit with details of its profile, material and lighting developed. Consideration of the colonnade is particularly important where the car park projects up into the space as this could have the potential to be a dead space. Consideration should also be given to pedestrian movement around the building and continuity of the colonnade to support movement patterns. These studies, together with successful reference material reviews (e.g. UK, Italy, Spain, etc) could assist in a successful resolution of use, scale, proportion and urban space.

Further consideration should be given to whether the roof could be used more effectively to take advantage of views out which have the potential to add value to the proposals. The parapet edge material is important and should be developed to integrate consistency in appearance across the building. Again, sectional studies together with physical models might assist in the development process.

Parking

This is a sustainable location, close to the city centre and good public transport links. The proposal for student accommodation suggests that minimal parking is required. The presence of alternative parking in close proximity to the site should help to build the argument for a reduced number of parking spaces. Precedent cases could also be referred to. The requirement for more parking on site could be a threat to the viability of the scheme or may result in a reduction in the quality of the building to compensate for the additional cost. We would therefore support a lower level of parking provision.

Deliverability

The stated ambition for quality design and materials is supported in this key location. However, the proposals must be realistic and matters that may be a threat to viability should be addressed now so that the quality is not compromised at a later stage.

With a design and build procurement method it is important that aspects that will ensure this is a quality building are locked in. This may involve providing additional information on materials and details at this stage. A robust specification could also be a way to capture the design intent and prevent any detrimental value engineering that might occur during the procurement and build of the project.

Environmental strategy

The stated aim is for the building to achieve BREEAM Excellent and it is understood that pre-assessments have been undertaken that suggest that the proposal is on track to meet that target. Additional environmental design features are being worked through but the overall approach to sustainability needs to be much more evident and built into the proposals now.

An early sustainability strategy would drive the design rather than relying on retrofitting at a later date. Dependence on blinds for solar shading should be reduced or eliminated as this approach would have ongoing maintenance and cost implications. The facade design should respond to the site analysis undertaken.

Public realm and landscape design

The design of the space around the building is critical for its success but no design was evident yet. Involving the landscape architect at an early stage would help to ensure that the proposals are integrated with the design of the building and add value to the development. The landscape design should support the sense of arrival into the site, the sense of 'home' and the water-side experience of this unique location.

Next steps

This site has considerable potential and the proposals are heading in a positive direction. The proposed timescales are ambitious, particularly given recent significant changes to the design. The quality of the design should not be compromised for unrealistic deadlines, it is important that the time is taken to get the design right. The planning application for the proposed development should demonstrate the process of design and how the vision has influenced the proposals rather than focusing on a policy compliant approach.

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

Attendees

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