

Design Review Report

Queen Street, Rhyl

DCFW Ref: 70

Meeting of 18th June 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	PUBLIC 18 th June 2015
Issue date	24 th June 2015
Scheme location	Rhyl town centre
Scheme description	Mixed use (affordable)
Scheme reference number	70
Planning status	Pre-application

Declarations of Interest

None declared.

Consultations to Date

None noted.

The Proposals

The site is situated within Rhyl town centre and in close proximity to the seafront promenade. The buildings which occupy the site have been disused for 20 years. Queen Street is one of the primary retail streets in Rhyl. The site is within a designated conservation area which is characterised by a mix of architectural styles including Victorian, Arts & Crafts, Edwardian, and Art Deco. Many of the pubs and churches are listed, and add character to the street scene. The site is confined with the main frontage onto Queen Street, and a narrow lane access to the rear.

The existing property on the site forms a significant element of a terrace of three-storey buildings on Queen Street. 49-55 Queen Street has undergone extensive alterations over the years and is currently in a poor state of repair.

The proposal is for a three storey development comprising commercial premises/shops on the ground floor and residential accommodation above. The scheme indicates two commercial units on the ground floor with associated parking and a servicing area to the rear. Residential accommodation consists of four two-bed apartments to each floor all with dedicated rear access and parking provision.

Main Points in Detail

The following points summarise key issues from the review, and should be used to inform work ahead of making a planning application:

Overall Approach

The Design Commission for Wales is supportive of the overall approach to redevelopment of this site. The proposed uses and scale of development are appropriate, and will be important to the regeneration and character of the wider area.

The review consultation took place at an early stage in the design process, while there is scope for the discussions to inform, add value and help improve proposals before a planning application is submitted.

The site analysis undertaken by the design team demonstrates a good understanding of the location and surrounding area and the requirements for this development.

Plan, Form and Layout

The current plan has been designed efficiently, and the Commission recognises that there is still more work to be done to refine it.

The floor-to-ceiling heights appear minimal, especially for the commercial units at ground floor. More generous headroom and height of fenestration might help the proposal sit more comfortably with its Victorian neighbours. There is scope to test different options for width of units and plan depths to make the flat plans and circulation more comfortable. This would also have an impact on the external spaces to rear of the building.

It was suggested that consideration be given to the provision of access to the apartments from Queen Street as well as from the rear. Relying on access only from the rear lane could be intimidating for residents.

External Spaces

The external spaces in this scheme will be important in delivering a place which is safe, easy to maintain and manage, and pleasant to live in. There is still much work to be done to resolve the design of the outside spaces.

Any improvements which can be made to the lane which provides access to the rear of the building will be valuable. Increasing the width, designing-in good lighting, providing overlooking and activity and removing the high wall to the existing adjacent car park would all help to make the approach feel safer and deter anti-social behaviour.

The external space to the rear of the building must incorporate a number of uses, including parking for residents, bin storage, cycle parking and amenity space for residents and access. The narrow lane means it is likely that the commercial units will be serviced from the main street, therefore it is worth considering how much, if any, of this space needs to be given to those units. The safety and security of this rear space will be important and must be balanced with making it a pleasant place to use.

Proportions, Elevations and Fenestration

Careful consideration of the proportions, elevation design and materials will be important to achieving a good modern and sensitive design solution in this interesting conservation area.

There may be benefit in varying the floor heights, as mentioned above, or manipulating the appearance of the floor heights with the proportioning of windows and signage. The appearance of 'plot widths' should also be considered in the way the elevations are designed, and might reflect the traditional plots widths found in this area. In this context, a continuous eaves line might be most appropriate.

There is still work to be done to resolve the design of the projecting bay windows. It would be best if these provided useable floor space and afforded good views up and down the street. There is a decision to be made about whether to include bays or balconies at second floor level; typical surrounding buildings do not have second floor bay windows.

Dedicated space for commercial signage should be designed in, rather than left to occupiers and could also be used to manipulate perceptions of height and proportion.

Materials

A number of materials are still being explored by the designers, making this a good stage to discuss the options.

In general, the choice of materials should demonstrate quality whilst being cohesive with the surroundings. The site is within a conservation area, so decisions should be made with this in mind. Most of the 'ordinary' buildings nearby have rendered facades and slate roofs, with other materials usually identifying buildings of particular significance. There should be a clear strategy that defines the palette of materials; which are sympathetic to the conservation area context and which are a deliberate departure and why those choices are appropriate.

The materials, at ground floor in particular, must be durable and easy to maintain. Thought should be given to the joining and detailing of different materials, keeping it simple to avoid maintenance issues.

Energy and Services Strategy

The form and orientation of the proposed building is largely dictated by the site, so a fabric-first approach to sustainability is appropriate.

A heating and ventilation strategy should be integrated with the design at this stage, as there will be an impact on layout and elevations where flues and maintenance access are required.

Opportunities for borrowed natural light into spaces set deeper within the plan should be sought wherever possible. The modelling and detailing of the rear of the building may offer potential for this.

If A3 uses are to be accommodated at ground floor, careful consideration should be given to locating vertical extract ducts.

Management Considerations

Provision of a safe, welcoming entrance to the flats off of the main road is essential. The location of this will have an impact on the potential division of ground floor commercial space, but there are many options which can be explored and tested. An accessibility strategy should be planned, and the design progressed accordingly.

A strategy for collection and storage of refuse and recycling needs to be incorporated. It would be useful to show diagrammatically, where local green and other amenity space is for residents of this town centre location.

Consideration should be given to provision of safe storage/parking for cycles and mobility scooters which may be more popular with town centre residents than cars. The floor plans have been efficiently designed. The client should consider whether all flats need to be two-bedroom. Inclusion of some one-bedroom flats might free up the plan, allowing for improvements to residents' quality of living.

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

Attendees

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