



Design Review Report

Urban Quarter,
Swansea

DCFW Ref: 39

Meeting of 10th April 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	10 th April 2014
Issue date	29 th April 2014
Scheme location	High Street, Swansea
Scheme description	Mixed-use regeneration
Scheme reference number	39
Planning status	Pre-application

Declarations of Interest

Steve Smith is a Design Review Panel Member, but was acting on behalf of the Local Authority for the purposes of this review and stepped down from the panel for the this review.

Consultations to Date

None discussed.

The Proposals

This scheme is the latest phase of regeneration along High Street proposed by Coastal Housing working with Holder Mathias Architects (HMA). The completed Urban Village project has been a catalyst for regeneration in the area, and has seen improvements to street frontages, increased footfall, new businesses and increased perceptions of safety.

This Urban Quarter phase would employ the principles of mixed-use development established through the Urban Village phase. Proposals are for affordable general needs residential development with some commercial and retail. There is a desire to attract creative industries, and to create a Cycle Hub. The Kings Lane route will be reinforced.

The brownfield site is within the city centre and is bounded by High Street to the west, The Strand to the east and Kings Lane to the north. The ground level at the Strand is approximately 9m lower than at High Street. The development along High Street aims to reflect the historic burgage plot widths. There is a desire to increase active frontage along The Strand. The former Grade II listed Bush Hotel formed part of the site but was demolished in 2013 as it was deemed structurally unsound. It has been agreed with Cadw that the facade onto High Street will be replicated. Proposals show residential development around a semi-private courtyard with car parking accessed from The Strand.

Summary

- The Design Commission for Wales welcomes the opportunity to review this scheme at an early and still fluid stage in the design process, when there is scope to make a difference and add value.
- The ambition of Coastal Housing and the input from the Local Authority are to be commended. The results of their efforts are already evident in the earlier Urban Village scheme. All parties should work to ensure that the design quality standard delivered by this scheme equals or exceeds that of the first phase.
- In principle, the Design Commission is supportive of the development, the aspirations to improve the Kings Lane connection, and to continue the regeneration of this part of Swansea. The key to the success of this scheme will be in the detail.
- Massing and viability studies are needed for the residential block. These studies should consider density, views in and out, daylight and sunlight, and the contribution of activity to The Strand. The practicalities of meeting DQR and fire regulations, as well as dealing with the replication of the Bush Hotel facade also needs to be considered in detail.
- The quality of the creative cluster and courtyard space need more careful further consideration. The team should consider whether the route through would really work, and whether the modular units would realistically attract the 'alternative' tenants that are hoped for. Designs should be guided and informed by detailed urban and commercial analysis.
- The scope of this project means that it would have a significant impact on part of the city. With the Local Authority, the design team must consider the surrounding public realm alongside design of the buildings and the private outside spaces. A good understanding of urban analysis is required to do this well and achieve the desired outcome.
- A sound energy strategy must be developed, and this should inform the rest of the design. Ventilation, daylight and renewable energy should all be carefully planned, and will affect form, layout and orientation. Environmental design should take into account the surrounding outdoor spaces as well as the buildings.

Main Points in Detail

Residential Block

Further work is needed on the proposed residential block, so it is difficult to comment in any detail at this stage. The team is currently working with the Local Authority to agree an appropriate scale of development which is also commercially deliverable for Coastal Housing.

It is encouraging to see models being used by the team to inform the design process. The models are particularly useful on this sloping city site, where massing will be important. Accurate models should form part of a comprehensive massing study for the residential part of this scheme, as they allow form and the impact on surrounding spaces to be better understood.

A methodical massing study, which tests different options for the residential tower and is informed by study of the surrounding cityscape is now needed. The study should include consideration of the following:

- Views of the building from different locations around the city
- Views out, including overlooking issues
- Daylight, sunlight and ventilation in the building
- Overall energy strategy
- Sunlight and overshadowing of surrounding open spaces and buildings
- Numbers of units and viability
- Access and entrances, including parking
- Relationship to surrounding buildings and public spaces, including potential for active frontages onto streets

Both the impact on the wider city and the quality of living accommodation will both be crucial to quality of life for residents. The residential block should be considered at both macro and micro scales.

Standards and regulations should also be incorporated at an early stage. The DQR and Parts B and M of Building Regulations are likely to have significant impact on form and floor layouts. Replication of the Bush Hotel facade and how this is integrated with the rest of the residential block will also influence form, storey heights and layouts.

It is important that when rebuilt, the Bush Hotel does not result in a pastiche of the original building. The use of proper detailing and good quality materials will be critical to achieving an acceptable building on completion.

Creative Cluster/Kings Lane

Flexible facilities for creative industries are proposed, to inhabit the courtyard space off of Kings Lane. There would also be a pedestrian route up through a series of spaces behind the old wall which runs along one edge of Kings Lane, including through the forge building which would be refurbished. It is proposed that the flexible units or pods might be prefabricated modular units, possibly containers. The team hope that these modular units will attract 'alternative' creative businesses.

The panel was concerned about the viability of this part of the scheme, especially that the courtyard space with modular units might feel too contrived. Successful creative clusters most often form organically, whereas this area would be planned and designated, and might not attract the tenants the team are hoping for. It is encouraging that the team have been talking with creative organisations and researching need for this approach and these conversations should be used to assess the feasibility of proposal options, and guide the design process. The quality and activity of this space will be vital to its success and that of the wider proposals.

The team must carefully consider whether the modular units or containers are the right solution for this part of the city. There is a danger that containers may appear passé and fail to attract the dynamic clusters at which they are aimed. Thought must also be given to the longer term maintenance and durability of solutions which are usually considered temporary. Any precedent projects should be carefully studied to see how well they have aged over time.

The nature of these spaces along Kings Lane will be important in making the place work successfully. Whether or not modular units are used, the design of this area must be an appropriate response, based on proper urban and commercial analysis, rather than guided by a 'pop-up' strategy.

The Cycle Hub is an interesting proposal and a good idea, and if well-designed, has the potential to attract more visitors to this part of the city and enhance city cycling and the use of cycle routes.

The Design Commission questions whether the proposed route behind the wall would be successful, as it would be less visible and less direct than walking up Kings Lane.

Energy Strategy

A clear energy strategy is needed at this early stage of design. The strategy should be based on analysis of the site and the potential uses. Sustainability principles should be integrated with design of the buildings and outside spaces, and will have an impact on form, massing, orientation, layouts, room depths, fenestration and materials. It would be more costly to add energy saving methods to the scheme at a later stage.

As well as informing architectural design decisions, a good energy strategy will help to set a brief for M&E consultants, and ensure that all members of the design team are working to the same vision. M&E consultants who are able to deliver contemporary solutions which push boundaries and are appropriate to this scheme should be selected.

In other words 'environmental design and architecture' should inform the design of the scheme from the outset, rather than be considered after the building is designed.

Public Realm

Although this scheme is essentially a collection of buildings and semi-private outside spaces, due to its nature and scale, it will have a significant impact on the public realm in this part of the city, especially when combined with other Coastal schemes in the vicinity.

The coordinated approach between the team and the Local Authority should also be applied to improving the surrounding streets and the whole 'piece of the city' should be considered.

The team are hoping that the lighting and signage along Kings Lane will be improved, and that a new pedestrian crossing at the corner with High Street will improve pedestrian circulation and access. These elements, which are outside of the control of the design team, would contribute to the success of the scheme. The Local Authority must do all they can to ensure that they can be delivered.

Further consideration needs to be given to The Strand, which is currently an uninviting street for pedestrians. Due to the delivery/servicing function on the opposite side of the road, improving this street will be more challenging. The building elevations along The Strand will be important, as they offer a chance to add activity and natural surveillance, which would make the street feel safer. The Local Authority should also consider improvements to this street.

Future Engagement

The Design Commission would welcome the opportunity for further review of this scheme as designs progress. An extended slot might be appropriate for the next review, so that the various complex issues relating to a scheme of this scope can be fully explored.

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

Attendees

Agent/Client/Developer:	Steve Griffiths, Coastal Housing Nodhlaig Barry, Coastal Housing
Architectural/Urban Designer:	Terry Morley, Holder Mathias Architects Julian Morgan, Holder Mathias Architects
Planning Consultant:	Richard Bowen, Asbri Planning
Local Authority:	Steve Smith, Swansea
Design Review Panel:	
Chair	Carole-Anne Davies, Chief Executive, DCFW
Lead Panellist	Phil Roberts Amanda Spence, Design Advisor, DCFW
Observing:	Susan Toner, Public Health Wales