

Addroddiad Adolygu Dylunio Design Review Report

Review Status: **Confidential**

Meeting date:	2nd March 2011
Issue Date:	25th March 2011
Scheme Location:	Westgate Plaza, Cardiff
Scheme Description:	Masterplan
Planning Status:	Pre-application

Part1: Presentation

This development brief is intended to formulate a vision for enhancing the site to enable the site owners, the Welsh Rugby Union (WRU), to seek proposals from development partners. The brief itself will have no formal status but it is hoped will constitute an informal agreement and provide a 'letter of comfort' between the Cardiff Council and the WRU, as well as potential Joint Venture partners. The Panel was informed that the WRU has recently acquired Yates's Wine Lodge and has offered to purchase the Arms Park site to the north.

The aim is to provide a legacy for the WRU and a centrepiece for the city. Gaunt Francis Architects have not been commissioned to design architectural elements or to submit a planning application, but they have thought it useful to test broadly indicative scheme designs in order to arrive at informed iterations of the possibilities that may exist.

The north-east facing site ramps up from Westgate Street by about 2m, forming one of the busiest entrances to the Millennium Stadium. Plans for improvement to surrounding areas are in hand, including the central bus station and the pedestrianisation of St Mary Street extending to Womanby Street and Quay Street. These moves towards limiting private car use will in turn impact on Westgate Street. The brief to the design team from WRU was not prescriptive and simply outlined what might be done if a 'big box', a cipher for an additional space, were to be added. The team have moved away from this notion of a development on the site, towards concentrating on the potential for the public realm. Different options for built form which serves to enclose the public realm have been considered. There is a requirement to maintain a 26.5m wide access from Westgate Street at some point along the site frontage, and a built form which bridges this access is currently under consideration. The eventual aim is to achieve a concourse running round the whole perimeter of the stadium.

Design principles, still at a very early stage, include the importance of responding to existing building lines, locating all parking and servicing at lower ground level, and restricting all vehicular access to the existing access opposite Guildhall Place. It is suggested that any new buildings should be part of the stadium rather than Westgate Street and might incorporate gently curved facades, serving to strengthen the sense of enclosure.

The local authority welcomed the early involvement of DCFW, and confirmed their aspiration to significantly reduce traffic movement on Westgate Street, possibly limiting it to buses only.

Summary of key points arising from discussion, to be read in conjunction with Part 2 of this report.

The Panel appreciated the opportunity for confidential consultation on this significant proposal for the Millennium Stadium and the city centre. We commend the high level of ambition and expertise invested in this project, and the long term, trust based relationship established between client and design team, the strength of which was evident. Such partnerships are vital to the realisation of such a project and we were encouraged to hear that similar trust existed between client, design team and the local authority. We believe that the opportunity to integrate the stadium with changes at Westgate Street and Cardiff's aspiration for enhancement linked with the bus and train stations, provides an important stimulus for regeneration and justifies innovative intervention.

In view of the very early stage and informal status of this document, a formal rating of the proposal is inappropriate. We therefore offer the following comments in summary:

- We support the creation of a comprehensive development brief and clear design principles. There is scope for these to be developed and refined.
- Creating a new civic space and principal entrance to the stadium, repairing this stretch of Westgate Street and a new landscaped public realm linked across to Quay Street and Womanby Street, are all to be applauded.
- We welcome the long term aim for public pedestrian routes around the entire stadium, and an improved setting for the former South Glamorgan County Club and Cardiff Arms Park buildings.
- Whilst activity is virtually guaranteed during events, it is critical that the proposed public space functions well when the stadium is closed.
- It will also be important to ensure that any proposals work equally well with or without change on the NCP site.
- The access, parking, servicing and lighting strategies must ensure that the basic tools are in place for a well designed scheme.
- We think the scale of the buildings could be increased without prejudicing the importance and dominance of the stadium, but we question the massing of development placed directly onto Westgate Street.

Part 2: Discussion and Panel Response in Full

The Panel recognised the significance of the site for the stadium and the WRU, and its importance in supporting the stadium's role in the city as a whole. It was confirmed that the function of this document was to attract possible Joint Venture partners and the local authority could offer future support in the form of a 'letter of comfort'. The Panel strongly welcomed the WRU's proper consideration of a development brief before engagement with a developer.

The problem of designing a space which works on match days and still generates enough activity on non-event days, was recognised by all. The project team hopes that the creation of a new, well designed public space will itself generate activity, and the team have considered various temporary uses. A similar problem of maintaining activity might arise in designing buildings which as yet have no defined end-uses. The WRU are developing ideas around an enhanced visitors experience, including a sports museum, and family oriented activity to encourage longer and more frequent visits. These are envisaged in addition to the sports, music, business, cultural and tour events that already exist in their programme.

The Panel fully supported the long term aim for pedestrian access all the way around the stadium and we were very encouraged that this is being considered even though it requires extensive coordination with sites and future developments not in WRU control. The team accepted that allowance for a future link to the north was not yet sufficiently resolved. Until an all-round concourse can be delivered, any new public space will be the end of a route and will have to work hard as a destination to attract activity without a through-flow of pedestrians.

The NCP car park site on the east side of Westgate Street is an obvious candidate for future development and the most thoroughly developed proposal encompassed this site too. The Panel welcomed this broad consideration of development options but we were concerned that ownership issues make this the least likely option. The Panel wondered whether the subsequent public space was oversized, especially in relation to the grain of the small twisted lanes on the east side of Westgate Street. We thought that the issue of traffic passing through the square was also unresolved, even if this were to be limited to buses. A proposal that is fully successful without the NCP site should be the highest priority.

A link between the context studies and the overall grain and mass of the development subsequently proposed was not clear. The importance of key views of the stadium, e.g. from Quay Street, was accepted and the merits of the bridge linking the two blocks was discussed. The project team thought that the 'bridge' element in the scheme gave added drama to the street frontage but the Panel was concerned about its impact on the narrow (vertical) glimpses of the north east mast on the approach along Quay Street. Whilst the Panel appreciated the aim of providing some sense of enclosure when the stadium is shut, we were concerned that the bridge was reinforcing the tendency for the scheme to become one complex mass, rather than several independent buildings.

The scale of the buildings in proportion to the space that they enclose was questioned. The architect stated that the focus would be on the two pavilion-like buildings fronting Westgate Street, and the buildings to the rear would be subordinate. The Panel suggested that this was the wrong way around and that the buildings were too deferential to the

stadium, (their forms stepped down towards the stadium). Taller elements may be better placed further back from Westgate Street, particularly if the structures can span over the BT tunnel.

The development brief will enshrine key development principles for the future proposals to follow. As stated in the draft document for review, the principles comprise a mix of general objectives that are good practice for any development and more relevant site specific guidance. The Panel felt that clearly separating these two types of guidance would enhance clarity.

We can see the advantages of pursuing a high quality 21st century intervention which does not pretend to be an earlier part of the conservation area. However, the Panel questioned the design principle that any new construction should “be part of the stadium not the adjacent Westgate Street buildings.” The stadium will always be the most distinctive form in the area, standing out from its surroundings and the adjacent urban grain. The Panel suggested that this contrast with its surroundings should be reinforced, and not weakened by adding new forms as “part of the stadium.”

Whilst the curved building forms shown for the comprehensive scheme including the NCP site related to the public space created, this was less apparent in the smaller scale scheme. The Panel was not convinced by the design principle that “any extensive elevations with public faces should incorporate gently curved facades” – this is a characteristic of the stadium not its context.

The Design Commission for Wales Design Review Panel and staff welcome further consultation and will be happy to provide further feedback on this report and/or where appropriate, to receive further presentations. Thank you for consulting the Commission and please keep in touch with us about the progress of your project.

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

Appendix 1: Attendees

Asiant/Client/Datblygwr: Agent/Client/Developer	Welsh Rugby Union (Roger Lewis)
Pensaer/Architect:	Gaunt Francis Architects (Alan Francis, Gavin Birt)
Consultants:	n/a
AwdurdodCynllunio/ Planning Authority	Cardiff City Council (Lawrence Dowdall)
Y Panel Adlygu Dylunio: Design Review Panel:	Richard Keogh Jonathan Adams

John Punter [Chair]
Cindy Harris [Officer]
Carole-Anne Davies

Andrew Linfoot
Ewan Jones
Roger Ayton

Lead Panellist:

Ewan Jones

Sylwedyddion/Observers:

Geraint Talfan Davies
(Institute of Welsh Affairs)

Declaration on interest: Alan Francis, partner of Gaunt Francis Architects, is also
Chairman of the Design Commission for Wales