

# Design Review Report

Queens Market, Rhyl

**DCFW Ref: N221**

Meeting of 13<sup>th</sup> February 2020



## Review Status

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

## Public

13<sup>th</sup> February 2020  
25<sup>th</sup> February 2020  
Rhyl  
Mixed use  
N221  
Pre-application

## Declarations of Interest

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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.

None.

## Consultations to Date

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No previous reviews of proposals for this site by DCFW.

## The Proposals

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The redevelopment of the Queens Market site is a key part of the Council's regeneration strategy for Rhyl Town Centre which is guided by the need to reinvent the seaside resort town and reverse many years of decline. The council has developed a strategy for urban transformation including improvements to the public realm, economic incentives and the promotion of mixed-use development, building restoration and upgraded movement connections across the town. A central theme of the strategy is the restoration of lost connections between the town and its spectacular beach.

This proposal is for the redevelopment of an entire seafront urban block around the historic Queens Market. It comprises the restoration of a few of the existing structures and the clearance and redevelopment of the remainder of the site. A mixed-use development is proposed including residential accommodation, shops and restaurants, a library, offices and workplaces around a reconfigured market. Existing buildings are generally three storeys high. The new development is generally of five storeys.

## Main Points

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The Commission welcomed the opportunity to review proposals for this site at a stage where there is scope for constructive input well in advance of a planning application submission. The dialogue between the local authority and development partner Ion is encouraging and a positive approach is being taken to encourage improvement to the town centre in a challenging economic and commercial context. Given that public investment is contributing to this project, demonstration of public value is essential.

Rhyl town centre, like many seaside towns, faces a range of challenges that will take time to turn around. It is important that the aspiration for this site is realistic but sufficiently high. Viability and the budget available for the project are tight so it is important to identify the areas of the project where money is best spent to ensure the greatest impact. A big scheme that tries to do too much but at a low quality could be more damaging in the long term than a more modest but high-quality scheme. In this context there are some elements of the scheme as it is currently proposed that require further consideration.

### **Land Use Mix**

The proposed library and council office elements are very positive and could provide a significant injection of life and expenditure into the town. DCFW supports this element of the proposal and encourage the council to fully commit to establishing a greater town centre presence.

Given the central theme of reinforcing connections between the town and beach, consideration could be given to whether the publicly funded library and more publicly accessible parts of the council offices be located to benefit from views to the beach and the sea beyond.

The target market for the residential element of the scheme is young professionals as provision for this demographic has been identified as absent from the current housing market. To be successful the design quality of the apartments must be aligned to the aspirations of this group and be supported by other facilities that support their lifestyle choices. Justification for the public subsidy of this market demographic needs to be reinforced.

As currently configured the quality of the apartments is compromised with 50% having only a single north facing aspect. Dual aspect apartments would benefit from both sea views to the north and passive solar gain to the south and further consideration of this is encouraged. There is a lack of variety in the proposed residential offer which may lead to a monoculture of residents which should be avoided. Greater variation in unit size and tenure would help to create a more diverse town centre community.

The current scheme includes a number of commercial spaces along with units within the market, providing a considerable amount of floor space for food and beverage businesses. In a struggling market it is important to be realistic about what is viable and helpful for the rest of the town. More testing and evidence would be helpful here and may lead to a greater diversity of ground level uses than currently proposed. It may also help to focus decisions about the appropriate mix of ground floor commercial uses to the locations which support the urban design aspirations of the development.

### **Urban Form and Public Spaces**

The analysis that has been undertaken highlights the granular nature of the urban form and the well-defined, historic street pattern. There appears to be a disconnect between this analysis and the current proposal. The West Parade frontage presents a very long block of development all at five storeys which currently appears mundane and repetitive. A new interpretation of the historic character of the town is needed. There would also be merit in exploring the difference between the corner of Queen Street and the corner of High Street with the latter having greater significance.

The courtyards internalise activity rather than focus it on to the public streets. The result is that much of the retail space faces both outwards to the street and inwards to the courtyard. Both public access and the necessary retail servicing are compromised by this arrangement. The movement of people, potential uses and users of these spaces should be considered to ensure that they don't compete with the wider public realm. Fronts, backs, public and private spaces must be clearly defined. There is the potential for conflict between the use of the courtyard spaces and servicing as these areas will function as the rear of surrounding buildings. Further consideration of where the focus of the public realm is best located is needed. Investigation of precedents from other seaside towns could assist in establishing successful urban form and public spaces.

Public realm improvements to West Parade are an important element for the success of this scheme and in helping to better connect the town centre to the seafront. Rather than just being within the courtyards, events such as the proposed seasonal markets could spill out into this space to help animate it and reinforce the connection.

### **Movement**

The routes through the site need to be more clearly defined. The connection into the site from West Parade is through a deep block and is not activated on either side. This entrance requires clear articulation through the urban form rather than depending on signage. There may be too many routes through the site which diminishes the beneficial impact of increased footfall on the surrounding streets. Analysis of existing uses in the surrounding area such as the cinema and water sports centre would inform potential desire lines which could assist with the urban form and viability of the redevelopment.

### **Landscape and Sustainability**

Further work on the SUDS provision should be undertaken in conjunction with landscape proposals for the site. The courtyard spaces could become important locations for attenuation linked to a landscape treatment that benefits ecology as well as users of the spaces.

The Commission supports the fabric first approach to environmental sustainability and encourages pursuit of Passive standards. The implications of this must be understood and integrated at this stage as it will have an impact on the form of the buildings, treatment of different elevations and overall development economics.

### **Materials and Finishes**

Careful consideration is needed in the selection of durable materials and finishes in response a challenging marine environment.

### **Next Steps**

Further work is needed to refine the vision for this development. The project promises the discovery of a big idea for the site that has not yet been found. Without ambition the development is unlikely to deliver impact and the level of change that is desired. The proposed mix of uses has good potential but we encourage further testing of urban forms, options and alternative arrangements to ensure the amount and type of commercial and residential space is the most appropriate to optimise the regeneration potential. Further refinement of the urban design approach will enhance the proposals and ensure that the arrangement of buildings and spaces works for the proposed uses as well as the wider town centre.

A programme of events or meanwhile uses could be used to help change how the market is perceived and support forthcoming physical interventions.

The Commission would welcome the opportunity for a further review as the scheme develops in relation to these comments. This could be undertaken in Rhyl and should be arranged at the earliest opportunity.

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

## Attendees

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Planning Consultant:	Kathleen Radford, BDP
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Chair	Kedrick Davies
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Panel	Simon Power Ben Sibert Carole-Anne Davies, DCFW Efa Lois, DCFW Jen Heal, DCFW
Observing	Taya Sellars Caren Shek