

City Design Manager Comments

Proposal:

Mixed use development including alterations to the West Quay Shopping Centre comprising Retail (Use Class A1, A2, A3, A4 and A5 - 19,500 square metres maximum floorspace); Hotel (Use Class C1 - 28,000 square metres maximum floorspace); Residential (Use Class C3 - maximum 260 flats); Leisure (Use Class D2 - 19,500 square metres maximum floorspace) including a Cinema; Offices (Class B1(a) - maximum 10,000 square metres floorspace); public open space; with associated car parking, access, highway, landscaping and other works including infilling the existing pedestrian subway in Bargate Street (Outline application with access for consideration at this stage - Environmental Impact Assessment Development).

Summary

The proposed scheme has been developed over the last two years working closely with Hammerson's architects and planning consultant, following on from the successful 2010 consented scheme. This scheme included 18,000 sqm retail (A1-A4 uses), a 10,200 sqm cinema (D2 use) 14 screens, 2,400 sqm Portland Terrace Mall (A1 use), c. 200 residential units (C3 use) provided in a 25 storey tower and a 6,800 sqm 112 bed hotel (C1 use).

The objectives of the scheme review have been to create a more viable scheme that includes the cinema in the initial phase, allowing the part of the site facing Forest View to have a number of smaller blocks that will break down the mass in this sensitive location. The principles of the 2010 consented scheme to provide active frontage facing the Town Walls and creating a new public plaza remain central to the success of the scheme.

The vision -...a distinctive new location, a special peoples place at the heart of Southampton.....animated by people and activity at all times of the day, week and seasons... one of the most important additions ever made to civic infrastructure (*West Quay Phase 3 Development Brief – Dec 2001*).

As with the previous consented scheme 2010 the proposed development as defined by the Design Principles clearly demonstrates that 'the vision' (now over a decade old but still highly relevant), quoted above, can be achieved. These principles and the supporting documentation indicate that a design of the highest quality is achievable at the reserved matters stage. ACME Architects have shown great skill in responding to the contextual heritage of the site, its topography and by the manipulation of a tightly constrained development brief set by the developer Hammerson. This is particularly demonstrated by the clever use of levels to bring people down to the plaza level via a continuous ramp – something that the previous architects had not been able to achieve. The result is a highly innovative development which reduces the large mass of the cinema by use of an articulated façade that recedes back from the Town Walls whilst providing shelter to the terraces below, that also places the Town Walls at its heart as a key focus for the scheme. The mix of uses should enhance the West Quay Shopping Centre's offer substantially, drawing more people to use this part of the City, also encouraging greater exploration of the Old Town and its antiquities. The design team has responded positively to the constructive criticism made by SCC Officers and EH throughout the design process and the vast majority of concerns have now been mitigated, leaving those remaining to be dealt with at the reserved matters stage. The submission is of very high quality containing some very detailed information that would be appropriate for a detailed application.

Detailed Response

DZ1 – Retail and Leisure Block

A key challenge for the proposals is to create a harmonious relationship between the existing WQSC and the proposed leisure and retail block DZ1, whilst providing a new pedestrian route and bridge link at the upper promenade level and retaining the identity of the existing WQSC as well as establishing an exciting and new visual attraction and landmark development for the city. The proposal demonstrates the potential to create just this however its success will be critical on the detailed design at the reserved matters stage, and the quality of materials and workmanship.

Specific areas to be addressed:

- As previously raised a key concern is the relationship with the existing WQSC, which has a blank inactive frontage directly abutting the proposed scheme that now juts out awkwardly into the flowing space of the terrace on the south eastern corner. This frontage is also very evident in views approaching from the Bargate and Bargate Street and opportunities to maximise commercial value as well as a more harmonious and attractive active frontage have not been developed. However it is recognised that this part of the WQSC contains M & S's back of house facilities and any improvements to this frontage would necessitate major upheaval for the store at a time of economic austerity. It is hoped that this position will be reviewed as the scheme comes forward and opportunities are sought to activate and enliven the existing south, south east and south west corners of the existing development in such a way that addresses these concerns.
- The relationship between WQSC and the proposed development on Harbour Parade is also an important design issue, in particular at ground level where the 'fortified' design and buttresses of the existing lower two storeys housing the existing multi-storey car park creates an uncomfortable and inhuman scale of development on Harbour Parade. The interface between the proposed development, the new bridge and the existing entrance to the car park will need to be carefully designed to ensure an appropriate relationship that distinguishes the two buildings distinctly and creates a much more 'comfortable' pedestrian environment along the east side of Harbour Parade.
- Opportunities to open up the existing partially glazed upper levels of the south west corner of the WQSC to greater activity (glazing and entrance doors) in response to the proposed active frontage to Harbour Parade should be maximised when economic conditions allow, as well as shop frontages along the bridge link where possible. The distinct environment created by the juxtaposition of the two buildings and this new stretch of public realm justifies its own character area to be identified (as for other areas see DAS p129).
- It is also noted that a canopy is proposed to provide pedestrian cover between DZ 1 and WQSC; again given the different architectural styles of these two buildings a simple but effective canopy is required that sits well between the two buildings.

DZ 2 - Public Realm

The proposals demonstrate the potential to produce a vibrant and high quality major new civic space for the City. As such the quality of materials proposed will need to be of excellent quality. The retention of some existing trees is also welcomed though this will need to be considered in further detail in relation to the space, the buildings and the landscape strategy. The detailed design of the hard and soft landscape will need careful

consideration to ensure that the Town Walls are shown off to maximum effect both during the day and at night time with an appropriate lighting strategy. Further work with English Heritage will be essential, particularly regarding the nature of the treatment at the foot of the Town Walls to ensure their setting is maintained and/or enhanced whilst being viable and maintainable..

The proposal to incorporate 'retail/pavilions' of up to 500 sqm is welcomed as these would help provide activity in the public spaces when the weather may not be conducive to much external footfall. These structures have been used successfully in similar developments such as at Brindley Place and the Bull Ring in Birmingham. These could really help enliven the space in the colder months or in the parts of the plaza that are more prone to shading. However this needs to be considered in the round with the number, size and location of other kiosks including a pavilion/kiosk at the upper level of Albion Place and the impact that they may have on the setting of the Town Walls and the hosting of large events in the Plaza.

It is noted that the design principles re the subway (now to be removed including handrails) and design of public realm to take into consideration route from Central Station and Western Esplanade) have been added – which is welcomed.

A new character area for the pedestrian bridge link between DZ 1 and WQSC has been included following detailed discussions.

The parameter sections on p14 of the Design Principles show that there may be an oversailing of the pavement on Harbour Parade. Although not a planning matter, except for its visual impact, this will need some consideration at the reserved matters stage.

It should be noted that the public realm extends beyond that detailed under DZ 2 to include the areas below and the public realm strategy should address all parts appropriately:

- DZ 1 Pavement interface on Harbour Parade, pedestrian link street and bridge at the upper promenade level and link street to Harbour Parade roundabout;
- DZ 2 The Plaza, Pocket Park, area south of the tower, Albion Place and Bargate Street;
- DZ 4 Pavement frontage to tower on Harbour Parade;
- Proposals should integrate with plans to improve links with Central Station and Royal Pier, including the proposal for the International Maritime Promenade (as identified in the Design Principles);
- Opportunities to integrate public art in the design of the public realm should also be considered. The water feature proposed would be an exciting way of animating the plaza however safety and practical design issues will need further consideration;
- It is recognised that the landscape proposals are indicative and much more discussions will be needed to agree the details.

DZ3 – South Block

I welcome the removal of the residential element from DZ3 and the reduced height of parameters adjacent to the Walls, after the initial stepping back, then rises from 26.0m AOD gradually to 36.0 m AOD.

This reflects the design principles/parameters agreed in the design of the cinema in the previous approved scheme to the extent that the parameters reflect considerable articulation of the facades facing the Town Walls. The amended design principles now reflect the need to better articulate the mass and elevations of the DZ3 facing the Town Walls and ensure they defer appropriately to them, as well as setting back upper storeys

and greater articulation of roof line and upper storeys. This will also ensure that new development here does not reinforce the mass and form of the Castle House residential block which juts out inappropriately from the low rise scale of the Old Town.

It is also more in keeping with new development in the city centre, which is tending towards a 5/6 storey (office/retail) height of development (and the tall building policy emerging in the City Centre Action Plan sets 5 storeys and above as a tall building), punctuated by taller buildings (with exceptions such as in the Old Town). This is demonstrated by the form of development in the local context by WQSC (parapet 26.38m AOD and roof apex 39.78m AOD), IKEA, Carnival (circa 21.5 to 25.3m AOD), WQ Site B Premier Inn (22.8m AOD to parapet) and WQ Site B Aqua (32.64 m AOD).

In the previous application the mass of the developed (the cinema/car park) was located close to the Town Walls (max height 35.98 m AOD) – a position accepted due to the nature of the development. DZ3 - the retail/hotel block (max height 31.88m AOD) was comparatively lower. In the new application the mass of the development (the cinema - max height 37.60m AOD) is now in a preferable location further from the Walls, with the height parameters of DZ3 (close to the Town Walls) now deferring to DZ1 and allowing also for appropriate deference to the Town Walls.

DZ 4 - Residential Tower

The tower remains from the previous consented scheme as a dramatic marker of this new development. The detailed design should minimise the impact of shading on the public square as far as practicable. The inclusion of external balconies is acceptable in principle but the practicality will need further consideration at detailed design stage – the tower could be quite exposed, particularly at the upper levels and so an external balcony may not be the best approach – possibly a ‘winter garden’ style balcony where windows can be opened inward in a large glazed facade (an approach they have taken at Admirals Quay on the main façade).