

Plymouth Design Panel Review Tuesday 23rd January 2007

In attendance

David Mackay (chair)
Bruce Duncan
Prof Adrian Gale
Mark Pearson
Tanya Griffiths (Secretary)

Apologies
David Morgan

Agenda Items

1. Plymstock Quarry (workshop)
2. Princess Yachts, Millbay. Update
3. North Cross redevelopment (workshop)
4. Sutton Harbour AAP. Update

1. Plymstock Quarry

Panel Members confirmed that they had no conflicts of interest in dealing with this item
The presentation team confirmed that the proposal was in the public domain.

The panel concurs with the comments and recommendations made in the letter from CABE following their review on the 10th January 2007. The panel has an overriding concern that the scheme does not respond to its very unique environment. The transition from the landscape setting to an urban situation was thought not to have been satisfactorily resolved and a sense of townscape is lacking in the proposal. The Panel was disappointed with the apparent lack of progress on the masterplan and, unless this is undertaken, the proposal is unlikely to get the support of the Panel.

The panel also wishes to express its disappointment that neither physical model nor digital visualisation for the site as a whole had been prepared and would expect that this would be an essential design tool given the complex topography of the site.

Masterplan

The panel is concerned that work on the design codes has commenced while the masterplan is incomplete and with key strategies needing further development. In this context the panel found assessment of the work on the design codes difficult.

The panel felt that the masterplan should include illustration of the street blocks and not just the important building frontage. It should also be made clear on the masterplan or by means of a supporting diagram, which street blocks have on-plot, on-street or rear courtyard parking.

The panel recommends that the masterplan should be further advanced and that a strategy be clearly set out describing how the design codes are structured and how they are to be implemented in relation to the masterplan.

Pedestrian and Vehicular Movement

The panel was not convinced that the pedestrian and vehicular movement had been fully resolved particularly in relation to the main square. The secondary public transport route which was illustrated in the public transport diagram as accessing the square on the south west corner was then described as accessing from the north west. Clarification of the strategy is needed.

Careful consideration of the hierarchy of circulation and the positioning of the MOBI hub, bus gates, bus stops, disabled parking, drop offs for the school and the supermarket/retail are vital to the understanding of the movement around the square and its impact on the character of the space.

Servicing strategies for all the principal buildings including the school, retail units and the business park should be included in the vehicular movement diagrams.

A green lane providing an edge to the east end of the development where it forms a boundary with the woodland should be considered.

Density and Massing

The panel did not raise any specific concerns except that it expected to see a model (a working model would have sufficed) and long and cross sections showing new and existing levels as previously requested. The panel will only be satisfied that the 9-10 storey tall building at the western end of the development would be acceptable once it had been demonstrated that this would not impact on views from Saltram House.

Sustainability

The panel shares the views expressed in the letter from CABI and would add that a development of this nature and scale should strive to go beyond the requirements of Building Regulations Part L2.

Design Codes – General

The codes should be very clear as to how they will be implemented and how they are to be read in conjunction with the masterplan.

Neighbourhood character- Identity and diversity

The codes should include detailed dimensioned sections through public spaces and streets and examples should be given of the character of each place.

There should be a consistent approach to the material and detailing of the ground surfaces across the development.

A good balance of overarching design principles for a consistent approach with sufficient flexibility to allow variation in detailing and/or materials to create diversity needs to be struck. Distinct neighbourhood character needs to be achieved.

Design Codes by Area

Main Square

This space in particular is seen as the heart of the scheme and the focus of the new community.

The square should be formal and the streets ordered in relation to the public space and the buildings that enclose it, rather than shaped by the swept paths of the buses. The road widths should be adjusted to accommodate the buses without the need to introduce serpentine kerb lines as illustrated in the presentation. The panel felt that the junctions might be simplified by realignment of the roads north east and north west to ease the bus turning issues.

Car Parking

The character of the square in the proposal presented is dominated by the presence of cars taking up virtually all of the central space of the square as parking. This is understood to be driven by the nature of the retail on the west side and the parking demands of a supermarket occupation. It is essential, if the square is to hold any civic function or cultural significance for this community, that its principal public space is experienced as more than a supermarket car park, therefore there should be no car-parking in the centre of the square.

Active frontages, shared space surface treatment and careful detailing of the hard and soft landscaping may go some way to mitigating this, but ultimately every effort should be made to reduce the number of parking spaces in the square to make it a place for people not cars. In addition to potentially creating a poor quality public realm, the quality of the residential properties in the mixed use around the square will be compromised if this is not achieved. The panel also noted that an analysis of the topography might reveal an opportunity to accommodate cars beneath or around the square.

Eastern Boulevard and the Business Park

The panel is disappointed that the water feature along the central spine of the development which had formed an integral part of the earlier scheme as narrow rectilinear canal, had been omitted in favour of a cascading rock lined water route of a very different nature. The landscaped area along the principal distribution road needs to mediate between the domestic order of the residential development on the north and the setting of the high quality business park buildings on the south of the road, the revised proposal did not appear to the panel to be a successful resolution.

The environmental impact arising from the necessity of pumping to achieve a continuous flow of water for a canal and the maintenance issues were acknowledged, nonetheless it was thought that a stronger water landscape concept should be possible.

It was felt that the environment of the business park is very important to its attractiveness as a high specification commercial development. The buildings should be sufficiently set back from the road to create a generous setting which they did not appear to have in the landscape proposal. Parking and service areas should be concealed behind the buildings to the south away from the residential areas.

Tall Building and Crescent

The panel welcomes the idea of a design competition for the tall building at the western end of the development but suggests that the competition should include the terraced crescent at the end of the western boulevard in order to ensure a harmonious design for the feature building within its context.

Supporting Material required

A plan illustrating the datum levels of the proposal within the quarry and a minimum of 2 sections showing existing and proposed levels across the whole site

A model

Visualisations

Photomontages at strategic positions to demonstrate the impact of the sports pitch (taking into consideration light spill) and the height of the tall building in respect of views from Saltram House.

More detailed proposals for preliminary renewable energy strategies and sustainable construction.

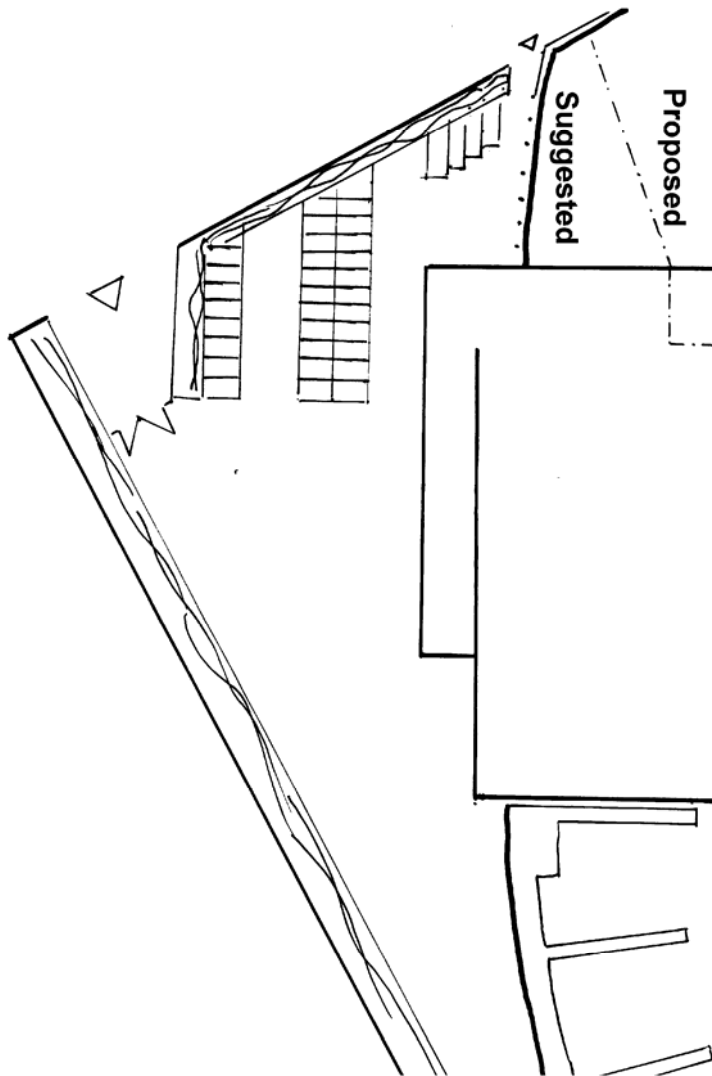
2. Princess Yachts, Millbay

Panel Members confirmed that they had no conflicts of interest in dealing with this item. The presentation team confirmed that the proposal was in the public domain.

The panel were encouraged to see a significant improvement on the scheme previously reviewed.

Roof and water edge condition.

The panel noted that the alignment of the water's edge relative to the building could be made simpler and more emphatic by continuing the geometry of the curve of the water front on the south side through to the north. In addition the expression of the roof would greatly benefit by omitting the cut back in plan of the roof profile. A suggested solution is illustrated below.



The panel seeks clarification on the nature of the 6 rectangular elements identified on the roof in the site location plan.

The curved profile of the entrance canopy (drwg 1542/10 rev-) was considered by the panel to be adding complexity where a simpler device, rectilinear in profile, would be more elegant and would not detract from the powerful gesture of the undulating roof forms.

Landscaping and Site Entrance

The panel would like to reiterate its previous comments on the landscaping proposal. This does not appear to be significantly altered from the earlier scheme. It is felt to be suburban in character and that a more appropriate response to the setting should be sought. (TR2 is cited as an example.)

A single vehicular entrance onto the site is suggested to help resolve the parking and landscape.

Materials and Details

The panel recommends that the use of blue tinted glass be re-considered and that details and samples of the curtain walling including the finishes and colour of framing elements for glazing and the timber louvres should be submitted for full approval. There are a number of metal finishes proposed– the glazing framing , roller shutters, steel columns, zinc coated aluminium roof, aluminium planking system, fascias and liners; these will require careful co-ordination. The specification in terms of weathering and maintenance of the timber louvres (including access) should be considered particularly in relation visually to the Prodema panelling which is pre-finished and UV stable.

Similarly, the quality of the detailing of the roof verges and jointing of the fascia panels were thought to be very important to the overall impact of the undulating roof form. An indication of how rain water is discharged from the roof (location, material and colour) should also be demonstrated.

Details of the external lighting (if the canopy is to glow as suggested in the statement) and signage schemes should be submitted for full approval.

Further details of hard landscaping finishes, boundary materials and fencing elements should be submitted with dimensions. The wave form of the fencing is thought not to complement the roof form. Consideration to the planting scheme at the boundary should be given – the elevations presented show very tall mature trees.

Plans illustrating the structure in plan should be included in the submission particularly those elements supporting the projecting roof canopy, without these, it is very difficult to read the elevations.

3. North Road Station

Panel Members confirmed that they had no conflicts of interest in dealing with this item. The presentation team confirmed that the proposal was in the public domain.

The panel would like to commend this initial study of the Railway Station and associated site of the North Road area and would support continued development of the proposal.

In particular, the study addresses the reinstatement of the East to West grain of the city and endeavours to connect Central Park (and the Life Centre) to the north, the University to the east and North Road West to the railway station and the commercial development which establishes a gateway to the city via Armada Way, Western Approach and Coburg Street.

The quality of the public spaces and routes will be key to the success of the scheme. To this end, the panel felt that the boulevard could be made more generous in its width and the proposal might successfully incorporate a porticoed, sheltered route through to the station.

The panel suggests that the pair of towers facing Armada Way may be too literal an expression of a 'gateway' and that the east tower element might become taller (of more elegant proportion) and that the west tower omitted to become a landscaped area allowing south and west light to penetrate the new business quarter.

The panel noted that the pedestrian route through the site and 'podium edge' require clear definition on the north east boundary of the site.

A concern was raised as to the travel distance from the railway entrance to the platforms and with the bridge link to Central Park.

The panel would recommend that further investigation of the potential of the site should include an option in which the Caprera Terrace is redeveloped and that the viability of a vehicular connection between North Road East and North Road West is tested.

The panel also feels that the collocation of the coach station (as re-provision of the facility at Bretonside) with the Railway should be included in the brief to create a fully integrated transport hub. As such, a holistic approach to the city wide restructuring of transport infrastructure encompassing the City Centre, Sutton Harbour and University sites is critical to the further development of the scheme.

The next level of design development should include more detailed sections through Armada Way to Central Park and East-West looking at the topography which will enable clearance of overhead connections to be understood and may reveal opportunities to resolve the pedestrian links east west and across to Armada Way.

4. Sutton Harbour AAP Preferred Options Report (update)

The panel found the presentation of the report to be very satisfactory, however, it would like more time to consider the report in more detail.

As preliminary comments:-

The panel would recommend that there continues to be a high level of co-ordination between the Sutton Harbour, Eastern Corridor, City Centre and University site developments.

Preferred Option 4 Bretonside

The panel strongly recommends that a development brief is produced for this site. The brief should address the possibility of relocating the coach station to the railway station site. Any development of this site should tackle the very poor pedestrian links that currently exist and the reinstatement of Charles Church as an accessible landmark monument in Plymouth.

Preferred Option 9 Coxside

The panel would like a better understanding of how the provisions of this option are to be enforced. In particular, the control of massing and the phasing of the development in such a way that the key links are established, for example 13 a. boulevard linking East Quay to St.John's Church.