

**Plymouth Design Panel Review  
Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> April 2007**

In attendance

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

**Agenda Items**

1. Plymstock Quarry Design Codes
2. Ker Street
3. Salt Quay House
4. Sutton Harbour AAP. Update
5. Note of Thanks

**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 would like to point out that the presentation was not easy to understand as the masterplan illustration did not coincide with the verbal presentation on many occasions.  
This should be rectified before PCC officials assess the changes.

The panel was pleased to see a marked progress in the development of the masterplan, advancement of the design codes and that previous comments, for the most part, had been addressed. A number of alterations to the masterplan were introduced in the meeting, it was however clear that further work would be needed to coordinate the changes and the codes. A number of concerns remain.

**Masterplan**

**Alterations**

The panel welcomed the proposed changes to the masterplan in respect of the introduction of street frontage on the eastern boulevard, the increased significance of the water feature, introduction of tall building at the eastern end of the east boulevard. The increase in density, building heights and principle of stepping the buildings were seen as improvements to the quarry area (provided it can be demonstrated that views from Saltram House are not affected.) The updated cross sections with the new levels particularly through the altered quarry area, and the relationship with the cliff face will be critical to the understanding of the impact of this remodelling.

The introduction of the path and integration of the employment zone buildings with the southern cliff and landscape was thought to be on a positive course.

The realignment of the road priority west of the central square to the crescent with the intent of making a better connection to Wakehams Quarry was acknowledged, although it was noted that the 'looped' road layout at the circular west end might be disorientating. The movement through the site should be legible.

The panel felt that although the frontage onto Billacombe Road represented an improvement, more emphasis needed to be made to acknowledge the presence of the new community, particularly at the two entrances from the main road. The point was made that the east entrance to the site needed to introduce and define the street leading into the development, rather than the corners necessarily being denoted by isolated landmarks. The junctions and pedestrian crossings were felt to be critical to creating successful links to the wider community. The panel were also concerned that the silhouette of the houses facing Billacombe should have the aspect of a larger scale terrace with a uniform façade to contrast with the suburban spread on the other side of Billacombe Rd.

### **Pedestrian and Vehicular Movement**

There remained a concern about the central square and its viability from a pedestrian and transport access point of view.

The apparent reduction in parking and intention to emphasise the square as a pedestrian priority area was welcomed, as was the realignment of the roads to ease the geometry issues raised at the last meeting. However, the panel would like to see the theory proved in the transport assessment and some demonstration that, - by restricting east-west car access to the north side of square (effectively the only car link E-W within the site) that the proposal is not inadvertently creating a primary route in a pedestrian priority area. The panel strongly support the 'shared surface' approach taken within the square, but for this to be a success, great care must be exercised in the detailed handling of the hard-landscape, and the panel recommends that experienced advice is secured in taking this idea forwards.

### **Sustainability**

The sustainability targets should be clearly defined in terms of recognised standards. There is as yet no evidence to suggest that CHP has been seriously considered or potential site/s identified.

The SUDS principles could be better illustrated and the proportion of fill material to be sourced off site should be more clearly defined.

The coding should consider early co-ordination of utilities and should also cover communal aerials and micro-generation.

### **Orientation**

Much greater consideration needs to be demonstrated in the building principles in terms of orientation and solar control. It should be clearly stated what is expected in terms of

balconies, amenity spaces, window openings and thermal performance. The block layouts should reflect these principles.

### **Design Codes – General**

The panel was broadly in support of the progress of the design codes. There was a strong concern that the use of 'illustrative' elevations should reveal building principles eg. relating to orientation and frontages without describing stylistic concerns. The use of the 3 dimensional block models was favoured as a means of communicating principles and generally the sketch perspective views definitely did not convey the quality of design that the scheme should be striving for.

It was pointed out that the codes should clarify which aspects are mandatory and which discretionary so as to achieve a balance of control and latitude for creativity.

The panel reiterated that whilst the distinct areas could have defined characteristics it was very important that the masterplan and codes imbued the proposal with an overall identity and coherence - and it was not yet clear what elements of the design were providing this.

Given the topography of the site, it may be useful to include guidance within the codes on how steps in either building form or landscape should be dealt with.

### **Car Parking**

The target parking ratios should be stated for each of the 4 housing areas, the public square and the employment areas. The codes currently allow considerable flexibility in terms of the proportion of on plot and garage parking. Reference should be made to the English Partnerships 'Car Parking:- what works where' guidance.

### **Civic and Commercial buildings**

The panel felt that there should be better illustration of the architectural quality intended for the civic and commercial buildings particularly facing the central square. (For example a ground floor arcade or a common material for the plinth).

Given the topography of the site, the codes should include reference to the appearance of roof plant.

### **Tall Building and Crescent**

As previously reported 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 and the external space defined in front of it at the end of the western boulevard in order to ensure a harmonious design for the feature building within its context. The illustration showing this building in the context of the whole quarry was thought to be a bad representation of a tower as it is shown as a merged element in a stepped-up terrace, obviously to obtain more floor space.

## **2. Ker Street**

The panel welcomed the opportunity to review the project at the brief and analysis stage and were encouraged by the proactive stance of the design team.

Since the panel were not in effect reviewing a proposal but discussing the issues of the regeneration of the site the following comments are observations that might inform future proposals:-

The panel strongly recommends the extension of the area for consideration to St. Stephens Street, and explores improved connections with Mount Wise, the waterfront and the Roperies.

Looking at the wider context, the masterplan should illustrate the current status on adjacent developments including the Enclave, Mount Wise, Brickfields and the James/Bennett Street developments. This is an opportunity to reconnect a fragmentary area of the city with an underexploited and complex topography. To this end the panel would recommend the proposals should be developed extensively using 3 dimensional modelling.

The panel expressed a concern that the protracted and complex phasing proposed might not provide the right socio-economic catalyst for successful regeneration. It was felt that the redevelopment may not, if conducted in too piecemeal a fashion, attract the quality of development needed to resuscitate Devonport as an urban centre and could result in replication of the existing problems.

The location of the larger retail unit on Chapel St as part of the Enclave development has a consequence for the location of commercial and civic activity elsewhere in Devonport, especially Ker Street, Market Hall and Marlborough Street. Care needs to be taken, that the tendency toward fragmentary development does not leave Devonport without a sufficient concentration of economic activity. The ambition to improve north south permeability and reconnect the previously divided communities is very much supported.

The historic buildings will require a sensitive approach both in terms of their use, and importantly their setting. The Guildhall, in particular, needs to support, and be supported by activity appropriate to its status as a Grade 1 listed civic building. The public realm areas identified are seen as key to the successful reintegration of historic buildings and to fostering a sense of ownership of the public spaces. It was thought that the space adjacent to Oddfellows Hall, (formerly the site of Mount Sion Chapel) currently an area of public realm of poor quality, could support a built form provided it made a suitable setting for the column and the 2 listed buildings.

It was observed from an earlier map that a fairly large public square to the south side of Ker Street close to the Guildhall, if reinstated could improve the civic identity of Devonport. It would also help if another public building (civic centre, or an activity, that would attract people to visit from the rest of the city).

The panel would like to see that the retention and re-working of the existing buildings on Ker Street is given due consideration. The framing of the street, overall height and the

reasonable storey heights may mean that a refurbishment option (to include improved overlooking of the street) is viable and therefore should be subject to a feasibility study. However new buildings to the right scale should not be discouraged.

The panel concurs with the initial assessment outlined in the briefing paper and looks forward to seeing the next stage of the proposal where the ideas presented are tested.

### **3. Salt Quay House**

The panel wishes to express its regret for the loss of the existing Salt Quay House building, which - whilst not listed, makes a significant contribution to the historic character of Sutton Harbour.

The panel would also like to note its disappointment that it was not given the opportunity to review this proposal as a key element in the regeneration of Sutton Harbour at pre-application stage. The panel raised a general concern that the emerging character of the new developments at Sutton Harbour including East Quay and Shepherds Wharf, lack a coherent architectural expression. There is a perceived danger that this may ultimately result in a collection of posturing 'landmark' buildings without balanced composition and will represent a missed opportunity for Plymouth to create a harbour environment of internationally recognised merit.

#### **Building Siting**

The panel acknowledged the constraints of the site and the issues arising from the failure to achieve proper land assembly, particularly to the rear of the site. However, the panel were very concerned that the boulevard which is an essential component of the Vision for Plymouth and the AAP had been seriously compromised by the position of the building at its eastern boundary.

The resulting width of the boulevard of 12m was considered too narrow to achieve the intent of the boulevard which is to provide visual and physical links with views both from the wider city to the harbour and from the harbour to St. Johns Church. It is essential that this link is of a high quality in terms of its spatial relationship with the buildings either side.

The panel suggests a minimum width for the boulevard of **20m**. The nature of the boulevard and character of the public space should be determined so the street environment can be set out. This should also take into consideration the impact of the building requiring servicing from the boulevard, the proposed drop off and the allocation of disabled parking. It has also been noted that no parking appears to have been allocated for this building within its demise line.

There is an overriding concern that the public realm described in the design statement will be a residual space between the buildings and not the positive entrance to the harbour envisaged, irrespective of high quality materials and detailing. A drawing illustrating the proposed hard landscaping with Salt Quay and East Quay buildings as ground plans is essential to complete the picture. The phasing will also need to be taken into account. The same would apply to proposals on the west end and potential Phase 2 plot.

Given the demands on the site in terms of area required and the constraints presented, the panel felt that the building would have been better sited, the form less contrived, had the link to the west of the building been omitted and had the site not been split into two plots. The link to the Tothill sidings, was felt to be less important than the quality of the boulevard and successful resolution of the harbour fronting buildings and a ground floor link could have been maintained if desired.

### **Building Massing**

In principle, the panel did not object to a projection of the building on the upper floors resulting in a colonnade on the quay which could make a positive contribution to the public realm. However, the panel did not feel that the curved arrangement of the colonnade was appropriate and that the result would be disconcerting and an ambiguous definition of territory. Notwithstanding the impact on the ground floor the panel found the curve of the projection unsatisfactory and uncharacteristic for the harbour frontage. As a device for turning the corner it was felt to be weak and generated an uncomfortable relationship with the East Quays Building which is heavily articulated. The relationship between the buildings is critical to the framing of the boulevard.

The roof profile also raised a concern and the architectural conceit of incorporating the roof plant and lift overrun to terminate the vertical façade element was considered unnecessary. Since there is no direct alignment with adjacent buildings at roof level the demands for nett floor area might have been accommodated on the top floor with little adverse effect.

### **Architectural Expression**

The panel felt that the façade composition on the harbour side needed to have either more vertical or more horizontal emphasis. Whilst being expressive of its use as office accommodation the building could afford to be a little less modest but ought to pay deference to its specific (and nautical) setting.

### **Sustainability**

The panel were disappointed that the proposal had not taken full advantage of its narrow plan depth and its very appropriate environment (in terms of lack of traffic noise and access to fresh air) to utilise natural ventilation. The panel would encourage the pursuit of a BREEAM 'excellent' standard and minimum use of air conditioning or comfort cooling.

As a conclusion, principally owing to position of the building and the consequence of this for the boulevard and on the building form and its architectural expression, the panel does not support this proposal.

The panel strongly recommends that all major schemes relating to the development of Sutton Harbour should be referred to the panel as early as possible and that an overview of development proposals for the whole area should be reviewed in a separate workshop.

#### **4. Sutton Harbour AAP update**

The panel had requested an update on the AAP in order to revisit the context to schemes coming forward for planning and to gain an understanding of the progression from the diagrammatic representation of the preferred options in the AAP to the implementation, particularly in terms of the massing, urban and architectural design.

It was reported that following consultation, the preferred option to infill the harbour by Sutton Jetty had been withdrawn.

The panel reiterated its concern that the AAP does not sufficiently emphasise the importance of reinstating public access to, and providing an appropriate setting for, Charles Church. To that end the panel also recommends the transport plans for the Eastern Corridor and City Centre take this into consideration, and that a development brief for the Bretonside site is undertaken.

In light of the applications approved and in progress within the Sutton Harbour Action plan, the panel suggests a workshop be convened to look at the overall emerging masterplan, massing and architectural composition.

#### **5. Note of Thanks**

Plymouth City Council would like to thank David Mackay for his inspiring leadership as the Chair of the Plymouth Design Panel since 2004. He has helped the Council make some key judgments on the quality of design of major development proposals in the city. The Council would also like to take the opportunity to thank the other members of the Panel for their continuing expertise and the Council is confident that, with the quality of the other members of the Panel, the Panel will continue to provide excellent advice on future proposals. With the help of the Panel the Council and Chamber of Commerce and Industry hope to announce a new Chair to the Panel shortly.