Proposal: Apsley House, erection of replacement office building, Wellington Street
Architects: 3D Architects
Status: Detailed Application 06/04188

Illustration indicates image of scheme as presented to the Glasgow Urban Design Panel 8th March 2007

Presented by:
Graham Feachan 3D Architects
Also in attendance:
Michael Smart HBG Properties.

The panel thanks the architects for presenting their proposal for the demolition of the 1960s Seifert influenced Apsley House and its replacement with a 75,000sqft office building on this site within both the IFSD and the outstanding Central conservation area. However, the panel are disappointed that the application has been presented to them for comment at such a late stage and would caution that such are their concerns that they object to the application in its current form and recommend refusal.

The panel's comments are as follows:

The panel were disappointed that the ambition and quality conveyed by both the initial design sketches and by reference to precedents had been lost, or not achieved in the actual submission.

The panel questioned the logic behind the building's form i.e. a purist sculptural tessellated glass box / cubic volume that was then incised into at key points with the resultant negative volumes (of terraces and balconies) exposed being expressed in a stone skin. The committee felt that this key move was confused. By virtue of the stone's weight and solidity it was contradictory that a fragile glass skin would support it. The committee felt that this concept would make more sense if it was reversed i.e. if one were to cut into a stone volume and expose a more crystalline interior. Perhaps a geode was a better precedent? Given contemporary concerns about the sustainability of fully glazed office buildings and minimization of energy use a stone clad building might be preferable.

The panel were also confused by the architects idea that the stone clad incised volumes would occur at places on the typical floor plan where the cellular offices on the exterior of the floorplate would stop i.e. the volumes occurred at the points were sunlight would be able to penetrate into the centre of the deep floor plate. It seemed obvious to the committee that you would then want to maximize your glazing at these key points rather than opt for opaque stone.

Concern was expressed that despite the architects attempt to link the location of the voids in the building volume back to cornice lines on neighbouring buildings little thought had been paid as to how the building sat within its context. Little justification was offered for the increased height relative to either of the proposed building's neighbours.

Though the architects stated that their intention was to achieve a BREEAM good to excellent rating for their proposed building the committee are unconvinced that this is achievable given the level of detail tabled. The architects seemed not to have thought about how to reconcile issues such as solar control with their stated aim for a purist glass box. They also did not appear to appreciate that such an extensive glass curtain wall would more likely give rise to issues of solar gain than heat loss or that this would dictate a mechanical rather than a passive ventilation strategy i.e. contrary to the ethos of the BREEAM objectives.

The panel would remind the design team that the most recent Scottish Executive target stated in Scottish Planning Policy 6 Renewable Energy part 36 (which is mandatory and takes effect from 22nd March 2007): *all future applications proposing development with a total cumulative floor space of 500 sq metres or more should incorporate on-site zero and low carbon equipment contributing at least an extra 15% reduction in CO2 emissions beyond the 2007 building regulations carbon dioxide emissions standard* . Consequently the panel request that a detailed sustainability report be submitted by the applicant in support of their submission.

With regards to sustainability and comfort issues the committee noted that it did not appear possible for a building user to simply open a window for ventilation.

The panel felt that the architects needed to give more thought as to the materials that make up their façade. Key details such as the junction between the curtain wall and the floor had yet to be thought through. A good deal of concern was expressed as to the detailing of junctions between materials. In particular it was critical that the architects thought more carefully about the key junction between the glass curtain wall and the areas of stone cladding as this currently looked flimsy and lacked conviction.

The architects also need to pay more thought as to the pedestrian experience of their building. If the Glasgow is to be successful in its ambitions for the IFSD then thought has to be paid as to how successful the streets that comprise the area are from a pedestrian point of view. Certain members of the panel felt that aspects of the building such as the deep-cantilevered floor plates over the two-storey high entrance void were aggressive and would make the building feel top heavy and intimidating to passers by. On the other hand the base of the Cadogan Street elevation lacked detail or interest and would be un-stimulating to passing pedestrians.

The cantilever over the service lane also highlighted secure by design issues. This overhang had the potential to obscure views into the lane from the offices i.e. it did not assist with the casual policing of the lane. This was particular failing in an area noted for problems with prostitution and petty crime.

Finally the panel felt that the Cadogan Street elevation of the proposed building, in particular where it abutted the neighbouring building and how it met the ground, looked under developed and required more thought.

In conclusion without significant amendments to the proposal the panel would reiterate that they would have no option but to recommend refusal of the planning application based on what has currently been tabled.

Glasgow Urban Design Panel members in attendance:

Alistair McDonald	Glasgow City Council
Gerry Grams	Glasgow City Council
Rob Hay	Strathclyde Police
Pauline Megson	Historic Scotland
Roger Guthrie	Alexander Greek Thomson Society
James Spence Watson	Landscape Institute
Guy Pettigrew	New Glasgow Society
Neil Pirrit	Architectural Heritage Society of Scotland
Murray Russell	Glasgow Institute of Architects
Jim Dick	Glasgow Institute of Architects
Niall Murphy	Pollokshields Heritage
Betty Sneddon	Old Glasgow Club
Angus Kerr	Glasgow Institute of Architects / Glasgow Architecture Committee
Gill Stewart	Glasgow Building Preservation Trust
Angela Williams	Architecture + Design Scotland