Proposal: Erection of Hotel Complex, Argyle Street, Robertson Street, York Street
Agent: Turley Associates
Architects : Ian Simpson Architects
Status: Pre-application

Presented by:

Ian Simpson	Ian Simpson Architects
Also in attendance:	
Ernest Ter Horst	Ian Simpson Architects,
Charles Price (MD)	PPC Developments
Kevin Fawcett	PPC Developments
Brian Currie	PPC Developments
Lawrence De Marco	PPC Developments
John Paton	Turley Associates

The panel thank the architects for presenting their proposal for a 23-storey hotel tower, crowned with a fully glazed health spa, and dramatically suspended over a planar glass podium base containing restaurant and banqueting facilities, with additional serviced apartments located behind an adjacent retained 'B' listed J Burnet façade at the corner of Argyle and York Street, at the pre-application stage.

The panel welcome the opportunity for providing commentary whilst the design of this imaginative proposal is still evolving. However the panel do have concerns about certain aspects of it. Consequently the panel want to make the following comments:

Whilst the panel recognise the commendable effort the architects have made with their tower proposal to date they wish to reiterate to Glasgow City Council the need for clarification of Glasgow's Tall buildings policy as laid out in the current City Plan.

They would point out to the council that the location of the tower does not comply with the areas noted for tall buildings as outlined in their current policy CC-DES 4.

The proposal underlines the pressing need for strategic 3-dimensional guidance to developers over the acceptability of sitting tall buildings.

As part of any review of policy the city must think more clearly about whether it wants clusters of tall buildings or towers as singular iconic objects.

The council also need to think about the impact of the sitting of new towers on key strategic views both within the city centre, on approaches from the Southside, and how proposed towers could add to, and articulate, the city's skyline.

The panel also feel the city needs to carefully consider the precedent established by approving such a tower as it runs the risk of both distorting land values and of exerting considerable pressure for development on neighbouring sites within the outstanding Central conservation area, many of which contain listed buildings.

However certain members of the panel felt strongly that given the proximity of key transport nodes i.e. Central Station, this was an ideal location for a 21st Century approach to city building and that a tall building, and in particular a hotel, was an entirely appropriate use for this site.

With regards to the demolition of the 'Cs' and 'B' listed buildings on the site and the retention of the 'B' listed J Burnet façade certain members of the panel expressed concern at the loss of these buildings and the precedent this would establish in the outstanding Central Conservation area. Additionally the panel feel that the interiors of the J Burnet building need to be assessed to understand if there is anything of merit that remains and, if it is of significant enough value, could it be retained and re-used?

Certain members of the panel also felt that the façade retention element needed further justification. The panel debated the appropriateness and honesty of façade retention as a way of securing the long-term future of parts of the city's architectural heritage and noted that in many other cities this method is now discredited. However other members of the panel felt that the J Burnet façade was of real townscape merit and its loss to Argyle Street would be keenly felt. Its retention both helped inform Ian Simpson Architects' approach (i.e. the contextual nod to Burnet's Second Empire mansard roofs in the form of the tower) and the scheme as a whole benefited from the deliberate contrast between it and the juxtaposed hyper modernist tower and podium.

However the panel felt strongly that the success of the façade retention approach will come down to how well the junction between the Victorian stone façade and the 21st century planar glass box is handled and that this detail requires sensitive consideration. The same sensitivity also applies to the York Street elevation where the mansard roof will be altered to allow a minimally detailed glass box to over sail the 'B' listed façade.

The panel noted with interest the involvement of noted conservation architects Simpson and Brown Architects in the conservation elements of the proposal.

The panel as a whole was supportive of the mixed-use aspect of the proposal as it was felt that this would assist in adding some much needed vitality to the surrounding streets of the International Financial Services District. By attracting more people into the IFSD at different times of day this would also help with the casual policing of the area.

Further to this the panel request confirmation from the design team that their intention is to promote active uses on the ground floor of the retained J Burnet façade i.e. in place of the current shop units. This is critical to the vitality of this stretch of Argyle Street and to add interest and human scale from a pedestrian point of view.

The panel felt that more thought needed to be given to casual surveillance of Robertson Lane at the rear of the proposed site. This lane is a noted hotspot for prostitution and crime within this area of the city centre. Part of the reason for this is that it lacks both 'eyes on the street' and the 90-degree bend in the lane obscures sightlines. Given the nature of their high class hotel proposal the panel hope the developers will pay heed to this issue.

The issue of the new building adhering to either the Robertson Street building line or aligning with the Blythswood Grid and thereby more clearly framing the Glasgow Style Art Nouveau tower of the 'A' listed John Campbell building at 71 –75 Robertson Street, which both effectively notes the shift in the city grid as well as the entrance to Robertson Lane, was keenly debated between panel members.

Ultimately the panel decided that the sense of urban enclosure to Robertson Street was more important than revealing Campbell's tower. This sense of urban enclosure is a key characteristic of Glasgow City Centre and should be reinforced, not undermined; therefore the retention of the Robertson Street building line was paramount. Consequently the panel request that the architects revisit the Robertson Street podium setback.

Certain panel members expressed concern on the impact of the width of the hotel tower when seen from the north. Consequently the panel request that an image illustrating the impact the tower will have on the key city centre view from Blythswood Hill down Wellington Street be supplied for their perusal and comment.

Given the architects comments about the materials of the new tower i.e. that it had to be smooth with the windows flush to the building's surface and that the proposed cladding material would be *'patinated to relate to sandstone'*; the panel are keen to know what palette the architects will ultimately opt for given that this will have a profound impact on both the weathering and appearance of the tower. The panel wish to be kept informed of developments in this regard.

The panel welcomed the inclusion of the health spa at the summit of the tower. They felt this was both an appropriately public use and that its appearance could provide a satisfactory termination and celebration of the apex of the tower.

The panel noted that the design team had already wind tunnel tested the tower and had taken cognisance of the impact of wind in their design solution.

When queried over the issue of tall buildings as clusters or singular objects the panel noted with interest that the design team had thought about forming their own tower cluster at an earlier presentation to Architecture Design Scotland. The architects were now opting for a single tower solution as they felt that what was previously tabled looked awkward.

In conclusion given the importance of this tower proposal to both Glasgow's city centre townscape, its impact on the city's skyline when seen from the Southside, and the potential consequences for the city's outstanding Central conservation area the panel wish to remain informed of any progress and design development pertaining to the scheme.

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