Erection of Office Building 110 Queen Street

Status: Full Planning Application 08/01350/DC
Developer: Valad Property Group
Agents: Turley Associates
Architects: Holmes Partnership

Presented by Harry Philips, Holmes Partnership
Also in attendance:

David Gardner	Holmes Partnership
TBC	Turley Associates
TBC	Turley Associates

The Panel thanks the architects for presenting their planning submission for a 13-storey office block incorporating retail provision on the corner of Queen Street, Ingram Street, and Hanover Street diagonally opposite Royal Exchange Square and GOMA. However, though the Panel welcomes this second opportunity to review the proposal, such is its concerns that unless there are significant amendments to the current proposal, the Panel would have no option but to unequivocally recommend refusal

The Panel takes the opportunity to remind the architects of its comments supplied following the pre-application review of 25-01-07. It is clear to the panel that many of the issues raised at that stage have still to be addressed. The panel view this with concern.

The panel's comments on the current proposal are as follows:

- The Panel expresses its disappointment that the architects tabled precedents at the outset of their presentation, thereby setting a benchmark for the level of design ambition for their proposal, only to retract these later as not being applicable on the grounds that the Glasgow market could not afford them. By doing so the architects unfortunately appeared to raised expectations they could not deliver.

The Panel strongly encourages the architects to retain the stated level of ambition of these precedents but resist watering down their proposal. Glasgow demands, and expects, the best modern building on such a prestigious site.

- The Panel noted the architect's refusal to reveal the proposed increase in floor area of their proposed building relative to that of the existing building currently occupying the site. The Panel reminds the architects that this is a legitimate planning question.

  At the pre-application stage the plot ratio was reported as being 9.5:1. Review of the Planning submission document, at the architect's suggestion, reveals the Plot ratio to have increased to c.10:1. As previously noted in pre-application discussions the increase in plot ratio presents a significant departure from the 3.0:1 to 5.0:1 range of plot ratios for the Victorian Business Centre city centre as indicated in City Plan Policy CC-DES 2.

  The Panel advises Glasgow City Council that the precedent established by approving such an increase in plot ratio within the Central Conservation area runs the risk of exerting considerable pressure for development on neighbouring sites. Many of these contain listed buildings of particular significance to Glasgow's built heritage and culture.

- The Panel's concerns in this regard specifically relate to how the scale and mass of proposed building impacts on Royal Exchange Square and GOMA and reminds the architects that the square is one of the UK's finest urban set pieces.

  The Panel was unanimous in their opinion that the proposed building is over dominant in its relationship to both Royal Exchange Square and GOMA. It is also the Panel's opinion that the architects' own townscape analysis clearly demonstrates that their building currently sits uneasily in this sensitive townscape context.
- The Panel reiterates its previous concerns over the height of the proposed building and has previously noted its opinion that the presence of an existing anomalous late 1960's 12-storey podium and tower

building on Queen Street cannot be interpreted as supplying sufficient justification for such a significant departure from general building datums in a sensitive townscape context.

- The Panel remains of the opinion that the imposition of the four to five storey glass 'skybox' surmounted on the 7 storey stone 'city scaled' box – also considered to be at least one storey too high relative to its neighbours - causes the building to be read as two separate and unrelated buildings. The proportional relationship between these two elements looks ungainly and should be reviewed.

  Furthermore the height of the glass skybox element remains such that it severs the key visual relationship on Glasgow's city centre skyline between the spire of the City Chambers and the clock tower of GOMA, i.e. that between Glasgow's key Civic and mercantile Victorian buildings.

- The Panel noted the architect's comments on how they had explored arrhythmic elevations as a means of creating visual interest in the proposed facades. In their own words they sought to avoid a 'boring' static façade. By utilising this device the architects hope the building will complement the richly ornamented Victorian and Edwardian facades that surround it. However, the Panel feels that the resulting elevations need further work to achieve this goal. In particular it was noted that the architect's explanation was undermined by a contradiction between the arrhythmic elevations to Queen Street and the westernmost three bays on Ingram Street and the static rhythm of the elevations to Miller Street and the easternmost three bays on Ingram Street.

  In addition the way the arrhythmic elevations to Queen Street and Ingram Street meet at the corner junction makes the resultant column look unnecessarily heavy handed. Consequently this corner, at one of Glasgow city centre's key intersections, lacks elegance or celebration and would greatly benefit from a lighter touch.

- In order to refine their elevation design the Panel is of the opinion that the architects would benefit from further analysis of the more subtle façade composition of their stated design precedents, in particularly the work of Raphael Moneo in Murcia and Eric Parry in the City of London.

- Concerns were raised by the Panel about the loss of public realm at the base of the new building that has resulted from the reversion to the former Ingram Street building line and its corner intersection with the existing Queen Street building line. The consequence of this is that the proposed building's corner, addressing GOMA and Royal Exchange Square, occupies a larger footprint than both the existing building and David Hamilton's British Linen Bank Headquarters that previously occupied this site. The area allocated to pavement has subsequently decreased.

- The Panel feels that this will be problematic at what is already known to be a busy pedestrian and public transport intersection. One that is likely to get busier as a result of both the proposed building as well as regeneration around George Square and in the Merchant City.

- The Panel remains of the opinion that the proposal would benefit from the introduction of a ground floor arcade on Ingram Street as a means of combating the reduction in pavement width and as a 'scaling' element. The Panel notes the architect's comments that arcades are not indigenous to Glasgow, however it also notes that an arcade has been successfully incorporated at the base of 9 George Square which is on the same block as the current proposal.

  Incorporation of an arcade may also assist in overcoming the contrived internal planning solution whereby the lift core of the proposed building is rotated towards a corner entrance at the junction of Ingram and Queen Streets thereby having an awkward relationship to the building's floor plates. An arcade could allow the entrance to be aligned with the full height glass bay on the Ingram Street elevation, thereby both making sense of this elevation feature, while still allowing access from the corner. This would enable the lift core to be re-orientated towards both entrance and the building's floor plates. The potential benefit of reconfiguring the building's plan along these lines is that it may increase net to gross floor area efficiency of the ground and upper floor levels by making both entrance and core more compact and economic while simultaneously rationalising the retail units' footprints.

Conclusion

The Panel remains keen to see a building of outstanding architectural and urban design merit on this key site in Glasgow city centre and encourage the architects in their pursuit of achieving this goal. To this end the Panel suggests that the architects pay close attention to the comments noted in this report.
The panel also reiterates that, without significant amendment, the panel have no option but to recommend refusal of the planning application based on the current submission.

Given the acknowledged importance of this proposal within Glasgow's city centre townscape the panel wishes to remain informed of any progress and design development and formally requests the opportunity to comment again on the submission at an appropriate stage.

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