

**Report Title:** Ardent House Office Development, North Esplanade West, Aberdeen  
**Issue Date:** 29 May 2008  
**Client/Developer:** Miller Cromdale (Ardent House) Ltd  
**Lead Designer:** Halliday Fraser Munro  
**Local Authority:** Aberdeen City Council  
**Location:** Aberdeen  
**Planning Ref:** A8/0282  
**Details:** Proposals for a major office development, on a site formerly used for fish processing, close to the city centre, and on the banks of the River Dee



## **INTRODUCTION**

This report relates to a detailed planning application for a new office development in Aberdeen, presented at an A+DS Design Review meeting held on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2008 in Edinburgh.

The project was presented by representatives of Halliday Fraser Munro, and Miller Cromdale (Ardent House) Ltd.

The meeting was also attended by a representative of Aberdeen City Council, and Historic Scotland.

## **A+DS VIEWS**

### **1 General comments**

1.1 We thank the project team for presenting to A+DS and commend them for their initiative in regenerating this part of Aberdeen city centre. We support the principle of a new office development of this scale on the site and recognise the importance of the scheme in setting the standard for the future development of the area. However, we have a number of concerns with the current designs, and the overall approach to the wider development of the area, that should be addressed.

### **2 Harbour masterplan**

2.1 We welcome the Council's initiative in working with the Harbour Board to develop a strategic framework for the wider harbour area. However, we are concerned that the current lack of a cohesive masterplan is resulting in a piecemeal approach to the development of this part of the city, and has precluded the possibility of a fundamental reconsideration of the outdated road pattern.

2.2 We encourage the Council to take the lead role in developing an overall vision for the area. In doing so, consideration should be given to issues of mixed-use, including how the area will be activated at all times, both day and night and at weekends; connectivity; transport; parking; road infrastructure; and landscape design.

### **3 Public realm / parking**

3.1 We question the amount of car parking that is being proposed for the building given its central location within the city and its close proximity to rail and bus links.

3.2 We have serious concerns with the mass and design of the proposed bridge over Russell Street, which appears bulky and creates an intimidating space below. We suggest that the required floor area could be accommodated elsewhere on the site by reducing the amount of parking, specifically in the West Car Park. If required, a more elegant footbridge could link the east and west blocks.

3.3 The creation of a quality pedestrian environment around the base of the building is key to ensuring a successful insertion into the city and contributing to the positive regeneration of the area. We are concerned that a raised plinth at ground level would be intimidating to pedestrians resulting in the need for ramps and steps up to the entrance of the building, which might not otherwise be required.

3.4 We question the extent of the set back proposed between the street edge and the building, which seems counterproductive to the creation of a new street frontage. We encourage the design team to develop a more pedestrian friendly environment for the area.

3.5 We commend the project team for proposing a new pedestrian crossing across the busy North Esplanade West road as part of the development. This will emphasise the importance of the southeast corner of the building and how the streetscape in this location is handled.

### **4 Existing buildings**

4.1 It is unfortunate that the listed smoke houses on the site would have to be demolished as part of the proposals, and we would support Historic Scotland should they actively seek their retention.

## **CONCLUSION**

We thank the project team for presenting to A+DS. We commend the client for their initiative towards regenerating this part of Aberdeen and recognise that this is a key scheme for setting the standard for future development. We urge the Council to respond quickly to develop a masterplan for the area, which is critical to set a high quality context for the development of this and future buildings in the area.

We have a number of concerns with the current designs, in particular the amount of parking proposed, and would encourage a more sustainable approach to transportation be adopted given the site's central location. Further consideration should be given to the proposed bridging of Russell Street, and the design of the pedestrian environment around the base of the building.

We look forward to seeing the scheme as it develops within the context of the Council's masterplan for the area.