



Architecture+DesignScotland
Aithearachd is Dealbhadh na h-Alba

Project Title:	STI 05 Station Road Mixed Use development, Stirling
Details:	Proposed city centre mixed use development
Location:	Stirling
Use type:	Housing / Retail / Leisure/Arts / Civic / Public Realm
Client / Developer:	Stirling Development Agency / Valad Property Group
Lead Designer(s):	Michael Laird Architects
Planning Authority:	Stirling Council
Planning Status and Ref:	Planning Permission in Principle: ref. 09/00525/PPP
Issue Date:	20 October 2009

Introduction

This report relates to proposals for the redevelopment of over half of a city block in the city centre of Stirling presented at an A+DS Design Review meeting held on 29th September 2009 in Edinburgh. A+DS has been involved through the Urbanism Programme in a process of 'City Visioning' with Stirling Council, to input into their process of forming a new Local Development Plan (LDP) to guide future development in and around Stirling.

A+DS Views

1 General

1.1 This site, located outside the train station on the edge of Stirling city centre, is in a key position for the city and is critical to the way it is perceived by visitors and residents. Currently characterised by backlands, parking and waste ground, the redevelopment of the site presents a real opportunity as a means to tie the city together, at the prime entry point on foot from the train and bus stations, and from the main road route into the urban centre. It is also a potentially desirable commercial and residential location, but one which has proved highly difficult to develop in the past. We welcome this submission as a co-ordinated proposal for the block, bringing together all land under different ownerships. Developing such outline strategic proposals could be the key to unlocking the potential of the site and kick-starting the regeneration of the wider area.

2 Urban strategy

2.1 Local development strategy

Strategically, this is a key site for future local development, both for how it can improve the city but also a key opportunity to progress the Council's current urban policies in a co-ordinated way. This block is on the pedestrian route from the castle and old-town, past the station, to the ongoing Forthside regeneration area via the recently completed high profile bridge over the rail-tracks. It has the potential to form an urban edge around the eastern side of the city centre, extending along the corridor of the A9 to the University. These axes present great opportunities for structuring the future development of Stirling on a larger scale. Additionally, there are a number of ongoing planning policy

areas which can be advanced through this development, such as strategies for the public realm, transport, or city centre housing. In this situation it is particularly important that the proposals are realised well, to set the standards for future development. The council should demonstrate design leadership and clarify their aims for the site to support an integrated approach to the re-structuring of the block. We also suggest that the applicants consider the block more within its current context, and specifically how it can form a model for the new eastern face of the city centre.

2.2 Proposed occupancy patterns

We welcome the proposed combination of commercial, leisure, and both high and low cost residential uses in one plan, all to be provided in a high-profile and extremely accessible location. The locations of the different uses within the block appear to be generally appropriate, although some parts will be challenging to deliver, with particular issues for the social housing, in relation to the units' aspect and their relation to the neighbouring nightclub. We support the use of commercial and public occupancy to activate the streets around the block and encourage the development of street frontages with relationships that will reinforce the quality of public spaces.

2.3 Urban Realm strategy for surrounding streets

We acknowledge the co-operation between Project Team and the Council, in attempting to incorporate policies for the surrounding streets into the proposals. However, we have concerns that the traffic considerations, such as relocation of bus stops, could be allowed to remain as the dominant feature, in spite of the importance of these streets within the pedestrian network for the city. We urge all parties to place at least as much emphasis on these as functioning places as well as traffic systems, in line with the requirements of the draft government policy document 'Designing Streets', to achieve an attractive pedestrian environment. These proposals should be incorporated into plans for the future improvements to the forecourt of the listed train station. There are also opportunities on the southern and western sides of the block, around the proposed new library, to take advantage of the sunnier and busier character of the streets to create small but attractive public spaces outside a major new public building. We suggest that these areas in the proposals need to be reviewed and developed accordingly. Planning such informal spaces will be vital to link into and build on the network of proposed new public spaces elsewhere, in and around the city centre.

3 Draft design proposals

3.1 Massing and footprint

As a future face of the city centre from the east, the scale proposed appears appropriate, although we suggest that an elevational drawing is required to test this, within the context of Goosecroft Road and the city beyond. We also note that the roofscape will be hugely important, as the site is overlooked from the old-town and nearby hills across the Forth valley. This development will set the building line for future development along Goosecroft Road, and it is very important to set a pattern that can turn this from a traffic route to a successful new street. We welcome the positioning of the buildings to allow for generous pavements, but question whether the irregular 'sawtooth' footprint at the northern end of Goosecroft Road is correct for instigating a pattern of adjacent development to follow.

3.2 Outline architectural language

While the application is only 'in principle' and the elevations as shown are indicative, they can and will set patterns for the following development. We recommend that some basic rules should be set to guide the future development of the architecture to be appropriate for this situation, and the draft designs amended accordingly. The facades need to be inviting and attractive to form a new face and image for the city centre, but they should also aim to make this block into a cohesive part of the urban fabric. We suggest that the facade treatment could be made more 'timeless' and less like currently ubiquitous styles in commercial buildings. We also suggest that it may be advantageous for different parts of the block to be developed by different architects, to prevent a singular treatment for such a large piece of built fabric. We feel that the visual handling of the library should be reviewed as needing to be better integrated with the other parts of the block. It is recognised that this will be difficult without a clearer brief, and we recommend that the Council gives as clear a lead as possible to the design team, to allow them to set out rules for a welcoming and prominent new building of high design quality, without necessarily making something that tries to be 'iconic'.

3.3 Interior of block

The development of the centre of the block will be key to making a pleasant and usable environment for the future occupants. Creating attractive and usable spaces, such as the proposed library garden, would greatly benefit the proposals. Residential overlooking of this area will have beneficial effects for safety and maintenance. We also suggest investigating the introduction of public access into the block through the pends, to provide further activity and opportunities for smaller scale and more sheltered semi-private spaces off the busy main streets. Further work is required to develop these spaces as attractive and viable places, taking into account sun penetration and access, and to successfully integrate the necessary car parking on site in the same areas.

Conclusion

We welcome the co-ordinated approach to this highly visible and pivotal site, to produce an inclusive development that clearly aims to deliver on many of the Council's ambitions and policies. We suggest this project needs to also be made a benchmark for the future development along the A9 corridor, to ultimately develop a new welcoming eastern face for Stirling and address a long standing poor environment at a main gateway to the city centre. We urge the project team to seize this opportunity and for the Council to provide leadership in ensuring a high quality urban environment is created. There are many positive aspects of the proposals, in its mix of uses and massing, but there are also some concerns that need to be addressed, particularly in relation to the approach to the public realm and the influence of traffic measures on them. There is also a need to review how this project can establish and control an appropriate architectural language to deliver individual buildings of high quality in this development, which will then set the standards for the future developments in Stirling. We look forward to the resolution of the important design issues highlighted and wish to be kept informed of future progress of this project.

Appendix

Presenting Team:

Jeremy Scott
Ross McNulty
Andrew Richardson

Michael Laird Architects
Valad Property Group
Stirling Development Agency

A+DS:

Chair:

Ric Russell

Panel:

Alison Blamire, Johnny Cadell, Stephen
Tucker and Brian Veitch

Staff lead:

David Seel

Staff:

Angela Williams, Tony Reilly, Linda Jansch

Other participants:

Principal Planning Officer, Stirling Council
Planning Officer Urban Design, Stirling
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Jay Dawson

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Observers

A+DS

Trevor Muir and Eric Dawson