

Report Title: Peacock Visual Arts Centre, Aberdeen
Issue Date: 30th October 2007
Client/Developer: Peacock Visual Arts
Lead Designer: Brisac Gonzalez Architects
Local Authority: Aberdeen City Council
Location: Aberdeen
Planning Ref.: A7/1415
Details: Proposals for a new public centre for contemporary arts in Union Terrace Gardens, Aberdeen



INTRODUCTION

This report relates to a planning application for a new Centre for Contemporary Arts presented at an A+DS Design Review meeting held on 23rd October 2007 in Edinburgh.

The project was presented by representatives of Brisac Gonzalez Architects and Peacock Visual Arts.

The meeting was also attended by representatives of Aberdeen City Council and Historic Scotland.

A+DS VIEWS

1 General comments

We thank the project team for a clear presentation and welcome the collaborative approach adopted between Peacock Visual Arts, Aberdeen City Council and City Moves to help realise the project. We are supportive of the principle of siting this development in Union Terrace Gardens and welcome the way in which the proposed Arts Centre would help to activate and regenerate the area and make a positive contribution to the city centre. We support the design approach, but there are some aspects of the designs that were not fully presented and require further explanation.

2 Context

We note the various physical and visual constraints imposed on the site, in particular the restrictions on the height of the building caused by the protected view corridor from His Majesty's Theatre. We recognise the way in which the designs respond sympathetically to the surrounding context in this respect by building down into the gardens. As part of a wider analysis of the city it would be useful to see contextual sections through the valley and the city centre, to better understand how the building ties into its wider physical context. A broader analysis of the gardens describing how their use has evolved over time could also help to inform and enliven the development and describe how it could potentially relate to the rest of the city.

3 Design approach

We recognise the way in which the designs are informed by, and respectful of, the existing gardens. The proposed aesthetic for a folding landscape is interesting and could potentially provide an appropriate response to this unique and sensitive location. However, the proposed geometries of the building appear slightly awkward in places and careful consideration should be given to ensure that the simplicity and purity of the concept is not lost as the designs develop. Some detailed aspects of the designs that we would expect to see at this stage were not presented, in particular the landscape proposals, the design of the handrails and public seating. However, we anticipate that these critical aspects of the scheme will be refined as the designs progress.

4 Public / private access and space

We welcome the proposed improvements to the public realm, in particular the creation of a public terrace on the roof of the building, which would help to activate Union Terrace and make a positive contribution to the streetscape. The way in which the building faces onto the

gardens also offers exciting possibilities for opening up and spilling out into the landscape. Additional images and information would help to describe how these spaces would be used and accessed by the public.

5 Light and ventilation

We commend the project team's commitment to sustainability generally. We have some concerns with regard to the quality of natural light that would be achieved in some of the spaces within the building, due in part to its northeast orientation. We note the extensive use of glazing on the northeast facade and the incorporation of light wells formed within the upper floors to help address this. Careful selection of internal finishes and materials could help to further mitigate this. We encourage the project team to carry out daylight modelling and ventilation studies to help demonstrate what the quality of the internal spaces would be like. It would also be beneficial to see how the building would appear at night to understand the impact it would have on the surrounding areas.

CONCLUSION

We support the project and welcome the way in which it would help to regenerate Union Terrace Gardens. We generally support the design approach but feel that further detail is required in some areas, particularly in the design of the landscape. We have some concerns regarding the quality of light in some parts of the building and encourage the project team to carry out modelling studies to further examine this. We welcome the broader partnerships that have been formed to help realise this project and hope that sufficient funding can be secured in order to deliver a development of sufficient quality for Aberdeen City Centre.

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