

Report Title: Mixed Use Development at Ayr Racecourse
Issue Date: 14th November 2007
Client/Developer: Ayr Racecourse
Lead Designer: Unick Architects
Local Authority: South Ayrshire Council
Location: Ayr
Planning Ref: 07/00680/REM
Details: Proposals for redevelopment of Ayr Racecourse, to include a new pavilion, racing academy / museum, hotel and conference facility, casino, cinema and retail units.



INTRODUCTION

This report relates to a planning application for a mixed-use development at Ayr Racecourse presented at an A+DS Design Review meeting held on 23rd October 2007 in Edinburgh.

The project was presented by representatives of Unick Architects and Ayr Racecourse.

The meeting was also attended by representatives of South Ayrshire Council and Historic Scotland.

A+DS VIEWS

1 General comments

We thank the project team for presenting their designs to A+DS. The project is significant for Ayr, as a point of arrival into the town and as a potential economic generator for the area. We welcome the proposed improvements to the current facilities in principle, in that they may help secure the long-term future of the racecourse. We support the project team in their ambition to create a first class national facility and new landmark building and improved gateway into the town. However, we have major concerns with the proposed designs and therefore do not support the project at this stage. We feel that the current scheme is fundamentally flawed and shows a complete lack of design and conceptual clarity.

2 Design quality

We support the Council's Planning Department for their aspirations in terms of good quality design. The design team should be adhering to the place making criteria set out in the Government's design guidance document 'Designing Places', to create a successful place and public environment.

3 Context

There is a lack of site analysis to adequately describe the context for the development. We are also concerned that the presentation did not include a long-term masterplan for the area, which is critical for a development of this scale. We would like to see how the proposals for the new complex relate to, and have been informed by, its wider context, both existing and proposed. The redevelopment of the site and other land adjacent to the racecourse present the opportunity for an integrated approach.

4 Design approach

4.1 Scale

We do not feel that the proposed large-scale single structure is successful in terms of urban design or place making. We suggest that a collection of smaller individual buildings may offer greater opportunity for the development to engage with the surrounding landscape, immediate context and human scale. We urge the project team to rethink their approach in

this respect. Should a large single building be deemed appropriate, however, we would encourage the project team to look at precedents of buildings of a similar scale to see how such an approach can be integrated into the urban fabric more successfully.

4.2 Identity

An expression of the racecourse is fundamental to the success of the scheme. However, the designs focus primarily on the other proposed leisure and retail aspects of the brief and do not convey the sense of excitement and occasion which one would associate with such an event. Furthermore, the designs reflect a non site-specific response that could potentially be located anywhere.

4.3 Public realm

There is a distinct lack of a designed landscape and it would appear that the building is fronted instead by a large expanse of car parking. The designs should address the sense of arrival from the road, for vehicles and pedestrians to the building. In doing so, there is an opportunity for the landscape to mediate between the road and the building.

4.4 Sustainability

We recognise the benefits the development would bring to Ayr, in terms of helping to sustain the local economy. However, the project is also significant in that it could set the tone for the future development and regeneration of the town, and would remain to be seen for many years. In this respect, we do not feel that the choice of materials is appropriate and urge the project team to use more sympathetic and sustainable materials that reflect the local context.

CONCLUSION

We welcome the regeneration and redevelopment of the Ayr Racecourse in principle. We recognise the socio-economic and historic significance of the project and support the project team in their aspiration to create an improved facility and gateway to Ayr. However, we do not support the current proposals, or the design approach, and feel that the designs should be revisited. This should be done in the context of the masterplan for the entire site. Further consideration is required with regards to scale, landscape design, urban design, place making and the development's relationship to its wider context.

Report issued: 15 November 2007