

Report Title: New Public Building, Coatbridge
Issue Date: 19th December 2007
Client/Developer: North Lanarkshire Council / NHS Services
Lead Designer: Keppie Design
Local Authority: North Lanarkshire Council
Location: Coatbridge
Planning Ref: C/07/01540/FUL
Details: Proposals for a large civic facility in Coatbridge town centre, incorporating a registry office, library, health services and other council services



Architecture+DesignScotland
Aitearachd is Dealbhadh na h-Alba

INTRODUCTION

This report relates to a current Planning Application for a new public building (incorporating a registry office, library, health services and other council services) in Coatbridge that was presented at an A+DS Design Review meeting held on 4th December 2007 at Bakehouse Close, Edinburgh.

The project was presented by representatives of Keppie Design, North Lanarkshire Council Property Services, Dawn Construction and Doig & Smith.

The meeting was also attended by representatives of North Lanarkshire Council.

A+DS VIEWS

1 General comments

The construction of a large civic facility in the centre of Coatbridge offers a chance to establish a new sense of place and identity for this section of Main Street, and an appropriate statement of confidence for the town. For the Council and NHS Lanarkshire the design of the new building provides an opportunity for them to present an image that speaks of the services provided and the value that is placed on the community. Whilst welcoming the development in principle, we do not think that the designs as currently presented aspire to these goals, or realise the full potential of the opportunities offered.

2 Opportunity

2.1 Whilst regretting the potential loss of buildings of some quality, we acknowledge that a sound argument may be made for demolition. However, any replacement building should be a recognisable improvement on those that exist. The opportunity to re-examine the form and layout of the new development in relation to its immediate surroundings and its place in the town should also be recognised.

2.2 The presentation provided no analysis of the urban grain or form, or an explanation of how the designs for the new building would respond to and improve on the public spaces in the town. The proposal adopts the footprint of the existing buildings on the site, and does not address the opportunity to improve on the current situation. We consider that the footprint, the height, and the typology of the building should all be re-assessed, to facilitate a design solution that responds to and improves the nature of the street, and produces a building that presents an appropriate civic frontage to Main Street, whilst at the same time declaring itself confidently as a civic facility when seen from other parts of the town. A taller building might be considered. This

would provide more freedom for the designers to reconsider the building's footprint, and introduce a more attractive public space and a building with more civic presence. As stated earlier, we do not think that the current designs realise the full potential of the opportunities offered. They fall short in a number of respects.

3 Public realm on Main Street

3.1 We recognise that the design team aspire to animate the street, and the large numbers of people using this building will undoubtedly assist. However, the designs do not improve on the public space that already exists, which is north facing and has an uncomfortable relationship with the crescent shaped space opposite. The site layout should be reconsidered, to facilitate the creation of a new urban space of high amenity value, commensurate with the public nature of the building and the large numbers of people using it.

4 Civic presence

4.1 The building lacks distinction. It does not present a welcoming or active frontage to Main Street, nor does it respond favourably to the scale of the buildings around it. The façade to the south seems to bear no relation to that to the north, and would be both unwelcoming and unrecognisable for what it is.

4.2 We believe that a building of this type should be designed to be viewed in the round, and all frontages carefully considered both in respect of their immediate surroundings and the way in which the building may be perceived as a whole from afar. Although the area to the south is somewhat hostile at present, a new building should promote the possibility of improvement, rather than act to preserve the status quo.

5 Internal programme and environment

5.1 Whilst we welcome the innovative programme for the building for the opportunities that it presents, it should be noted that such a complex agenda will require careful internal planning to properly provide for the very different needs of user groups. We recognise the complex planning issues that have been resolved so far, but it is not yet clear how the apparently contradictory expectations and requirements of, for instance, those attending a health clinic, returning a library book, or getting married, will be accommodated.

5.2 We welcome the concentration on wayfinding, space and light in the central communication areas and the proposed atrium shows promise. Some of the secondary areas and internal rooms are less successful, and we would encourage the designers to give them an equivalent level of consideration so that they, too, can be inspiring.

CONCLUSION

A+DS actively encourages early engagement with the design review process. It is recognised that the procurement process is now well advanced, and the project has not benefited from early engagement which might have reduced the potential risk to the programme of A+DS's views being addressed at this stage. We consider that the design for the building does not sufficiently improve on the quality of the buildings being lost, and would not contribute to the much needed betterment of Coatbridge.

This initiative presents a unique opportunity for the town to acquire a civic building and public space of which it can be proud, and we encourage the Council and their designers to significantly develop the designs to match the aspirations and commitments given in 'Designing North Lanarkshire', the 'Policy on Design Quality for NHSScotland' and the Scottish Government's 'Designing Places'.

Report issued: 19th December 2007