

Report Title: Bells Hotel, Aberdeen
Issue Date: 5th December 2007
Client/Developer: Kenmore Aberdeen Union Ltd
Lead Designer: SMC Jenkins & Marr
Local Authority: Aberdeen City Council
Location: Aberdeen
Planning Ref: A7/1823
Details: Proposals for a city centre hotel development on Union Street / Justice Mill Lane, Aberdeen



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INTRODUCTION

This report relates to a planning application for the redevelopment of a hotel presented at an A+DS Design Review meeting held on 13th November 2007 in Edinburgh.

The project was presented by representatives of SMC Jenkins & Marr.

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

A+DS VIEWS

1 General comments

We thank the project team for their presentation. We support the principle of redeveloping the site and recognise the need for new hotel accommodation in the city centre. We accept that the area could support a new building with a degree of height. However, we have major concerns with the scale of the proposed development, and how it relates to the street and the wider context.

2 Context

We note the various photomontages showing how the building would appear from Justice Mill Lane and Union Street. It is vitally important that these illustrations demonstrate the situation accurately; however, it appears that the proposed view from the south of the city does not reflect the true height of the building. Inaccuracy in one image calls into question the accuracy of all the other views presented. We encourage Aberdeen City Council to identify key views that should be demonstrated from Union Street and the rest of the city to show the building in its context.

3 Scale

Neither an adequate nor a convincing case has been made for a tower proposal in this location in urban design terms. The proposed height of the tower is predicated on the potential change in scale of future developments along Justice Mill Lane and the size of the consented scheme opposite. However, it is difficult to gauge whether or not the street will develop in this way, and the proposed building would be considerably taller than the consented development across the street, which exploits the topography of its site to achieve its height.

4 Architectural expression, form and mass

We recognise the project team's intention to mark the entrance to the hotel with a glass tower facing onto Justice Mill Lane. We understand the way in which the tower steps down towards Union Street in order to minimise its visual impact. However, we have reservations about the overall design of this element, which is more of a slab than a tower, does not appear legible as

an object perceived in the round, and lacks elegance. Furthermore, it is divorced from the ground level of the hotel, producing a building that is incongruous and illegible from the street.

5 Public realm

The proposed main entrance to the hotel from Justice Mill Lane via a car park undercroft neither provides an appropriate entrance experience for the user nor produces a positive engagement with the street. This aspect requires further consideration to provide an entrance sequence that both conveys a feeling of confidence, quality and legibility and provides a better interface with the public realm.

6 Sustainability

We support the proposed re-use of existing buildings and the selection of a brownfield site within the city centre. We recognise that the site is located in close proximity to various forms of public transport. We welcome the way in which the proposed structure for the building would allow for a degree of flexibility with the arrangement of internal spaces and encourage the project team to follow this through. However, sustainable benchmarking criteria should be applied to the designs, such as a BREEAM rating, in order to set targets for improving the building's sustainability.

CONCLUSION

Whilst we support the redevelopment of the site in principle we have serious concerns with the proposed designs and do not support the application in its current form. There are major issues in relation to the proposed height of the building and its relationship to the public realm and wider context that should be addressed. A fundamental reappraisal of the designs, and the brief that is driving them, is required

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