

## PROJECT: Seaburn Centre redevelopment masterplan

**Local Authority:** Sunderland City Council  
**Client/Developer:** Siglion  
**Planning Consultants:** Cundall  
**Scheme Designer:** URBED  
**Architects:** Architects to be confirmed – a range of differing architects is proposed.  
**Landscape Architects:** Landscape Projects

## ATTENDEES

### Development Team

Ian Cansfield Cundall  
David Rudlin URBED  
Katie Sully Development Director, Siglion

### Observers

Anthony Jukes Sunderland City Council  
Daniel Hattle Sunderland City Council

## PURPOSE OF DESIGN REVIEW

The purpose of the North East Design Review and Enabling Service is to achieve high design quality in the built environment in the region by offering expert, constructive, impartial advice to developers, planning authorities, and regional agencies on the architectural, landscape and urban design aspects and on sustainability impacts, of master plans and development proposals.

The Design Review & Enabling Panel's regional remit is intended to help raise design aspirations and encourage adoption of more consistent design standards across the region.

The Panel is particularly keen that schemes brought forward for review should:

1. Demonstrate through their design & use of materials that they are "grounded" in the North East, and not simply design solutions "beamed-in" from somewhere else in the country/world,
2. Demonstrate creativity, originality and imagination,
3. Where relevant, schemes and masterplans should demonstrate resilience, with the ability to flex over time to meet changing needs, be diverse in their uses, and thereby demonstrate longevity and sustainability in the broadest sense.

## THIS PROJECT

This project involves masterplanning the redevelopment of the greater Seaburn Centre site for a mixed leisure, residential and retail development.

The project is being promoted by Siglion which is a joint venture between Carillion and Sunderland City Council and managed by igloo Regeneration.

## SCHEME CONTEXT

The site, which has been the subject of a number of large-scale but unrealised proposals, is recognised by Sunderland City Council as potentially becoming a tourist/visitor destination in its own right.

The site is of considerable importance to the City Council's strategy for Seaburn, which aims to enhance the day-time and night-time economy, as well as trigger wider regeneration, built around an updated leisure offer.

The proposed development comprises:

- 50,000 sq.ft. large leisure unit on NE corner.
- Hotel - preferably located on sea front (would be netted-off residential numbers); possibly a 40 bed boutique hotel.
- A further 47,000 sq.ft of leisure use, including up to 20,000 sq.ft of retail
- 279 housing units:
  - semi-detached and detached.
  - Sheltered scheme/ town houses.
  - Flats
  - Apartments (up to 4 levels) over 6m high leisure units on sea frontage.
- Links to walks into open countryside.

Two existing public rights of way will be relocated slightly as part of the development.

The Martino's Restaurant is specifically excluded from the plans.

The Morrison's site is also excluded from the plans but it is intended to explore the potential for their overspill car park to be part of the car parking offer.

Proposed car parking provision has been based upon survey data and the amount and types of development proposed.

It was also noted that there is no public sector funding for this development. The inclusion of residential is therefore key to the development economics of the scheme.

## PANEL DISCUSSION

- The Panel welcomed this project being brought forward for Design Review.

- The clear analytical diagrams prepared by the masterplanning team were welcomed and demonstrated the considerable breadth and depth of thought that had gone into the proposals, even at this stage.
- The pragmatic principles embodied in the proposals, which are likely to give the project a long-term flexibility and deliverability, were acknowledged and welcomed.

## Masterplan:

- It was noted that the Siglion proposals vary from the approved SPD in not having large pavilion blocks as part of the scheme.
- The Panel were pleased to note that the site has been masterplanned to enable differing architects to be appointed for differing sections of the scheme in order to achieve a variety of architectural responses to the masterplan development blocks.
- The slight offset of the boulevard with the Fat Buddha was noted but not felt to be detrimental to the urban design of the composition.
- The accessible green roofs across the scheme were welcomed by the Panel.
- The Panel were pleased to note that colour in the buildings was under active consideration, particularly shades and materials that would be durable in the seafront environment – pastel shades being considered. The Panel very much encourage this proposal.
- The potential for designs to include an arcaded facade along the N-S sea frontage was encouraged by the Panel.

## Urban Design:

- The Panel felt that the building heights (rising from 2 storey in the SW to 5/6 storeys in the NE) and the “perforated” upper floors on the sea frontage buildings are appropriate to the scale of development in this location and for mitigating sun shading.
- There is felt to be potential for an even taller element on the sea-front elevation, if so desired. Perhaps even a mast element to give a high visual marker to the development.
- The Panel asked the team to consider whether the site is a little under-developed in terms of the potential residential capacity of the site? The layout suggests that residential densities could be increased slightly without compromising the principles of the scheme.
- The Panel suggests that there is potential for 3 storey residential along the first half of the development west of the boulevard/Lowry Road. This could be controlled by appropriate Coding.
- The strength of the linearity within the scheme was welcomed, particularly for the blocks on the eastern half of the development site.
- The Panel enquired if a “winter garden” had been considered for the boulevard? To provide shelter from the elements, even if a semi-permanent structure.
- Lowry Road/Boulevard junction: the Panel suggested that the crossing point might benefit from a differing surface treatment/tabling so that vehicles passing along Lowry road would be aware that they were crossing a strong, predominantly pedestrian, East-West route.

- The Panel further suggested that the character of the Boulevard as it extends west into the residential zone to the west might benefit from a significant change in character, with the street design emphasising pedestrian priority over vehicles.
- The Boulevard and its extension westwards suggests that there is potential to make a focal point of the dwelling on the extreme west end of the axis of this route, as a closure to the vista and also as a landmark element for the development. This dwelling would be visible from the sea front as the end-stop on the east-west viewing axis and is therefore worthy of detailed consideration.
- The Panel suggested that the public realm route from the sea front at the site's SE corner needs to be better/more boldly resolved in design terms.

#### Landscape strategy:

- The really strong vision exhibited in the scheme was welcomed and the Panel believes this will create a very desirable place to live.
- Generally, pedestrian road crossing points on the road network within the site could be bolder – with the potential to neck the roads and give pedestrian visual and physical priority.
- Establishing mature trees is difficult on a seaside locations. The Panel therefore wondered if any of the existing landscape structure may be worth retaining in parts, in order to provide early visual impact until such times as the new planting began to develop, even though it was noted that most trees are “C”s - no “A”s or “B”s.
- Cut Throat Dene is assumed to be used as part of the SUDS attenuation system.
- The suggested water-play element was very welcome as a concept, having potentially a great draw.
- The Linear Park running north/south on the western boundary currently has a lot of highways shown. The Panel asked if these can be visually reduced or made less formal? For example, could it be a HomeZone? The Panel suggested making the layout less obviously a highways-led design solution. Vigilance would be required during design development to ensure soft landscaping not sacrificed to tarmac/highways..

#### Traffic & Highways:

- The Panel felt that shared spaces generally seem to be an issue for the highways department, despite there being many examples of successful schemes in the UK.
- Can examples from, say Tynemouth, be cited demonstrate the way in which traffic from secondary roads can better meet more major roads, and acknowledge the desire-lines of pedestrians?
- It was suggested that the Design Team make the hierarchy of roads more evident and obvious to all users, by making distinctly different styles for each level of the hierarchy.
- The Panel asked the designers to consider whether the pedestrian/cycle route to the amenities was obvious and safe?

#### Public Art:

- The potential for integration of public art was discussed.

- Could glass-based public art forge a link with the Sunderland Glass Centre? The promoters were unsure if there was a sufficiently strong link to the Glass Centre and whether other themes might be more appropriate.

## General:

- The Panel noted that that this development, particularly the sea front elevations, will be a gateway for the annual illuminations, and therefore an important end-stop in the urban scene.
- The Panel asked the promoters to consider how this development will cater for all ages and abilities, taking into consideration:
  - The varying types of leisure opportunities that can be offered by the development.
  - More than just the range of house types.
  - BFL12 assessments have revealed that often walking routes can be much longer than “as the crow flies” isochrones might suggest.
  - Noting that the site appears to reasonably well connect to shops, services and schools.
- Archaeology:
  - It was noted that there are remains of a couple of WW2 trenches and a pill box on site, but these are unaffected by the proposals.
- The Panel suggest trying avoid north-facing gardens - it can make units difficult to market. (ref. the dwellings along the north side of the westward extension to the boulevard)
- Lighting needs to be addressed in terms of the scheme establishing its own night-time character.

## Post-script:

After the conclusion of the Design Review session the Panel discussion continued and the following points were felt worthy of bringing to the attention of the scheme promoters:

- The Panel wondered if the designers might consider if there could be an opportunity for some community growing spaces within the scheme.
- In respect of the provision of "affordable" housing which is under consideration it was noted that a figure of 10% of the residential total was proposed. The Panel's preference is always for 'anonymous', pepper-potted provision of affordable/social properties within the wider development – as proposed for this development - rather than the obligation being dealt with by way of a commuted sum, which still remains an alternative for the scheme. It is appreciated that this issue may require a viability test with appropriate financial & commercial disclosure.
- An aspect which wasn't mentioned on the day, but which may warrant consideration by the promoters, is the possibility of including plots for self-build/custom housing (under the Design Coding) in response to the Register.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In summary the main recommendations of the Panel were:

1. Consider whether or not the scheme, as currently drawn, may be slightly under-developing the available lands.
2. The potential for a higher element on the seafront frontage be tested.
3. The Panel suggest that the road hierarchy be more clearly defined.
4. Pedestrian route crossing points on highways should suggest prioritisation for the pedestrian.
5. Potential to use the focal point building at the west end of the boulevard as a marker – make it special/a focal point.
6. The scheme should be tested against the **Building for Life 12** criteria.

The Panel would welcome the opportunity to further review the scheme in a later stage of its development.

## REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

- Sustainability Appraisal of the Seaburn Masterplan SPD - Sustainability Statement, September 2011
- Seaburn October Exhibition Boards.pdf

## Design Review Panel:

John Devlin (Chair)  
Neil Barker  
Chris Davis  
Alan Wann

End.