City Centre Opportunity Site South – Design Competition Public Questions & Architects Answers

Question Set 1:

1 - Please confirm the areas of Commercial accommodation provided in the scheme, a) In the main office building, b) elsewhere, c) cafe provision.

[DESIGN 1 ARCHITECT RESPONSE]:
Commercial areas as follows :

a) office building = 3239 sqm GIA
b) ground floor commercial space = 2117sqm
c) café space shown is indicative only and is included in the ground floor commercial areas above – we have indicated 3 possible locations where it would seem to work best , including adjacent to and as part of the office building foyer which is an interesting recent trend in multi-tenanted office buildings

[DESIGN 2 ARCHITECT RESPONSE]:
Commercial Areas are left flexible, so could have any use. The overall space is 5,593sqm GIA.

[DESIGN 3 ARCHITECT RESPONSE]:

a) Ground floor could be utilised as an openly public space taking in an extent of A3 use and therefore could be utilised as a café along with the office reception. GIA = 300 sqm
b) GIA = 418 sqm
c) GIA = 49 sqm

2 - Please confirm the number of Residential units provided in the scheme, how many for Affordable and/or Social housing., and the space standards proposed.
[SADC RESPONSE]: The split between affordable and open market units is 35% - 65%. They will be designed to the nationally described space standards.

Design 1 has a total of 98 units
Design 2 has a total of 99 units
Design 3 has a total of 99 units

The architects for Scheme 3 to demonstrate the following:
3 - How the Victoria Street elevation of the west block, with its five very distinct bays, fits the plan with just four Residential units?

4 - How the Bricket Street elevation of the east block, with its eight very distinct bays, fits the ground floor plan of seven Commercial/Residential units and, at levels 1-3,

the plans of six Residential units. Also how, at level 4, the elevation of six bays fits the plan of only four Residential units.

5 - How is this discontinuity in planning dealt with effectively in the construction of these blocks? Is it proposed to use cross laminated timber (CLT) here as in the office building?

[DESIGN 3 ARCHITECT RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS 3, 4 & 5]:
When addressing the top of the residential blocks all of the top floors are afforded the same floor to ceiling heights as the typical floor, before utilising any of the height generated by the pitched roofs. In essence the opportunity to open up the ceilings to expose the pitched roof internally is entirely in addition and not a necessity.
So to some degree, one could generate a truly efficient horizontal plan order without full regard to the pitches. Having said that, this would not be our desire and there is at this early stage sufficient coordination between the façade balconies and the roof ridges to eaves to marry with the apartment party walls. Beyond this, we would work with St Albans in defining the internal layouts to the rightful residential product where we could, where desired, (apartment living rooms for instance), open up part or all of the increased height given by the pitched roofs.

We have utilised CLT construction within residential apartment buildings to great effect and this is something we could explore here with St Albans.

6 - What sustainability measures do the architects for Scheme 2 propose in their project?

[DESIGN 2 ARCHITECT RESPONSE]:
Not only does the CCOS South proposal aim to make St Alban's greener through the extensive use of planting across the site it also has sustainable features such green walls and climbing plants on the façade.
In addition to the visible greening of the site the proposal should be designed to be as sustainable as possible. Focusing on identifying sensible and achievable methods to insulate the building fabric, harvest the energy naturally available on site, and use efficient and renewable energy technology where possible. It should reduce operational energy in use and embodied energy in construction.
As a development of this an integrated team approach to sustainability is essential. If we are successful we would recommend the appointment of the appropriate specialism onto the project team and the establishment of a clear set of sustainability goals. For example we believe that the project should aim to minimise embodied carbon and operational carbon and a combined approach as to how the scheme could be made zero carbon should be prepared for the project. This can be done in a number of ways including reducing embodied energy by reducing quantities and mass of materials used, reducing transport emissions and reducing site emissions from construction processes. Consideration should also be given to reducing the 'in use' stages from recurring and replacing materials over the life of the building.

7 - What measures for off-site fabrication are proposed by architects of the three schemes?

[DESIGN 1 ARCHITECT RESPONSE]:
Off-site fabrication would be used as much as possible – the office building will be made of cross-laminated timber [CLT] or a steel CLT hybrid. If CLT proves unaffordable then we would suggest precast concrete floors within a steel frame. Springing from a robust concrete base at first floor separating commercial and residential uses we would also hope to look at using some offsite CLT honeycomb structure or precast panels for the residential units above. All facades will be made up of offsite manufactured components including, if cost effective, pre-formed brick panels for the residential buildings which are purposely designed with repetitive elements to enable this.

For the office building the façade design could be unitised and manufactured off-site. This speeds up the construction time but also ensures higher quality of the detail of the façade.
Similarly for the residential buildings. The facades have lots of repetitive elements and these could be prefabricated with cladding units with integrated brick and reconstituted stone. A CLT honeycomb structure could be used to build the residential blocks of 1st floor and SIPs type of walls could be used to speed up the construction.

[DESIGN 2 ARCHITECT RESPONSE]:
We haven't proposed measures for off-site fabrication as part of the competition entry. However it is a good question to ask as it can offer a number of advantages including improvements in quality and safety, reduction of waste, reducing disruption and time on site, improvements in sustainability etc. If successful we would be happy to investigate this further with the project team.

[DESIGN 3 ARCHITECT RESPONSE]:
Our office undertakes reviews for sustainability measures from an entirely holistic viewpoint on all projects and that means reviews start from conception through to final construction, handover of the building by the end user and beyond to taking in post occupancy reviews.

We continue to review, research and test with wider consultants and clients Modern Methods of Construction and look to apply these principles to a project where it is deemed beneficial and can be applied to gain the rightful results for the project, client, end user and the environment in total. These go hand in hand with our research and testing with numerous clients in Design for Manufacture and Assembly (DfMA) principles.

In terms of our approach to St Albans CCOS, we have set out in our submission and further presentation some initial ideas to which we would look to develop going forward;

- *The construction method for the office building is proposed as a "kit of parts" (as explained in both the panels and the presentation, specifically in*

slide 42) where we would explore the potential for a hybrid structure of steel frame with Cross Laminated Timber slabs and spanning infill. The steel structure would then be developed to enable this to come as a pre-fabricated element.

- *In terms of the façade construction, all the façades could be envisaged as precast brick facades that are fabricated off site and then craned in. This would ease speed of construction and allow multiple phasing on what could be a constrained site.*
- *We would review the potential of further of site construction opportunities with the residential blocks, where whole apartment delivery could be possible with sufficient early stage coordination. However there are also a lot of ways to ease construction for the interior of the units with prefabrication methods, such as prefabricated pods for the bathrooms, or prefabricated MEP kits which have eased congestion on fit out with improved health and safety on site and ultimately a greater level of control to the quality of the end product.*

8 - Are any sustainability measures proposed in the use of concrete for the schemes?

[DESIGN 1 ARCHITECT RESPONSE]:
The use of in situ reinforced concrete for the project will be minimised with pre-cast 'biscuit' permanent formwork used for stair and lift cores if possible. Where poured concrete is unavoidable, such as for basement slabs, we will seek to use cement-replacement techniques such as GGBS [ground granulated blast-furnace slag, a bi-product of the steel industry] to reduce the embodied carbon used in construction. Combining this with CLT that is a carbon positive product could help achieve net zero carbon for the whole project.

[DESIGN 2 ARCHITECT RESPONSE]:
The volumes of concrete required for large scale schemes contributes significant proportions of the total embodied carbon for a development. We would work with the project team to minimise the use of concrete, perhaps by using steelwork or cross laminated timber. Where concrete is used, cement replacement methods could be employed to reduce embodied carbon.

[DESIGN 3 ARCHITECT RESPONSE]:
Exposed concrete soffits have proven to be very efficient in residential schemes as it can assist in creating a time lag in fluctuating temperatures due to its thermal capacity and as a result the internal temperatures stay more consistent for longer.

Having said this, we continue to review and test the carbon off-sets for all methods of construction and we are very mindful of the position products with gypsum and cement based components have within the current environmental conditions. We would look to minimise any negative environmental impacts as much as possible.

9 - Are the architects able to provide elevations missing from their presentations, specifically: north elevation, west elevation of the west block and the east and west

elevations to the Promenade, all also to include the profiles of the adjoining existing buildings?
[SADC RESPONSE] No additional elevation information will be requested or presented by the architects at this time. Such information will be provided as part of the planning application at a later date and it will be possible to comment further on this at that time.

Question Set 2:

General Questions on all 3 Designs

1. Some concern has been raised about the layout of the Quaker Garden in all three schemes. There is a worry that the contemplative aspect of the Garden has not been taken into account. How will the architects respond to this concern?

   [SADC RESPONSE]: The design of the Quaker Garden has been agreed with the Quaker's and there is no intention to make any alteration to this as a result of the design competition.

2. Has consideration been given in all three designs to integration with Civic Centre Opportunity Site North (CCOSN)? Have the architects seen a master-plan?

   [SADC RESPONSE]: We understand that architects have given consideration to the CCOS North site during their design process.

3. Given the situation with 'high street' retail, has enough flexibility been accommodated for in all three designs? Could the architects explain how they are dealing with this issue?

   [DESIGN 1 ARCHITECT RESPONSE]:
   We are conscious that retail in this location would be secondary and could be undesirable if it were to draw trade from the high street. The brief required commercial space as distinct from the office and we have indicated active frontages, punctuated by residential entrances, that could be used with a range of unit sizes by businesses that would benefit from a ground floor street presence – as well as cafes and restaurants this could be leisure uses such as a gym or pilates studio, commercial office uses that have a public interface such as a citizens advice bureau and NHS clinic or some sort or secondary retail such as a bicycle repair shop.

   [DESIGN 2 ARCHITECT RESPONSE]:
   Flexibility is retained within the commercial space but business tenancies are be preferred in recognition of the important role that St Peter's Street plays as the retail heart of St Albans. The proposed Samuel Ryder Promenade will be

a green space in which to be. A promenade that will be a pleasant place to walk along as well as an active environment which businesses open out onto and family's from the apartments above feel free to use and play in. Perhaps a small café or other use that the community can benefit from is created in the pavilion, that provides a modest and considerate focus beside the Quaker Gardens. In playing its part to link the high street to Victoria Street this development can help to reinvigorate the Maltings by improving pedestrian flow.

[DESIGN 3 ARCHITECT RESPONSE]:
Set against the brief provided we have actually purposefully reduced the extent of retail units within the development to key frontages onto Victoria Street for the very concern aired here.
Whilst we are clearly not retail agents, we have amassed a huge amount of experience in dealing with large regeneration developments and masterplans where by the importance of getting the ground floor uses right can make all the difference to successful place making. We are very aware of the current picture facing retail and every High Street.

Should the world of retail change, we do have an element of flexibility in our plan to accommodate further retail if the need proves favourable. We see it safer in development this way than to try and reduce back, leaving the site with inactive facades at ground floor whilst the client waits hopefully.
We have entertained areas of residential amenity towards the rear of the Magistrates Court building which could readily facilitate further F&B uses and with our approach to the ground floor of the office building this could easily suit further retail aspects.

Question on Design 1

4. Could the architects elaborate on their vision of the design coherence between the office building and the residential blocks ?

[DESIGN 1 ARCHITECT RESPONSE]:
A criticism of the previous design was that the different uses of the buildings were blurred and lacked coherence. Our vision is to articulate a traditional grammar to the collection of buildings that creates legibility and relates to the St Albans context – the three residential buildings have commercial ground floor units with flats above, a familiar typology in central St Albans. The office building is separate, has civic qualities and is at the most public visible corner of the site. While the design and materials vary between the brick residential buildings and the timber and metal office building they are brought together coherently as a piece of urban design by the public realm with covered pedestrian colonnades and planting throughout.

Questions on Design 2

5. The design mentions sustainability but how is that to be achieved?

[DESIGN 2 ARCHITECT RESPONSE]:
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Questions on Design 3

6. Looking at the plans and elevations it appears that although the external elevations are a series of tall terraced units with individual roofs, the residential layout has a horizontal circulation pattern resulting in the individual units not always corresponding with the junction of the terraced building units. Is this because the proposals have not yet been fully resolved or is this intentional, although I would have thought that there will be numerous technical difficulties with the construction if this is intended?

[DESIGN 3 ARCHITECT RESPONSE]
When addressing the top of the residential blocks all of the top floors are afforded the same floor to ceiling heights as the typical floor, before utilising any of the height generated by the pitched roofs. In essence the opportunity to open up the ceilings to expose the pitched roof internally is entirely in addition and not a necessity.
So to some degree, one could generate a truly efficient horizontal plan order without full regard to the pitches. Having said that, this would not be our desire and there is at this early stage sufficient coordination between the façade balconies and the roof ridges to eaves to marry with the apartment party walls. Beyond this, we would work with St Albans in defining the internal layouts to the rightful residential product where we could, where desired, (apartment living rooms for instance), open up part or all of the increased height given by the pitched roofs.

5. How will the residential private external space at ground floor level be separated from the central main public circulation route to resolve the problem of privacy, security and visual clutter?

[DESIGN 3 ARCHITECT RESPONSE]:
There are a number of very good examples where these adjacencies and the principles set to achieve them have been delivered.
Starting with the first principles of creating the most efficient residential blocks, we have afforded greater separation widths between buildings, in turn giving way to wider separation between uses. With considered planting and sufficiently deep landscaped 'buffer' zones residents on the ground floor can afford active and pleasantly changing views from their apartments whilst keeping a polite separation from passers-by.