

'New Rotterdam Wharf – Public Objections: (NRW-PO-1)'

Outline Objections Paper / Regeneration Projects - Forth & Clyde Canal at Speirs Wharf August 2005

Introduction

As investors in Glasgow, we take great pride in being responsible, over 15 years ago, for the regeneration of Port Dundas at Speirs Wharf and support, in principle, the continued regeneration of the Forth & Clyde Canal. We are extremely proud of our role as custodians of an internationally-renowned architectural treasure, and take this role extremely seriously.

We are shocked and appalled that the cost of the regeneration of the canal, 15 years later, is to be the active removal, for all Glaswegians, of the view to this international asset which has stood sentinel over our city for over 200 years.

The development proposals, in their current form, will obliterate Speirs Wharf from the city skyline, and be lost to future generations. This is an outrage, and the people who perpetrate this type of crime should not be rewarded.

Purpose

This paper sets out to consider the impact that the proposed developments at Dundas Wharf and New Rotterdam Wharf would have on the city, with particular reference to the historic and listed nature of the existing buildings known as Speirs Wharf.

It is hoped that the concerns raised in this paper will initiate a full enquiry into the planning proposals being developed in a partnership between Glasgow City Council and ISIS waterside regeneration. The first phase of the development 'Dundas Wharf' will be presented to Glasgow City Council in September 2005. This in itself should call into question the Council's position where there is clearly a conflict of interest. While the planning process will only consider material considerations, there are a number of aspects of the regeneration of this area which do require a full investigation, however the Council is not best placed to carry this out given the conflict of interest already established. Of particular concern is the manner in which the old Department of Cleansing building on the canalside at Sawmillfield Street was demolished. This two-storey, Victorian brick building stood in the way of the proposed development. The timing and speed of the demolition works also raised concerns, coinciding with the launch of the public consultation exercise.

Background

Speirs Wharf stands majestically on the banks of the Forth & Clyde Canal at Port Dundas - a scheduled ancient monument, less than a mile from George Square. The social and historical importance of Speirs Wharf and Port Dundas are clearly recognised by the city fathers, featuring in the City Plan. The development of Port Dundas began in 1790 and, by 1849, a vast spread of foundries, mills, manufacturing and craft industries made Port Dundas Glasgow's main industrial centre and principal port. The canal stretched for 35 miles making it the first sea-to-sea waterway in Britain. It was this rich cultural heritage, which saved the 'B'-listed Speirs Wharf Victorian grain mills from falling into dereliction in 1987 when a range of partners came together to fund the conversion of the 10 grain mills and the canal house for a mixed development of 149 homes and commercial accommodation. The partners involved included:

- The Scottish Development Agency
- Glasgow District Council
- The Historic Buildings and Monuments Directorate
- Windex

As one of the most cherished and instantly recognisable city landmarks, key to the city's skyline as you travel to and from the city centre, Speirs Wharf has gained international recognition. It was one of the first buildings to participate in the 'Light up Glasgow' initiative and was recognised as a building of European significance in the Europa Nostra Awards in 1991.

Lack of Open-ness and Transparency

Following media coverage, a public consultation exercise was held at Woodside Library between 23-25 June 2005, where models and plans of the development proposals were made available to the public. There are serious concerns regarding the lack of open-ness and transparency during this consultation phase, carried out by Wave PR and ISIS, who have consistently failed to recognise the established canalside community of Speirs Wharf.

For 15 years, redevelopment of Speirs Wharf has been the sole contribution to regeneration of the canal at Port Dundas. The contribution which this community can make to the continued development of the area will be critical to the success of the community planning process.

In considering the proposed development for New Rotterdam Wharf and Dundas Wharf, several aspects give cause for concern as they may contravene the development policy as outlined in the Glasgow City Plan. For ease of reference, extracts from the city plan have been highlighted in **bold print**.

Listed Buildings & Existing Townscapes

- As per the national guidelines governing architectural policy and the development of sustainable communities, materials used in any proposed buildings should be sympathetic to the traditional blonde sandstone of the existing B-listed Speirs Wharf buildings. In terms of Development Policy principles, the City Plan specifies that new developments in the city centre "**should enhance the image of the city...and respect the existing townscape and constituent identity**".
- Where issues affecting the public realm are involved, as with the banks of the canal, **Section 7, Urban Design, DES5 'Public Realm', 'Context and Justification' and 'Policy'** of Glasgow City Council's City Plan Part 2, '**Development Policies**' specifically highlights the contribution of Glasgow's attractive public (and green) spaces to its own citizens, as well as to the city's many visitors whose 'visitor spend' is so crucial to the city's continued economic wellbeing.

The same sections of the City Plan also place the onus squarely on the Council to ensure '**the highest possible quality of public realm**', and the use of a '**selective palette of materials to provide a unifying theme and a distinctive sense of identity to the locality**', as well as '**specifying materials that reflect the relative importance of the location**' and which '**maintain their appearance over time**'.

The section designated **DES 3** also states '**that there will be a general presumption in favour of pitched roofs**', and specific guidance is provided, regarding appropriate materials to be used for walls, roofs and boundaries.

- Just as importantly, there should be mixed tenure housing, using sustainable, locally-sourced materials with minimal environmental impact or 'travel miles'. The design should feature maximum energy efficiency, with minimal carbon dioxide emissions, and optimum mix of energy sources, including a blend of natural gas, choice of electricity from 'green' suppliers, and with solar and/or wind or hydro-powered contributions maximised.

None of the above points are addressed in the proposals.

Design & Build

- The current design proposals for New Rotterdam Wharf, which include penthouse flats, appear from the models to be greater in height than Speirs Wharf.

According to the City Plan, the new development would therefore be considered as a high-rise development as it will **...exceed the general building heights of their surroundings...** and will be required to satisfy the terms of the city centre and citywide urban design policies.

New developments are required to take account of surrounding buildings and **the impact on the skyline**. The plan also states that **...There will be a general presumption against high-rise development within the Central Conservation Area**. As a landmark B-listed building standing on one of the highest points for many miles in the city centre, Speirs Wharf makes a significant contribution to the city's skyline which is enjoyed by both residents and visitors alike.

This is particularly true in the evenings and winter months when the Wharf is floodlit, creating a skyline feature which many have come to cherish and appreciate as they travel to and from the city centre. The proposed development of New Rotterdam Wharf would in effect remove Speirs Wharf from the city skyline, and the loss of this historic landmark building to the city and its visitors would be criminal.

Indeed, the DES 7 'Lighting' section of the City Plan, Part 2, clearly states that **'Lighting has an important role to play in defining the character of streets, spaces and buildings. Many buildings in the City have been celebrated through floodlighting to great effect for a number of years, providing interest and vitality to the night time scene and contributing to an enhanced City image.'** Nowhere is this more true than of Speirs Wharf.

Glasgow's architectural heritage has been drawn on, extensively, to promote the city to further develop the tourist economy, which provides many jobs and training opportunities thereby helping to tackle Glasgow's high unemployment rate and poor training record. Indeed, Glasgow's rich architectural heritage played an important role in securing the city's status in 1999 as European City of Architecture – and the officially-recognised value of buildings such as Speirs Wharf, Glasgow School of Art and the Kelvingrove Museum and Art Gallery were fundamental in helping to achieve this. These buildings are not just local, but national assets, which must be preserved and their surrounding areas treated sympathetically to enhance their social, historical and cultural value.

- One of the greatest concerns regarding the proposed development would be the infringement on the **..."existing strategic views into or out of the City Centre...High-rise developments should not compete with established landmarks, landmark buildings...and should take account of its impact on significant or prominent listed buildings ...across the City Centre or in the immediate hinterland"**... Speirs Wharf sits one mile from George Square, the heart of the city centre.

Is there a detailed design statement that includes a context study, site analysis and design concept and an assessment of its skyline impact? The City Plan clearly expects that development proposals **... "will not interrupt existing strategic views"**.

Environmental Concerns

- **“The impact of weather and wind on any proposed high-rise development and the impact of the development on the micro-climate will be fully tested and assessed”...** What studies – ideally from an independent specialist organisation – have been conducted to quantify the potentially huge adverse effect of reducing available sunlight into Speirs Wharf residents’ homes, particularly in Scotland’s dark winter months when the sun barely rises above the horizon?

In terms of the unique canal environment, the new development would effectively restrict the light onto the canal at Speirs Wharf. It is understood that the new student accommodation built at the Nolly Brig has already had a detrimental effect on the ecology of the canal. The effect on the canal at Speirs Wharf would be far greater, given the greater height, scale, mass, **visual looming and dominance of the proposed development, despite its meeting minimum daylight standards.**

In addition, **new buildings should be designed to minimise overshadowing of neighbouring properties. If it is suspected that new housing will cause excessive overshadowing of neighbouring properties, daylight assessments should be carried out according to ‘Site Layout Planning for Daylight and Sunlight’.**

It is expected that the greater part of any overshadowing caused by the new building should be confined to the applicant’s own plot, the major factors being the height, distance to boundary, size of plot, orientation and topography. Problems can be caused by the juxtaposition of 2-storey developments against single store developments particularly if there is a difference in ground levels and the 2-storey component is located to the south of the lower component. City Plan - Part 2 - Development Policies - Section 3 – Residential. RES 2 Residential Site Layouts

- A further concern would be the rise in noise levels created by the canyon-type effect on the canalside that the new development would create. This would in effect magnify the noise level along with anticipated increased canal traffic and proposed licensed and commercial developments.

Traffic levels, (during and post construction), will considerably increase on Craighall Road. Stringent guidelines exist governing acceptable levels of noise and air pollution, both of which are likely to be exceeded given this increased traffic thereby requiring a full investigation.

Environment tests, conducted 15 years ago prior to Speirs Wharf’s completion, confirmed that the noise pollution on Craighall Road was above an acceptable standard in the three blocks of flats closest to Craighall Road. Secondary glazing was installed to reduce the noise levels at that time. The effect of reopening Craighall Road, and the anticipated increase in volumes of traffic that the new industrial units and the new developments will create, will further exacerbate this problem.

Craighall Business Park will accommodate 440 cars, Mill Wharf a further 100 vehicles, and Dundas Wharf approximately 100 more. Consequently, over 600 cars will require to be accommodated in an area of less than one square mile in which the current road network struggles to cope with the vehicles associated with the 149 homes and commercial properties in Speirs Wharf.

The effect which these developments, together with the New Rotterdam Wharf, and the re-opening of the canal, plus existing and future developments, will have on the Speirs Wharf

biodiversity and micro-climate and requires a full investigation to be carried out to determine that there will be no detrimental effect, prior to the granting of any planning permission.

Public Services

- Concerns are currently being voiced regarding adequate provision of water and sufficient infrastructure and services with regard to the Deputy Prime Minister's proposed plans to build many tens of thousands of new homes in the South East.

There are concerns regarding overdevelopment of the Port Dundas area. What detailed studies have been conducted to conclusively prove that so many residential and commercial properties can be accommodated in the area immediately surrounding Speirs Wharf, within an area less than one square mile?

Currently, existing drainage and sewer systems become overwhelmed and flood regularly throughout the year. With expected climate change and associated problems, coupled with the added demands of several hundred new homes, the ability and condition of the infrastructure must be questioned.

Speirs Wharf has made an important contribution to the city's cultural and historical development, and continues to do so. Any proposed development must be undertaken with extreme sensitivity – far more than for almost any other development, elsewhere in Scotland or the rest of the UK. Key input should therefore be sought from specialist bodies including Historic Scotland, the Glasgow Building Preservation Trust, the Strathclyde Building Preservation Trust and The Glasgow Conservation Trust.

Protecting the City's Heritage

- The **DES 10 'Development Along the Forth and Clyde Canal'** section of the City Plan, Part 2 states that **'the canal and its associated buildings have been designated a Scheduled Ancient Monument and parts of it are also listed. It also forms part of the City's green network and is a corridor of landscape and wildlife importance.'**

It further states that **'While it is the intention to encourage development adjacent to the Forth and Clyde Canal within the City, it is also recognised that the Canal's environmental and ecological assets need to be protected and enhanced'** and that **'Development proposals that affect the Canal and its setting must ensure that the permeability of the Canal corridor is protected.'**

More specifically, DES10 states that **'there will be a presumption against development that is not compatible with the objective of protecting the Canal's status as a Scheduled Ancient Monument, the listed buildings and its designation as a corridor of landscape and wildlife importance'**. Also, that **'high quality design and materials will be expected in the vicinity of the Canal'**, and that **'Development proposals must be shown in the context of the canal and demonstrate that they recognise the integrity of the heritage and landscape elements.'**

- **Section 8 of the City Plan, Part 2 - The Stirling Charter, National Planning Policy Guideline 18 - protecting Glasgow's Built Heritage - contains extensive reference to the stringent national criteria with which Glasgow City Council must comply in order to safeguard and enhance the city's more than 1,800 listed buildings, which include Speirs Wharf. Specific reference is made to many of these being in disrepair, and the Council's aim of encouraging owners to undertake**

systematic repairs and maintenance to ensure these buildings' protection, through enforcement powers where necessary. The residents of Speirs Wharf currently meet all maintenance, canalside and floodlighting costs.

If a building has been listed, by virtue of its historical and architectural value, it is essential that a systematic approach is taken to the assessment of any development proposals.

Several miles of the Forth & Clyde canalside lie undeveloped and derelict and should be developed for mixed use. This could be achieved without disturbing the quarter mile adjacent to Speirs Wharf which is currently enjoyed by the existing canalside community and many other citizens and visitors to our city of Glasgow.

The city's rich pool of Victorian architecture is referenced - **a legacy of the city's worldwide prominence as Second City of the Empire – and the need for a systematic approach to assessing any development proposals which affect listed buildings.**

Closing Statement

There are a number of other concerns regarding the **designated greenspace, public realm and landscaping** of the areas around Dundas Wharf and New Rotterdam Wharf. Specifically: **cycle and disabled access, lack of clear distinction between public and private space and assurances that new landscaping will provide safe, well maintained public paths.** The planning application for Dundas Wharf highlights that the plans are "potentially contrary to Policy Principles DEV11 (Greenspace) & DEV13 (Transport Infrastructure) of the City Plan", we seek assurances that these issues will be fully investigated to ascertain whether this development conforms to the City Plan.

The objections raised herein are of great concern as this proposed development will set the benchmark for the continuing regeneration of Glasgow's waterways. Speirs Wharf sets an extremely high standard, and Glasgow deserves no less from the next phase of a project which must deliver lasting and sustainable benefits for future generations of Glaswegians.

While this paper has been put together by lay people, it none the less highlights a significant number of legitimate concerns regarding the proposed redevelopment of the canalside by Glasgow City Council and ISIS. These concerns merit a full and open investigation into the manner in which the planning process has been managed to date, and the impact of these proposals on one of the city's internationally renowned landmarks of great social and historical importance.

In 200 years time, will the architecture of the proposed developments stand the test of time and have had bestowed on them the same architectural plaudits as Speirs Wharf? Are these our listed buildings of the future, a suitable legacy to bequeath future generations?

For your reference please find attached photographs showing Speirs Wharf. In addition if you wish to view the architects' sketches of the proposed developments please follow this link:

http://www.glasgowarchitecture.co.uk/port_dundas_speirs_wharf.htm

This page shows details of both developments.

Speirs Wharf Web site www.speirs-wharf.co.uk

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View of Speirs Wharf from Glasgow



Speirs Wharf