

Dundee's V & A

Dundee Civic Trust would like to congratulate the Design Dundee Ltd on the exhibition showing the proposals from the six practices invited to submit projects for the final stage. We have on a number of occasions been asked by the Press and others as to our position on the short listed schemes. We still feel that the V & A building should have been sited at the end of the open space at the heart of the new Waterfront but recognise that a different decision has now been reached.

As our membership encompasses a wide range of opinions the Trust does not wish to indicate a clear preference for one particular scheme. However, there are some general points which the Trust feels are worth making and which in our view significantly narrows the number of acceptable schemes.

The first is that whatever the design selected, it must have an external form which will register strongly from both of the of the principal approaches to the city from the south, namely the Tay Road Bridge and the Tay Rail bridge. It also seems essential that final design looks radically different from any of the other buildings on the Waterfront.

All would need to go through the complicated process of development of a project from a design model to a completed building. This can result in greatly increased costs and in a loss of the clarity of the design due to structural requirements. Problems of maintenance and durability do not affect models but they do affect buildings. For all these reasons the Trust would expect that that the panel judging the schemes will have architectural, costing and engineering advice within its ranks which would enable it to foresee such problems.

It would appear that none of the creators of the schemes has ever walked along the Esplanade on a wet and windy winter day. The need to provide some form of sheltered access from the shore to the selected building is particularly important whatever design is selected.

Three of the designs have buildings which go straight into the river, and hence will have a band around them which will lie between high and low water mark. Given the usual consequences of staining and weed growth, how this is dealt with will be crucial to the image of the building in use.

The exposed nature of the building, not just to a river environment but to a marine environment, will have real implications for the choice of materials employed on the exterior of the building. In particular the use of concrete can be guaranteed to result in the visual deterioration of the building in a short period of time.

Whilst the long views across the Tay are magnificent, the tidal and muddy nature of the river at its edge is not particularly attractive. Accordingly there would seem to be some question as why access decks for some of the schemes feature holes in them looking down into the river.

It is important that any elements above the general roof line are designed to contribute to the overall design and not to detract from it as the top of any selected design will be visible not only from the level of the High Street but also from the Tay Road and Rail Bridges. Many otherwise attractive buildings are ruined by the addition of various boxes to accommodate everything from lift motors to water tanks to access stairs to cleaning facilities.

Some of the schemes have not really come to terms with the servicing requirements of the museum and one features a solution which does nothing for the appearance of the building and is frankly bizarre. Smoothly operating and simple arrangements must be a part of the final design.

On the basis of these points and a general evaluation of the schemes we are of the opinion that the Sutherland Hussey, Steven Holl, and Snohetta designs should be rejected at this stage. We also have some doubts as to whether the very much larger building designed by Kengo Kuma could be delivered within the agreed budget.

Finally whatever scheme is selected it is important that the Discovery is provided with an attractive setting and not just left in a corner.