

# Design Review Report

Swansea University Student Precinct

**DCFW Ref: 101**

Meeting of 28<sup>th</sup> March 2017



## Declarations of Interest

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Panel members, observers and other relevant parties are required to declare ***in advance*** any interests they may have in relation to the Design Review Agenda items. Any such declarations are recorded here and in DCFW's central records.

### Review Status

Meeting date

Issue date

Scheme location

Scheme description

Scheme reference number

Planning status

### CONFIDENTIAL

28<sup>th</sup> March 2017

10<sup>th</sup> April 2017

Swansea Singleton Campus

Education new-build & refurbishment

101

Pre-application

## Declarations of Interest

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Steve Smith, City and County of Swansea Council, is a member of DCFW's Design Review panel and Fiona Nixon is a DCFW Board Member. Panel member Mark Hallett is also a DCFW Board Member. All present at the meeting were content to proceed following these declarations.

## Consultations to Date

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The period of formal pre-application consultation is planned for April 2017. Consultation with the local planning authority has taken place.

This scheme was reviewed by the Design Commission in November 2016 and this report should be read in conjunction with the report from the previous review.

## The Proposals

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The site is located at the heart of the existing Singleton Park Campus, adjacent to the Grade II listed Fulton House building, for which some internal remodelling is proposed as part of the scheme. It is proposed that the existing Digital Technium building will be demolished and replaced with a new three storey building with a central atrium joining Fulton House through a 'link'.

The proposed building will house centralised student support and pastoral care services, administration for the Student Union, student-led media facilities and flexible teaching/seminar spaces. There will be 6700m<sup>2</sup> of floor space in the project, with significant areas built as 'shells'.

## Main Points in Detail

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The following points summarise key issues from the review and should be considered to inform work ahead of making a planning application or engaging in further review.

### **Vision, ambition and design narrative**

This project has the potential for the University to demonstrate a commitment to excellent design quality, sustainability and well-being. An exemplar scheme would set the University apart and make a significant positive contribution to the student experience. An exemplar scheme requires an ambitious approach and a strong vision to drive the whole design process.

Currently the vision is confused by trying to respond to multiple influences and ideas, each of which is diluted by the others. The resulting narrative therefore lacks conviction and does not clearly reflect the stated ambitions of the project. The Design Review process provides a good opportunity to consider all the ideas and ambitions for the project and to prioritise them. The scheme will be stronger if one or two key ideas are prioritised to drive the design process and provide a focus for decision making. It will also allow for more efficient investment of design and physical resources. Prioritising the ideas will allow for the project vision and design narrative to be revisited and refined.

### **Routes, way-finding and student experience**

The design team stated a desire to make the north-south route through the building a priority route through the campus. In order to achieve this the following issues should be further considered:

- Legibility of entrances to north and south
- Way-finding through legible design, views and landscape design
- Physical dimensions of entrances and the route through the building. The proposed funnel shaped entrance and double doors to the north side of the building would feel constrictive
- The layout of rooms and spaces around the route
- The overall pedestrian experience
- Landscape design for this phase and in future development, especially to the north side of the building
- The inside/outside relationships in the forum
- Detail of the form and materiality of the projecting lecture theatre and its impact on the route

Integrated consideration of landscape design would improve amenity space and create comfortable, welcoming breakout and social spaces for students to use both north and south of the building. There may be more opportunity to use the external space to the south of the building to add amenity value. Use of the external hard landscape material inside the forum space could improve the transition between inside and out.

Consideration of the student experience and inclusive design should address the following:

- Physical inclusivity
- Acoustics
- Lighting

- Way-finding
- Arrival, entry and navigation which is not intimidating
- Scale of spaces to allow people to 'find a place which is ours'

### **Design for flexibility**

In order to allow for the future flexibility required by the university the following issues should be considered:

- A regular, rational approach to façade treatment which allows adaptability of fenestration and floor layout
- Testing of different potential layouts in conjunction with façade design
- Iterative testing of different potential layouts alongside environmental design studies
- Rational building structure to maximise flexibility of layout. This may include replacing the slanted columns with vertical
- Application/testing of grid dimensions, in façade, structure and plan arrangement, to maximise flexibility

### **Energy & sustainability strategy**

For the scheme to be exemplar, an innovative environmental and sustainability strategy needs to be intrinsic to the narrative of the design and drive the entire design process. This was not evident in the work presented at the review. The Commission refers the client and design team to the comments made in relation to Energy and sustainability in our previous report of the design review meeting of 17<sup>th</sup> November 2016 which remain relevant.

The sustainability strategy is highly significant to the University, students' experience and Swansea as a city. As well as energy issues, a sustainable, efficient building structure and sustainable demolition of the existing building should be sought.

### **Form, scale and relationships**

The relationships between the new building and Fulton House and Taliesin remain important. Three options were presented to address concerns regarding the relationship in scale with Fulton House. The following should be considered to determine the most appropriate response:

- Any intervention made to the top west corner of the building must be considered within the overall composition of the building
- Test relationships on the north side/elevation as well as south
- Physical model studies would be helpful to test the options
- Exploration of opportunities for place-making, flexibility, legibility, sustainability and well-being benefits created by each option
- Integration of lighting design and impact on night-time views
- Each solution must be worked through and integral to the whole building design, not just superficial appearance

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***A Welsh language copy of this report is available upon request.***

## Attendees

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Agent/Client/Developer:	Fiona Nixon, Head of Projects, Swansea University
Architect/Planning Consultant:	Richard Croydon, Stride Treglown Architects Pierre Wassenaar, Stride Treglown Architects Ashley Davies, Stride Treglown Architects Elaine Veaudour, Arup
Local Authority:	Steve Smith, Swansea CB
Design Review Panel:	
Chair	Jen Heal, Design Advisor, DCFW
Lead Panellist	Maria Asenjo Mark Lawton Mark Hallett Amanda Spence, Design Advisor, DCFW
Observer	John Lloyd