

Design Review Report

The Interchange, Central Square,
Cardiff

DCFW Ref: 126

Meeting of 22nd September 2016



Declarations of Interest

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

PUBLIC

22nd September 2016

4th October 2016

Central Square, Cardiff

Transport & mixed use

126

Pre-application

Declarations of Interest

Mark Hallett recorded a declaration that he is working with ARUP and Aecom on separate projects. All present confirmed that they were content to proceed following this declaration.

Consultations to Date

The team informed the panel that two pre-application consultations have been held to date and consultation with statutory bodies undertaken in accordance with an EIA screening. The LPA's screening opinion was negative; accordingly an EIA will not be required.

The Proposals

The proposal is for a mixed use development comprising a 14-stand bus station with associated facilities, approximately 142 Private Rented Sector apartments, 13,000m² Grade A office space and 225 space car park. The city centre site is close to the existing Central train station and the new BBC Headquarter which is currently under construction. The existing Marland House building and multi-storey car park on the site are currently being demolished.

The proposal forms part of the Central Square masterplan encompassing the BBC Cymru Wales headquarters, which has been reviewed by the Design Commission on a number of occasions throughout 2014. The reports of the previous masterplan reviews should be referred to alongside this report.

Main Points in Detail

The review took place at an early stage when there remains some flexibility, scope for suggestions to be incorporated and for discussions to add value to design quality. 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.

Vehicle Movement & Pedestrian Experience

Vehicle movement studies have been carried out to show that the required number of buses and coaches can move through the station. However, the next stages of design will be crucial in ensuring vehicle movement works safely and comfortably with pedestrians and cyclists.

The public realm design will play an important role in deterring or preventing pedestrians walking via Great Western Lane and into the bus area. Crossings, surface treatments and landscape design should be used to help emphasise appropriate desire lines.

Providing a safe, pedestrian-friendly route along Saunders Street will be particularly challenging. The work the design team are doing to reduce the width of crossing required by combining the bus and car park entrance is positive. Maintaining a clear, visible pedestrian route will be important. Careful consideration should also be given to driver psychology and how the street can be designed to encourage reduced vehicle speeds and pedestrian and cyclist priority.

It would be useful to see images of both bus station entrances in order to assess how well they work in relation to the streetscape and pedestrian and vehicle movement. It is important that the design of these entrances strongly discourages or prevents pedestrians accidentally entering a potentially dangerous space intended for vehicles only. The crossing at the St Mary Street/Wood Street junction is particularly important. Both the team and CCC Major Projects understand and believe that a diagonal crossing will be the preferred way forward, which will help relieve congestion at the new vehicular entrance.

Plans for future taxi provision are currently unresolved. However, it will be important for taxi provision to be integrated into the design so that a convenient and safe service can be provided.

Way-finding between the bus station, train station and city centre will be important to the pedestrian experience.

Bus Station Concourse

The design of the bus station concourse is a key element of this scheme. The design team and Cardiff Council must be confident that it will provide a comfortable, user-friendly place which works with the public realm and other facilities, such as the retail outlets. Detailed design studies which test and demonstrate how people will move through the space, locate their bus, wait for departures and meet arrivals will be useful. The width of the concourse should be determined by the amount and arrangement of seating (particularly in relation to retail frontages), signage and modelled pedestrian and bus passenger flow to ensure a successful environment. It is important that this is not compromised by the scale and layout of the retail units.

Consideration needs to be given to accommodating a wide range of passengers including those with luggage, pushchairs, cycles; young and elderly people, people with disabilities and new-comers to the city. The work the design team is doing with access groups will be valuable and should inform the design process. It is important that the bus station concourse provides a fully-inclusive environment.

The relationship between the ground floor concourse and passenger facilities on upper levels will also be important and more consideration needs to be given to how the first floor facilities will be used and accessed. It will be important to design for activity along the west edge of the ground and first floor to achieve what is shown in the images of the scheme. The team advised that retail use at first floor would be difficult to integrate and so have fronted up the western elevation with a car park access corridor instead. This appears to be an interesting addition and might make pedestrian car park access a little safer, but the Commission is yet to be convinced that it will be fully used and that retail space at that level is not deliverable. Providing an active use, such as a cafe/restaurant on the south corner of the first floor would also be a positive step, though it could be hindered by the horizontal 'blades' running around the building and some further work is required to ensure the blades do not cut off important views out from the restaurant, or stop views looking in. Maintenance of the blades will also need consideration.

The future proofing to allow for a footbridge link over to the Network Rail car park and all platforms is welcomed.

Relationship to Surrounding Buildings & Public Realm

The relationships created between the proposed development and existing buildings and the public realm will be important. There are existing buildings of interest adjacent to the site, especially on the north and south corners of Great Western Avenue, and this new development has the potential to improve their settings. The form and quality of finishes of the proposed development should take these opportunities into account.

The relationship between the existing and new public realm and spaces inside the new building will be especially important for this public transport interchange. The location and arrangement of building entrances will have a significant impact on the flow of people into and out of the building and through the public realm. The office entrance will need to properly announce itself and needs more work to define it in relation to the car park access, the south west corner of the bus station and the horizontal blades which are a strong feature of the scheme.

Where views from inside the building to the public realm are desired, these should be tested. The projecting canopy/blades are an interesting part of the proposals, but may restrict views from upper level to the streets below.

Environmental Strategy

The Commission would like to see a comprehensive environmental strategy developed as an integral part of the design process in order to achieve the highest possible sustainability. This should be informed by analysis of the site and should consider efficient energy use, occupant and user comfort and well-being and other aspects of sustainability.

The residential element of the scheme is likely to have units/rooms which face north. This would be more acceptable for a hotel use and, whilst we recognise that north-facing apartments are less likely to be problematic in PRS use, the orientation is not ideal and the impact of this on the comfort and well-being of occupants should be considered in the overall environmental strategy, in order to ensure a successful outcome.

The value of attaining the highest possible BREEAM rating should be carefully considered. The Commission urges Cardiff Council and the developer to aim for an 'Outstanding' rating for this significant project in the city.

Affordable Housing

The Commission would like to see a commitment to the delivery of a proportion of affordable housing as part of any residential development in this scheme.

Landscape Design

Much of the landscape design of the public realm has already been considered in the masterplan, including provision of trees (refer to DCFW reports from August 2014 and September 2014). However, it is important that opportunities to add value and improve the environment through landscape design are not overlooked in this scheme.

In particular, there are opportunities to utilise the roof deck over the bus station, especially if the development includes a hotel with dining. A green edge to the car park edge overlooking Marland Street has also been suggested. The proposals presented at the review did not include any amenity space or parking for the PRS accommodation. These will need to be given further consideration as the design progresses. Thought should be given to the quality of views from the offices and residential units which would overlook the car park covered roof deck.

Further Review

The Design Commission would welcome the opportunity to review this complex scheme again once designs have progressed, and before a planning application is made.

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

Attendees

Agent/Client/Developer:	Paul McCarthy, Rightacres
Architect/Planning Consultant:	Toby Blunt, Foster and Partners Tim O'Rourke, Foster and Partners John Cottrell, NLP Planning Ben Tricklebank, Arup Caitlin Forster, Aecom
Local Authority:	Claire Moggridge, Operational Manager, Cardiff Lawrence Dowdall, Planning Officer, Cardiff
Design Review Panel:	
Chair	Alan Francis
Lead Panellist	John Punter Richard Woods Mark Hallett Mark Lawton Michael Gwyther-Jones Jen Heal, Design Advisor, DCFW Amanda Spence, Design Advisor, DCFW Carole-Anne Davies, CE, DCFW