



DESIGN
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Design Review Report

Police Headquarters, Cwmbran

DCFW Ref: N159

Meeting of 15th March 2018

Review Status

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15th March 2018
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Cwmbran
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N159
Application Submitted

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.

None.

Consultations to Date

This is the first time that the Design Commission for Wales has reviewed these proposals for this site.

The Proposals

The proposal is for a new headquarters building and associated parking facility for Gwent Police located on the Llantarnam Industrial Estate. The two components of the development are to be delivered on separate plots within the Estate. The new headquarters will consolidate staff from several existing locations into one main building as well as replacing the existing Cwmbran Police Headquarters.

A planning application has already been submitted for the proposed development and the review was undertaken during the consultation period.

Main Points

We welcomed the opportunity to review proposals for this site, however there would have been much greater value in the process if there was the opportunity to review this scheme earlier in the design process and before the submission of an application so that the broader strategic considerations could have been discussed more meaningfully. The proposals for the building have developed in a considered way but there are some key issues that should be taken into account and responded to.

Vision

This proposal presents the challenge of balancing a range of site constraints and security requirements with the aspirations for the headquarters and car park to reflect the values of the client. These matters have been addressed in a rational way but the proposal is constraints led, particularly evident in the Design and Access Statement. It would be more helpful to see a positive vision and defined aspiration for the building that sets out in a clear brief what it should be like as a modern, low energy, delightful workplace that is resilient and adaptable to future change whilst meeting the specific operational needs

of the Police force. Had the design process been led more by these aspirations, there may have been the opportunity to explore alternative, creative and innovative options.

Movement

It is acknowledged that a location that is easily accessible by car was one of the requirements in the selection of a site for the headquarters. Whilst not a public body listed in the Act, Gwent Police has made a commitment to the principles of the Well-being of Future Generations Act and should also positively address the requirements the Active Travel Act in promoting sustainable development including sustainable travel. The Local Authority should be mindful of its duties in relation to both Acts and to sustainable development. The approach presented did not suggest that every effort is yet being made to encourage the change of travel patterns away from the private car and this has resulted in the desire for a very large car park.

The proposed car park accommodates a number of spaces well above that indicated as acceptable by local parking standards and may present a significant planning challenge. The need for this number of spaces was not fully justified given the lack of consideration of how to promote other forms of transport. The aims and ambitions of active travel, which should be explicit in the Travel Plan, need to be articulated and integrated into the proposed design and should have found expression in the Design and Access Statement including cycle and public transport strategies and connectivity.

Further consideration of the Well-being Goals and Ways of Working set out on the Well-being of Future Generations Act could help to identify different ways of doing things and potential to deliver the car park in a different way.

Car Park

Based on the proposed car parking numbers, the multi-storey car park is a significant structure occupying its own plot within the Estate. Its design quality therefore needs to be considered in its own right. The proposed raw 'off the peg' structure is very crude and little has been done to enhance the quality or appearance of the structure. The design of the structure should have some relation to the headquarters building to demonstrate a common design language. This could be incorporated into specific areas such as the stair cores and entrances to give the building more expression. Staff of the headquarters will interact with the car park on a daily basis and the proposals should seek to deliver a better, enhanced user experience on arrival and departure including through the treatment of the public realm.

Particular consideration should be given to the use and lighting of the top deck of the car park. Light pollution can be a particular issue here, which could have an impact on the adjacent hotel and bats. Management of the use of the car park can help to ensure that the top deck is not used after dark to help overcome this problem.

Form, Massing and Materials

The proposed building addresses the constraints of the site and security requirements and it is clear that the needs of the client have been considered through the 'well-briefing' process. The use of some of the internal spaces was explained in more detail in the review, which gave reassurance that the atrium and circulation spaces should be well used and will fit with the proposed way of working.

The curve of the building could present some challenges in terms of material choice and detailing. Attention to detail will be required to ensure that it is executed to a high quality and the clarity of the curve is not diminished. The 'boxes' on top of the podium have been articulated quite well but the depth and creation of shadow indicated in the drawings must be delivered to ensure the design intent is followed through.

We welcome the design strategy that establishes a ground floor datum which differs in applied materials and articulation from the upper floors. In addition the establishment of a gabion plinth to the building and site is appropriate but the detailing and selection of materials including wire caging will be critical to the success of the design.

Careful consideration has been given to security whilst not allowing fencing to dominate and it is positive that other solutions have been incorporated into the proposals.

The public entrance is where visitors will first interact with the building and, whilst it is acknowledged that numbers are likely to be small, it is nevertheless disappointing that the entrance lobby is so small. The arrival experience could be improved and the building will seem more welcoming if this lobby could be larger. A greater sense of connection to the whole building could be created by opening up views beyond the foyer into the atrium space.

Landscape and Public Realm

The memorial garden must not inhibit a clear route to the visitor entrance. It must also be a meaningful, useable, easy to maintain space that adds to the quality of the space and the appearance of the building from passers-by. Currently the entrance area is too complex.

The available external space is limited by the amount of parking provided around the building. If the parking can be reduced it could significantly improve the quality of space available for staff to use and establish an attractive setting for the headquarters building. The spaces that are currently shown on the plan are fragmented and may benefit from being collected together to make a single, more substantial and useable space rather than many small spaces. Where parking is provided it should be considered as a shared space to reduce the dominance of cars in the space and move away from a considerable amount of tarmac, especially towards the front of the building and where the staff outdoor space is planned.

The route from the car park to the main entrance must be as safe, direct and pleasant as it can be. This requires some further consideration of the location of the pedestrian crossing so that people will only need to cross one road. The stretch of road between the car park and building is currently very congested with parked cars and will have higher levels of vehicular traffic going to the car park. The team should work positively with the highways department/Estate to look at how this area can be improved as well as made safe and more attractive.

The headquarters constitute a public building, used to support a public service effectively and is enabled by public funds. Good urban design, public realm and architecture as well as a commitment to fully inclusive, sustainable design and development should be better pursued so that all parties can ensure the project contributes significantly to public value for the long term.

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

Attendees

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