



Design Review Report

Cardiff University Centre for
Student Life

DCFW Ref: 88

Meeting of 18th August 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

18th August 2016

25th August 2016

Cardiff

University (non-academic)

88

Application validated 29.07.16

Declarations of Interest

None declared.

Consultations to Date

The client took the opportunity to provide an early briefing and exploratory meeting with DCFW on 22nd October 2015, prior to the confirmation of the appointment of their design team. A second meeting on 6th June 2016 took place prior to a formal design review on 23rd June 2016. This review meeting of 18th August 2016 took place after the submission of a planning application, by agreement with DCFW. This report should be read in conjunction with the reports from the earlier meetings.

Key stakeholders and members of the public have now been consulted and a planning application has been submitted. In line with our previously advised and published guidelines on confidentiality and publicity, the views of the Commission have now been made public.

The full planning application was validated on 29th July 2016.

The Proposals

The design team was procured through a design competition for a new student services building on a site adjacent to the existing student union building and Cathays train station. The ambition is to consolidate non-academic student services into one place to improve the student experience. The competition brief, which required 9,000m² floor area, has now been refined with the floor area reduced to 8,500m². The site is within a Conservation Area and faces the University's Main Building and the National Museum of Wales. A number of buildings exist on the site within the Conservation Area. We understand that none of these buildings are listed. A University Estates 'masterplan' sets the context for this project.

Main Points in Detail

Key points from the discussion are outlined below. This review meeting took place after the submission of a planning application, primarily to address concerns raised in the Commission's report of the Design Review of 23rd June 2016. Therefore, the comments in this report will focus on how these issues have since been approached.

Overall approach

The Design Commission reiterates that it is supportive of the principle of this project, and recognises the importance of the project for the University. The Commission also recognises the importance of the site, within a Conservation Area in the city centre.

A project of such importance demands the best quality in every aspect. It is encouraging that the University and the design team are also ambitious about delivering a quality scheme. The Commission urges the University, design team and local authority to continue to strive for good quality throughout the detail design and delivery of the building and public realm.

Communication and overarching idea

The Design and Access Statement and the presentation at this review explained and justified the design approach and overarching architectural ideas much more clearly than the previous review. This will be helpful for all stakeholders and for the local authority in their decision making process.

It was useful to see how the design has developed in response to the site and wider context, as well as the challenging brief. This explanation clearly justifies the 'quiet' architectural language adopted and the form and layout of the building. The additional section drawings presented better articulate how the proposal relates to important surrounding buildings.

The proposals now represent a courageous response to a difficult brief and complex site. It will be useful for the team to draw out the concepts essential to the scheme so that they are not diluted by procurement processes and are carried through to detail design. For example, the concept of a stepped landscape framed with a colonnade might give clues to the detailing of floor finishes. Great care should be taken to protect these key concepts throughout delivery.

Inclusive design

In an enhanced response to wider inclusivity, the proposed addition of a passenger lift providing a close and convenient alternative to the main external stair was welcomed by the Commission. The areas at either end of the staircase will be important social spaces, and the extra lift will make these much more inclusive.

Quality through detail design and procurement

The Commission recognises that the design of interior spaces and detail design in general are work in progress. However, they will be crucial to the overall quality of the building.

Images of some previously completed projects which the architects have worked on were presented at the review. These demonstrate that they are experienced in delivering good quality, rich interior spaces at a scale similar to the proposed atrium in this scheme. We urge the client to protect that quality in delivery.

In line with the overarching architectural approach, the Commission encourages the design team to restrain the material palette inside and out. Richness can be achieved in interior spaces through careful consideration of scale, light, texture and details. The University will add posters, furniture, signage, objects and people to spaces once the building is handed over. Therefore, a more refined and restrained 'back drop' to the necessary clutter of life in the building might be the best approach. There is a risk that the addition of metal panels on the facade would dilute the strength of a minimal material palette, but further testing of the idea is required to establish the best option.

It is positive that the potential for glare within the building is being considered and the interior spaces and building facade refined accordingly.

A well designed and integrated signage strategy has potential to add significant value to the scheme and could be used creatively alongside the 'quiet' material palette.

Whichever procurement route is taken, quality of design should be safeguarded through the delivery of the scheme to ensure value and longevity. The University's stated commitment to delivering quality is welcomed.

Relationship to existing SU building

The proposed 'events terrace' would provide a more positive relationship between the existing Students Union (SU) building and the Centre for Student life than the previous proposal.

We would still encourage further consideration of the conditions that will be created for the exiting SU terraces through the impact of the new building. There may be opportunities to improve these existing environments to encourage better use of them. Exploration of different options for future use would be welcomed.

Public realm design

The design of the public realm in and around the site is as important as that of the building itself. The Commission is pleased to see that the wider public realm outside of the technical site boundary is being considered through consultation with the local authority.

The Commission urges the local authority to continue these discussions so that the best integration of public realm and building can be achieved. The proposed widening of the pavement in front of the new building will be essential. Iterative collaboration will help to resolve other public realm design issues and set a good precedent for future projects in the area.

The revision of the strategy for new tree planting in front of the building is welcomed and more realistic. We would question the value of the two proposed new trees at the central entrance.

In the future, communications with Network Rail over the new footbridge will be also be important.

Environmental design

The Commission welcomes the ongoing commitment to achieving BREEAM Excellent on this challenging building. We recognise that work on resolving environmental strategies in detail is ongoing at this stage and urge the team to continue to be ambitious in their approach. Achieving a passively ventilated lecture theatre on this site is commendable.

Resolving thermal bridging issues will be a particular challenge in this scheme and should be given appropriate consideration.

Elevation and colonnade design

The end elevations and roofscape have been more fully resolved since the previous review and better address the context and proposed internal uses.

It will be useful to test the clarity of the diagram at the south corner where the entrance is cut back from the facade behind the colonnade to align with adjacent buildings. The team should be sure that this makes the entrance visible enough. An alternative might be to stop the colonnade short of the end of the building, but this would need to be tested against the overall concept to which the columns are crucial.

The Commission welcomed this final opportunity to consider this important project as the design approach is set by the context of the planning determination process. The greater clarity and stronger justification of the design approach and the positive response to our earlier comments was welcomed.

This project is vital to setting the necessary standards of design and construction quality at the heart of an important conservation setting in the capital city. The realisation of the design ambition in delivery is critical to success. We urge client and design team to hold fast to key concepts throughout and ensure this location is enhanced by this ambitious scheme in the manner they intend.

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

Attendees

Client/developer:	Paul Lancaster, Aecom (representing client)
Architect/Planning Consultants:	Tom Jarman, Architect, FCB Studios Caitlin Forster, Aecom, Project Manager Hywyn Jones, Arup, MEP Engineer Gareth Hooper, DPP, Planning Consultant
Local Authority:	Richard Cole, Cardiff Council, Planning Officer
Design Review Panel: Chair	Jen Heal, Design Advisor, DCFW Jonathan Hines Steve Smith Kedrick Davies Amanda Spence, Design Advisor, DCFW Carole-Anne Davies, CE, DCFW
Observing:	Wendy Maden Samia Namina