



Design Review Report

Cardiff University Centre for
Student Life

DCFW Ref: 88

Meeting of 23rd June 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

23rd June 2016
7th July 2016
Cardiff
University (non-academic)
88
Pre-application

Declarations of Interest

DCFW panel member and commissioner, Mark Hallett, employs AECOM and ARUP on projects not related to this scheme. Following this declaration all attendees confirmed that they were happy for the review to proceed with Mark Hallett present.

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 this formal design review on 23rd June 2016 in order to provide an update on progress since the previous meeting. This report should be read in conjunction with the reports from the earlier meetings.

The Commission understands that key stakeholders and members of the public have now been consulted, so in line with our previously advised and published guidelines on confidentiality and publicity, the views of the Commission will now also be made public.

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 9000m² 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 and should inform work prior to making a planning application.

Overall approach

The Design Commission 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.

It is encouraging to hear the University's ambitions for the scheme, but it is important that these ambitions are met, as far as possible through the designed proposal. Although there has been some improvement in the scheme since the introductory meeting on 6th June, little has been changed since the competition winning entry. The Design Commission believes that there are elements missing, either from the design process or from the communication of that process, which need to be addressed before a planning application is made and key elements become fixed.

The scheme has adopted a somewhat 'quiet' approach. On the whole this is accepted and endorsed, but a scheme of this importance will benefit if further opportunities for introducing greater richness, particularly regarding the interior design strategy, are fully explored.

Communication and overarching idea

Whilst the University's ambitions are clear, the overriding architectural concept and idea for the project is not made clear in the presentation material. It would be useful to explicitly communicate the central idea so that all design decisions can be tested against it.

As well as resolving the functional elements of the brief, it is important to carefully consider what type of place you intend to make. What is its character? What does it feel like to experience the building and surrounding spaces? Is there a hierarchy of spaces? The character and experiential qualities should be appropriate for the setting and the users of the building, including students embarking on a new and important change with mixed feelings and experiences as they adjust to new living circumstances. It is then important that the qualities of spaces are communicated through visual materials. The section drawings supplied should be supplemented with further sections to clearly articulate a thorough analysis of comparative scale. These should include sections which show the wider context and in particular the adjacent civic centre.

It is good practice to show that different strategies and design options have been tested as evidence that the best solution has been found. An informative modelling and testing process is crucial to achieving good design. This process was not demonstrated in the review and is not evident in the supporting material.

Many strategic ambitions were set out in the supporting material, but it is not clear which of these are priorities or commitments and which are ambitions unlikely to be realised. It is particularly important that firm commitments to sustainability are made and an appropriate design strategy developed.

A clear and justified message about the approach to conservation and heritage, including demolition of existing buildings, should be made in written and visual material.

Inclusive design

The Commission is committed to good, inclusive, sustainable design. The proposal presented at the review showed a significant physical separation between the main (external) staircase and lift access, which goes against best practice for inclusivity. We strongly encourage the design team to find better solutions, possibly with lift access closer to the stair.

Quality through detail design and procurement

It is important that quality is maintained through the detail design and delivery stages of the project. The success of a number of parts of the scheme will be significantly determined by the detail design. These include, but are not limited to:

- Orientation and way-finding
- Identification of entrance
- Arrival/entrance experience
- Signalling of the Student Union (SU) building
- Atmosphere and environment in the atrium space
- Environment created between the colonnade and the building facade
- The lecture theatre

Junction details and material and fixing specifications will be especially important to creating the quality of building demanded by this setting. The junctions at the heads and bases of columns, and the soffit design are important examples. Minimising water and dirt staining of the facade through detail design will also be important.

The interior design, details and materials in the main atrium/foyer space will have a significant impact on the way the space feels and how comfortable the internal environment is. This should be carefully considered, modelled and tested to ensure the space is welcoming and useable, as per the University's expressed aims. It is accepted that the internal visualisations represent early studies but the excessive use of hard, white surfaces and finishes suggest a potentially uncomfortable environment with a high degree of echo, noise and glare. The interior design strategy should be developed and tested to ensure potentially negative aspects are mitigated and to avoid expensive retrofitting and maintenance costs.

Whichever procurement route is taken, quality of design should be safeguarded through the delivery of the scheme to ensure value and longevity.

Relationship to existing SU building

The new building would make a significant impact on the existing SU building, and the current proposal largely turns its back on it. It is important that the qualities of spaces in and around the existing building are fully considered. Where existing outdoor terraces are not currently used, there is an opportunity for this scheme to contribute to an improved environment in order to encourage this.

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. Consultation and collaboration with the local authority planning and highways teams on this will be critical.

Whilst there should be some flexibility in the public realm proposals at this stage, to accommodate the local authority's long term decisions, it is useful for the design team to set out ambitions for coordination with the building design and overall project ambitions which include a successful public realm.

Any proposal for new tree planting should be realistic in terms of scale, space and long term health of the trees. It is also important for the impact of new trees on the conditions that would be created under the colonnade to be fully considered. Trees would reduce the amount of sunlight and daylight under the colonnade. Any tree planting should be fully coordinated with the location of columns, lighting, signage, pedestrian desire lines and views. There is a risk that poorly placed trees could compromise the rhythm of the colonnade.

Environmental design

It is crucial that environmental design is an integrated part of the design process. The environmental and energy strategy was not clearly presented, and it is essential that this can be shown to be resolved prior to a planning application being made.

The facade will be an important part of the environmental design strategy to ensure a low-energy, comfortable building. The glare, thermal and reflective properties of the glazing should be fully considered.

Elevation design

It is important that the designs for the elevations are fully resolved prior to the planning application being made. The elevation of the short, south end of the building is less successful than the north end, and it would be good to see different options tested. The architects should decide whether it is appropriate to wrap the colonnade around this end of the building.

The design of the roofscape/elevation is also important as there are taller buildings nearby with views down onto the roof. The roofscape will also have an impact on the silhouette of the building.

Concluding comments

This project should be one that makes a positive contribution to an area of the city recognised as distinctive and afforded Conservation Area status. An approach of a quiet nature, simple and elegant in its realisation could make that contribution. However, based on the material provided and the presentations made, the Commission is of the view that a significant amount of design work has yet to be carried out and that a planning submission is premature.

Comisiwn Dylunio Cymru Design Commission for Wales is the trading name of DCFW LIMITED, a Private Limited Company established under the Companies Act 1985 and 2006, Company No: 04391072 incorporated in England and

Wales. DCFW is a non-statutory consultee, a private limited company and a wholly owned subsidiary of the Welsh Government. Registered office: 4th Floor, Cambrian Buildings, Mount Stuart Square, Cardiff CF10 5FL T: 029 2045 1964 E connect@dcfw.org. The comment recorded in this report, arising from formal Design Review through our Design Review Service, is provided in the public interest for the consideration of local planning authorities as a material consideration and other users of the Design Review Service. It is not and should not be considered 'advice' and no third party is bound or required to act upon it. The Design Review Service is delivered in line with DCFW's published protocols, code of conduct and complaints procedure, which should be read and considered by users of the service.

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

Attendees

Client/developer:	Anita Edson, Cardiff University
Architect/Planning Consultants:	Tom Jarman, Architect, FCB Studios Hannah Parham, Donald Insall Associates Caitlin Forster, Aecom, Project Manager Hywyn Jones, Arup, MEP Engineer Gareth Hooper, DPP, Planning Consultant Hester Brough, FCB Studios, Architect
Local Authority:	Richard Cole, Cardiff Council, Planning Officer
Design Review Panel:	
Chair	Jen Heal, Design Advisor, DCFW
Lead panellist	Jamie Brewster Maria Asenjo Mark Hallett Amanda Spence, Design Advisor, DCFW Mark Lawton (observing) Simon Richards (observing)