



DESIGN  
COMMISSION  
FOR WALES  
COMISIWN  
DYLUNIO  
CYMRU

20 August 2018

Dear Colleagues

**Re: Cardiff University Public Consultation Response: Plans for 10,000m<sup>2</sup> building to house School of Computer Science and Informatics (COMSC) and the School of Mathematics (MATHS) within a single facility at Senghennydd Road, Cardiff, adjacent to Cardiff Business Technology Centre, Students' Union and Cathays rail station.**

Please find below the comment of the Design Commission for Wales on publicly available materials relating to the above named proposals. We also attach our guide to consulting the Commission to allow more detailed assessment of proposals and encourage the local authority, client and design team to take advantage of consultation with the Commission, following assessment of public responses. We have the following observations as the body established by the Welsh Government to promote good design quality in the built environment:

### **1. Station legibility and wayfinding**

Much of the value to be drawn from this proposal could be considered to reside in the quality of public realm and important connections. Given the level of investment at c£600m, and that public transport links are stated as among the key criteria for the site selection, more work is needed to maximise their value and make a wider contribution to the cityscape and wider public benefits to be drawn from the scheme.

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The adjacent rail station is arguably one of the most important in the city due to it serving the city's largest University. The current arrival at the station lacks the necessary quality of approach given the opportunity afforded for a high quality architectural solution to the building and a public realm which sets the tone for users of and visitors to Cardiff University.

Although the site is currently under-utilised and neglected, it provides a clear sightline for the station which could be strengthened to enhance legibility, inclusivity and natural surveillance. This development must grasp the opportunity to maximise the value of such connections to public transport and ensure that inclusive design, legibility and way-finding are key design objectives, given the importance of the station to visitors, staff and students.

## **2. Relationship to the northern platform station building**

The relationship to the station building on the northern platform and associated adjacent space currently lacks clarity. The project creates an opportunity to enhance the context of Cathays Station, however the client, local authority and design team will need to work closely and meaningfully with the rail operator to ensure that there is a smooth transition between the University site and the adjacent transport facility to realise the capacity for place-making and the realisation of the full potential of the location and its connections.

The currently proposed 'station plaza' seems to suggest it would follow the north eastern elevation of the station building which carries no activity or access from it. This lack of activity around the public space is a matter of concern and places greater need to establish comprehensive natural surveillance from the MSCS building itself. This is not yet an adequate solution as currently proposed and suggested by the publicly available design materials.

Clarity is needed on the nature of the site to the south east of the steps which extends beyond these proposals. The quality of the public realm proposed in this scheme could be compromised by the adjacent site. Perspective views of this area may help to clarify

how the existing transport place and MSCS proposal will sit together. All parties will need to work together to achieve this.

### **3. Pedestrian routes**

Reference to potential public access through the building is made in the Design and Access Statement. The efficacy of this link would depend on a number of factors, including legibility, opening times, management and modes of security, and is unlikely to be used by those who are not familiar with the University. With this in mind, the route around the building will need to be of the highest quality and routes to Cathays station and the foot bridge must be as legible as possible. Wrapping the colonnade around the east facing elevation may be tested as a means to activate and enhance this as a pedestrian route, providing better natural surveillance and sheltered areas.

The aspiration to deliver a high quality public realm around the building is clear in the available material, however this should be further detailed in the proposals to become fully convincing.

### **4. Boundaries of the site**

Given that the south corner of the site bounds the refuse storage and servicing area of the adjacent Sports Centre, further consideration is needed as to how this corner can be resolved to avoid negative impacts on the pedestrian route through to the station. The tree screening proposed goes some way to mitigate this impact however the plan is currently unconvincing. Good design quality is not simply a means of mitigation.

### **5. Architecture**

Design strategies could be more explicit and better communicated to explain the rationale for the design approach. The colonnade is presented as the primary strategic design decision, however testing of different options is not evidenced in the material.

This building has a civic function and is located adjacent to an important transport node and route, however doesn't currently make a civic gesture beyond the proposed colonnade along one elevation. By proposing this volume of accommodation on a site of this size, a very large building takes up most of the site and little opportunity remains for a civic gesture, negating the stated aim for the quality of the public realm.

The building is densely planned and accommodates many deep plan internal rooms, the implications of which, for natural lighting and ventilation, are not tested or evaluated in the material available. The internal layout could benefit from better consideration to avoid toilets and stair cores taking up significant amounts of elevation.

The northern elevation which sits behind the proposed colonnade is described as an 'active frontage', however the plans available detail this space as a double height corridor to lecture theatres. This internal use may not be as active as would be preferable along this street and further consideration should be given to how a truly active frontage can be achieved. The eastern and southern elevations of the building could be strengthened to better respond to the rail station, rail crossing and routes to there to.

The photovoltaics proposed for the roof of the building may need to be tested further to ensure that the mechanical and electrical enclosures do not shade them and impact efficacy of the energy strategy.

Perspective views of the proposed building from the southern side of the rail line and nearby Conservation Area may be helpfully included in the material submitted to the Local Planning Authority.

### **Opportunities for further dialogue:**

The Design Commission for Wales would welcome the client and design team to further dialogue constructive dialogue. The local authority may also choose to take the

opportunity to consult with us further, either independently or alongside the client and design team.

We also encourage all parties to ensure that the materials available during the public consultation phase are sufficiently clear for lay people to engage with, meaningfully. Whilst members of the public are usually very well informed as to their locale, online materials can aid or frustrate access and understanding. This is particularly important in the context of legislation and the duty placed on the Local Authority and associated public bodies toward the Well-Being of Future Generations and Active Travel Acts.

We will be pleased to welcome you to further dialogue and to play our role in ensuring the education estate in Wales in all its forms is the best it can be, in order to achieve public value and serve the needs of future generations.



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For and on behalf of the Board of Directors

### **Further information about the Design Commission for Wales**

The Design Commission for Wales is a company limited by guarantee (DCFW LTD), without share capital and incorporated in 2002 as a wholly owned subsidiary of the National Assembly for Wales, now Welsh Ministers, pursuant to the Government of

Wales Act 2006. The Commission receives funds from the Welsh Government for its activities, carried out in pursuit of the Objects of the Company as set out in its Memorandum of Association. These are:

- *To champion high standards of design and architecture to the public and private sectors in Wales through promoting wider understanding of design issues and the importance of enhancing the built environment across all sectors, including the organisation of exhibitions, meetings, seminars and conferences.*
- *To promote design practice that is compatible with the scheme made by the National Assembly for Wales under Section 121 of the Government of Wales Act 1998 ("the Sustainable Development Scheme"), promoting best practice in energy efficiency, waste disposal and access to public transport.*
- *To promote design practice compatible with the highest standards in relation to the promotion of equality of opportunity and social inclusion.*
- *Whilst promoting excellence in prestige projects to have due regard also to the promotion of excellence in day to day developments such as residential estates and industrial units*

In addition to the company Objects the Commission responds to a number of requirements set out annually by its Sponsor department, the Planning Directorate of the Welsh Government. DCFW may also respond to requirements from other Welsh Government portfolio areas, major projects or Ministerial requirements. DCFW responds to legislation and policy requirements pursuing its Objects through Client support and training; the National Design Review Service and through events, publications and networks. DCFW operates throughout Wales with all 22 Local Authorities and 3 National Parks and across private, public and third sectors.

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