

Design Review Report

Central Quay (Brains Brewery Site),
Cardiff

DCFW Ref: 139

Meeting of 28th February 2017



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	CONFIDENTIAL 28 th February 2017
Issue date	10 th March 2017
Scheme location	Cardiff
Scheme description	Mixed Use
Scheme reference number	N139
Planning status	Pre-application

Declarations of Interest

None declared.

Consultations to Date

An initial meeting with the Local Authority has been undertaken.

The Proposals

Proposed urban regeneration scheme to deliver circa 2.5m sq ft of mixed use development including food, beverage and leisure; Private Rented Sector (PRS) residential, offices, hotel and associated facilities.

Main Points

The Design Commission welcomes early engagement on this very significant site and the opportunity to understand the extent and direction of the project. This has allowed us to provide initial comments on the emerging concept of which the key points are set out below.

This is a large and complex site and this early meeting focused on the more strategic issues, however, we would like to continue to be engaged through further review as the proposals develop and the design of the buildings and spaces can be considered in more detail.

The work undertaken to date was well presented and provided a clear overview of the issues that have been considered and the design direction. It is positive that physical models are being used at this early stage to explore the mass and structure of the development.

The Big Picture

The comprehensive approach being taken in considering the whole of the site is welcomed as this will help reconcile the differing requirements of the site in a way that creates a legible piece of the city.

The mix of land ownerships is an added complication affecting a comprehensive approach. We recognise that this is an emerging picture and that the implications of land ownership will vary as the project progresses, however, clarity for the brief for this piece of work is necessary as it will influence the masterplan. In particular, it should be clear whether ownership boundaries are to be reflected or ignored.

Each of the three edges of the site are very different but very important. Widening the boundary of the masterplan to consider what happens along each edge, particularly along Penarth Road and on the western bank of the River Taff would help to ensure that the site is properly stitched in to this part of the city and could add value to the proposals.

With so much change anticipated in this area of the city it is important to work with the local authority and other key stakeholders to integrate emerging plans for the area. A slightly wider plan in the documentation that identifies other plans and future development that has been considered e.g. higher level masterplans, proposals for other sites and strategy/guidance documents would be helpful.

The Vision

The emerging plans for this site have a degree of momentum and are, therefore, likely to lead the way for change in the area. Having a clear vision that aligns various interests will provide something that all parties can sign up to and work towards delivering. This 'pre-concept' stage is critical and should be given sufficient development time.

Refining the vision and objectives, adding more detail and clarity to the type of place this will be could help with establishing the buy-in required from stakeholders, the local authority and the public. Building on what is presented in the documentation, a very positive vision can be established for what this development will be like for those who live there, work there, visit or pass through. This will also provide a reference point for future design decisions.

Whilst improvements are proposed for the pedestrian connections between this site and Central Square to the north of the station, they are physically disconnected by the railway line and are already very different in their nature. The vision should reflect this different nature rather than being an extension of Central Square. The site is not a blank canvas, and further exploration of existing features of the site and the Brains brand could lead to some alternative considerations of mix of uses, development grain and scale. Retaining more of the buildings on site and encouraging temporary uses could lead to a more organic evolution of proposed uses and built form. This would also help to animate the site during its long development period.

Transport Hub

This location has many transport requirements to accommodate. This benefits the site by attracting more people to and through it and it is highly accessible, thus having the positive effect of reducing car dependency. Some key points to consider in the development of the masterplan and integration of transport modes include the following:

- Ensure that the metro stop is positively integrated into the site with good links to the train station. This needs to be further considered and improved upon, from the current proposals.

- We question the need for a car park of the scale that Network Rail appears to be seeking. The number of spaces must be considered in the wider context of movement around the city and the council's ambition for a 50/50 modal shift.
- The station plans, including phasing, need to be fully understood and relevant steps taken to ensure the long-term compatibility of the transport needs and development requirements.
- The links between different transport modes start to set up movement patterns that would benefit from further exploration. For example, from the Metro stop to the station, the location of cycle parking, and the visibility of the station for those coming from outside the site. Continue using diagrams to work these things through.
- A forum for all transport providers to discuss in a focused and strategic manner, the needs of the site would be helpful and might usefully be hosted by the developer given their role, influence and long term partnership with the local authority.
- A comprehensive transport plan for the site and station is an essential prerequisite for the rest of the masterplan.

Public Realm Framework

At this concept stage, establishing the framework of streets and spaces is critical. Connections to and through the site are an important aspect of the masterplan. The key challenge is to ensure that they are based on realistic anticipated movement of people both to get people where they want to go and to enliven the development itself.

Further consideration of the nature of the riverside is needed in relation to the sections that will be very public and those that will be more private. The lack of connectivity along the riverside to the north will significantly limit any movement of people beyond the Brewery Square so this section may be treated differently. Maximising the opportunity offered by high quality riverside development will rest on this further analysis.

A wider review of movement to and through the site should include the potential for a pedestrian and cycle links across the river that might better connect the Grangetown community to the site and into the city centre. This could also help to drive footfall to the western side of the site which is otherwise quite cut off.

Proposals to improve existing connections including Penarth Road as it goes under the railway are welcomed, however the railway remains a barrier to movement.

The public space around the Brewery is a positive focal point for the development but the large scale of this space needs to be carefully considered. It may be appropriate to look at reducing the size of the space.

Establishing a clear hierarchy of routes and spaces, together with key views to and through the site, will help determine where the most important elevations and key corners are located. In these locations, the architecture must respond appropriately.

The main north south street is a strong aspect of the framework and must be designed with a good degree of continuity, enclosure and active frontages to be successful. Simplification of the framework to the east and west may help to increase the legibility of the site and reduce the number of gaps in the street. Development of this scale should define the urban form of the city rather than individual buildings in spaces. A finer blend of the proposed uses may help to move away from individual buildings with all edges exposed, to the creation of blocks that have a clear front and back and create streets and spaces.

Existing Buildings

We welcome the retention of the Brewery building and chimney which will give the development character, interest and a link to the history of the site. Initial thinking about how the building will be converted and any contemporary extension are starting to establish a direction but the extent to which these buildings influence the character of the proposed development in form and materials needs to be worked through. The proposed use of the building will also be important for the success of the public space.

The setting of the chimney requires further consideration. Currently the plans show it as an isolated object set in a space which looks uncomfortable. It may be more appropriately set within the context of new buildings.

There may be opportunities for temporary 'meanwhile' uses of some of the buildings on the site particularly as the overall programme and phasing will take many years to develop out.

Architecture

The design of the buildings was not discussed in detail at this stage. However, the first building on the site will set the tone for the whole development and will need to be of the highest quality. At this time, indications are that this first structure may be a multi-storey car park which would need an active ground floor on key edges and well-articulated facades.

Next Steps

The material presented at this review demonstrates a positive and pro-active start to the comprehensive consideration of the site and its development over time. We would welcome further reviews on the masterplan as it develops as well as on individual buildings as they come forward. We recommend that the developer liaises with DCFW on programming to enable this longer term engagement.

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

Attendees

Architect/Design Team:	Jamie Webb, Benoy Felix Wu, Benoy Adam Windle, Benoy
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Planning Consultant:	Nigel Hanson, Urban Prospects
Transport Consultant:	Matthew Thomas, Vectos
Client Team:	Paul McCarthy, Rightacres Stephen Widnall, Rightacres
Local Planning Authority:	Ross Cannon Mike Biddulph
Design Review Panel:	
Chair	Jen Heal, Design Advisor, DCFW
Lead Panellist	Steve Smith
Panel	Martin Knight Mark Lawton Amanda Spence, Design Advisor, DCFW Carole-Anne Davies, Chief Executive, DCFW