

Design Review Report

Gladstone's Library,
Hawarden

DCFW Ref: N51

Meeting of 19th November 2015



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

CONFIDENTIAL

19th November 2015

1st December 2015

Hawarden

Library & supporting facilities

51

Pre-application

Declarations of Interest

None declared.

Consultations to Date

The Design Commission for Wales was consulted by the client and worked with them to assist their scoping and development of key project aims, to inform the brief for the project. A member of DCFW contributed to the subsequent interview following the OJEU process for selection of the design team.

Informal discussions have been held with the local authority, Cadw, and HLF and more will follow.

The Proposals

The site is on the edge of Hawarden village Flintshire, close to a busy road junction on the A550. The site is accessed off the small Church Lane to the south east of the site. An old pedestrian gate, facing onto the main road is blocked off. The existing buildings on the site comprise the impressive original John Douglas designed main block; a 1930s accommodation wing; a 2009 built chapel; the western store wing; and the Warden's house and garage. The buildings are set well back from the road with formal lawns in front. There is an area of informal garden and woodland to the rear. Limited parking means that at busy times, cars have to be parked on the lawns in front of the building. St. Deiniol's church and churchyard are immediately to the east of the buildings. The complex currently houses the library and associated reading spaces, a small reception/shop, canteen style restaurant, chapel, seminar room, storage, staff offices and overnight accommodation. The Warden currently lives in a 1970s house on the site.

Gladstone's Library wishes to continue providing the same services, but requires more space and better facilities in which to do so. The current set up is successful, but there is no room for expansion. In particular, a larger meeting/conference space is required

along with improved arrival/reception/shop sequence, a noisier library 'Foyer' space, improved kitchen/dining, more bedrooms and improved staff facilities.

The client brief emphasises the need for the scheme to build on Gladstone's original vision. The library should remain open during implementation and the number of extra staff required kept to a minimum.

Main Points in Detail

This review took place at a usefully early stage in the design process, when there is scope for discussion to inform future work and to add value. The following points summarise key issues from the discussion, and should be considered ahead of making a planning application:

Project Vision & Brief

A design strategy is emerging for this exciting and important project. However, it is important that the overall ambition and vision is made clear in all of the design development work.

It is important that the vision and brief are continually developed and tested through design studies and dialogue between the design team and the client (the operational team, users and trustees). The material presented at the review did not demonstrate to the Design Commission that this process was taking place. The proposed strategy is very similar to that presented at the competitive interview, which suggests that different options have not been fully tested in conversation and through consultation with the client since the design team appointment.

As with all complex design projects, different constraints and opportunities will emerge as the project progresses. Having a strong and up-to-date agreed vision and brief will allow the client and design team to get the most value out of those opportunities, and will allow solutions which deal with the constraints to be properly tested. It will also be important to prioritise different aspects of the vision so that it is not compromised when problems arise.

If the Warden's House is to be replaced, it would be useful for a mini-brief for that part of the scheme to be developed and agreed between the design team and the client, with input from the trustees and current Warden. This brief should take into account likely needs of the current and future Wardens, and should draw on the experience of the existing Warden and his family.

Feasibility

It is important that the operational and logistical design aspects of the scheme go hand-in-hand with the poetic and conceptual design aspects. The buildability and funding of the project are crucial to achieving the vision and proposals being developed. Therefore, it is critical that both the value and practicalities of the vision are clearly demonstrated in any presentation materials. When applications for funding and planning are made, it must be clear that the proposals are the best solutions for achieving the Gladstone's Living Heritage Project vision and in terms of practicality. To achieve such an effective

and hard-working solution will require an iterative process of testing options and ideas, and making refinements, at all times remaining mindful of the project brief.

A strong vision which accepts the functional requirements of the brief is required.

For the HLF application it is essential that the design team tells a really clear story for their client, focussing on delivery of the vision and exactly what will and will not be funded. Although a large amount of information will be submitted, it should be easy for the HLF team to quickly understand the design story and be reassured that the proposed solution has been tested and refined as far as possible and that it supports the desired activity and operational plans. Prioritising the vision will be important to ensure that the main objectives are not compromised if full funding is not achieved.

Entrance, Arrival and Parking

The proposed strategy would greatly improve the arrival and entrance sequence, and resolving the visitor parking in this way would be a positive move, reducing traffic on Church Lane which can currently get congested.

The proposed layout shows staff parking to the south west corner of the buildings, with an access route cutting in front of the main facade. All options should be explored to be sure that this is the best solution for staff parking, as the 'purity' of the front lawns and access routes could be compromised by this approach. If this solution is found to be the best and appropriate to the overall vision, the treatment and detail of the landscape design will be important to quality.

Due to the busy road junction adjacent to the site, it is important that discussions take place with the local authority highways department. Although it is outside of the project boundary, there may be opportunities to improve pedestrian crossings and footways alongside this project. The possibilities should be discussed at an early stage with the local authority.

Layout & Adjacencies

The proposed courtyard arrangement could work well, and there is much precedent that suggests that a cloistered courtyard would provide the type of social environment desired. The way in which the new building joins the existing will be important and must be carefully detailed. An option which explores providing a continuous circular route around the courtyard should be explored. This would not necessarily require closing the gap between buildings at the north west corner of the courtyard.

Clustering the service facilities in the new layout, so that they have a separate service access/entrance would be sensible. However, an adjacencies flow diagram for the services area would be useful to test and demonstrate the strength of the proposed layout.

In general, there is more work to be done to achieve the right layout and adjacencies of spaces. The layout should be adjusted and tested to achieve the best daylighting, ventilation and overall experience for staff and visitors using the building.

In particular, the chapel environment needs to be reconsidered. The chapel should be a peaceful, contemplative place which allows people to get away from the hustle and

bustle. Therefore, the noise, lighting, views and relationships to other spaces in the building will be important to achieving the right quality of place. Relationship to landscape and outside spaces must also be carefully considered.

How the new facilities relate to external spaces and site boundaries is also important. There is potential to use the woodland at the back of the site, either now or in the future, and options for this should be explored. The edges of the site, especially alongside the churchyard should be considered.

Environmental Performance

The Commission supports the principle of the 'build right and robust' approach to environmental performance described by the architect.

It is crucial that environmental performance is properly considered at this early stage in the design process. Decisions about form, layout, orientation and fenestration will have an impact on the effectiveness of passive environmental design.

The detail of the environmental improvement in the existing building will also be important and must be dealt with sensitively given the historic value of the place.

The development of the energy strategies for both the new and old parts of the scheme should be clearly illustrated diagrammatically.

Landscape Design

Good landscape design will be crucial to this scheme, and the project vision should integrate landscape aspirations. It is important that the landscape architect is involved at this early stage so that the design is developed through an integrated approach. Landscape design will be especially important for the parking areas, any new courtyard space and the relationship of the new buildings to the site and its edges.

Communication & Narrative

Having a clear narrative to the design development and communicating this clearly will strengthen the scheme.

Telling a clear story, diagrammatically, about how the proposals have been developed will allow quick understanding of the scheme, its vision and value. It will reassure client, local authority and potential funders if they can easily see that different options have been considered and rigorously tested, and if they can understand that the proposed solution is the best one.

Future Review

The Design Commission for Wales is committed to continued engagement with the client and their important project as it progresses through the design stages. We would welcome the opportunity for further consultation and to see the scheme a number of times in the future, at key stages and certainly prior to the HLF application being made.

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

Attendees

Client/Developer:	Peter Francis, Warden, Gladstone's Library Lowri Goss, Gladstone's Library Michael Wheeler, Trustee, Gladstone's Library
Architect/Planning Consultant:	Andy James, OMI Architects
Local Authority:	Eleanor Carpenter, Flintshire CC Glyn Jones, Flintshire CC
Design Review Panel:	
Chair	Jamie Brewster
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