

DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

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.

Design Review Report

Review status

CONFIDENTIAL

Meeting date	Thursday 6 th June 2013
Issue date	Thursday 13 th June 2013
Scheme location	High Street, Merthyr Tydfil
Scheme description	New Library Building
Scheme reference number	82B
Planning status	Pre- application
Declaration of interests	None

Consultations to date

DCFW have consulted with Merthyr County Borough Council on the development brief prepared for this site in January 2013 and were also invited to attend an inception meeting with the architectural team from Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council. Informal consultations have taken place internally with officers and members of the council, Welsh Government and Cadw.

Summary

The Panel acknowledges that this is an important site within the town centre and the quality of the design response should be appropriate. The Panel was pleased to be consulted at such an early stage in the process with material that highlighted a creative approach to the design of the building.

There were however a number of fundamental and more detailed specific points raised by the Panel during the review:

- The building urgently needs a more defined brief and clear vision from the 'client'. In addition the proposals need to provide a flexible solution to allow future proofing for uses and users.
- The design development and option choice does not demonstrate how the proposals have responded to the townscape character, the conservation area, the adjacent listed buildings or views to and from the proposed building from outside the immediate context. Whilst this response may be being detailed through the emerging Design and Access Statement it was not obvious from discussions at the review.

- A clearer solution to delivering the ground floor of the building identifying access and entrances to proposed retail uses and more importantly providing a sense of arrival at the library need to be resolved. The current arrangement prioritises retail, making the library seem to be a secondary use of the building.
- The relationship between the Library and the new public space, and the impact that the new building will have on the relationship of the Town Hall and other buildings to that space, needs to be more thoroughly considered.
- The circulation and spatial disposition within the building and its relationship to views outside needs to be clarified and resolved.
- The services and structural strategy was not shown and given the open spaces proposed will be critical to the internal environment and its environmental sustainability.
- The current proposal for a three storey building is an appropriate solution to this location in order that the building remains subservient to the adjacent Listed Town Hall (Red House). A further attic storey was mentioned in the documentation but its value and cost were challenged.
- The cost allowance for the building work is challenging. At this stage it is important to demonstrate that the proposals are achievable to avoid raising expectations within the client body.

Discussion and Panel response in full:

Overall the Panel are in agreement that a new building to mark the corner of this new public square is an appropriate solution to this cleared site. The design options reviewed and the internal configuration were still very fluid in terms of design development and the client's brief requires clarification and more detailed description before the scheme can be fixed.

The Merthyr regeneration team outlined the context for the scheme and the work currently under design development and implementation in the town centre. The demolition of the Castle Cinema, the previous occupier of this site, has provided the opportunity to build a new library, with the existing library building retained, but its use to turn to genealogy, reference, and a tourist information centre. A development brief has been prepared by the council for internal use, to help inform discussions and decisions about the site.

The site lies within the Town Centre Conservation Area, the building has been demolished and the site boundary has been hoarded off from public access. The proposed building is 564m² and the site is bounded to the east by High Street, the west Castle Yard and to the south faces what will be a new public square 'Penderyn Square'. The proposed building will form part of the strategic regeneration of the northern area of the town centre. To the south east of the site is the Grade II* listed Town Hall which is nearing completion as a new arts venue called RedHouse.

The project budget is estimated to be £3.5m with Merthyr County Borough Council supporting £1m of this total, the other monies will form a bid to the Welsh Government regeneration fund and other agencies/funders as appropriate.

The design development for the proposals developed three options, the first creating a 'modern jewel', the second option emphasising the corner of the building rather than the relationship to the square and the third option primarily concentrating on the new square. The architect explained that option one had been seen as too expensive, option two, too residential in character so the preferred option being developed was option three where the ground floor treatment was predominantly glazed. There was ongoing design testing of the scheme and recent discussions with the librarian.

The main facade of the building is orientated to the south, providing vertical 'blades' as protection against solar gain, these elements extended into the library at upper floors to provide smaller more private spaces for reading. The facade facing the high street has many windows providing a similar rhythm to those along the street, some project out to provide small seating areas for viewing and reading on upper floors. (This is not apparent in the plan form.) The material finish will be masonry/stone cladding if affordable, the elevation to Castle Yard is proposed to contain an inscription of poetry, coloured glazing to the southern elevation is proposed.

The internal arrangement is currently divided into three distinct zones, a services space, communications (stair and lift) and free multifunctional space. Upon entering the building on the ground floor you arrive in a coffee shop concession with associated servicing and an internalised office space. Access to the library at upper floors is immediately right, through and exhibition space and associated shop. On the first floor the Library space is to the front, south facing elevation of the building with storage, office space and toilets provided, the second floor footprint echoes the first, without offices.

BREEAM Excellent is proposed, the current programme for submitting a planning application was not confirmed.

The Panel agreed that the form and massing of the building was being developed in appropriate manner, however they queried the choice of design option that was moving into design development, with concerns about the amount of south facing, coloured glazing and the treatment to the ground floor. There were also concerns that a budget of £3.5m build and fit out costs was a tight budget to work to.

In addition the shape of the plan form seemed to be generated by a paving scheme that has not been implemented yet. The Library and public space need to be developed together with respect to the other buildings in the proposed Square. By treating the two projects together, budgets could possibly be shared across the two to beneficial effect.

It was clear that there was no client lead for the project and in the absence of input from the building user/manager it had fallen to the architect to interpret the approach and brief for the internal spaces. Recent dialogue had started with the council librarian.

In the absence of input from a specific client, the building should therefore provide a flexible solution with appropriate internal circulation, access and response to the site. If the operators of the ground floor were going to be retail concessions and an exhibition space, how would this work with a sense of arrival to the library? What would be the requirements of those concessions to operate, would roller shutters be required for glazing as security after hours? The entrance in the southern elevation seems to be a small opening given the overall size of

the facade. The internal space planning directed library users to a smaller door into the exhibition space and up to the library. The actual brief for the building design had not been outlined to the Panel.

The Panel were concerned at the lack of 'sense of arrival' to the library which was currently through a narrow door and on the upper floors only, unless there was a significant signal in the exhibition area that it was above, the use was not going to be obvious. Similarly the current and future use of the library as a resource for learning was not outlined.

Through discussions it became apparent that the architectural team were developing their Design and Access statement, it would have been useful to understand their response to the exiting character and context of the townscape and conservation area and to understand how views to and from the building had been considered and how the proposed end to the current block related to the adjacent property on the high street.

Given the fluidity of the scheme and the ongoing discussions with the client, the Panel considered that their input in reviewing the scheme would be more helpful once details had been confirmed. Given the current programme is being updated, an additional design review of the design development of this important scheme should be accommodated. In order to achieve BREEAM excellent the services engineering for the building should be part of the integrated design approach.

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

Attendees

Agent/Client/Developer	Gavin Lewis Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council
Architectural/Urban Designer	Jim Allen & Ana Aranguren Sancez-Ostiz Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council
Planning Authority Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council	Carolyn Tobin – Regeneration Officer Chris Clarke – Conservation Officer
<u>Design Review Panel</u>	
Chair	Wendy Richards
Lead Panellist	Simon Carne Angela Williams