



# Design Review Report

Brecknock Museum and  
Brecon Library,

Brecon

20<sup>th</sup> February 2014



## Declarations of Interest

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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

### PUBLIC

Meeting date	20 <sup>th</sup> February 2014
Issue date	28 <sup>th</sup> February 2014
Scheme location	Brecon
Scheme description	Refurbishment and new library
Scheme reference number	33
Planning status	Pre-application

## Declarations of Interest

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None declared.

## Consultations to Date

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Two public consultations have been held for earlier versions of this scheme, and consultation on the present proposal is planned for 10th-28th March 2014. Meetings with planning officers and Cadw have taken place.

The scheme was first reviewed by the Design Commission for Wales on 30th January 2014. This report should be read alongside the report from the previous review.

## The Proposals

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This is a scheme for a conjoined facility including a refurbished museum and new library. It is proposed that the site will be created by demolishing the existing Police Station and County Court buildings. The brief has shifted considerably with the large variety of functions originally required, being significantly simplified to the Museum and Library services coming together with some community hub facilities. There are key site constraints including the museum building itself, and a listed wall that crosses the site. The existing Police Station building is Grade II\* listed. The budget for the project is £8.5m. Submission of a planning application is planned for mid April 2014. As a requirement of Heritage Lottery Funding, the build must be completed by the end of 2016.

## Summary

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- The Design Commission welcomes this second opportunity to review this important cultural project which has the potential to make a valuable contribution

to Brecon. Whilst the design has benefitted from simplification since the previous review, the Commission still has major concerns.

- Clear, simple statements and decisions need to be made about treatment of the listed structures. Demolition of the Police Station needs to be clearly justified. The listed wall requires further investigation and decision making about whether it is retained or referenced in the proposal.
- The circulation strategy has improved by reducing the number of entrances. The car park should be designed to lead people to the main entrance on Glamorgan Street, avoiding the need for an additional side entrance. The vertical circulation needs to be better resolved.
- The connecting 'hub' area could be better resolved and simplified. Where the structure meets the 'octagonal' end of the museum, complex geometries are formed. This space might be treated as a 'semi-outside' space.
- The relationship to public realm along the north and south edges needs further work. The walled treatment could continue along the south edge to define usable outside spaces.
- The design of the library needs more work. Acoustics, security, daylighting, views, zoning of activities and creating a pleasant experience for users all need to be considered and tested in plan and section.
- The following aspects all require further work: cafe kitchen, delivery and refuse collection strategies, environmental strategies, materials and architectural treatment, views, plant handling and landscape design.
- The Design Commission would welcome the opportunity to review the scheme again as the designs are developed. However, we are mindful of the timing issues and this would need to be at the discretion of the team. We would welcome notification of submission of the planning application and the opportunity to comment via the LPA.

## Main Points in Detail

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### **Conservation**

There are a number of listed structures on this site which need to be carefully assessed, to allow a clear response to be made.

Demolition of the Police Station building still needs to be justified in a clear, logical statement, responding to the reasons as to why it is listed. A clear justification is important as demolition is required to enable the proposed regeneration of this site.

The listed wall has a stronger relationship to the original Shire Hall setting, as it originally helped to define a public space. The proposed plan reflects the line of the wall, but if the wall were retained, it would require significant puncturing and/or rebuilding. A

decision must be made about the value and importance of the wall and whether physically retaining it is the best option in this case. It is having a significant constraining impact on the new building as the design approach is responding to its presence.

### **Circulation**

In the previous design review, it was advised that a clear circulation and entrance strategy was needed. The number of entrances has been reduced and the ground floor route into the museum from the linking space made larger, providing a clearer horizontal circulation strategy and a more manageable building.

It remains important that the linking 'hub' space is easy to navigate as it will be where most visitors arrive at this public building and it links all the facilities both horizontally and vertically. The vertical circulation needs better clarity and planning. The proposal shows the only lift inside the museum building. It would improve accessibility and navigation if a lift and stairs were co-located, and the team should consider whether a second lift is necessary. The main stairs should be easily located on arrival, and public spaces on the first floor should be easily identified. Overall, the circulation should make efficient use of the space.

Cross sections would help with design and understanding of the vertical circulation.

### **The Hub Space**

A 'hub' space is proposed to link the museum and library as well as provide shared facilities. This space will be crucial in making the two facilities work effectively together. It will be a space where people arrive, and should therefore be welcoming and easy to navigate.

The hub space needs to be better resolved. The plan appears congested at the North end of the hub space, and the geometries where it joins the octagonal shape at the rear of the museum are complex. This space would be simplified if the link to the museum building was minimised to the south corner, which would allow an outside space at the entrance to the North.

The structural support and nature of the roof material in this space needs to be very carefully considered, as does the way the roof structure meets the listed fabric of the museum.

Opportunities for displaying artefacts from the museum in the hub space should be explored.

### **Form and Layout**

There is a desire to encourage visitors to use both the museum and the library when they visit, but realistically this cannot be significantly influenced or controlled. Therefore, the building should be equally usable by those visiting either of the facilities separately. This could in effect be how it is used during most visits.

The overall form of the new building has been simplified, making the internal spaces more usable. However, this has created residual external spaces along the south edge of the site which require better definition. A walled approach would seem appropriate

along this edge to strongly define private outdoor spaces relating to the library and semi-private spaces relating to the hub. Any garden areas for children would need to be secure and enclosed.

### **Library Design**

A good library will be carefully designed and organised to be functional, and to provide comfortable, enjoyable places for a variety of visitor activities: browsing, reading and studying. The current proposal shows a large empty space for the library. Whilst this demonstrates to some extent that the space is flexible, the arrangement of the three different collections required should be tested in plan.

A series of zoning studies, which take into account noise, daylighting, security, views and activities could be carried out to help organise the space effectively. The design team should work closely with the librarians to plan a facility which meets their needs. The client body should consider providing additional support to the library team, who may not be sufficiently experienced in commissioning a project of this scale.

Library designers can call upon a distinguished architectural heritage for inspiration. This lineage may offer clues and helpful precedent for the design of this project and we encourage the designers to take advantage of this opportunity.

### **Further Work and Engagement**

There are a number of important aspects of the design which will need further work alongside resolution of the basic plans, form and organisation which are not yet satisfactory in themselves. These aspects include:

- Materials – we would wish to see possibilities for material from demolished structures to be reclaimed and reused
- Environmental strategy
- Visual impact from key views around Brecon
- Landscape design
- Servicing and deliveries

The Design Commission recognises the valuable contribution a well-designed cultural building of this type could make to Brecon, and would welcome the opportunity to review the scheme again as designs progress.

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

## Attendees

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Agent/Client/Developer:	Louise Ingram, Powys CC Nigel Blackmore, Powys CC
Architectural/Urban Designer:	Andrew Nixon, Powell Dobson Architects Yvonne Gibbs, Powell Dobson Architects
Local Authority:	Mike Woodburn, Powys CC
Design Review Panel:	
Chair	Ewan Jones
Lead Panellist	Toby Adam Elfed Roberts Roger Ayton Amanda Spence, Design Advisor, DCFW
Observing:	Carole-Anne Davies, DCFW Max Hampton, Welsh Government Owain Williams, Welsh Government