

# Design Review Report

Central Square & BBC Wales  
Headquarters Building,  
Cardiff

**DCFW Ref: 36**

Meeting of 23<sup>rd</sup> September 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

Meeting date

Issue date

Scheme location

Scheme description

Scheme reference number

Planning status

### CONFIDENTIAL (Pre-Application)

23<sup>rd</sup> September 2014

2<sup>nd</sup> October 2014

Central Square, Cardiff

Masterplan and BBC building

36

Pre-application

## Declarations of Interest

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None declared.

## Consultations to Date

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The developer and design team are meeting regularly with the Local Authority to develop the masterplan. Earlier workshops with the Design Commission for Wales (DCFW) were held at DCFW on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2014, at Foster + Partners on 15<sup>th</sup> July 2014, at DCFW on 14<sup>th</sup> August and 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2014. Each meeting extended between a half day or a full day, considering the masterplan, public realm and proposals for the BBC headquarters building. The Commission is aware that extensive consultation processes have included dialogue with the Local Authority, Diverse Cymru, Sustrans and other stakeholders. This report should be read alongside DCFW's reports from those workshops, for purposes of continuity.

## The Proposals

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The Central Square masterplan aims to develop a vibrant, people centred, mixed-use development and civic space for the citizens of Cardiff and visitors to the capital city. The scheme aims to respond to the needs of commuters and citizens as well as the requirement to manage large numbers of people during Millennium Stadium events.

Management of the city's public transport networks is a key issue for this masterplan, as the site incorporates the current bus station, and is adjacent to the Grade II Listed Cardiff Central rail station. As well as public realm, the masterplan incorporates buildings for retail, offices, residential and tourist information, with a prominent BBC headquarters building planned for the centre of the development.

It is intended that a hybrid planning application will be made in early October for the first phase of this project embracing Central Square, Millennium Way, the underground car park and the BBC building. This will be submitted in outline for the masterplan, and in detail for the BBC headquarters and the first phase of the public realm.

The Design Commission for Wales is very supportive of this scheme, which is vital for the future success of the city centre. The developer, design team and client representatives are to be applauded for their commitment to exemplary, early and sustained engagement with the Commission; to an ambitious scheme of high design quality, and in their efforts to provide new public spaces of high quality throughout.

## Key Considerations

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The following summarises key issues from the review, and should be used to inform work ahead of making the planning application, and further detailed design of the whole masterplan area.

**Progress since the previous review:** The Design Commission for Wales remains supportive of the scheme. We recognise that good progress has been made since the previous review, which has improved the proposals. The scheme responds positively to the city centre, the impact of the stadium, and Network Rail's landownings and potential station improvements.

**Accommodating stadium crowds:** Much progress has been made in planning the management of crowds leaving the Millennium Stadium after an event. The building overhangs will provide welcome shelter, and the 'resting' place on the north eastern corner of Millennium Way will help crowds to pause and orientate themselves.

The team explained how they have tested the designs for possible future increases in flow and for a scenario where the rail station building is extended northwards into the square. The Design Commission recognises this and other constraints, which are not in the control of the design/developer team, and we welcome the efforts made by the team to address and accommodate these constraints in their design and modelling.

Although match days present the biggest challenge, the design should now prioritise making the public realm as attractive and as functional as possible on the more usual non-event days. The detailed application site should extend to the north side of Wood Street and the junction with St Mary Street.

**Marland Street/Wood Street junction:** The design of this junction, and its associated pedestrian crossing, will have a significant impact on pedestrian movement between both the rail and bus stations and the city centre. Although the intentions of the team to encourage the direction of pedestrian traffic away from the bus station entrance/exit seem sensible, the Commission believes there is still more work that can be done to improve the design of the junction and crossing.

The team should consider and test whether rounding or chamfering the northwest corner of the replacement Marland House building will really help to achieve the flow of pedestrian traffic expected. Furthermore, it is not yet clear how traffic will be controlled at this crossing. There is potential for Havelock Street to be

pedestrianised in future, which would help the flow of people on foot and ensure that the north side of Wood Street has the best possible pedestrian connection with St Mary Street. The flow of pedestrian traffic at this point should be considered in the context of the wider picture of pedestrian movement through the city.

**Wood Street streetscape:** Further and more detailed consideration should be given to the nature of Wood Street. Wood Street provides a natural separation between different uses to the north and south of the masterplan area, and the detailed design of the street offers the potential to better define this separation. Inclusion of kerbs and different ground surface materials should be considered here, remembering that the street will need to safely accommodate a variety of traffic types.

Maintenance and durability of street finishes should also be considered carefully. Wood Street will be the most heavily trafficked street in the scheme and the surface should be easily replaced after road works/servicing. Tree planting should be set out to permit future tram/light rail installation.

The streetscape at the east end of Wood Street should be carefully considered. With the bus station entrance/exit and the road junctions, there is a danger that there will be a lack of active frontages at this end of a main route. The Commission supports the idea of reducing the width of the entrance to the bus station as much as possible, and providing active uses across the Wood Street frontage when the designs for the bus station are developed.

**Connection to river:** Although the river bank is outside of the masterplan boundary, the proposals create opportunities for better connections between the city and the river and the west side of the city, including a new walkway southwards on the east bank which could be explored in the future.

**Provision for cyclists:** Provision of adequate, secure and easily accessible cycle parking, during all phases of development will be important. The quantity of spaces available should be able to accommodate the predicted increase in cycling at the transport hub and the shops and offices.

**Car park access on Saunders Road:** The recent proposal to include a car park access ramp off Saunders Road could easily impact negatively on the quality of the public realm in this street. This is an important pedestrian route, currently serving over 30% of station traffic. The public realm should be designed to manage the conflict between pedestrians and vehicles entering and exiting the car park, or a different access point should be considered.

**Central Street:** Further consideration should be given to the nature of Central Street, particularly the treatment of elevations fronting it. There is a danger that blank elevations or even a 'feature' (or green) wall could lead to an uninviting dead space. The treatment of the car park ramp edge and its enclosure will have a significant impact on this space. Inclusion of an active internal space on the south east corner of Building 2 will help overcome this and add life to the street.

**Management of signage and way-finding:** Signage and way-finding will be particularly important in the management of crowds from the Millennium Stadium. Management of the signage and temporary barriers should be considered at this

design stage, including the balance of permanent and temporary way-finding signage. The ways in which signage and the barriers integrate with the design of the rest of the public realm will have an impact on quality, and should be carefully planned. Concealed storage for barriers is also an important issue.

**Management company:** The establishment of a company to manage the public realm is a reassuring decision, recognising the multiple stakeholder interests on and adjacent to the site. The Commission would strongly encourage all public sector and private stakeholders to become actively involved and fully support this organisation.

**Station taxi/drop-off/pick-up:** Further clarity is needed over the car drop-off/pick-up strategy for the station, whether it is north or south of the station. The proposal for a dedicated taxi ramp on the Fish Quay behind the new office building was considered to be viable, but allowing the public to use this to drop off or pick up passengers was not a convincing solution given its tortuous access.

**Landscape details:** The Design Commission is supportive of the gridded landscape strategy, which helps to organise paving materials, lighting and street furniture, and coordinates the BBC building with the public realm. Indicative paving material examples were shown, but we are yet to see the detail of the landscape design. The detail design and specification of materials, lighting and street furniture will be critical to the quality of the public realm. The design team talked of the introduction of 'interest' through public art, perhaps in the form lighting and/or integrated text on pavements which will be useful in adding another layer of interest and assist in giving individual spaces more of their own identity.

The Commission is not fully convinced that the placement of two rows of trees in the north east corner of the square does not conflict with desire lines. The trees would provide a pleasant place to sit or eat, but the current proposed location crosses the main path of normal pedestrian flow to and from the city centre. Further consideration should be given to the placement, spacing, size and species of trees, as well as any proposed seating. It should be clearly demonstrated that the proposal works with predicted, modelled pedestrian flows.

**Network Rail Land:** The design team has made every effort to accommodate future expansion of the station by Network Rail, and demonstrated that the public realm provided by the Central Square team will work effectively and comfortably on stadium event days, and provide a fitting new public space for the City of an appropriate scale. The Commission agrees with the design team that it would be unjust and illogical for them to oversize the public space now, in anticipation of unknown expansion plans by adjacent landowners.

**BBC Building:** The Design Commission is supportive of the design of the BBC building. The form, massing, elevational treatment and arrangement of cores and circulation have been carefully thought through.

The Commission still has concerns about the conflict between achieving a transparent facade and controlling unwanted solar gains, although it is acknowledged that the team are working toward the best compromise.

The energy strategy of the building was briefly discussed although there was little detail and there is still much work to be done to ensure that the building submitted for planning consent, will be able to achieve the BREEAM 'Outstanding' target.

Decisions on the cladding material, colours and interior finishes remain under consideration at this stage. As mentioned in the previous review, the ceiling finishes on the upper floors will have a significant impact on the views from the public realm. The design team are clearly aware of this and are pursuing this positively.

**Next steps:** The Design Commission would welcome the opportunity to review future stages of this masterplan scheme. The Commission would like to review the detailed planning application, as there are details of the scheme which were not fully resolved in the materials presented at this stage of design evolution and review.

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

## Attendees

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Agent/Client/Developer:	Paul McCarthy, Rightacres Jason Hyett, Rightachres Alan Bainbridge, BBC Neil Davis, BBC
Architectural/Urban Designer:	Toby Blunt, Foster & Partners Adam Newburn, Foster & Partners John Cottrell, NLP Planning Shrikant Sharma, Buro Happold Mike Durrant, Sheppard Robson Helen Berresford, Sheppard Robson Dan Cruddace, Sheppard Robson Chris Butten, Hyland Edgar Driver Jon Folly, Capita
Local Authority:	Claire Moggridge, Cardiff Council

Nigel Hanson, Cardiff Council  
Lawrence Dowdall, Cardiff Council  
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