

# Design Review Report

Former Taff Vale Centre, Pontypridd

**DCFW Ref: N127**

Meeting of 28<sup>th</sup> March 2017



## 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	28 <sup>th</sup> March 2017
Issue date	5th April 2017
Scheme location	Pontypridd
Scheme description	Mixed use commercial
Scheme reference number	127
Planning status	Full planning application

## Declarations of Interest

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Mark Hallett is a DCFW board member as well as panellist. All present confirmed that they were content to proceed following this declaration.

## Consultations to Date

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DCFW previously reviewed proposals for this site in September 2017 prior to an outline planning application being submitted.

## The Proposals

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This proposed redevelopment of the previously developed, but now vacant site of the former Taff Vale Shopping Centre, comprises a new build, mixed use development providing predominantly B1 space but with ancillary A3, D1 and D2 uses. The scheme will include the construction of three buildings over a basement level, with the buildings ranging in height from two storeys at the northern end to five at the southern end. It is intended that a basement will be constructed across the entire site providing car parking, servicing and accommodation for associated plant and other infrastructure.

An outline application with all matters reserved was submitted on 29th July 2016 and consent was granted on 4th November 2016. Tenders were then sought for the next design stage and Darnton B3 Architects were appointed. The scheme has since been revised and requires a full planning application due to an increase in the proposed floor area from 12,675 sq.m.

## Main Points

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The Design Commission welcomed the opportunity to review this important scheme again. This provided a useful update and greater clarity regarding the need and end users for the development. It is positive to see this project promoted and championed by the local authority and with this comes the need for a commitment to quality.

The following key points were raised in the review and should be considered in the development of proposals before a planning application is submitted.

### **Public realm**

The changes that have been made since the previous review have improved the levels to create a more accessible and attractive riverside walkway which is a positive addition to the scheme and the town centre.

It was helpful to see more detail on the proposals for the public realm including provision for markets and day to day use. As the proposals develop further the focus should be on how people will use the space and how the design accommodates this. The quality of planting and maintenance will be significant and it is important that the impact of the shadow path on the ability of plants to grow is understood. A wind study is to be undertaken, but this needs to be done soon so that the results can inform the design and appropriate amendments made.

Whilst the riverside walkway cannot be continued along the river to the south at present, the opportunity to do so in the future should not be precluded. The potential for a footbridge over the river to link to Ynysangharad Park and the Lido to the south would enhance the public realm and the contribution of the project to the town. A bridge would help to enliven the riverside through increased footfall, giving people somewhere to go as they move through the space. Ideally both the proposed development and the bridge should be designed, applied for and delivered at the same time.

The implications of the potential footbridge should be followed through into the design of the spaces and location of uses as it will alter the flow of people around the site and the views into the site. Consideration should be given to the interaction between the site and the park including people who will work within the development and use the park, people using the park who may come across to use the A3 uses within the development, and general movement through the site to get from the town centre to the park.

It may be helpful to think about names for the spaces, buildings and development as a whole to help establish the character of the development.

### **Entrances**

The anticipated flow of people through the site, the desire to create a vibrant heart to the development and the need to address Taff Street should be weighed up in deciding where to locate entrances to the different uses. For example, relocating the entrance to the office uses to the newly created public spaces could help to draw more people into those spaces which will instantly provide more life and activity. The movement pattern created by this decision will then impact the location for the entrances to the A3 uses which will benefit from high levels of passing footfall, influencing the commercial appeal of these units.

In all cases the entrances must be welcoming and legible through the building form rather than relying on signage. In the current proposals the entrance to Building A is in a dark location and legibility is confused as the projection on the south side of the building draws attention away from the entrance.

### **Crossbrook Street**

It is positive that tree planting can be accommodated along the street to screen the view across to the car park. However, this street is still a challenging environment with traffic movements to the existing Gas Road car park and the new basement car park, refuse collections, deliveries, pedestrian movement and underground services. Further consideration should be given to how public and active this street is designed to be. It may be more appropriate to focus pedestrian movement through the two pedestrian-only spaces between the buildings rather than wrap it round into Crossbrook Street as well. This may also influence the location of the café/restaurant use which will catch the sun and have a view across to the park on the ground floor of Building A but will also look out over Crossbrook Street and the car park. These decisions will also need to consider how the corner of Building A will be treated to provide natural surveillance of the street and the riverside walk if the A3 use is moved.

A medium and long term perspective should be given to Crossbrook Street, as this may become a more attractive and pedestrian-friendly space in the future if development is proposed to the rear of properties on Taff Street and particularly if there is potential for the riverside walk to be extended.

Interventions to the highway to promote greater pedestrian priority at the junction of Taff Street and Crossbrook Street have not been carried through into the current proposals. These will be important to support the quality of the public realm and the flow of people into the site. These highway improvements could carry on into Crossbrook Street with elements such as the turning head for refuse vehicles downplayed.

### **Building C**

Some concern remains regarding the complexities of the shape of the building and quality of materials given the proposed budget. It would be helpful to re-iterate building objectives (such as being a public building, security requirements and not having a reception desk) and ensure that the design responds to uses and the qualities of the site.

The relationship between the building and the street and public space should be worked through in more detail. There may be a desire to link the café to some external space which will influence its location and the design of the public realm.

### **Quality**

It is positive that a town-wide masterplan is being pursued by the local authority which will set the plans for this site in the wider context of change and regeneration. This development will set the bar for future projects so the process must seek to positively influence quality at each stage.

Quality needs to be built in through the procurement process including having a realistic cost plan at this stage and a robust specification going into the tender process. It is

important to develop a partnership approach between the local authority as client, contractor and design team. Retaining consistent architectural expertise throughout the process will help to promote quality.

### **Next steps**

The Design Commission would welcome the opportunity to be consulted on the footbridge proposals if they come forward and the overall town centre masterplan.

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

## Attendees

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Design team:	Matthew Savory, Darnton B3 Richard Cole, Landscape Architect, Soltys Brewster Alan Francis, Client Advisor, Gaunt Francis Architects
Local Authority:	Jim Bailey, RCTCBC Simon Gale, RCTCBC
Design Review Panel:	
Chair	Jen Heal, Design Advisor, DCFW
Lead panellist	Mark Lawton
Panel	Maria Asenjo Mark Hallett Amanda Spence, Design Advisor, DCFW