

Design Review Report

Swansea University Student Precinct

DCFW Ref: 101

Meeting of 17th November 2016



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

17th November 2016

7th December 2016

Swansea Singleton Campus

Education new-build & refurbishment

101

Pre-application

Declarations of Interest

Steve Smith, City and County of Swansea Council, is a member of DCFW's Design Review panel and Fiona Nixon is a DCFW Board Member. All present at the meeting were happy to proceed following these declarations.

Consultations to Date

The local planning authority has not yet been engaged in formal pre-application consultation.

The Proposals

The site is located at the heart of the existing Singleton Park Campus, adjacent to the Grade II listed Fulton House building, for which some internal remodelling is proposed as part of the scheme. It is proposed that the existing Digital Technium building will be demolished and replaced with a new three storey building with a central atrium joining Fulton House through a 'link'.

The proposed building will house centralised student support and pastoral care services, administration for the Student Union, student-led media facilities and flexible teaching/seminar spaces. There will be 6700m² of floor space in the project, with significant areas built as 'shells'.

Main Points in Detail

The following points summarise key issues from the review, and should be considered to inform work ahead of making a planning application or engaging in further review.

Masterplan & external relationships

One of the most interesting and valuable aspects of the Singleton Park campus is its original masterplan which was controlled by an orthogonal grid. Although the original plan has been diluted by ad hoc building over the years, it is still useful to consider this project in the context of a campus-wide masterplan. An up-to-date masterplan will set out requirements for the new building in terms of routes, connections, entrances and other important external relationships, both now and in the near future. It is noted that this is work in progress, but the masterplan should be the driver for the project, and not the other way around.

Proposals would be strengthened if the predicted flow of people to, from and around the building was modelled. This numerical modelling could then be used to inform the location, alignment, scale and hierarchy of entrances and routes through the building. By considering the most common approaches to the building, by foot, cycle or bus, the team will be able to design a building and landscape which is welcoming, easy to read, aids way-finding and sits comfortably with adjacent buildings.

Refurbishment of the listed Fulton House to make it suitable for modern use is a positive step. Relationships between the proposed new building, Fulton House and the adjacent theatre building will be important. There are a number of important issues which need to be considered and addressed in this respect:

- The scale and roof height should respond to the 'bookends' of Fulton House. The current proposed height of the new building is above this datum, making it feel more dominant.
- The scale and massing of the new building in relation to the existing theatre building and the space between them are important too.
- The dimensions and nature of the link between old and new externally are crucial to the relationship between the two. The level of transparency is important. Where the facade is recessed, thought should be given to the conditions created externally.
- The experience of moving between the old and new buildings internally, at ground and first floor needs consideration. Transparency, openness and solidity need to be carefully considered alongside fire requirements.
- The relationship of new building and alternations in the context of the original and current campus masterplan are crucial. This is important because the movement of people through the campus means that all elevations are equally important, but this was not addressed in the review presentation.
- The elevations should all be designed in response to site analysis. It was not clear from the presentation that site studies were informing the facade design to date. Facade design should consider environmental performance, views, target atmosphere, and comfort conditions in addition to appearance. This means that each facade is likely to be treated differently to respond to climate, views and

routes. An informed facade design process will better assist the selection of the most appropriate materials.

- The overall composition of solids and voids, buildings and gaps, massing and apparent weight of the elevations, and the clarity of entrances/way-finding and perceived permeability needs further work.
- In designing the facades it will be useful to consider the materiality and tectonics (density and feeling of weight) of the new building in relation to Fulton House.

Drawing 'street' elevations of the new building in context will help with the design process. It is important that all sides of the new building are considered in equal detail as the building has no 'back' elevation. There may be opportunities to address some of the existing problems with the 'back' of Fulton House as part of this scheme.

Landscape design & public realm

The spaces outside and around the proposed new building are as important as those inside. Developing a good landscape design strategy from an early stage will help to integrate indoor and outdoor spaces and maximise the value of the project for the university. The relationship of the atrium to outdoor spaces through views and physical connections should be considered.

The landscape strategy should ensure that all spaces are purposeful and not just left over spaces which could become unsightly if not maintained.

The landscape design will be useful in dealing with topography and level changes across the site. It is important that these level changes are shown on section drawings which take in the landscape beyond the edges of the buildings. Section drawings were missing from the presentation at this review, making it difficult to understand how the proposal was responding to topography.

Energy & sustainability strategy

The Commission welcomes the ambition to achieve BREEAM Excellent. However, it is important that sustainability is an integrated part of the design process and built in from an early stage, with priority given to passive design principles over expensive or complicated technology. It would be useful to consider this building in the context of a wider energy strategy for the whole campus, including Singleton Hospital.

Early and iterative modelling and testing of proposals for daylight, ventilation and heat should inform the design process, but there is no evidence of this so far. It is important that the team is confident that natural ventilation strategies work with the fire engineering strategies. The team should strive to achieve natural ventilation throughout the building.

Facade design will play an important role in the energy strategy and providing a comfortable, healthy environment for occupants.

If a design and build procurement route is used, performance specifications will be critical to achieving sustainability and energy aspirations.

Inclusive design

It is important that an inclusive design strategy is resolved and integrated from an early stage in the design process, especially because a key feature of the proposal is the social circulation space over two levels. Inclusive design principles should be designed into the outside spaces too, and be included in the campus masterplan.

Communicating a justified design process

For clarity and reassurance to the local planning authority, the university and other stakeholders and consultees, it is important that the design process is clearly communicated and that design decisions are fully justified. The drawings and information presented should tell the story of an analytical, rational and evidence-based process which has led to the best solution for the university. Two very similar options were presented at the review, and there was no evidence that these had been informed by site analysis. Fully rendered perspective views are premature when there are strategic issues still to be resolved.

Quality through procurement & delivery

Specifications and detail design requirements will be crucial to locking in and managing quality if a design and build procurement route is used. The durability, maintenance and management of materials, finishes and building services should be carefully considered from an early stage so that the project continues to be a valuable asset to the university over the long-term. This will be extremely critical for a brick facade and/or where elegant simplicity is proposed, where success will be in the detail.

The Commission would welcome further consultation at a future review and would urge the team to secure a slot in our forthcoming calendar of meetings by liaising with our office as soon as possible.

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

Attendees

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