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# Design Review Report

University of South Wales Campus,  
Caerleon

**DCFW Ref: N122**

Meeting of 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2016



## 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	22 <sup>nd</sup> September 2016
Issue date	3 <sup>rd</sup> October 2016
Scheme location	Caerleon
Scheme description	Residential led mixed use
Scheme reference number	122
Planning status	Pre-application

## Declarations of Interest

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Mark Hallett is currently exploring opportunities with the University of South Wales on a separate site. All present confirmed that they were content to proceed following this declaration.

## Consultations to Date

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This is the first time that DCFW has reviewed proposals for this scheme.

## The Proposals

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Following the closure of the campus in July 2016, the University of South Wales intends to submit an outline planning application for a residential-led mixed use development of the site. The proposals retain the main building on the site along with others identified as of historic, architectural or re-use value.

## Main Points

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The Design Commission for Wales welcomed the opportunity to review proposals for this site at this time where there remains flexibility in the proposals and the potential to add value to the design. This is a significant site which provides a good opportunity to create a distinctive residential development of high quality to complement the local area. The current proposals have identified some of the key features of the site that should be addressed but the scheme would benefit from further consideration of the following points prior to a planning application being submitted.

### Identity

Further analysis and design development is needed to establish how the character of existing buildings, landscape and context of the site will inform the development. The

history of the site presented in the review material is interesting and consideration should be given to how this is reflected in the treatment of the site.

A concept plan and vision statement will help to set out the character of the development, what type of place it will be, what it will be like to live there and how the physical attributes of the site contribute to this. A single plan and/or statement are also important in future as the design develops so that proposals can be checked back against the vision to ensure that it is not diluted as decisions are made. The concept plan should identify the key elements that should be achieved in the development.

Additional consideration should be given to the *tone* of residential development in the context of the main building. One approach would be for the houses to be subtle and passive to allow the main building to dominate whilst another would be for the residential development to contrast more dramatically with the architecture of the main building. The design team should explore all options to come to a preferred position. This will then inform decisions made in relation to layout, materials, form and proportions of the proposed buildings.

It is important to identify what elements of the historic context will be picked up and referenced in the development in a way that respects the existing buildings but does not create a pastiche. Again, further more detailed analysis is required to achieve this.

### **Sustainability and viability**

Sustainability considerations should include what existing elements on the site already could be retained. The key buildings that have been identified by Cadw for listing have been identified for retention and we support this approach. However, there may be other buildings or infrastructure such as roads and drainage that can be retained and utilised to reduce the cost of future development and allow investment to be focused on delivering the elements of the development that will create the desired character. In particular, consideration should be given to the accommodation in the south east corner of the site which is relatively recent and it may be feasible to convert the space or use the bases for future development.

It is a positive indicator that the Kegie building is being proposed for retention, as this is a relatively recently constructed building that has not yet reached the end of its useful life. The inclusion of a non-residential use in this building is also positive as it creates life in the development at different times of the day and will contribute to wider sustainability aims.

### **Layout**

Taking the main building as the driver for the structure and grain of the site is logical and respects the formality of the entrance and landscape around the building. However, the proposed layout would benefit from further iterations to tighten up some of the loose edges and corners and to give the whole development a stronger sense of coherence. Some of the corners of the perimeter blocks and the ends of terraces are currently weak and reduce the strength of the site structure.

Natural surveillance of pedestrian routes is essential and is currently lacking on the main east-west route to the rear of the main building. This route has very few units fronting

on to it and could feel hostile. Reorientation of some blocks or consideration of how the back of the main building is treated is needed to address this important route.

A parking strategy is needed to test whether the proposed layout can be achieved and to ensure that the development doesn't become dominated by parked cars. A blend of on-plot, on-street and small parking courts often create a better result than predominance of one particular approach to parking.

### **Landscape and management**

Several green spaces have been identified within the development but a coherent landscape strategy is lacking. The value of the open space provided could be enhanced by clearly defining what each space is for and developing connections between them with the potential of forming a route around the site. This could help to connect the whole of the development to the space in front of the main building and the arboretum so that all residents benefit from proximity to these assets.

Further clarity on the location of play spaces and a clear plan showing pedestrian and cycle networks for both leisure and necessary trips would be helpful. Consideration should be given to desire lines to destinations such as bus stops, schools and facilities in the development of these routes.

Proposals for soft and hard landscape should take into consideration how the spaces will be managed to ensure that there are mechanisms in place to maintain the quality of the spaces. Similarly it is important to establish with the local highways authority what street design proposals would be possible within adoption standards to understand what can be achieved within the streetscape.

Trees proposed for retention should be clearly identified and integrated into the layout.

### **Meanwhile uses**

The University should consider what happens to the site, which is now largely vacant, between now and its sale or commencement of works. Given that there is suitable accommodation on the site there could be opportunities to support temporary business uses or emergency accommodation needs.

### **Maintaining design quality**

Measures are required to ensure that the design quality developed at this stage is locked into the proposals and carried through to the final development. The vision and concept will help with this in providing a reference point for future iterations of the development to be compared against. One or two key plans and a vision statement should convey the main design intent but this was not yet clear in the material presented at design review.

A landscape framework will help to set out the parameters for development as well as the form and function of the spaces between the buildings. This will help to avoid the issue of left-over spaces that do not contribute to the quality of the development but become a maintenance burden.

Sufficient detail regarding the scale, design approach and materials of future buildings should be provided with the planning application so that it can be agreed with the local

planning authority. A design code would help to establish the main design principles but should allow flexibility for design innovation.

### **Conversion of the main building**

Proposals for the main building were only looked at briefly as they were in the early stages of development. It is recommended that a further design review session is arranged that will focus more specifically on the main building. At this stage it is important to identify the features of the building that are most important both internally and externally and that these elements guide the approach to conversion. This may, for example, provide some guidance as to whether the space would be best divided horizontally or vertically. Early consideration of amenity space and arrangements for waste disposal will enable them to be successfully integrated into the design.

The plot on which the main building sits is an island within the current layout resulting in no obvious 'back' to the building. The treatment of each of the edges of this plot will be critical to the success of the scheme and further work is required to demonstrate how this will be handled.

### **Building for Life**

Building for Life (BfL) 12 Wales is now available on the DCFW website <http://dcfw.org/building-for-life-12-wales/>. It has been endorsed by Welsh Government and DCFW and has been adapted to fit with the Welsh planning policy context. Built for Life accreditation would be an appropriate target for this development and consideration of the 12 questions now will ensure that it is achievable. DCFW offers Building for Life workshops and are also the organisation through which independent assessment for accreditation is undertaken in Wales. We recommend that a further engagement with DCFW on Building for Life is undertaken on route to assessment.

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

## Attendees

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Design team:	Paul Osborne, LHC Amy Walton, LHC
Client:	Stephen Godber, University of South Wales
Planning consultant:	Karl Scholz
Local Authority:	Geraint N Roberts, Newport City Council
Design Review Panel:	
Chair	Jen Heal, Design Advisor, DCFW
Lead panellist	Mark Hallett
Panel	Mike Gwyther-Jones Richard Woods Amanda Spence, Design Advisor, DCFW Carole-Anne Davies, Chief Executive, DCFW
Observer:	Mike Singleton, Chair, Caerleon Civic Society