

Design Review Report

Ysgol Y Wern, Cardiff

DCFW Ref: 46

Meeting of 17th July 2014



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	CONFIDENTIAL
Meeting date	17 th July 2014
Issue date	1 st August 2014
Scheme location	Cardiff
Scheme description	Extension/refurbishment
Scheme reference number	46
Planning status	Pre-application

Declarations of Interest

None declared.

Consultations to Date

Statutory consultation has not yet been undertaken.

The Proposals

The client brief requires greater capacity to meet increasing demands for Welsh medium education. Plans are to accommodate a 2.5 form entry by September 2015, with potential to increase to 3 form entry in the future. A number of extension options are being considered.

Summary

- The Design Commission for Wales welcomes the opportunity to review a series of Cardiff school projects, including this scheme which is at an early stage in the design process. The Commission recommends that the project is reviewed again prior to a planning application being made.
- There is logic to the evolution of the existing buildings which the proposals continue. However, the spaces created by the new scheme need further careful consideration to ensure they are fully useable, and that they properly address orientation and access.
- The presenting team appreciate the potential local educational benefits of the design and construction processes, which should be shared with staff, pupils and a wider audience.
- There may be benefits to procuring the new school building using an off-site construction method or system build. This would need to be further explored with the City Council and Welsh Government.

- It is important to consider the proposed building works in the context of the wider site and the surrounding landscape and spaces. The spaces between and around the buildings are equally important, and there may be necessary and beneficial changes to the landscape design which should be carried out alongside the works to the buildings. The budget also needs to cover work to the wider site.
- A strategy for connecting the new buildings to the old should be developed with flexibility in mind. If new connections result in new room sizes and shapes, the resultant impact on pedagogy needs to be fully understood
- The Design Commission encourages the team to appoint a landscape architect as soon as possible, who will explore opportunities to add educational value and learning experiences through the landscape design.
- The new scheme appears to result in the need to revise external access and circulation. A strategy for dropping off and picking up children should be developed alongside the proposals.
- The school might wish to consider use of the school facilities for the wider community outside of school hours (adult education classes perhaps) though the Commission understands the language tensions involved.
- The proposal creates an interesting new courtyard space in what is otherwise a consistently linear form. Further design work is required to maximise this opportunity, including consideration of circulation and the treatment of the walls lining the courtyard. The team should consider moving the single room that remains within the courtyard, so as to achieve a fully legible, more useable, new space.
- The form of the new classrooms should be explored in section and three dimensions to develop comfortable, healthy, uplifting spaces conducive to the learning experience. Orientation, daylight, sunlight, views, ventilation and scale should all be considered.
- The team might consider different funding options to generate more capital for the project, and provide the best facilities possible.
- Whilst there are a number of materials used in the existing school, the selection of materials for the new building should be more sustainable.

Main Points in Detail

Consultation and Analysis

Properly managed consultation with stakeholders including staff and parents will inform a number of decisions which will impact upon the design of the school extensions.

Analysis should include a thorough appraisal of the site and surroundings, as well as a study of activities and movements throughout the school day. Ecological assessments, acoustic assessments and arboricultural surveys will all have an impact on design strategies.

Architectural and Educational Brief

The design and construction processes, as well as the completed building and landscape, have the potential to enhance educational benefits for the school. There are a number of learning opportunities which could be explored by the team and included in the programme and proposals. Hounslow Junior School is an example where this has been done successfully.

The brief should incorporate landscape design and external teaching spaces, which, as the team explained, are particularly important for primary education.

If the school is to provide local community facilities, the brief should allow for this, and the approach should bear in mind Welsh Medium education principles. If a strategy for local community use can be developed, the brief needs to be extended to fully explore permeability, security, heating and entrance strategies outside of normal school hours.

Site Layout, Building Form and Landscape

There is logic to the layout of the existing school which the proposals seek to extend. This is an appropriate response to extending the building. However, the team should ensure that all the internal and external spaces created are useful, including the corner spaces, and ensure that any new connections do not cause difficulties with existing spaces. Current proposals show an existing classroom being converted into an L shaped corner classroom which may limit flexibility for the range of teaching methods.

A new courtyard is created by the proposed scheme – a form which is missing from the existing layout and which could provide a delightful new addition. The ‘inner’ circulation corridor has the potential to become part of the new courtyard space, provided its external wall was generously glazed and accessible. At present one classroom remains within the courtyard space and the team should consider relocating this. The new courtyard would then be surrounded by the circulation route, which, with innovative planning, could become an important and flexible new learning space.

It is important that any new building relates well to the rest of the site and the existing buildings. The generous green space offers many opportunities of which the building design could take advantage. Analysis of the site should inform these relationships, taking into account circulation and entrances. The budget planning should include provision for works to the landscape as well as the building itself.

Including an arrival, entrance and circulation strategy within the proposed drawings will positively influence the landscape strategy. There is a written landscape strategy, but the team now needs to develop this visually, and demonstrate how it will be implemented.

Appointment of a landscape architect at an early stage, to work alongside the architectural and engineering design team, will encourage the integrated design of buildings and the spaces between them. There are opportunities for the landscape design to add educational value to the scheme, including in the new courtyard space.

There may be opportunities to improve parts of the existing building which do not currently perform well e.g. flat roofed corridors, although it was understood that many of

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