



Meeting Report

Cardiff University Centre for
Student Life

DCFW Ref: 88

Meeting of 6th June 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	6 th June 2016
Issue date	10 th June 2016
Scheme location	Cardiff
Scheme description	University (non-academic)
Scheme reference number	88
Planning status	Pre-application

CONFIDENTIAL

Declarations of Interest

None declared.

Consultations to Date

The client took the opportunity to provide an early briefing and exploratory meeting with DCFW on 22nd October 2015, prior to the confirmation of the appointment of their design team. This meeting of 6th June 2016 took place prior to a more formal design review scheduled for 23rd June 2016 in order to provide an update on progress since the previous meeting. This report should be read in conjunction with the report from the earlier meeting.

The Commission understands that key stakeholders and consultees are being identified prior to a drop-in consultation taking place on 16th June, followed by a public consultation session that evening. This project is being afforded early consultation and confidential status with the Commission as per our published guidelines, until such time as public consultation opens. At this time the views of the Commission will also be made public.

The Proposals

The design team was procured through a design competition for a new student services building on a site adjacent to the existing student union building and Cathays train station. The ambition is to consolidate non-academic student services into one place to improve the student experience. The competition brief, which required 9000m² floor area, has now been refined with the floor area reduced to 8,500m². The site is within a Conservation Area and faces the University's Main Building and the National Museum of Wales. A number of buildings exist on the site within the Conservation Area. However, we are given to understand none of them are listed. A University Estates 'masterplan' sets the context for this project.

Main Points in Detail

This second introductory meeting was not a formal review of the design, rather a further preparatory meeting. The current proposals were presented by the architect at the meeting and important issues which the Design Commission expects to see addressed in the forthcoming Design Review meeting of 23rd June 2016 were discussed. The key points from that discussion are outlined below and should inform work prior to the next meeting.

A building in the city

The scale, nature and location of this proposal mean that this project provides an opportunity to make a valuable and transformational contribution to the city. It is, therefore, important that the wider context for the scheme is properly analysed and understood and that the design process is carried out in response to this.

The Commission would like to see the client, design team and local authority working in partnership to develop a coherent vision for this part of the city.

This project forms part of the University's wider masterplan for its facilities which are dispersed across the city. The Design Commission expects to see this proposal in the full context of that masterplan. It will be useful for the Commission and other stakeholders to understand more about the ambitions of the masterplan and how this scheme responds to them. This should include consideration of the implications of relocation and the possibilities for vacated spaces once services are relocated to the new building. It is important that the language and images used to communicate the aspirations for this scheme in the context of the masterplan are clear and carefully crafted, especially in consultation with stakeholders and the public.

The site is within one of the most important designated Conservation Areas in the capital city, which is likely to see many changes and new development over the coming years. The design team's understanding of the conservation area should be clearly demonstrated alongside the narrative of the ways in which this understanding has informed the design process. One important characteristic of this Conservation Area is the tree-lined street. The current proposals would require the removal of some trees and it is important that the aspirations in relation to re-establishing character are clearly explained.

Connectivity & movement

Connectivity and movement of people will be important for the success of this project and other related projects in the future. The existing site and immediate context currently experience problems with connectivity and movement which should be addressed as far as possible through this project.

In particular, the movement of pedestrians into, through and around the building is important. Equalities and inclusive design, responses to the Active Travel Act and broader design for cyclists and other vehicle users must be fully integrated. Entrance locations and articulation, signage, lighting and the design of external spaces are important for connectivity. The Commission will expect to see more evidence of this at the forthcoming meeting.

We are pleased to see that provision for future links to a new Network Rail footbridge are being considered, but greater design consideration will be needed to avoid a standard solution and to fully integrate the link.

Access & inclusion

The Design Commission expects to see that every effort has been made to design for equality of access to services and wider inclusivity for all users. It is especially important that disabled users have easy access to all the services which will be offered in the building. Accessibility to the Student Union should also be considered.

Sustainability, environmental design & plant

The Commission promotes best practice in the integration of sustainability principles as a key element of design strategy from the start of any project. We welcome the environmental modelling that is being used to test facade options at this stage. The Commission expects to see further evidence that environmental testing is informing all aspects of the design process, in order to provide the best levels of sustainability, environmental comfort and user well-being. Prior to making a planning application, it is important to have a degree of certainty that the proposed building will perform as expected.

The design, siting and organisation of the plant will be important, as there is potential for it to have a negative visual impact on the sensitive surroundings. Views of the plant from street level and from surrounding buildings should be checked, including the impact of plant on the building's silhouette.

Relationship with Student Union building

The proximity of this scheme means that it will have a significant impact on the existing Student Union (SU) building. There is potential for both positive and negative impacts and the creation of future opportunities for the SU building. Therefore, impacts need to be carefully considered and managed.

There is potential to improve access to the SU building by connecting through from the proposed new building. The design of this link should take into account flexibility for any reorganising of the SU building which might take place in the future.

The external terraces and windows on the east side of the SU building would face onto the rear wall of the proposed new building which will be a predominantly blank facade due to lack of access for maintenance. It is important that the impact on these spaces in the SU building are fully explored and understood. Even if the terraces are not used very often now, potential for future use should be compromised as little as possible.

The age and future maintenance of the SU buildings should also be fully considered.

Highway & public realm strategy

Design of the public realm around the proposed building and its neighbours is as important as the building itself. Although much of the public realm may fall outside of the 'red-line boundary', the Design Commission would like to see proposals put forward by the project design team. The proposals should then form the basis of discussion with

the local planning and highways authorities to demonstrate partnership and shared leadership on a clear vision for this important new contribution to the city.

The design of the building and public realm will benefit from being properly integrated and coordinated, rather than leaving the public realm design solely to the local authority, a partnership approach would add greater value. For example, jointly proposed principles might include positioning of new trees in relation to building columns.

As it serves a large number of pedestrians, the public realm should be designed to prioritise pedestrian access and safety. Walking and cycling should be encouraged through the design of the street and public realm.

Future Review

At the next review the Design Commission expects to see comprehensive evidence that the complex issues of the building and its context, as outlined above, are being properly managed through design.

It is recognised that some positive development of the competition proposals has taken place. We would like to see evidence that these proposals, and the analytical work that will have informed them, have since been rigorously tested and reviewed in the further development of the scheme.

The presentation and discussion at the next review should demonstrate a thorough understanding of context and should fully explain and illustrate the design story so far.

The next meeting will be close to the team's intended planning submission so it is important the issues are very close to being fully resolved at that stage, with adequate testing of proposals to demonstrate that required performance and design ambitions can be achieved. This will help to provide all partners with confidence that the ambition articulated will be delivered to the benefit of the student experience and, more broadly, the heart of the capital city.

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

Attendees

Client/developer:	Anita Edson, Cardiff University
Architect/Planning Consultants:	Tom Jarman, Architect, FCB Studios Paul Lancaster, Aecom, Project Manager Nick Ashby, Arup Gareth Hooper, DPP, Planning Consultant
Local Authority:	
Design Review Panel: Chair	Jamie Brewster Carole-Anne Davies, CE, DCFW Jen Heal, Design Advisor, DCFW Amanda Spence, Design Advisor, DCFW