

# Design Review Report

Whitehall – Brechfa, Carmarthenshire

**DCFW Ref: 93**

Meeting of 28<sup>th</sup> January 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

Meeting date

Issue date

Scheme location

Scheme description

Scheme reference number

Planning status

### PUBLIC

28<sup>th</sup> January 2016

15<sup>th</sup> February 2016

Brechfa, Carmarthenshire

House extension

N93

Planning application submitted

## Declarations of Interest

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None declared.

## Consultations to Date

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Meetings have been held between the architect, local planning officer and conservation officer since the planning and listed building consent application was submitted in July 2015. This is the first time that the Design Commission for Wales (DCFW) has been consulted on the proposals.

## The Proposals

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The proposal is for the extension of an existing Grade II listed house in the form of a separate contemporary building, adjoining the main house via a glazed link. The new extension would accommodate a kitchen/diner and master bedroom. The existing listed building is in poor condition, close to derelict.

## Main Points

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It was unfortunate that the Local Planning Authority (LPA) representative needed to alter their schedule and that the LPA was not represented at the review meeting. The Commission's understanding is that concern has been expressed by the LPA conservation officer, regarding the proposed development. These relate to overdevelopment of the site, the impact on the Grade II listed house, the contemporary nature of the proposals and the officer's view that the extension should be subservient to the main house.

DCFW supports the ambition to bring the existing building back into sustainable re-use and the contemporary design approach proposed enables the property to achieve modern living standards including adequate daylight, thermal efficiency and comfort. To secure a sustainable future for the existing property it is essential that the extension is

robust and functional. The proposal achieves this in many ways but may benefit from some refinement.

### **Separate building**

DCFW supports the proposed extension as a separate building to the existing cottage and there are many existing precedents which are successful. The architect's concept and rationale for this as an engine room to the main house reflecting the working buildings that were once located on the site supports this approach. Identifying some local precedents as well as national exemplars, would help to further demonstrate the appropriateness of the approach.

### **Height and mass**

The upstairs room within the proposed extension has restricted headroom for much of the space which limits its success as a usable room. To achieve the necessary height it will be necessary to increase the eaves and ridge height and it may also help to widen the space. To date, the architect has tried to achieve an eaves height that corresponds to the existing property. This would seem an artificial constraint, given the topography of the site and surrounding area, in the Commission's view it is unlikely that a change in height would be perceived from many surrounding views.

It is understood that properties stepping up the hill are common to the village and could be an appropriate approach for this extension. A model that shows more of the context of the site and surrounding properties, as well as long sections including adjacent properties, would help to demonstrate how this approach would be appropriate within the existing built form of the village. The view of the building on the approach down the hill and the impact of a taller and/or wider extension require further consideration, but DCFW is supportive of the principle of this approach.

### **Materials**

The materials selected for the extension must be appropriate for the context and be robust and true to the 21<sup>st</sup> century nature of the building and the design concept. We question whether the use of timber for the roof and exterior walls would meet these criteria and possible alternatives were discussed including zinc. The selection of materials must be justified in relation to building performance, importance to the design concept and relevance to the context.

The benefit of eaves overhangs and gutters given the climate of the area, should be weighed up against the impact on the design of the building.

Ambitious targets for the performance of the building beyond standard requirements would support the intentions of the development and provide a positive legacy through the achievement of a high quality, robust and long-lasting property. Such considerations should include landscape, orientation, the fabric of the building and passive design. These ambitions and the steps taken to meet them should be demonstrated and communicated in documentation accompanying the project proposals.

### **Link between old and new**

DCFW supports the concept of a neutral and simple link between the existing house and new extension and that it must function effectively. Further work is required to refine

and simplify the design of this element. The proposed mono-pitch roof increases the height of the link at the front of the property resulting in a large amount of glazing. Reducing the height at the front could help to make the link more subtle and elegant. The frame and the door need to be well detailed to ensure that they are simple and elegant, appropriate to the design concept.

The merits of amending the location of the front and back walls of the link were discussed. The rationale for the purity of the continuation of the rear elevation is understood, but there may be merit in exploring the effect of bringing the front further forward if (1) it helps clearly denote the new principal entrance (rather than visitors continuing to use the existing front door) – (2) to help avoid debris collecting outside the new recess and (3) to provide a useful lobby area to improve circulation inside.

It is important that the entrance to the house is clear and legible. Visitors to the property should naturally be directed to the new front door in the glazed link. Bringing the link forward would help to achieve this and lessen the effect of a dark recess, but consideration should also be given to what happens with the front door of the existing house. There would be benefits to the daylight within the living space as well as the legibility of the building if this could be sympathetically treated and perhaps converted into a window.

### **External space**

The proposed extension will be seen in the context of the plot in which it sits. Further information regarding the design of the external space and boundaries would aid understanding of the visual impact of the development.

### **Conclusion**

A clearly articulated and justified rationale for the design decisions being made, demonstrated in project documentation, is essential. Longevity, achieved through good design, material quality and performance is imperative and broader perspectives need to be considered alongside conservation considerations. It is clear that to enable the house to function as a modern family home a practical extension of sufficient size and adequate living space is required. The existing property is of historical interest rather than architectural merit, is in poor condition and there is significant benefit in avoiding further dereliction and achieving a new life for the building as a family home, fit for purpose and the needs of modern day residents.

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

## Attendees

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Client:	Robert Bazalgette
Architect:	Catherine Thompson, Ekhomi Studio LLP Jeff Davies, Ekhomi Studio LLP
Planning consultant:	Steven Jardine, Jardine Consultancy Services
Design Review Panel:	
Chair	Alan Francis
Lead Panellist	Lynne Sullivan Simon Carne Jonathan Vernon Smith Maria Asenjo Jen Heal, Design Advisor, DCFW
Observing	Carole-Anne Davies, Chief Executive, DCFW

Officers of the Local Planning Authority were invited to attend but advised that they were not available to do so.