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Design Review Report

Brecknock Museum and
Brecon Library,

Brecon

30th January 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

PUBLIC

Meeting date	30 th January 2014
Issue date	10 th February 2014
Scheme location	Brecon
Scheme description	Refurbishment and new library
Scheme reference number	33
Planning status	Pre-application

Declarations of Interest

Wendy Richards, panel co-chair, works for The Urbanists, a Powell Dobson company and therefore stepped out of the room. The review meeting was chaired by Carole-Anne Davies.

Consultations to Date

Two public consultations have been held for previous versions of this scheme, and consultation on the present proposal is planned. Meetings with planning officers and Cadw have taken place.

The Proposals

This is a scheme which aims to combine services in a conjoined facility including a refurbished museum and new library. It is proposed that the site is created by demolishing the existing Police Station and County Court buildings. The brief has shifted considerably in the history of the project, with a large variety of additional functions having been previously included in the proposals. This now appears to have been significantly reduced and simplified to leave just the Museum and Library coming together with community hub facilities. There are key site constraints including the museum building itself, and a listed wall that crosses the site. The existing Police Station building is Grade 2* listed. The budget for the project is £8.5m.

Summary

- The principle and aspiration for a new cultural and civic facility in Brecon is supported. A new combined library and museum facility has the potential to be a valuable cultural contribution to the town centre, in line with aspirations articulated in the LDP.

- The design should support the successful integration of the two facilities on this site.
- The public realm, entrances and circulation need to be resolved in line with an overall movement strategy.
- A simplification and rationalisation of the design is required following the simplification of the brief.
- The constraints of and approach to conservation of the historically significant structures on the site should be clearly set out. A further meeting with Cadw would help to clarify their expectations.
- The environmental strategies need to be rationalised and considered in more detail prior to a planning application.
- A February planning application seems premature. The Design Commission would welcome further review of the scheme prior to the application being submitted.

Main Points in Detail

Function and Brief

The brief for this project was previously much more complex, with additional functions; but has now been simplified to the core functions of museum, library and associated community hub facilities. The complexity of the previous brief would have required a more complex design to accommodate a wider variety of activities, environments and user groups. Although the brief has now been simplified, it appears that various complexities have been inherited from the previous version by the current design proposal.

A considerable simplification and rationalisation of the design would help to produce a building which is more elegant, efficient and functional. This should be informed by the client team/end users so that clarity is established in the current brief. The design must respond to the requirements of the current brief, a clear conservation strategy and site analysis studies, but should not be compromised by ideas and requirements associated with the previous brief.

Conservation

There are a number of constraints and complexities which must be dealt with due to the culturally and historically significant structures on the site: the listed Shire Hall (now museum); the listed stone wall; and the listed Police Station building. A clear strategy should be set out for how the scheme responds to each of these.

The current proposal retains the listed wall, and uses it to set the distance between the new building and the Shire Hall. However, in order to create a functional building which

links to the Shire Hall, holes must be punched through the wall, compromising its integrity. This warrants further consideration.

It is proposed that the Police Station building will be demolished, allowing restoration of the rear of the Shire Hall, including reinstating the court room, and the creation of new outside garden space which takes advantage of the views to the south. Demolition would also make way for creation of a new important cultural and civic facility on this site. The justification for demolition should be clearly argued. It is crucial to this scheme being possible.

Further detailed consultation with Cadw is advised, to be clear what their expectations are.

Precedent for successful contemporary architecture which adjoins historic buildings is usually simple and elegant. Simplification of the proposal would help it sit more comfortably with these important historic structures and better serve access to the collections and services they house.

Public Realm and Movement

A clear strategy for movement and public realm is a vital and urgent requirement. This should be informed by study of movement around the site, anticipated entrances and circulation routes, and the staffing available to monitor these.

The current proposal shows five entrances to the buildings, yet here is no indication how all these will be used, managed and kept secure day to day. The design team must also remember that each entrance is a point for heat loss, and multiple entrances into one space are likely to cause through draughts. It is not clear which of the entrances would be the main one, which could cause confusion for visitors to the facility. The original main entrance to the Shire Hall building will always look like a main entrance and is likely to draw visitors to it. This should be considered in the overall design strategy. As acknowledged by the architects, the number of entrances needs to be rationalised in line with a movement strategy.

There is a high percentage of floor space dedicated to circulation in the current proposal. This is partly a result of the multiple entrances which has led to routes being carved through the space. A more efficient diagram would leave more budget for spaces that function well and for good quality, durable materials and finishes.

There is limited connectivity between the museum and the new library facilities due to the listed wall and the small doorway into the museum. It is important that the architects and building users work together to decide how the two elements will function together, and whether the proposed connectivity is sufficient. If it is not, a different strategic approach is required.

The nature and function of the public realm around the buildings has not been clearly thought through. The piazza-like space to the south appears to be a grand entrance, but functionally, it is needed as an external learning space. Revisiting the concept of reinstating this space as a memory of the landscaped area that once surrounded the Shire Hall might offer useful solutions. A bus drop-off point is required, and should be integrated with the public realm design. The relationship between the building, car park

and Captain's Walk also needs to be considered. The design of the outside spaces should relate to the rationalised movement strategy, and must integrate with the building design.

Building Services and Sustainability

It is understood that separate building services strategies are proposed for the museum and library building, due to different environments required in each. The new building must also have a controlled 'black box' space to storage.

The large amount of south facing glazing, whilst making the most of the views, has the potential to cause overheating. This should be mitigated by the design.

The form of the proposed building should be informed by daylighting and ventilation strategies. The proposed deep-plan is not conducive to passive design, and would therefore increase energy demand. Again, a more rationalised plan and form could be of benefit here.

Given the sensitive nature of this site, and the cultural significance of the project, the visibility of any roof mounted equipment must be well considered. Any views onto the roof from higher ground or surrounding buildings should be taken into account.

Internal Space and Building Form

Little consideration seems to have been given to the nature of the environment created inside the new building. A successful library requires carefully planned spaces to provide comfortable environments in which people can read or study. The architects should work closely with the librarian to achieve appropriate, functional, delightful environments for this library.

Daylighting and noise control are particularly significant for library design, and spaces should be zoned and planned with these in mind.

The building should be flexible so that spaces can be adapted to changes in use over time. The building should be designed for a long life span if it is to become the cultural and civic legacy for Brecon that is anticipated. A flexible but good quality building and public realm will add value and increase revenue potential.

The glazed link connection creates awkward junctions which could be eliminated or simplified.

Timescale

Given the significant amount of design work still required since the changed brief, the anticipated February Planning Application date seems premature.

To be of most value, it is ideal if Design Review first takes place at an early stage, when there is more scope for influencing the design. For complex projects it is useful to have further reviews as the design progresses.

The Design Commission would welcome a further review of the scheme before an application for planning permission is submitted. Before the next review we would expect the issues above to have been addressed in detail.

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

Attendees

Agent/Client/Developer:	Louise Ingram, Powys CC Nigel Blackmore, Powys CC Kay Thomas, Powys CC
Architectural/Urban Designer:	Andrew Nixon, Powell Dobson Architects Steven Hooper, Powell Dobson Architects
Planning Authority:	Helen Rice, Brecon Beacons NPA David Lockhart, Powys CC
Design Review Panel:	
Chair	Carole-Anne Davies, DCFW
Lead Panellist	Toby Adam Simon Power Elfed Roberts Ashley Bateson Amanda Spence, Design Advisor, DCFW
Observing:	