

### **DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS**

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 DCFWDCF's central records.

#### **Review status**

#### **CONFIDENTIAL**

Meeting date	12th September 2013
Issue date	27 <sup>th</sup> September 2013
Scheme location	Holywell School
Scheme description	School (aged 5 – 16)
Scheme reference number	19
Planning status	Pre-planning
Declaration of interests	None recorded

#### **Consultations to date**

Pre-application meetings have been held and key stakeholders and end users have been engaged in the design process. A public consultation will commence at the end of October 2013. The client expects to appoint contractors in March 2014. As advised during the review, the status of the review report is confidential until the public consultation begins in October, at which point the comments of the Commission will also be made public.

#### **Summary**

The Panel was pleased to review this ambitious scheme to replace the existing school. The existing school will remain in use throughout the construction period in 2014. The Panel acknowledged the aspiration of the client and design team to provide a good quality school for learners of 5yrs to 16yrs. The Panel recognised the ambition of the design team and appreciated the difficulties inherent constructing a new school whilst the existing school remains fully operational.

The Panel also recognised that the scheme is at a very early stage however there are key elements that need detailed consideration. Whilst the Panel were supportive of the project in principle, there were concerns about the location and built form, access and egress arrangements and other elements of the proposal which need greater consideration:

- The site is very elongated with a significant slope of approximately 40m. The Panel questioned the location of the planned new build in terms of optimum positioning on site and how the form had been generated by site constraints and/or opportunities. Consideration should be given to moving the building

south to reduce the distance between the site entrance and the main doors to the school, and to reduce the visual dominance of car-parking and boundary fences. The Panel was also concerned about the approach to level changes and how that would impact on the ways in which spaces are used and particularly, in terms of movement through the site.

- The Panel was not assured that the proposed form was an optimum solution for this site and questioned the advantages of the curved design elements which will add cost and could make some of the spaces impractical and inflexible in use. The curved design will also have an impact on internal views and light levels.
- Tiers are proposed with flat roof areas outside but it was not clear if these are intended to be useable spaces and the Panel would like to see more detail demonstrating whether these could be used as external learning environments.
- Access to the school building appears to be predominantly vehicular and the Panel urged greater access via pedestrian and cycle routes which should be better prioritised and made safer for users.
- The circulation spaces and how they will be used were also an issue for greater consideration. The provision of a single lift and staircase seemed inadequate for the size of the school and the number of people using it.

## **Discussion and Panel response in full**

The Panel welcomed early consultation on this scheme and acknowledged the challenges of building a replacement school next to the existing school whilst limiting disruption for pupils and staff. The Panel was pleased that the school building was not intended to be screened or hidden but celebrated as an important community facility and positive contribution to the locality.

Stakeholder and user consultation has been carried out and the teaching staff and school community have communicated their requirements and helped inform the design process. A public consultation is due to begin at the end of October. Pre-planning discussions have been undertaken and the team expect to submit a planning application before the end of 2013. The development aims for BREEAM Excellent, maximising natural ventilation and daylight. The possibility of introducing some renewable element on site is also being considered.

The Panel was concerned that neither the written document nor the review presentation provided an explanation for the architectural form. The design team admitted that the proposed building form was not specifically related to the Holywell site. They were not able to give a convincing account of the design process that led to the development of the proposed building form or to explain how it derived from the Clients' brief.

The Panel was concerned about the timescales proposed given the stage the design has reached and the effect this could have on securing the best design outcome. The necessity to build whilst maintaining use of the existing school will also present additional difficulties.

The site is a challenging one given the drop of approximately 40m between the southern and northern ends and the Panel wanted to better understand how the site characteristics had informed the design approach. The design team explained that the building has been sited on a flatter part of the site with the lower ground being used for the main area of sports grounds.

The Panel observed that the proposed plans suggested the level difference between the school and the sports pitches could be as much as 20-30m. This will require long stairways and access ramps which could prove problematic in use. The Panel wished to see additional detail regarding the approach and treatment of the change in levels and better demonstration of how these areas would work.

The Panel thought that the benefits claimed by the design team for their curved plan may be outweighed by disadvantages. The first concern is the loss of spatial efficiency and flexibility in the teaching spaces. It must be borne in mind that the Building Bulletin space guidelines are predicated on simple rectangular spaces. The central space in the secondary school is particularly compromised in this respect. The second concern is construction cost, which will be higher than would be the case for a building with a conventional orthogonal grid, regardless of the degree of 'facetting' used to create the curves.

In the plan of the secondary school the separation of the circulation routes to each side of a central void amounts to a 'single banked' relationship of circulation and teaching spaces. This reduces the scope to use circulation areas for educational activity, as is intended by the Building Bulletin guidance.

The design currently only allows for one stairway and one lift. The Panel thought this might be inadequate considering that c900 pupils will be using the school in addition to staff and visitors and members of the community.

The Panel felt that the proposed location of the public/community entrance to the sports hall should be reconsidered and that the community use of the school needs generally to be given greater consideration to ensure that school and community users are appropriately segregated and that the community is provided with good quality access.

The design team explained that the atrium space aimed to allow passive surveillance throughout the school. The Panel questioned the proportion of central space and whether this was adequate to enable the circulation of pupils successfully. The acoustics in this area and the adequacy of provision for daylight and natural ventilation in a space which will quickly accumulate significant heat, all requires resolution.

The internal visualisations of the central space in the secondary school suggested that the design team had given only superficial consideration to the character and the fitness for purpose of this critical functional volume. The proposed transverse bridge at first floor level appears to compromise the use of the space for performances. The design team also explained that the numerous balustrades required around this space would not be clear glass, as implied by the image, but would more likely be steel railings. This led the Panel to question whether the Clients and stakeholders may have

been had been given a potentially misleading impression of the quality of the central space by these images.

The purpose of the external flat roofed areas is not resolved. If they are to become inaccessible flat roofs, they may have a negative impact on views from the classrooms. The design team indicated that they had considered making these roof areas accessible and the Panel encouraged this approach. The design team also suggested that these could be pitched roofs, not flat roofs as implied in the presentation.

The Panel also commented on the massing of the building resulting from the current design approach. The relationship of the curved elements with the rectangular blocks of the 'central hub' and sports hall is poorly resolved. The north and south elevations are treated the same with no recognition of the influence of solar gain and the need to manage heating, cooling and light in these areas. The Panel accepted the design team's assurance that the arrangement of glazing shown on the 3D visualisations would not necessarily be representative of the final design, however, in the absence of any other information the Panel needed to raise its concern that a high quality glazing proposal will be critical to the architectural and functional success of the building, and that in view of the timescale of the project more progress should ideally have been made in this aspect of the design.

Access and egress to the school building was an issue that the Panel thought may be difficult with the current approach. The building could be moved south to reduce the distance from the proposed main site entrance to the school's main doors. In the current proposal it appears that pupils will need to travel around 200m to reach the school from the road. This could also result in vehicular congestion on the site if pupils are being dropped off/picked up and if the school is more widely used by the community for events etc.

The Panel suggested that the design team should give more thought to the locations of the site entrances and that consideration should be given to the opportunities to segregate vehicle access from the access for cycles and pedestrians. A concern was also raised about primary and senior pupils using the same entrance and this should be given additional thought.

Overall the Panel thought the design was too complex in terms of responding to the needs of the facility and the characteristics of the site. It was understood that the team had previously delivered a similarly formed school, on a different site, and the Panel questioned whether an attempt to replicate the approach here was the optimum solution.

The scheme may benefit from further consultation with the Commission as it progresses over the autumn and a return to Design Review would be welcomed if programme allows.

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

## **Attendees**

Client		Flintshire County Council Lifelong Learning Department
Architect	Martin Bocking Stuart Hadfield	Lovelock Mitchell Architects
Planning Authority	Dave Moreton David Glyn Jones Ian Edwards Andy Smith	Flintshire County Council
Design Review Panel Chair	Alan Francis Simon Carne Jonathan Adams Steve Smith	
Observing Recording	Carole-Anne Davies, DCFW Sue Jones, DCFW	