

Design Review Report

Offices and Public Realm, Wood
Street, Cardiff

DCFW Ref: N138

Meeting of 16th February 2017



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	28 th February 2017
Issue date	10 th March 2017
Scheme location	Cardiff
Scheme description	Office & Public Realm
Scheme reference number	N138
Planning status	Pre-application

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Declarations of Interest

None declared.

Consultations to Date

The site is part of the Central Square Masterplan which has been consulted on as part of the planning process.

The Design Commission for Wales reviewed the masterplan in February 2014, July 2014, August 2014 and September 2014, and this report should be read alongside our reports from those reviews.

The Commission has previously been informally consulted on this specific proposal in preparation for this review meeting.

The Proposals

The city centre site is part of the Central Square Masterplan and has an existing building (the former Western Mail printing office) which would be demolished to make way for an office building and a new public square.

The proposed office building is 12-14 storeys, accommodating up to 30,000m² floor space, forming the northern edge to a new public space. Wood Street would define the southern edge of the new square, with the new BBC Cymru Wales building facing the space on the opposite side of the street.

Main Points in Detail

The Commission welcomes this second opportunity to consider this proposal at the formative stages when most value can be drawn from the review process. The following points summarise key issues from the review meeting, and should be considered to inform further work ahead of further consultation and the submission of a planning application:

Masterplan Context & Hierarchy

It is important that this project (both the building and public realm) is considered within the context of the Central Square masterplan. The flexibility in the masterplan which has allowed this public space to become more visible is a strength.

Alongside this project, it would be useful for a detailed landscape/public realm strategy for the whole of the masterplan area to be considered as part of the planning process. This should include:

- Design responsibilities/coordination
- Long term management and maintenance responsibilities
- Curation of a programme of events and activities

As each part of the masterplan is developed, the hierarchy of streets and spaces will become more defined. It is important that each project considers the purpose, identity and status of routes and public space within this hierarchy and that this is reflected in the brief for the project.

Wood Street is likely to remain as the main traffic route and Marland Street the main pedestrian approach. However, Central Street, the route between the BBC building and Plot 2, could be considered as a secondary route and should be reflected in the design. Continuation of Central Street through the new public space should be reviewed, as closing off or narrowing this corner of the new public space could help better define the square.

Public Realm

The design of the public realm and landscape treatment will be crucial to the success of this project.

The Design Commission encourages the developer and design team to undertake a separate brief-writing exercise specifically for the public space, part of which will include considering how to make it distinct from other spaces in the city. Having a strong brief and strategy for the public space will help to ensure that investment provides long term value for the whole masterplan site and wider city. This should consider the following:

- Identity
- Who is the space for? For example, residents, students, workers, or the whole of the city
- What will people do in the space?
- How will the space be curated/activated at different times? Typical week day/weekend and event day scenarios
- A potential calendar of events linked to the earlier 'Square for all Seasons' aspiration

- Level of flexibility
- How to incorporate pop-ups/kiosks which could be independent, local, or seasonal
- Nature of materials and planting approach
- A name for the square
- Long term care and maintenance

The edges of the new public space should help to define it. It would be beneficial to include the space outside Southgate House in the wider consideration of the square. Wood Street forms a strong edge, but tree planting along that side of the square would reduce visibility from the street and approach from the south. The nature of a potential phase two office development and whether there is a physical gap/route between the phases is significant for the enclosure of the space. A tighter corner and strong west edge will help to give the square more definition.

There is a risk that a perceived barrier forms around the perimeter of the proposed building, even if there is no physical barrier. The landscape should be designed to avoid this, and to encourage the sense that the public space flows up to and into the ground floor of the building. Required physical security measures should be well integrated into this approach along with consideration of access and inclusivity for all users.

Entrance and Arrival Strategy

The relationship between the public realm and the ground floor of the building is important. This includes the legibility of the entrances which will be defined by the layout of the public realm and articulation of the façade. The current proposal, with the main entrance to the side of the vertical set-back in the façade could be confusing.

It is logical to have a main/public-facing entrance off the square with secondary entrances to the 'service' side of the building.

Building Design

The footprint and internal layout of the proposed office building is well resolved and it is good to see that the design team has been working closely with the user client to develop this.

As far as possible, given that the fit out of the building will not be designed at this stage, active uses should be encouraged within the ground floor spaces facing the new public square, so that the building helps to animate the public realm. This may mean relocating communal uses that are currently proposed for the top floor of the building.

The south façade of the building will provide the backdrop to the proposed public space and is, therefore, a key aspect of the design. Each of the other facades, whilst different in nature and secondary to the south façade, should be of very good quality. There are several issues which need to be considered and integrated into the façade design:

- Expression of the façade should reflect the principles and nature of the user client. A sound, good quality approach that is timeless and not subject to the whim of trends, and which reflects long term, whole life value in return for the public investment is important. Expression of the façade should be secondary to the BBC building and stadium
- Good quality should be achieved, even if the façade is more understated and 'quieter' than its neighbours

- The lower level 'datum' or 'grand order' should be appropriate to this building and its immediate context, not necessarily the same as the buildings surrounding Central Square.
- The facades for each side of the building might not all take exactly the same format. Each façade should be designed to be appropriate to its orientation and the nature of its context
- The 'back' façades (to the north and west) may be simpler than the 'front', but not of lower quality
- A sound environmental strategy should inform the façade design alongside consideration of efficiency, buildability and long term maintenance/durability
- Legibility of the building, including entrance locations, will be important

Public Engagement Strategy

There is good opportunity for public engagement to influence the design of the public space and add value to the scheme. Clear and engaging presentation of the project's opportunities and constraints during the period of statutory consultation will be crucial. A good, innovative engagement strategy will be required to meaningfully engage a wide variety of people and maximise value from the consultation. This should include engaging with key access groups.

Further Review

The Design Commission would welcome the opportunity to review this scheme again following the period of public consultation, but with sufficient time before the planning application is made for feedback to be meaningful.

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

Attendees

Agent/Client/Developer:	Paul McCarthy, Jason Hyatt – Rightacres Property
Design/Planning Consultant:	Marco Gamini, Kenny Allan, Tadas Pangonis - Gensler John Cottrell - Lichfields Planning

Local Authority:

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Chair

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