

# Design Review Report

Plot Two Central Square,  
Cardiff

**DCFW Ref: N72**

Meeting of 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2015



## 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.

<b>Review Status</b>	<b>CONFIDENTIAL (Pre-Application)</b>
Meeting date	23 <sup>rd</sup> April 2015
Issue date	14 <sup>th</sup> May 2015
Scheme location	Central Square, Cardiff
Scheme description	Office building
Scheme reference number	N72
Planning status	Pre-application

## Declarations of Interest

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None declared.

## Consultations to Date

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The developer and design team met regularly with the Local Authority to develop the masterplan for the wider Central Square area which includes the plot for this building. Earlier workshops with the Design Commission for Wales (DCFW) were held at DCFW on 3rd February 2014, at Foster + Partners on 15th July 2014, at DCFW on 14th August and 23rd September 2014. Each meeting extended between a half day or a full day, considering the masterplan, public realm and proposals for the BBC headquarters building. The Commission is aware that extensive consultation processes on the masterplan have included dialogue with the Local Authority, Diverse Cymru, Sustrans and other stakeholders. This report should be read alongside DCFW's reports from those workshops, for purposes of continuity.

## The Proposals

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The Central Square masterplan aims to develop a vibrant, people centred, mixed-use development and civic space for the citizens of Cardiff and visitors to the capital city. The scheme responds to the needs of commuters and citizens as well as the requirement to manage large numbers of people during Millennium Stadium events. This review considered Plot 2 Central Square, a proposed commercial HQ building, immediately north of the Grade II-listed Central Station.

Plot 1 is already on site and is the 10-storey commercial building immediately west of the station. Plot 3 is the 'flagship' site which has been let to the BBC. Plot 2 is an island site, triangular in plan, effectively fixed by the masterplan. The building fills the plot with an arcaded set-back at ground level on the south-west to accommodate match-day

crowds processing to the Millennium Stadium. The building is divided between a broadly rectilinear block (on the south-west) and a triangular block (on the north-east) with a linear service/circulation core and a triangular top-lit atrium. The upper floors have been pre-let to a Cardiff law firm, Hugh James. Their main entrance is on the north side, facing onto Wood Street. The whole of the ground level east façade onto Central Street is a screen to the basement car park access. The remainder of the ground floor facing onto Millennium Way is given over to retail/restaurant use with a stepped covered terrace at the south-east corner and a set-back at the north-west. The external architectural language of the building is predominantly glazed curtain walling. The BREEAM target is Excellent. The internal layout reflects a speculative office development tailored to an incoming client and combines flexibility with some interesting points, including extensive cycle parking, shower facilities and a staff canteen.

The Design Commission for Wales is pleased to have had the opportunity to review this scheme at an early stage. The developer, design team and client representatives are to be applauded for their commitment to exemplary, early and sustained engagement with the Commission, and their ambitions to provide office spaces of high quality design to attract large businesses to Cardiff's city centre.

## Key Considerations

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The following summarises key issues from the review, and should be used to inform work ahead of making the planning application and further review with the Design Commission.

### **Wood Street**

The success of Wood Street as a primary route will, to a large extent, determine the success of this building with its north facing main frontage. The success of Wood street will depend on it being developed in as an active and interesting street, as shown in the visualisations, although we understand that this is partly outside the scope of this review. This building will make a significant impact on the character of Wood Street. Therefore, the design of the elevation and nature of the ground floor on the north side of plot 2 are important.

It is proposed that the main entrance to the offices is from Wood Street, which would add activity at street level. However, the natural way-finding from the train station, along Central Street, to this entrance must be carefully considered, as the entrance will not be directly visible from the Square. Pedestrians arriving at the train or bus stations should be guided by the buildings and landscaping. The nature of the Wood Street entrance would provide attractive access for clients visiting the offices, but long-term users of the building and potential future reconfiguration should also be taken into account.

### **Central Square Corner**

The south corner is the only part of the building which faces onto Central Square, making this the most public and prominent face. The design of this corner is crucial, and there is still work to be done to resolve the design here.

The proposals presented at this review showed 'Huw James' signage on the corner at ground floor level behind a stepped, landscaped terrace which accommodates the parking ramp below. This could be misleading, as it appears as the office entrance.

The design team suggested there could be a better link between the stepped terrace and the restaurant/retail unit along Millennium Way. This could help to animate the Square and make the ground floor more legible, and should be explored. It will be important to consider the climatic conditions on this terrace when deciding whether it will be suitable for outdoor eating and drinking.

Given the location and orientation of the retail unit along Millennium Way, it should be considered carefully whether the conditions suit a restaurant/bar, or whether a shop retail unit would be more suitable.

### **Ground Floor**

The ground floor of Plot 2 is where the framework set out in the masterplan meets the brief set out by the future occupants of this building. This means that there are complex issues to resolve in the arrangement and articulation of spaces and functions at ground floor level. There is still work to be done to resolve these issues which include entrance strategies, creating a suitable office arrival, providing commercially viable retail space, way-finding and defining the edge of the public realm.

### **Building and Street Relationships**

The relationships between the various buildings in the masterplan will be important to the overall quality and character of Central Square. Plot 2 should be developed as a worthy sister to the more prominent BBC building. Continuity of design team across the two buildings will help to achieve this. Relationships between Plot 2 and the other building and public realm should be considered throughout the design process.

Further consideration should be given to how this building determines the nature of Central Street. It may be appropriate to consider this north-south route as more of a 'lane' in the hierarchy of the masterplan.

### **Procurement and Quality**

Procurement can have a significant impact on the quality of building delivered. The Design Commission was reassured that the design team would be novated and there has been early contractor involvement. These things should help to ensure continuity of design ambition.

### **Sustainability and Building Services**

It is best practice to consider environmental and sustainability strategies at this early stage in the design process. Early input means changes can be made and design decisions taken without large extra costs incurred, providing best value for money.

The building form and layout should be informed by a detailed micro-climate study which looks at air movement around the buildings. Urban developments, such as this, can create adverse wind conditions which can be tempered through the design of the landscaping.

The team expressed a commitment to achieving BREEAM Excellent, which is commendable. However, there are many factors which need to be designed for at this early stage, well in advance of a planning application being submitted, which will have an impact on the building form and facade design.

A highly glazed facade is proposed. There are many examples where this has caused difficulties for overheating, daylight and ventilation strategies. Solar shading, openable vents and glass specification will all have an impact on the appearance of the building, so strategies should be tested in detail at this stage in order to find a positive solution which the client is comfortable with. The Design Commission would encourage careful planning for softlandings.

The design of the roof has the potential to provide significant benefits. Pale colours can reduce overheating, whereas a green or brown roof would also improve biodiversity and water runoff.

The provision of plenty of cycle parking and showers, and the proximity to public transport are good and promote sustainable travel and healthy living.

### **Inclusive Design**

It is good that Diverse Cymru has already been involved in workshops at the masterplan stage. This has set out a framework for inclusivity. The Design Commission would like see more information about how designs for this building are providing for inclusivity as the scheme progresses.

### **Next steps**

The Design Commission would welcome the opportunity to review this scheme twice more before a planning application is made, when we would expect to see details of the following:

- Micro-climate and wind studies
- Better resolution of the ground floor arrangement
- Central Street/Lane considered in more detail
- Further design work on the building corners, especially the south east corner
- Ventilation, plant and building services strategies
- facade design in greater detail (materiality, solar performance, shading etc.)
- Design for inclusivity

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

## Attendees

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Agent/Client/Developer:	Paul McCarthy, Rightacres
Architectural/Urban Designer:	Toby Blunt, Foster & Partners Atis Charoenkool, Foster & Partners
Local Authority:	Lawrence Dowdall, Cardiff Council
DCFW Design Review Service:	
Chair	Jamie Brewster, DCFW
Lead Panellist	Martin Knight, DCFW Panel Ashley Bateson, DCFW Panel Amanda Spence, Design Advisor, DCFW Carole-Anne Davies, Chief Executive, DCFW