

Design Review Introduction Report

Cardiff University Centre for
Student Life

DCFW Ref: 88

Meeting of 22nd October 2015



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	22 nd October 2015
Issue date	9 th November 2015
Scheme location	Cardiff
Scheme description	University (non-academic)
Scheme reference number	88
Planning status	Pre-application

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Declarations of Interest

None declared.

Consultations to Date

No public consultation has yet taken place. The client has taken the opportunity to provide an early briefing and exploratory meeting with DCFW, prior to the confirmation of the appointment of their design team.

The Proposals

The design team is being procured through a design competition for a new student services building on a site adjacent to the existing student union building and Cathays train station. The ambition is to consolidate non-academic student services into one place to improve the student experience. The competition brief, which required 9000m² floor area, is now being refined. A review of the University's service provision is being undertaken in parallel, as well as consultation with staff. The site is within a Conservation Area and faces the University's Main Building and the National Museum of Wales. A number of buildings exist on the site, but, according to the presenting team, none of them are listed. A University Estates 'masterplan' sets the context for this project.

At the time of this exploratory review service meeting, the architects and design team could not be named. This meeting was convened in order to introduce the project scope, brief and key issues to the Design Commission with the intention that a long term engagement programme is established, encompassing a series of reviews or workshops to take place during the design process.

Main Points in Detail

This introductory meeting was timely and valuable at this early stage in the project, where there is scope for a series of design review meetings, with a view to enhancing the scheme as the design process progresses. The following points summarise key issues from this initial meeting, and should be used to inform development of the brief and initial design work following the appointment of the design team:

The Brief

The team explained that the competition design brief is now being revised in parallel with the work being carried out by a service redesign company. It is important that a sound brief which covers the University's vision and physical, cultural and service requirements is clearly set out and signed-off before more detailed work begins. The brief and aspirations should drive the project. An insufficient brief or late changes to project requirements will result in unnecessary extra costs and potentially reduced quality and value; and importantly, the brief must take into account the volume of development which can realistically be accommodated on the specified site.

In an ideal scenario, a high-level concept or strategy would inform an initial brief which, in turn, would inform a thorough masterplan, site selection and subsequent design process.

The appointed design team should work closely with the University to develop the brief in more detail, and the Design Commission is willing to assist with this aspect of the project.

Site Choice

The site next to the Student Union has been chosen in line with the Estate's masterplan, and because it offers a central location with a physical relationship to the services provided by the Student Union. However, the site presents a number of significant challenges.

The ratio of site area compared with the floor area required currently indicates that demolition of the existing structures and a significant tall new building would be required, although it is understood that the required area may decrease. Given that the site is within a Conservation Area, it will be very difficult to successfully resolve this problem. An underground sewer and stepped access to the Student Union building create additional constraints. There are also mature trees on the site which are valuable and should be properly identified with a tree survey.

A new building on this site should be appropriate for the context – at the end of a tree-lined avenue with three-storey Victorian villas. The Conservation Area status means that the design team will need to demonstrate and clearly justify that the proposal preserves or enhances character.

Before proceeding with the project, the University should be absolutely sure that they have chosen the right site for these facilities. It would be worth revisiting other options

to check that the right decision is made. The wrong choice of site could compromise good design principles, quality and value in the longer term.

Project Scope

The team would benefit from an exploration of the opportunities for extending the scope of the scheme, in terms of both site and aspiration, without necessarily increasing budget. Incorporating other areas around the site, and including considerations for the existing Student Union building (i.e. by making the SU building more efficient or by using its footprint to add more space, rather than removing existing SU facilities from it) might widen the possibilities for this project to add value to the student experience, and give more breathing space for what currently appears to be too large a floor space requirement.

Including and considering a wide range of stakeholders would also benefit the scheme.

Future Proofing

The University and project team should take into account future-proofing as the brief is refined and design strategies are made. The nature of student services and the facility's relationship with the Student Union may change over time.

Plans are currently being developed for the remodelling of Cathays rail station and footbridge. Whilst it may not be feasible for the University to influence the station project, the Centre for Student Life project should consider and keep open opportunities for future integration with the station.

Future Review

The Design Commission welcomes the opportunity to establish the long term engagement suggested above and review this scheme as the design progresses. The most effective way for this to happen would be to programme a series of reviews or workshops. The Commission also offers client support services for developing project briefs, which may be useful for this scheme.

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

Attendees

Client/developer:	Anita Edson, Cardiff University
Architect/Planning Consultant:	<i>Design team not yet announced</i> Caitlin Forster, AECOM, Project Manager Gareth Hooper, DPP, Planning Consultant
Local Authority:	
Design Review Panel: Chair	Alan Francis Cora Kwiatowski Alister Kratt Steven Smith Carole-Anne Davies, CE, DCFW Amanda Spence, Design Advisor, DCFW