

Design Review Report

YMCA, Pontypridd

DCFW Ref: 84

Meeting of 12th August 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

Issue date

Scheme location

Scheme description

Scheme reference number

Planning status

PUBLIC

12th August 2015

26th August 2015

Pontypridd

YMCA refurbishment and extension

84

Pre-application

Declarations of Interest

None declared.

Consultations to Date

On-going public consultation is being coordinated by the clients. The scheme has been published in local and national media.

The Proposals

This town centre site is steeply sloping which has resulted in the existing building having various split levels. The original building was constructed in 1910, but was never completed to the original designs. Subsequent additions and alterations have been made over the years. The north-west frontage faces the important Morgan Street Municipal Building and the south-east frontage faces the former Taff Vale Shopping Centre site.

This project aims to 'complete' the original building by adding its two 'un-built' storeys, and by demolishing a later independent single storey building on Morgan Street and replacing it with a new extension of the main building. Internal alterations aim to resolve issues with new circulation space and adjusted levels. It is hoped that the scheme will be a catalyst to change and improvement in the town

Main Points in Detail

This review took place at a late stage in the process, leaving limited scope for the review discussion to inform the design. Nevertheless, all present were willing to consider new thinking, and the following points summarise key issues from the review, and should be considered to inform work ahead of making a planning application:

Design approach and ambition

The Design Commission is supportive of the ambition for this strategically important project to catalyse the regeneration of the town, and of the proposed Morgan Street solution. There is potential for a well-designed scheme to make a really positive and valuable contribution to the town centre, and to signal a time of change and improvement. Very good design will add value for the clients, the funding bodies and for the wider town. The passion and enthusiasm of the client team and commitment of the architect are to be commended.

It is encouraging that the history of the existing building has been thoroughly researched and that this is informing the design. An important consideration for this scheme is how to complete an incomplete historic building, and what part authenticity plays in the re-creation of those parts now altered or lost. A number of valid approaches are possible, but the architectural narrative must be absolutely coherent for a successful outcome to be achieved.

The Commission supports the approach taken for the new Morgan Street 'extension'. However, an option should be tested which continues the same approach for the remodelled upper floors on the Taff Street side. This may lead to a more coherent and simplified solution, and avoids the need to modify a faithful reproduction of the original design to suit modern construction and use. Whilst we recognise the very tight time constraints, we would encourage the client/funding and design teams to allow some extra time for different options to be explored and tested. Alternatively, a dual application might be considered, using the first to trigger funding and construction, and the second as a 'variation' if the re-considered top floors prove beneficial. That would allow the necessary time for an alternative Taff Street treatment to be fully considered without delaying current progress. It is important that the most appropriate solution is reached at this stage, as there will be implications for the long term use, running costs and maintenance of the building.

Facade design

The unusual facade design proposed for Morgan Street will need to be given careful consideration at detail design level. The facade will not only provide the new 'face' of the building, but will affect conditions internally. The long-term cleaning, maintenance and durability must be fully considered. The architect and client nevertheless appreciated that small details - how the cladding system deals with corner conditions; meets the ground, and deals with water run-off - are all crucial.

The Design Commission strongly encourages the appointment of a specialist facade engineer to work collaboratively with the architect in order to reduce the risks associated with this proposal and provide a warranted solution. A good engineer would be a creative addition to the design team, and could help usefully help to develop the facade design quickly.

Public realm

The public realm around the site will be as important as the building itself, and therefore requires further consideration at this stage. This project provides opportunities to improve the public realm, again making a positive contribution to the town and to help signal change. Potential improvements should be discussed with the local authority's planning and highway teams to achieve a coordinated approach.

In particular, the space in front of the building on Morgan Street, including its recess, needs careful consideration. The space should have a clear purpose, or set of purposes, otherwise it could become an unpleasant litter trap. If a drop-off point is required here, it should be designed in, rather than added as an afterthought. The public realm here also offers the opportunity to link to the Municipal building opposite – perhaps through some shared surface finishes across the street.

In general, the quality of pedestrian spaces should be enhanced, and good quality finishes and lighting designed in.

Energy and services strategy

An integrated services and energy strategy, considered from an early stage in the design process, before a planning application is made, will be essential to achieving good quality development.

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

Attendees

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Kath Davies, Arts Council Wales
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Design Review Panel:
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