



DESIGN  
COMMISSION  
FOR WALES  
COMISIWN  
DYLUNIO  
CYMRU

# Design Review Report

Howells, Cardiff

**DCFW Ref: 280**

Meeting of 21<sup>st</sup> July 2022



## Review Status

Meeting date  
Issue date  
Scheme description  
Scheme location  
Scheme reference number  
Planning status

## CONFIDENTIAL

21<sup>st</sup> July 2022  
28<sup>th</sup> July 2022  
Retail + Mixed Use  
Cardiff  
N280  
Pre-Application

## 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 and meeting Agenda items. Any such declarations are recorded here and in DCFW's central records.

Chris Jefford and Toby Adam stated that they work for a practice who are currently working with Cardiff Council on a city centre project in proximity to this site, but neither Chris nor Toby are directly involved with the project.

## Consultations to Date

---

None on this proposal to date.

## The Proposals

---

The proposals are for the proposed re-development of the Howells buildings at the heart of Cardiff City Centre, which currently comprise of an amalgamation of buildings most recently occupied by 'House of Fraser'. The proposals seek to deliver a mixed-use scheme including a new public space. The proposed uses include retail, services, food and drink, business, hotel, residential, and assembly and leisure.

The proposals seek to demolish parts of the buildings, to improve access through the site, and to reveal Bethany Chapel as part of a new public space that would be well connected to the surrounding public realm.

## Main Points

---

The Design Commission welcomed the opportunity to engage early in the development of this scheme.

The Commission appreciates that this is a project with a lot of potential, and that, in its current state, the building is complicated, due to its multi-level, and multi-phase nature.

## **Sustainability**

It is important to consider, from the outset, the embodied carbon of the existing building, and how demolishing certain aspects of the building would impact the embodied carbon calculations.

It is also important to consider the multiple levels of history on site, and the possible subterranean impacts of this on any development, including potential archaeological discoveries.

## **Design Concept**

The context and historic accretion of buildings on the site has been very clearly set out but the decisions on which historic elements to retain, and the development of a clear design concept have not been presented with the same clarity. This is possibly because a clear design concept is still to be determined, although some of the presentation material looks to be drawn to a level that exceeds conceptual approaches. It is important that a clear narrative for design decisions, founded on careful consideration of the historic fabric and urban context, is set out and justified so that all stakeholders can appreciate the design process followed.

## **High-rise element**

Some of the presentation materials appear to indicate a high-rise element within the curtilage of the site. This will require further design development in order to justify its location within this scheme and the choice of location.

## **Courtyard design**

The proposals would benefit from the exploration of the nature and character of the courtyard, and how the design could become a space where people want to spend their time. It is worth exploring whether the courtyard will be a lively, vibrant area or if it should be more of a calm retreat that is complimentary to but not competing with the urban life of the surrounding streets. Consideration could also be given to the courtyard as a green space, a 'secret garden', in which case plants would need to be selected that would thrive in the courtyard setting, and consideration given to how this space will be managed and used, given that it will be in shade most of the day. It is also worth exploring whether the courtyard will be covered, and whether it will shut in the evenings.

As the design is developed further, it is worth considering how the spaces tell the story of the building, and to further clarify the hierarchy of spaces, as well as which parts are publicly accessible.

## **Routes through the site**

The Design Team clarified that their intention is to look at surrounding sites, and their existing provisions, to ensure that this proposal doesn't clash, or detract from local businesses. The project team should explore the existing routes further and create scenarios in conjunction with the provision of key uses or anchor tenants in certain locations.

The Design Team explained their vision for the Howells building reactivating St Mary St, and Trinity Street in the city centre. It is important that the balance of private, semi-private and public spaces and routes is considered as the design is developed further. The panel welcomed that key views have been considered when deciding on the routes.

The routes through the site will be of paramount importance as the design is developed further, to ensure that there are no dead or underused spaces within the proposal. It may also be beneficial to explore alternative layouts for the ground floor plans, although these may be restricted by the retention of key elements such as the chapel.

## **Placemaking and identity**

The 'identity' element of the placemaking of this scheme is important. Collective memory of Howells, as well as the interesting history of the site, and landmarks within it, should all contribute to the placemaking strategy.

It is also worth exploring heritage links beyond the site, such as the tiled corridor in the Old Library, and how this could also influence routes through the site.

## **Design development**

As the design is developed further, it may be worth exploring further precedents that closely resemble the buildings in terms of scale and the re-use of historic structures, as these more accurate comparisons could help with forming ideas of what the space could be, as well as help with communicating the idea to others.

## **Engagement**

It will be important to communicate the change, the phased nature of the development, and the construction process to the public. Telling the story of the redevelopment could help to attract potential customers, as well as allowing visitors to Cardiff and the local community to feel as if they're part of the story.

## Next Steps

The Commission would welcome continuous further engagement on this scheme, which could be facilitated through the medium of design workshops.

---

**Comisiwn Dylunio Cymru Design Commission for Wales is the trading name of DCFW LIMITED, a Private Limited Company established under the Companies Act 1985 and 2006, Company No: 04391072 incorporated in England and Wales as a wholly owned subsidiary of the Welsh Government. Registered office: 4<sup>th</sup> Floor, Cambrian Buildings, Mount Stuart Square, Cardiff CF10 5FL T: 029 2045 1964 E [connect@dcfw.org](mailto:connect@dcfw.org). The comment recorded in this report, arising from formal Design Review through our Design Review Service, is provided in the public interest for the consideration of local planning authorities as a material consideration, and other users of the Design Review Service. It is not and should not be considered 'advice' and no third party is bound or required to act upon it. The Design Review Service is delivered in line with DCFW's published protocols, code of conduct and complaints procedure, which should be read and considered by users of the service.**

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

## Attendees

---

Agent/Client/Developer:	David Owens, Thackeray Estates Giles Hoare, Thackeray Estates John Cottrell, Lichfields
Architect/Design Team:	Andrew Taylor, Patel Taylor Architects Ignacio Tirado, Patel Taylor Architects
Local Authority:	Tim Walter, Cardiff Council Ross Cannon, Cardiff Council Steve Ball, Cardiff Council Guy Arnall, Cardiff Council

### **DCFW Design Review Panel**

Chair:	Cora Kwiatkowski
Lead Panellist:	Chris Jefford
Panel:	Toby Adam Simon Carne Michael Gwyther-Jones Jen Heal, DCFW, Design Advisor Efa Lois, DCFW, Place Advisor