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# Design Review Report

Swansea Museum Extension, Swansea

**DCFW Ref: 303**

Meeting of 28<sup>th</sup> September 2023



**Review Status**

Meeting date

Issue date

Scheme description

Scheme location

Scheme reference number

Planning status

**PUBLIC**28<sup>th</sup> September 202311<sup>th</sup> October 2023Culture, Leisure, Education,  
Regeneration

Swansea

N303

Pre-application

## Key Points

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- Swansea Museum is the oldest surviving museum in Wales, erected between 1839-41 and designed by Mr F Long of Liverpool; William Rayner, builder. Later additions include the art gallery of 1901. It is listed Grade II\*, indicating particular importance. The current proposals lack sufficient analysis of the conservation area as a whole and the significance of the existing building has not informed the design approach.
- A strategic decision is needed as to which/how many objects/collections are to be located at this site as opposed to the current store at the Rolling Mill. The absence of this decision is frustrating design decisions which could add value for the Museum proposal and help define uses in the emerging proposals for the Copperworks site wherein the Rolling Mill is located.
- As a result of the above, there is a lack of clarity as to curatorial and collection priorities regarding the key stories to be told and the accompanying layout, exhibition design and display needs. Currently, this is leading to the design of additional space which is ill-defined and insufficiently informed by the significance of the existing structure, its purpose and user needs.
- Recent developments in response to flood management and circulation within the building require sufficient time for a design response which may include a review of the overall design 'diagram'.
- Environmental design considerations are absent – energy strategy and building performance are essential now, as is a more sophisticated approach to flood risk.
- Access and inclusion in all their forms are insufficiently addressed and require immediate specialist input.
- The front and back are unresolved.
- Required 'levelling-up' outputs were not defined at the meeting and the remaining scope for proposals was therefore unclear to us.

## Consultations to Date

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This is the first consultation with the Design Commission on this proposal for Swansea Museum. Swansea Council are working with Wardell Armstrong's public engagement team who have been working with key stakeholders, statutory and non-statutory bodies, access groups, businesses, friends' groups and others. Next steps will include councillors, more access groups, and members of the public, prior to more formal consultation processes appropriate to the submission of the planning application.

## The Proposal

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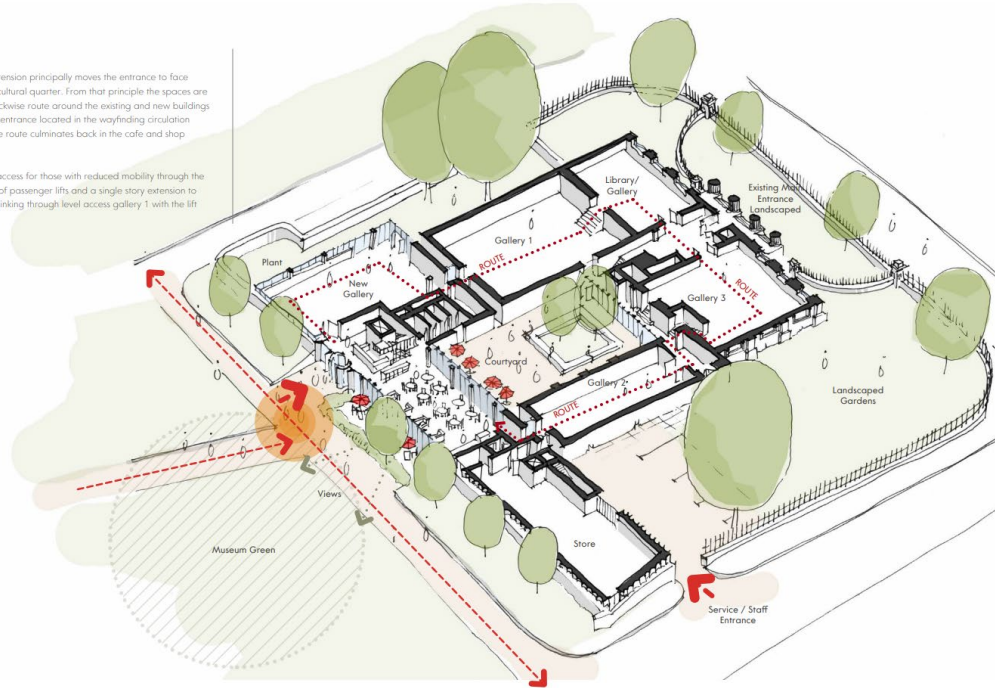
Swansea Museum is reported to be the oldest museum in Wales. The Museum services are currently viewed as disparate, with the Swansea Museum itself and the National Waterfront Museum and Tramway Centre to the south having no 'connection' despite being proximate and adjacent.

The Dylan Thomas Exhibition is at the former Guildhall, and currently managed by the University of Wales Trinity St David; the Museum Collections Centre, and some of its staff are located a few miles away in the former Rolling Mill at the Morfa Copperworks site and other staff locations generally are dispersed. The aim of this project is therefore to bring all of the facilities, visitor offer and staff to one location, improving facilities and visitors' services at the same time. The project is approximately 3,605m<sup>2</sup> with an overall budget of £9,161,255.00 drawn from UK Government Levelling Up funding and Swansea Council matched funding, forming most of the available capital budget. Swansea Council are signatories to the Wales Placemaking Charter and stated that these proposals will address the principles therein.

#### Overview

The movement strategy for the extension principally moves the entrance to face Museum Green and the growing cultural quarter. From that principle the spaces are organised to create a legible clockwise route around the existing and new buildings - starting from a single controlled entrance located in the wayfinding circulation tower fronting Museum Green. The route culminates back in the cafe and shop adjacent the existing entrance.

Consideration has been given to access for those with reduced mobility through the introduction and/or replacement of passenger lifts and a single story extension to the rear of the existing museum - linking through level access gallery 1 with the lift adjacent gallery 3.



*Proposed Ground Floor Isometric*

## Context

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Swansea Museum is located within the Maritime Quarter of Swansea, which is in turn located immediately south of the city centre shopping core. Swansea Museum occupies an exposed island site. Its entrance faces northeast onto Burrows Place, accessed from the A4067 also known as Victoria Road.

## Main Points

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The Design Commission understands the key drivers for this, and other proposals reviewed in the context of Swansea Council's success in achieving significant funding. These proposals were reviewed alongside proposals for the Strand Arches and emerging masterplanning works for the former Copperworks - all described in the masterplanning approach as forming a 'strategic historic corridor', maximising the re-use of heritage assets to assist regeneration, culture, and leisure opportunities. Swansea Council deserves considerable credit for achieving such significant funding and must now ensure focussed design work to realise proposals which leave a positive legacy and enable subsequent works to be realised effectively.

Overall, detailed analysis is not evident in the proposals. This is required at several levels to understand and respond to context, curatorial and visitor needs; environmental design; architectural and group significance; access and inclusion in all their forms.

Several aspects of the design are unresolved and recent changes add to lack of clarity in the proposals. Time is needed to go back to the architectural approach to ensure it now fits the requirements of the project. This includes resolving the location of the main entrance, treatment of the front and back of the building, circulation, dealing with level changes internally and externally, and daylight. St Paul's Cathedral and the V&A Museum were identified as potential precedents for access solutions.

The business plan for the Museum should be guiding the design including future staffing levels, role of the proposed café (and therefore size/prominence), relationship with events on Museum Green, rotation of exhibitions, main target audience.

Visual and diagrammatic material showed the site and proposals only from the south with no explanation of the impact of proposals from the north.

Whilst the Commission is alert to the demands of the programme, the current proposals for Swansea Museum lack fundamental design considerations and action that risk the long-term success. These are not insurmountable however they do require focussed strategic design work and some specialist input in key areas in the immediate future. These must be addressed successfully to avoid a negative legacy for a building of particular importance, a valuable museum service, and cultural attraction.

## Next Steps

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- A reappraisal of the concept diagram is required which accommodates the change of having a covered courtyard in the heart of the plan, and which responds to the emerging constraint of the flood levels.
- The concept diagram will also need to resolve the tensions and possibilities that lie between the business plan, the curatorial plan, and the architectural opportunity. Design is rarely a linear process of development, and the design team must have the opportunity to revisit their approach. This will inevitably save time and money later.
- The client should be mindful of the impact that the business plan and curatorial plan will have on the emerging design, so needs to be able to provide clear decisions in a timely manner that align with their strategic goals.

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

## Attendees

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Client:	Barry Hughes, Swansea Museum
Design Team:	Ben Parish, GWPA Ashley Davies, GWPA
Project Manager:	Chris von Tersch, Coreus
Planning Consultant:	Will Mulvany, Wardell Armstrong
Local Authority:	Elliott Williams, City & County of Swansea David Owen, City & County of Swansea Stephen Smith, City & County of Swansea

### **DCFW Design Review Panel**

Chair:	Jamie Brewster
Panel:	Toby Adam (Lead Panellist) Simon Power Steven Smith Mark Hallet Carole-Anne Davies, Chief Executive Jen Heal, Deputy Chief Executive, DCFW Max Hampton, Design Advisor, DCFW
Observers:	Luke Williams, TfW Hayley Kemp, City & County of Swansea Jonathan Green, Cadw

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

This proposal was reviewed as one of three during a full day with Swansea and the following declaration stood for the entire day:

- Mark Hallett is a Director of Pobl, who are in partnership with Urban Splash but are not involved in this project.
- Steven Smith of Swansea Council is also a Design Review Panellist but was present today on behalf of Swansea.
- Ian Carter, Director of DCFW Ltd, is seconded to Urban Splash who are retained by Swansea City Council. This declaration is made for completeness only and Ian was not present at the meeting.