

# Design Review Report

Wrexham Gateway

**DCFW Ref: N338**

Meeting of 26<sup>th</sup> March 2025



**Review Status**

Meeting date

Issue date

Scheme description

Scheme location

Scheme reference number

Planning status

Planning status of DCFW comment

**Confidential**26<sup>th</sup> March 20259<sup>th</sup> April 2025

Transport interchange and mixed-use development

Station Approach, Wrexham,  
LL11 2AA

N338

Pre-planning

Material Consideration

## Key Points

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- The overall aims of improving the interchange and arrival experience at Wrexham Station, and the area around the station as a place to travel through, work in and potentially visit are to be welcomed. Transport for Wales are to be commended in working with the local authority and other partners to develop an integrated approach to the area.
  - The proposed station public realm layout needs further testing and refinement to ensure it works easily and effectively as an interchange between different transport modes and meets users' needs.
  - The public realm needs to be robust, deliverable and maintainable, and the landscaping would benefit from being simpler and bolder. Who will be responsible for maintaining each part must be defined, as this should influence the design.
  - The proposed office building needs further testing, viability, engineering and efficiencies, with consideration of how the design might be simpler and more flexible to future changes of use.
  - The proposed interventions to the station building need to be clearer on what the benefits will be compared to the current arrangement and ensure the new additions positively contribute to the character of this Grade II Listed Building.
  - The inclusion of a brewery, including a tap room, restaurant and museum, is a promising addition to the area in principle, but the plans need to be developed to demonstrate how this will successfully work and integrate with the site as a whole.
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## Consultations to Date

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There has been early engagement with the Design Commission. Previous discussions about the project were undertaken in February and November 2024. This is the first formal Design Review for the scheme.

There has been a public consultation and stakeholder engagement on the Transport Hub elements of the Eastern Gateway Development Zone as part of the WelTAG process. Pre-Application Consultation (PAC) is planned to take place in April.

The Station Building Feasibility Project or any plans for the redevelopment associated with the Wrexham Lager site have not yet involved the public.

## The Proposal

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Wrexham Gateway is a regeneration project around Wrexham General railway station. The Eastern Development Zone element of the project proposes a transport hub in front of Wrexham General station, a public plaza and landscaping, and a commercial development with new access and highway arrangements. There is also potential for a new brewery with a tap room, restaurant and museum.

The stated aspiration for the project is to drive economic growth and prosperity for businesses and the community, enhance transport connectivity and integration, deliver growth in employment opportunities and private sector investment. The project aims to enhance the setting of the station and welcome to the city, as well as create a new 'landmark' building.

The Western Development Zone includes proposals for improvements to Wrexham Football Club's Racecourse Ground, with a new Kop Stand, and potentially a new hotel. This element of the project did not form part of this review.



*Proposed Masterplan*

## Context

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The Wrexham Gateway project is focused around Wrexham General railway station. The area is on the edge of the city centre, between the historic centre and more recent suburban extensions, the stadium and university, and big box out-of-town development.

The site is a relatively short walk from the city centre. The surrounding streets do however currently prioritise the needs of cars above those of walking and cycling, creating a road system that is quite oppressive for walking.



*Site Location Map*

## Main Points

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Overall, the Design Commission is supportive of the aspirations of the project to support the increased use of Wrexham General station, improve the interchange between different transport modes and build higher-density transit-orientated development. The project would benefit from further reflection on the drivers for the project and more specifically the 'problems' it is trying to fix.

### **Transport**

We welcome the ambitions to improve the experience of people walking and cycling to Wrexham General railway station. The route to the city centre should be clear and visible.

Consideration is needed about how cyclists are likely to enter the area from the planned active travel route to ensure this is as easy and smooth as possible. Consideration should also be given to any likely conflict between cyclists and pedestrians, as well as vehicles. The proposed cycle parking should also be well located, safe and secure.

An important potential benefit of the project is creating a high-quality interchange between rail and bus (though it is acknowledged the main bus terminal is to remain in the city centre). To maximise these benefits, it is important the bus stops are well located. As presented, two of the three bus stops are 'hidden' behind the office building. They would not be visible from the station (or vice versa) and may not feel like a safe place to wait for a bus (especially at night when the building is unoccupied). This aspect of the scheme must be addressed and further consideration given to how the bus stops can have a clearer relationship with the station and potentially the 'boulevard' ramp from the road to the station frontage. The design of the main bus shelter, if moved, would benefit from something more bespoke to this site than a standard model, to highlight its location and significance.

The interchange between trains and taxis also needs to be clear and accessible for all users. We encourage giving further consideration to the location of the taxi waiting areas to enable the best possible experience for users.

Short term drop off/pick up, especially at peak times, was not particularly explored. Drivers may drop passengers as close to the station door as possible instead of in designated bays. Is this a problem or should it be designed in? This needs a clear view on whether traffic is ever likely to be busy enough to cause congestion affecting functioning of the roundabout, especially if use of train services grows.

The new car park for train passengers is further away than the current arrangement. However, it is a relatively short walk that is direct and visible, but it's safety and success is heavily reliant on occupation and reuse of the former Jewson shed and the old railway good shed. The way this route is designed and the redevelopment of the buildings on the Jewson site will be key to creating an active, safe and attractive route, especially in the evenings, weekends etc when general footfall is reduced in the vicinity.

Overall, the design needs to ensure users understand how to get to the different elements of the transport interchange. In the meeting we discussed potential ways this could be achieved and we encourage the design team to develop and test different options further. We encourage working through the sustainable transport hierarchy to ensure the route to the city centre, bike parking, bus stops, replacement bus stops, taxis and car parking are obvious and will meet the users' needs.

### **Public Realm**

The plans presented include a large amount of public realm and landscaping. We welcome the aspiration to create an attractive and vibrant public space outside the railway station, but we have concerns about the vision compared to the reality and this requires further consideration, testing and refinement.

This area is currently quiet at most times and, whilst we recognise the ambition to increase the number of train and bus passengers and build new facilities on the site, we feel there needs to be more realism about how many people are ever likely to be using this space. The design needs to reflect that relatively large pedestrianised public spaces can feel quite bleak without people to bring activity and life to the area.

Consideration needs to be given to the amount of public space proposed and whether there could be potential for more development. The design of the public realm then needs to be reviewed to ensure it is robust. Could it be harder, bolder and simpler? Can it be used to positively direct passengers towards the buses and/or towards the city centre? Examples were discussed of large hard-landscape elements being used to create character and identity, whilst also helping to define routes and spaces.

The proposed landscaping is ornamental in character and would benefit from not being broken-up into so many small elements. There could be more planting directly associated with the office building, maintained by that owner and helping to manage access and privacy to some ground floor functions for example. More trees (and less low-level planting) could add significant character with lower long term maintenance costs. Low level planting will likely need to be in raised beds to avoid damage by pedestrians.

Consideration should be given to how the landscape relates to the character of the station building, and its proposed new entrance location. Should it be more formal and regular? Analysis of the station history presented might inform the design of the public realm.

How the public realm will be maintained needs to also be considered as soon as possible as it should influence the design. Who will maintain what, to what standard, and what will it look like in the future? These questions need to be answered to understand whether what is proposed can be maintained to an appropriate standard.

The design of the proposed 'boulevard' should make it clear that this is the route to the city centre. The paving or public art could be designed to highlight the route and the landscaping should maintain visibility along the boulevard.

The public realm on the Jewson site has not been developed yet to the same extent as the rest of the site. There is currently little landscaping shown and it is dominated by car parking and hardstanding. This area needs to be integrated with the rest of the site. Early thinking had been carried out in respect of the likely HGV servicing for the Jewson site, but this will need testing, especially considering long term needs of Wrexham Lager should the enterprise be successful or if the site is taken over by a more intensive distribution use in the future.

Further consideration is needed to the location, design and primacy of the pedestrian crossings. On the plan graphics, the crossing to the pocket park reads as being the primary crossing whereas the crossing near the main road lacks prominence. The proposals for the active travel route should also be shown on the plans to show the relationship and integration with these proposals.

Further consideration of the positioning of bus and rail replacement bus stops should offer the opportunity to rationalise the use of the carriageway. The design should seek to avoid the need for large areas of hatched tarmac on the carriageway. Is there an alternative use for rail replacement bus bays when they are not in use (the vast majority of time)?

The roundabout is likely to be used by drivers dropping-off passengers. This is not necessarily a bad thing but the design needs to be realistic about this and avoid having landscaping that people are likely to walk through. The design should however naturally deter people parking here without relying on yellow lines.

To inform refinement of the public realm design we suggest preparing a diagram that shows the amount of public realm and who will maintain it. We also encourage looking at station forecourt precedents and comparable train stations (town size, passenger

numbers, interchange needs, etc). They will all be different but there will be lessons to learn from elsewhere.

Overall, the public realm needs to be robust, deliverable and maintainable. The landscaping would benefit from being bolder and simpler. User needs should be at the forefront of the design.

### **Office Building**

The proposal is for a 'landmark' building that is seeking to highlight what is possible. However, without a development partner (and/or a significant signed tenant) there is a lack of certainty and the proposals are more of an aspiration than what is likely to actually be built. It is an outline planning application scheme.

Further consideration about the engineering and viability of what is being proposed is needed. The proposed design has quite a complex form that would benefit from being simplified. It is important that the design allows for good quality materials and finish to realise the high aspirations for the building. Further consideration is needed about the proposed frame spans, floor to floor heights, the number and location of the columns, the rounded corners, the varied form and the efficiency of the core. The rents achievable here will be a significant constraint on construction cost for a viable scheme: it will need to be efficient and economical. The engineering, efficiencies and viability need to be further developed. This would include establishing the highest sustainability ratings for such a publicly promoted building.

Further consideration should be given to whether there will be demand for deep plan offices in this location now and in the future. Should the design be more flexible to allow for different future uses? The principle of long-life, loose-fit should be the key aspect of the sustainability strategy to keep flexibility for the future and avoid the building becoming obsolete. Aspects of the design that will influence how flexible it will be include the core to window distances, opening windows vs sealed windows, and the frame material.

Inclusion of a retail unit on the prominent corner of the building requires consideration of the demand for retail in this location, given light footfall during large parts of the day. There should also be flexibility to allow for other uses that can create an active frontage, as well as the ability for the space to be absorbed as office space if necessary.

The relationship between the proposed office building and the train station needs further testing. What will views to and from the train station be like from Mold Road?

The 'back' of the building has little active frontage but faces onto the street and buses. Consideration should be given to how this elevation can have a better relationship with the public realm.

It needs to be recognised that consulting the public with the scheme as presented may raise expectations that are very hard to achieve.

### **Station Building**

The material presented highlighted a good level of analysis of the history of the building and how it has changed over time. The proposals seemed to be driven by the need for a revenue protection gateline plus the opportunity to upgrade passenger facilities, but this was only loosely defined. We were presented with potential architectural solutions but no explanation of any options considered. The proposed plan appeared to be a rational well considered use of the spaces available. Clarity is needed about what the brief for the project is. What are the problems with the current building that the project is trying to address? What are the needs of the users of the station?

To achieve accessibility aims will necessitate, as understood, adapting the original station entrance arched doorway (currently the café entrance). The proposed stone arch is a bold intervention with the potential to have character and strength. Infilling the existing entrance to create a waiting area is less convincing as presented. We have concerns that this intervention will present a blank façade whilst being quite prominent, while the platform elevation of this infill proposed an entirely different elevational treatment. The simple robust character of a self-supporting stone arch was lost when the stone was used as sheets of cladding for the new staff area. Could these be simple ground bearing stone walls with stainless steel details used only for junctions with other construction – like the new entrance?

How the additions connect with the building will be critical and will benefit from using a limited palette of materials. Consideration also needs to be given to how the interventions will look at night – especially the new entrance. There needs to be early consideration of costs, client technical approvals and funding to ensure the proposals are deliverable.

The station building is a Grade II Listed Building and the proposals will need to ensure they preserve or enhance the character of the building. We encourage early engagement with Cadw and the Local Planning Authority.

The Transport for Wales contemporary branding is not shown in the material as presented. Consideration will need to be given to how station signage extends out onto the public

realm. Consideration is also needed as to whether the arched entrance will need protection from vehicle impact and what the resultant effect will be on the public realm.

Further consideration is needed as to whether the Changing Places toilet should face onto the street or the platform. Having this facility facing onto the street will make it more accessible to the wider community, but is potentially confusing having it separate from the other toilet facilities. The equality impact assessment and further input on inclusive access should inform this aspect of the design.

There should be a connection between the interventions to the station and the wider site design and public realm, such as between the alignment of the station entrance and the centre of the proposed public realm enhancement. This might also extend to material use: the distinctive red stone proposed for the station might be used in a hard landscape wall along the boulevard and the primary bus stop for example.

### **Brewery**

The proposed relocation of Wrexham Larger would be a good use of the existing vacant buildings and the introduction of a tap room, restaurant and museum would help generate the activity and life this area needs.

We encourage focusing investment in bringing the old railway goods sheds back to life, but would encourage a realistic and viable approach which is based on a robust independent heritage assessment of the most valuable parts of the structure. We suspect it may need significant expenditure, and spending may be better placed here than re-cladding the Jewson building. The remaining lifespan of the Jewson building cladding should be assessed. If the cladding does not need immediate replacement (some repairs are clearly needed), minor external changes with graphics, paint and branding that maintains its robust character and makes it an obviously adapted shed would provide the opportunity to do something contemporary without major expenditure.

## **Next Steps**

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The Design Commission will continue to offer support to Transport for Wales and Wrexham Council as the proposals develop. We recommend further engagement following the refinement of the proposals in response to the community consultation and this report.

For future schemes, we recommend holding Design Review sessions earlier in the design process (particularly after the selection of a preferred option but prior to the development of that option to a more detailed stage) to enable greater scope to inform the design development.

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

## Attendees

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Client: Caroline Thomas, Transport for Wales  
Adam Graham, Transport for Wales  
Alistair Aldridge, Wrexham County Borough Council  
Leane Taylor, Wrexham County Borough Council

Design Team: Ryan Glynn, Cushman and Wakefield  
Shaun Lyons, Exterior Architecture  
Matt Thomas, ESA Architecture  
Jonathan Adams, ESA Architecture  
Drew Lowe, SHR

### **DCFW Design Review Panel**

Chair: Ewan Jones

Panel: Simon Power  
Steve Smith  
Max Hampton, DCFW, Design Advisor

## 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.

Jonathan Adams is a DCFW Design Review panel member and was attending the meeting as part of the design team for the project. The declaration was noted but there was not considered to be a conflict of interest.