



# Design Review Report

Former Taff Vale Centre, Pontypridd

**DCFW Ref: N127**

Meeting of 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2016



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

### Review Status

### PUBLIC

Meeting date	22 <sup>nd</sup> September 2016
Issue date	6 <sup>th</sup> October 2016
Scheme location	Pontypridd
Scheme description	Mixed use commercial
Scheme reference number	127
Planning status	Outline planning application

## Declarations of Interest

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Mark Hallett employs Hoare Lea on a separate development. All present confirmed that they were content to proceed following this declaration. A further declaration noted that the scheme was being presented by Alan Francis, Gaunt Francis Architects. Alan was the Chair of the Design Commission for 10 years until 31 March 2016. All present confirmed that they were content to proceed following this declaration.

## Consultations to Date

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This is the first time that DCFW has reviewed proposals for this scheme.

## The Proposals

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This proposed redevelopment of the previously developed, but now vacant, site of the former Taff Vale Shopping Centre, comprises a new build, mixed use development providing predominantly B1 space but with ancillary A3, D1 and D2 uses. The scheme will include the construction of three buildings over a basement level, with the buildings ranging in height from two storeys at the northern end to five at the southern end. It is intended that a basement will be constructed across the entire site providing car parking, servicing and accommodation for associated plant and other infrastructure.

## Main Points

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### Town Centre Masterplan

Proposals for this site form part of a series of interventions in the town centre to improve and enhance its potential for success as a strategic town in the South Wales Valleys. The communication of this bigger picture would be enhanced by a visual plan of the town centre that identifies what has been done, what is planned and where there are further

opportunities for the future. This will help to set the scene in relation to uses, movement, context and public realm for this and other developments in the town centre.

This is an important site for the town centre due to its scale, prominence and location on the riverside and the positive influence that the local authority can have in contributing to the regeneration of the town centre by bringing this site forward. The ambition underpinning the proposals is to be welcomed. Design quality is therefore paramount to support the ambitions of the local authority for a genuinely transformational project. This must be reflected in both the buildings and the public realm throughout all stages of the project including procurement.

### **Outline application**

A planning application has been submitted however there remain a number of unknown factors. Combined with the fact of that this is an outline submission, with all matters reserved, there are a number of items that cannot yet be reviewed in sufficient detail. The main points below are based on the information available at the time of review and acknowledge that there may be changes as tenants are determined and the design process evolves. The Design Commission would like to see the scheme again when the proposals are further developed.

### **History**

The history of the site is important and the presentation of previous schemes for development was illuminating. The move away from a large commercial retail development provides the opportunity for the proposed development to be more responsive to the unique features of the site and the character of the town.

### **Public realm**

The space around the buildings is particularly important for this development as it will form part of the public realm.

The proposed development of three separate blocks make a bold move in shifting away from completing the street frontage on to Taff Street to creating areas of public realm around the buildings. A clear intention and strategy for the public realm is required to ensure that these become positive and purposeful spaces rather than left over spaces. If the strategy is to draw people through to the riverside, this needs to be worked through in the arrangement of uses, glimpses of activity, location of entrances, hierarchy of spaces, siting of cafes/restaurant units and associated external seating and establishing as much continuity in the riverside walk as possible given the constraints.

The strategy for the public realm is not yet clear resulting in some nervousness about the spaces around the buildings. Such a strategy would inform the treatment of buildings at ground floor, location of uses and entrances. The interaction between the buildings and the public space will be critical to ensure high quality inclusive and welcoming spaces. Items such as servicing and waste disposal and ventilation grilles should also be fully considered.

The potential for a footbridge that connects the site to the other side of the river would be an attribute for the town and would help to connect the town centre with the riverside, the lido and Ynysangharad Park. If the bridge proposal does come forward

there would be benefit in considering how the riverside walk would respond to this including whether projecting out over the river as an option to increase the space available.

The nature and feel of the public realm should also form part of the strategy. This should include how will it reflect the character and nature of Pontypridd and avoid being too corporate whilst being of a high quality. The More London Riverside precedent, whilst useful, is different in character and context and in terms footfall levels to this site.

The south west corner of the site is rightly identified as an important point of arrival at the development for pedestrians coming from the train station and within the town centre. It is positive that consideration is being given to how treatment of the public realm in this location should be continued across the road.

Soft landscaping is currently lacking and could be helpful to contribute to increase urban greening, to soften the space and screen particular views such as the Gas Road car park.

Inclusive design of the public realm has rightly been identified as a challenge due to the level changes across the site. Further work in consultation with access groups is needed to develop the most appropriate solution to movement through the site.

## **Uses**

The final occupants of the buildings are currently unknown but the proposal is for office space and some public uses within building C, which will support greater footfall in the town centre, whilst the cafe and restaurant uses will enliven the ground floors and provide the potential for evening uses. Kiosks to populate the space, or small scale ground floor units, could provide space for start up businesses which would create more diversity within the space and could feed into other empty space within the town centre.

## **Form, mass and scale**

No justification or background was provided for the amount of floor space proposed and whether there is sufficient need within the town for this much space. This rationale would support the reasoning for the scale of the proposed buildings.

The scale of building C is appropriate in relation to the listed chapel and this is demonstrated in the model. The sketches, sections and model provided in the review were more helpful in exploring and demonstrating the scale of development than the visuals provided in the pre-review information. Further exploration of the relationship between the proposed development and the buildings on Taff Street is required to demonstrate that this relationship is appropriate.

The brief for the buildings has been fluid as the proposed end users have yet to be identified. Once this becomes more established a review of building C to check the appropriateness of the form of the building may be required. A rationale for the design of the building is needed in relation to the context, uses and cost constraints. Currently the curved form of the building could be at odds with the proposed uses and deliverability within a budget is yet to be demonstrated.

Overall the scale of the development seems to be appropriate given the limited view points from which the whole development will be seen.

The transparent ends of the buildings work well and the articulation of these elevations is critical. The use of brick and dark metal cladding can bring richness to the buildings but quality of materials and detailing is needed to ensure this.

## Next Steps

This is a positive and confident approach to an important scheme for the town centre, and its ambition is welcomed by the Commission. It is important that design quality is locked in and followed through to the detailed design stage. Further clarity on strategic principles and objectives such as the public realm strategy would help with this.

The Design Commission would like to see the scheme again as proposals are finalised and the detailed design is developed.

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

## Attendees

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Design team:	Alan Francis, Gaunt Francis Romy Franke, Gaunt Francis Manuel Lago, Gaunt Francis Wynne Harris, Hoare Lea
Local Authority:	Jim Bailey, RCTCBC Simon Gale, RCTCBC Andrea Saunders, RCTCBC David Powell, RCTCBC
Design Review Panel:	
Chair	Jen Heal, Design Advisor, DCFW
Lead panellist	Mark Lawton
Panel	Mike Gwyther-Jones Richard Woods Mark Hallett Amanda Spence, Design Advisor, DCFW Carole-Anne Davies, Chief Executive, DCFW

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