

THE PIERHEAD BUILDING, CARDIFF

Design & Access and Justification Statement for alterations to accommodate flexible use as Interpretative Centre, Events Venue and in Support of Assembly Business

INTRODUCTION

The process of developing a scheme for Pierhead began in 2007 with the commissioning of a study to determine the potential for future use of the building. Among the requirements of the study were the following:

- 1) To prepare a feasibility report on the future use to be made of the building.
- 2) To provide recommendations on options for the use of the building, and the programme for major spaces, including the interpretative framework and the ways in which this might be presented.
- 3) To plan options for new uses for the building, showing how different partners may be combined and where decisions of priority need to be made.

In response to this brief, the following work was carried out:

- § A heritage baseline assessment of Pierhead.
- § A review of the range of spaces and facilities available.
- § Consultation with stakeholders and responsible officers within the Assembly.
- § The seeking of views of Assembly Members.
- § Consultation with potential partners and users beyond the Assembly.
- § Preliminary consultation with planning authorities regarding the use of the building

PIERHEAD AND ITS PRIOR USES

The Pierhead Building is listed as Grade I and situated between the entrances of the former Bute East and Bute West Docks in Cardiff Bay. An exceptional Victorian building it reflects the confidence of the period and the wealth associated with the trade routes between Cardiff, Wales and the world in its flamboyant architectural detail. It makes an important contribution to the historical and visual dockscape of Cardiff.

The Pierhead building is located at the heart of the Cardiff Bay regeneration area and faces South over the harbour. Until recently it has been open to the public as an interpretation and exhibition space for the Assembly and sponsored organisations and offers great potential as a key historic orientation point for visitors to the political, commercial and leisure attractions in its vicinity.

The Pierhead Building was constructed in 1897 and was originally built as offices for the Bute Dock Company, which then became the Cardiff Railway Company before the end of the century. A coat of arms on the building's façade bears the company's motto 'wrth ddwr a than' (by fire and water) encapsulating the elements creating the steam power which transformed Wales. It continued as the

administrative offices for the port of Cardiff in 1947, until the development and regeneration of the Cardiff Bay area took off in the 1990s.

Grosvenor Waterside has owned the freehold of the Pierhead building since 2000. The National Assembly took a short lease from Associated British Ports in 1998 and then purchased the leasehold in 2002. Considerable capital works were carried out by the Assembly on the restoration of the building at this time, which included restoring the main hall area, re-wiring and general decoration.

The plan of the building is rectangular in perimeter, but internally quite complex and divided into three distinct areas, running over three storeys.

The main function hall on the ground floor has a lay light running from behind the clock tower south to north along the centre of the building. Previously the hall housed a permanent exhibition giving the public an insight into the workings of the National Assembly for Wales. This was moved to the new Senedd building in April 2007. Since that time the main function hall has provided a large space for meetings or receptions. The building has continued to be accessible to the public primarily to see a series of temporary exhibitions, created by others and hosted by the National Assembly - for instance the photographic exhibition of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. Staff report continued public interest in the building, and attendances have dipped little from previous levels.

From the main entrance, there is a staircase leading to the former Port Manager's suite of offices, which run across the southern end of the building. In the central part of the first floor there are two main rooms and until recently these were used for educational purposes.

The third distinct area is the north end of the building, which is built over effectively four floors (Ground, mezzanine, first and second), this housing mainly offices, the three-storey safe, and kitchen and toilet facilities. The public is restricted from accessing the upper floors, although the staircase can be seen when entering the building.

When considering the future use of Pierhead, the importance of the building's heritage and the opportunities that this presents for interpretation were a key consideration. The building is clearly popular and people are interested in it and in its stories. As the continued level of public admission since April 2007 shows, it is clear that many people really do want to 'take a peek' at this interesting building.

A key challenge in developing the Pierhead scheme was to find a use going forward in which the building remained accessible to the public, thereby satisfying this desire without removing options for more organised activities by the Assembly - some of which will mean closing the building to the public on a temporary basis.

DEVELOPING A SCHEME FOR FUTURE USE

The thinking on the future use of Pierhead has been developed in response to the constraints and opportunities of the building, and the aspiration of the Assembly to identify a coherent and exciting future for Pierhead while retaining overall control of and responsibility for the building.

From consultations with the Assembly and other stakeholders, it is evident that Pierhead offers opportunities for a range of potential users, from the Assembly itself to community groups, cultural organisations, and the general public. With a mix of large spaces and smaller rooms, the building lends itself to a variety of applications, and this has been reinforced by the interest in the building from the Assembly and from external stakeholders.

The scheme being proposed for Pierhead is based on the mixed use of the spaces within the building, with priority on retaining flexibility for the spaces, and the building in particular. Underlying the scheme is recognition that Pierhead is a place to ask questions as well as to provide information, and that the activities that take place in the building need to relate as much to the future of Wales as the present and the past. To this end, the proposed Pierhead scheme has been built upon three main principles:

- § To inform
- § To involve
- § To inspire

Guided by these principles, a lightweight and flexible scheme is proposed which respects the architectural integrity of the building and which fulfills three major requirements: the need to offer interpretation to visitors; the requirement to engage community groups and to run a programme of events; and the requirement to support Assembly business.

Interpretation

There is a continuing public interest in the history and stories of the building and a desire to have a look inside. The Pierhead scheme aims to develop these stories into an interpretative experience that helps to expose the history of the building for visitors, and to explore the context in Welsh and world history for the building. There is the opportunity to demonstrate the way in which the activities that had their focus in Pierhead, and Cardiff Bay in general, have resonated across Wales, and to offer an insight into the diversity of people connected with these stories. The Pierhead scheme has been developed and constructed to provide a rich experience for each visitor while maintaining the flexibility of the space for other uses.

The interpretation scheme for Pierhead has been developed in association with HKD Associates, a company specialising in museum exhibition and design. It is light-touch. Given the proposed mix use of the building and the need to be flexible in catering to different types of activities, the approach to interpretation has been to create default exhibitry that in most cases can be easily 'dismantled' if the space is required for a different type of event, or if other stakeholder groups wish to bring in their own content. The proposed forms for the interpretation experience were guided by the following:

- § The interpretative content should be dynamic with a degree of active interface with visitors (the requirement to ask as well as to tell).
- § The interpretation scheme should have relevance to all of Wales and not just Cardiff, and should provide opportunity to engage audiences throughout the country.
- § There should be the opportunity to change or update the default exhibitry so that there is ongoing relevance to Assembly business and current events, and

that the content continues to resonate with Assembly's aspiration of considering a future for Wales.

There are four main threads to the interpretative experience:

- 1) To answer basic questions about Pierhead itself, including its architecture and its uses over time.
- 2) To tell the story of the building as a 'witness to history' in the development of Wales.
- 3) To showcase the 'great and the good' who have made an important contribution to the development of Wales over time, across political, social, economic, cultural and other platforms.
- 4) To encourage democracy and citizenship in Wales, and to provide visitors with a sense of empowerment in shaping the future of the country.

These four elements collectively provide a cohesive experience for visitors. They will be supported by visitor services staff and printed material to assist visitors in orientating themselves with the building. The interpretation scheme has been developed with full consideration of access requirements, and material will be presented in a various ways to ensure that the building speaks to as wide an audience as possible.

Programme of Events

One of the main messages that emerged from discussions with the Assembly and external stakeholders, and from early work on the aspirations for Pierhead, related to the purpose of the building, and how it is used. While Pierhead is a place where visitors can dip in and out and engage with interpretative material, the building is not a dedicated visitor attraction. Rather, it is first and foremost a place 'where things can happen'. To this end, the Pierhead scheme has been based on the need to develop a range of spaces in which can be hosted a robust programme of events, typically with a public profile.

It is envisaged that the events programme will have three main components:

1) Events in support of the overall Pierhead mission

There are specific events that will contribute to the Pierhead mission, specifically the need to 'inform, involve and inspire' audiences in making a future for Wales. It is expected that such events might take the form of debates, lectures and presentations, managed either by the Assembly or through external groups such as the Wales Futures Network.

2) Events hosted by the Assembly

The Senedd is presently used for a range of events including recitals, launches, cultural presentations, trade shows and discussion forums. However, the Senedd is not ideal for many of these types of events. There are limitations imposed by its shape, and it lacks the infrastructure and facilities to stage and effectively manage such activities, particularly where the event format requires a top table or a panel of speakers. Pierhead offers a range of spaces that are far more suited to these and other such events.

3) Events in support of external stakeholders

From early discussions with external stakeholders such as Merchant Navy Association, the Butetown History and Arts Centre and others about ways in which they might contribute to the project, it is clear that there are many community groups and other organisations, in Cardiff and throughout Wales, that would benefit from spaces where they can put on events, host activities, and present their work to a wider audience.

In addition to events to do with the Assembly, Members also sponsor activities by community groups and organizations, and these also take place in the Senedd. However, there are the same limitations of infrastructure and facilities, and the team that operates public and event access to the Senedd is unable to respond to all of the substantial number of such events that Members wish to sponsor. Pierhead will reduce the pressure on the Senedd, and more fully engage with external stakeholders in providing opportunities for them to present their work.

Developing the infrastructure to be able to host events at Pierhead is at the core of the proposed scheme as the identity of the building will be defined as much by what happens there as by its architectural features and the default interpretative material. It is envisaged that all events, whether internal or with through external stakeholders, will be sponsored by Assembly Members. There will be strict criteria to ensure that range of events is driven by the work of the Assembly and members, and by through partnership with organisations engaged in issues and debates shared with the Assembly, so that the events programme as a whole contributes to the overall aspirations for Pierhead

Support of Assembly Business

In addition to the events programme, Pierhead needs to support with Assembly business and the work of Assembly Members. There is an overlap between Assembly business and the events programme. However, whereas the aforementioned events tend to have more of a public profile, Assembly business is geared towards those activities which are internal and which support Members and Assembly staff in the running and management of the Assembly.

There is already pressure on the Senedd and other spaces in the Assembly for the hosting of activities and events, including those in support of Assembly business such as meetings, receptions for visiting dignitaries, discussion forums, meet-and-greet activities and catered functions including dinners. The team that operates public and event access to the Senedd is presently unable to respond to all of the substantial number of events sponsored by Assembly Members and organised by a wide variety of groups and organisations that might take place in the existing facilities. Pierhead offers solutions to this problem by being used as an event and business space within the Assembly domain.

THE REQUIREMENT FOR FLEXIBILITY

The Pierhead scheme is based on a mixed use of space within the building. There are operational constraints in the management of events and activities within the defined spaces, and in catering to different types of audiences and users. The development of the scheme has therefore been governed by the requirement for flexibility.

The scheme is based on the development of four main spaces:

- 1) A Reception area and Orientation Gallery
- 2) The Function Hall
- 3) A suite of three Showrooms
- 4) A Futures Gallery

Provision is also made for functional meeting and break-out space in support of events and Assembly business.

It is the intention that each these spaces will be open to the public at set times, and when there are no events being held. Each space will contain default exhibitry and interpretative material for visitors, based on the four threads delineated earlier.

The Orientation Gallery will house a permanent exhibit that answers fundamental questions about the Pierhead building. For the other areas, the interpretation will be light-touch and will be designed so that it can be easily stored during times when the spaces are used for other types of events. So far as possible, the spaces have been designed so that they are kept clear of permanently installed exhibitions or elements - so as to facilitate a range of ways of setting up the space.

THE PIERHEAD SCHEME

The proposed scheme has been developed in collaboration with HKD Associates, who have advised on the exhibition design and the interpretation scheme, and Paul Covell Theatre and Lighting Consultants, who have worked on the infrastructure required to carry interpretation content and to host events and activities.

G1: Reception

The design of the Reception area is minimal in order to showcase the space and architectural features, particularly the mosaic floor and the decorative tiling.

The Reception area will feature a bespoke reception desk which will be manned by visitor services staff. It is an area where the public can collect information to help them navigate around the building, and where people attending events can be directed to specific spaces.

The space will also feature a digital screen showing information about what is on at Pierhead, wall graphics based on the Pierhead strapline of 'Inform, Involve, Inspire' and an audio 'listening post' which will contain general information about the architectural features of the space and its historic use.

G3: Orientation Gallery

Early consultation work indicated that Pierhead was a building that visitors would like to dip into, and that there were fundamental questions about the history of the building. The Orientation Gallery will house a permanent exhibition that answers these questions. This Gallery is adjacent to the Reception and so even if other spaces within Pierhead are closed or being used

for events, it is still possible for visitors to gain a perspective on the role of Pierhead in the development of Cardiff, and Wales in general.

The interpretation scheme for the Orientation Gallery is comprised of several elements including:

- § Graphic wallpaper providing information about Pierhead.
- § A video installation showing the development of Cardiff Bay.
- § A tactile display unit showcasing the features of the building.
- § A listening post to provide information about the use of the room in an audio format.

A seating unit will be provided in the circular area at the rear of the gallery.

G6/G3/G7: Function Hall and Adjacent Rooms

The Function Hall is the focal point of the building and the most important in terms of the types of uses to which it lends itself. These include:

- § Conferences and seminars
- § Lectures and public debates
- § Receptions
- § Trade events and launches
- § Workshops
- § Recitals and performances
- § Dinners

For times when there are no events or activities programmed for the Function Hall, the space will be open to the public, and there is the requirement for default interpretation in order to engage visitors. The scheme for the Function Hall therefore has two parts: firstly there is the infrastructure necessary to be able to stage events; and secondly there are the interpretative elements for general visitors.

1) Seating unit(s)

Seating units are required in order to host seminars, presentations and other such events, and are a distinct part of the infrastructure. The considerations in developing seating options were that the seating needed to be elegant, that it complemented the architecture of the main hall, and that it was sufficiently flexible to cater to limitations of the hall space, and specifically the compromises in line-of-sight caused by the four large pillars.

The proposed seating takes the form of free-standing retractable units at the side of the hall. These units are made up of five segments, each of which contains three-tier platforms and which can be retracted individually so that there are various configurations from a theatre-in-the-round format to bleacher style seating. For informal events, participants can sit on the platforms themselves. For more formal events, the platforms can be used as a base for chairs.

Retractable units would be backed up by loose seating brought out for each event as necessary. For certain formats, loose seating would be used exclusively and the seating units retracted. The units have a high-spec finish

and have been designed so that when they are fully retracted their tops have functional application such as display space or as a serving platform for drinks and buffets.

For the initial phase of the Pierhead scheme, seating units will be installed on one side of the Function Hall only. The requirement for seating units on the other side will be determined on the basis of the types of events held, and the requirement for additional flexibility.

2) AV infrastructure

In order to stage a variety of events in the Function Hall, the scheme proposes installing infrastructure for sound, lighting and projection.

The initial proposal was to suspend a central rig/gantry in the central lightwell area on which would be held AV equipment. However, it was felt that this option was overly intrusive for the space, and so the infrastructure has been simplified to include the following:

§ Projection

The scheme includes a projection system for the Function Hall, comprised of six projectors, with the east and west elevation windows used as projection spaces. The projectors will be suspended from the flat paneled soffit of the ceiling above the crown of the arcade arches on either side of the lightwell, with minimal visual impact. Each of the six windows will house a double set of motorised blinds for blackout and projection.

The projection capability is a feature of the Function Hall. It will carry the interpretation content (refer below) and there will therefore be no requirement for other forms of physical interpretation that will take up space. The projectors can also be used in support of events and activities, providing opportunities for the creative interpretation of events.

§ Lighting

A dedicated theatre lighting system with directional spotlights has been designed to illuminate the main performance spaces in the middle of the hall, and in areas where a speaker podium might be positioned. The lights will be suspended on simple, short lighting tracks on either side of the hall between the windows, with additional spotlights at fixed points in other areas of the hall. The spotlights themselves will be colour coordinated with walls for minimal visual impact.

A general lighting scheme for the main hall is proposed based on 'rings of light' which are contemporary and have been selected in order to ensure that the architectural integrity of the hall is maintained.

The scheme also includes LED lights as part of the blind housing in order to be able to provide a nighttime lighting effect for the window areas which can be viewed from outside. This is presently being tested.

§ Sound

Mounted on each of the six blind housings are speakers that can carry an audio soundscape to accompany projected displays, and which can be used in support of events and activities. These speakers will be supported by stand-alone speakers that can be brought in as necessary.

The AV scheme is inclusive of cameras that mounted on two of the blind housings so that events and presentations can be recorded. Also included is loose equipment such as microphones, staging units, lecterns and other items necessary for the staging of events and activities.

The AV system for the Function Hall will be controlled through an AMX system that integrates projectors, blinds, lights and audio. A control room in Lift Room (G7) will house hardware for the running of the AV system

3) Interpretation

The Function Hall is an important interpretation space within Pierhead and default content has been designed for when the Hall is not used for events and is open to the general public. Interpretative content is based on the use of the AV and projection system so that there is no major physical content that needs to be packed away.

There are two main forms of interpretation for the Function Hall:

§ Projected display

A video installation will be commissioned that makes use of the six projectors in the Hall. The theme of the video will be Pierhead looking out as a witness to developments in Cardiff Bay, through until the present day, and will include archival photographs and film footage. The video will last for approximately 4-5 minutes and will play periodically during general visitor opening hours.

§ Interactive voting on Pierhead Points

Pierhead will be a place for asking as much as telling, and where visitors will be encouraged to form an opinion and provide a response. It is a venue for discussion and debate. The planned interpretation includes an interactive voting system based on 'Pierhead Points'. These will be questions relevant to subjects being debated by Assembly Members, and responses will serve to inform policy. In the Hall there will be two bespoke interactive voting booths which will allow visitors to provide responses. These booths will be mobile and can be stored when not needed. Those not able to visit Pierhead can vote on the Pierhead website, or on handheld units. The results of the voting will be projected live onto one or more of the screens in the main hall, together with content relevant to the subject under discussion.

Tied to the operation and management of the Function Hall are rooms G4, G7 and G9.

Room G4 has been allocated as support space for events, and for the operation of Pierhead in general. This space will be used as a security station, as an administrative space for the management of events and activities, and as a cloakroom. There is access from either Reception or the Function Hall.

Room G7 is lobby space and a lift room providing access to the first floor for disabled and other visitors. Space within this room will also be used to create a control room in which will be the AV/IT control equipment for the management of events in the Function Hall.

Room G9 is vault space which will be used for the storage of loose equipment including tables, rostrums, chairs, staging, etc. At present there is a heavy and unsightly barrier limiting access to the vault (which is down a short flight of stairs). The scheme proposes to replace the existing barrier with a trap-door structure in line with the aim of preserving the architectural integrity of the building.

F2/F3/F4: Showrooms

The suite of three showrooms on the first floor centres on the vestibule (F2) and offices of the Chief Docks Manager (F4) and Assistant Docks Manager (F3).

Room F2 will serve as a lobby. It will contain a large, archive quality display case that will hold artifacts and exhibits. This display case will be the main object-driven interpretative element in the scheme. The contents of the case are presently being researched and collated.

Room F4 is the premiere showroom in Pierhead. The focus for the default interpretation content will be a bespoke table of oak and Welsh slate on which will be a series of 16 digital photoframes showcasing biographies of Welsh heroes. It will be accompanied by a flat screen which will provide information on how the heroes were selected and by whom.

Walls will be decorated by wallpaper printed with the names of approximately 100 of 'the great and the good' of Wales, and a subtle soundscape will recite this list of names at times when the room is open to the public.

Room F4 will be used for high level meetings, and for receptions and dinners. The digital photoframes will retract into the table so that it can be used for such events.

Room F4 will also have a listening post to provide information about the use of the room in an audio format.

Room F3 will be simply decorated in the style of a library. It will be a reflective space and will include a desk, seats and bookshelves. Telephones that contain a selection of oral histories that can be listened to by visitors.

F6/F9: Futures Gallery

The Futures Gallery is being developed as blank space in which external stakeholders and community groups can bring in their own exhibitions and other forms of content. Pierhead will provide exhibition infrastructure to allow such

groups to display their content, or to stage activities. The infrastructure will include display panels, several of which will hold audio content, and cases.

A default exhibition is being developed based on the theme of 'Welsh Democracy and Citizenship'. This will tie to the activities of the Assembly and will encourage visitors to become more engaged in the making of a future for Wales.

The Gallery will include a circular 'digital tickertape' display that will run through the Gallery and the adjacent lightwell area. A console will allow visitors to type in messages or comments that relate to the exhibition being held, thereby providing the opportunity for engagement and for responses.

There are enabling works proposed for the Futures Gallery, including the removal of a wall in order to open up the space. This work is necessary in order to accommodate the digital tickertape display, and to improve the proportions of the room so that it is more suited to exhibition and display activity.

Access to the Futures Gallery will be through Room F6, with the opening up of a doorway that has previously been sealed.

F10: Meeting and Breakout Areas

Also included in the Pierhead scheme is room F10. The intention is to use this space for meetings and as breakout space in support of conferences, seminars and other such events. It is function space and there are limited works required outside of stripping out of superfluous fittings. A flexible partition will be introduced so that the room can be divided when necessary.

MEETING ASPIRATIONS THROUGH ENABLING WORKS

One of the aspirations in developing the scheme is to do justice to the building, not only in terms of interpretation material and the information provided about the building, but also in the enabling and building works needed to carry the scheme. Throughout its life, the building has been subject to adaptations and interventions, and its inherent character has been compromised as a result. As part of the enabling works, the intention is to 'make good' on the building, and to put the architectural integrity of the building at the forefront of the scheme.

As part of the process of 'making good', the enabling works include:

- § Stripping out of existing interventions such as security systems and scanners, existing reception desk, tiered benching in the first floor rooms, tea-point in the showrooms, barriers to main hall vault, and outdated display panels - most of which serve to mask the building and its features.
- § Addressing faults within the building such as cracks in floors, damp walls, and poor finishes.
- § Developing a mechanical and electrical scheme that removes many of the existing and unsightly services including visible cable runs, security screens and cameras, inadequate light fixtures, heating/cooling units and other.
- § Restoration of wooden floors and paneling.
- § Removal of obtrusive signage and design of a more elegant and subtle signage strategy for the building.
- § Provision of attention to ongoing maintenance of the building.

§ Developing a coherent lighting scheme throughout the building that serves to showcase the building, its exhibits and its uses.

Interpretation, signage, graphics and installations will be relatively light-touch. The objective is to showcase the building and so far as possible to let it speak for itself, giving visitors the opportunity to engage with its attributes and features in a visual and tactile manner.

EXTERNAL WORKS

It is recognised that the access to the building is compromised by a lack of signage, information and a 'sense of arrival'. Options are being considered for ways in which this can be improved. However, such external works are not part of the present Pierhead scheme and will be treated as a later phase, with a separate, future application.

DCA Consultants