

Design Review Report

Upper Cosmeston Farm, Penarth

DCFW Ref: N194

Meeting of 21st of January 2021



Review Status

Meeting date	21 st of January 2021
Issue date	XX February 2021
Scheme location	Penarth, Vale of Glamorgan
Scheme description	Residential/Mixed use masterplan
Scheme reference number	N194
Planning status	Outline application submitted

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.

Consultations to Date

DCFW was consulted by the Welsh Government during the early stages of masterplan development for the site in March 2019. The project was brought forward for Design Review in June 2019, and a DCFW workshop was held with the team in December 2019. Important and fundamental questions were raised in all sessions, given the stated ambition and Government policy and legislation. These are referred to in this report, which should be read in conjunction with previous reports and correspondence.

The Proposals

The proposal is for the predominantly residential development of an expansion site south of Penarth, situated between the Severn Estuary and Cosmeston Lakes, Vale of Glamorgan. The site is currently green fields but is identified as a potential housing site in the Local Development Plan. The site is owned by Welsh Government. It benefits from views across the estuary and back to Penarth Head and is close to Cosmeston Lakes park. It also adjoins the Wales Coastal Path. The masterplan will include up to 576 dwellings, seeking 50% affordable homes, a primary school as part of Section 106 contribution, public open space, and community facilities.

Main Points

Presentation

The design team chose to present the scheme to the panel from first principles, despite the Commission's familiarity with the proposals from previous meetings. Due to time constraints resulting from the extended presentation, significant elements of the scheme were not afforded the attention they need, not least the Vision, the Design Code and its status. The Commission would welcome further opportunities to review these critical aspects which set the foundation and key parameters for the proposals.

The material submitted for review included the entire suite of planning application documents. It would help if supporting information was kept to key summary documents to allow a focussed discussion. Further reference to DCFW's guidance on the materials which are most useful for submission to Review would be helpful. This proposal is significant and, given the role of the Welsh Government in leading by example on such development, in future more time would be beneficial for review.

Context

The Commission is supportive of the principle of development and intended uses of this site in Penarth. The linkages, paths and supporting networks identified within the proposals could be very beneficial to the broader Penarth area, and the plan to achieve 50% affordable housing on the site, as well as achieving zero operational carbon energy in use is entirely supportable.

However, there are fundamental issues with the current proposals that remain to be addressed if the aims are to be met and the proposals are to be successful.

Building height

During the review, it was stated that the local planning authority has received negative feedback regarding the height of some buildings within the proposals. If the proposal is exemplary due to its height, it is important that the reasons why are clearly communicated.

If higher buildings will allow for the population density that is deemed necessary to sustain and support a shop, or community facility, it is important that this is clearly explained.

The broad principle of a high-quality taller building or buildings is not regarded as a problem. If it were tied more clearly to potential views, use of the topography and support of site density, and if it demonstrates the necessary quality, it could be justified. Currently, the reasoning behind the inclusion of tall buildings, their design and location within the scheme are not sufficiently explained.

Any taller, visually prominent elements of the development must be of exceptional quality but, with the future developer as yet unknown, this is difficult to ensure at this stage.

Relationship to Coastal Path

The Commission is concerned about the lack of integration of the coastal path into the masterplan. The proposals seem to turn their back on the sea, and this element of the design requires further development to realise the value of the coastal asset.

Position of School

The Commission is aware that there was an unwillingness to review the position of the proposed school following the matter being raised at previous Design Reviews.

Although the team provided reasons for the location, the Commission suggests the location of the school should be reconsidered. It remains the primary opportunity for community development on the site, an opportunity which needs to be maximised. The school location is a key strategic decision and alternative locations should be tested to optimise the potential to bring existing and new communities and facilities together, providing a focus for communal activity within the development. It would also be more convenient in terms of prioritising better active travel access.

The Commission is aware of site and policy constraints that exist. However, with Welsh Government as the site owner, with the ambitions for schools and for placemaking in Wales, it is disappointing that these avenues for creative dialogue with all relevant parties to address these constraints and contribute to better placemaking, remain unexplored.

Relationships between backs and front of development

The relationships between the perceived front and backs of buildings is unresolved. The rear of some buildings face the frontages of other properties, and it is unclear as yet how this will be successfully resolved.

Future home/flexible/working

It is important to consider how people will live in the future, given considerable changes in live/work patterns and the likelihood of the need for much more flexible spaces for home working. Allied to this is the importance of easy access to outdoor green space from dwellings. How this will work is unclear in the current proposals, including how any shared/communal spaces will be managed and maintained.

Active Travel

The proposal remains a very private vehicle-focussed, and it is unclear how the proposals will become more active travel-focused as it is developed further. While a sum of money has been identified for sustainable transport the details of how this will be used effectively to encourage greater active travel and a change in travel behaviours is unclear.

Net Zero Carbon Development

The Commission is supportive of the principle that this site will be a net-zero carbon for operational energy, but embodied energy must also be considered and firm, measurable contractual targets set if this is to be an exemplary project. The narrative around the proposals signals that net zero is a commitment, but there is currently no clear set of targets to explain how it will be achieved.

Framework

The approach to disposal of the site for development by other organisations remains unclear along with details of what controls will be in place to ensure that the positive aspects of these proposals are delivered. These are important aspects in delivering the stated aspirations of the project and need to be explicit.

Fundamental Concerns

The Commission raised a number of fundamental concerns about this project in December 2019 and has to date seen no evidence that the masterplan has been meaningfully altered to take account of and respond to those concerns.

The scheme has a scale and importance that merits further debate, and there are critical parts of the proposal which were not discussed, such as the Design Code and Vision.

The Welsh Government, as client and land-owner, has a particular responsibility to deliver exemplary development that meets the standards and ambitions set out in policy and legislation which it advocates for others and this scheme must be exemplary in every aspect. It is unclear which elements of the proposed development will make it distinctive

from other residential development, and we are not currently confident that it will result in an exemplar of residential-led placemaking.

In consultation with the Commission in March 2019, Design Review in June 2019, and a DCFW workshop with the team in December 2019 fundamental concerns were raised regarding elements of the approach to the project. We are now a year on and based on the planning application materials available, there has been no change that would enable the scheme to meet the stated aspirations. A new approach is needed, ensuring that there is a clear client brief and design team that can positively address the site constraints, fully test new ideas, and find new ways to do things in order to deliver something better than the ordinary.

We have considered this report very carefully looking back at earlier correspondence and reports which are appended here. Based on these and the materials now submitted for review in January 2021, we are unable to support the proposals as they have been submitted for outline planning consent, which is in our view a premature step.

We therefore append to this report our earlier correspondence and recommend that the approach is revisited so as to take the steps needed to ensure the proposals can respond to the stated aspirations. The Commission remains willing to facilitate further discussion and to assist all parties in doing so.

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: 4th Floor, Cambrian Buildings, Mount Stuart Square, Cardiff CF10 5FL T: 029 2045 1964 E 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:	Lydia Haskey, Welsh Government Sophie Beynon Davies, Welsh Government
Architect/Design Team:	Tanya Simeonova, Austin-Smith: Lord Martin Roe, Austin-Smith: Lord Catherine Cosgrove, Austin-Smith: Lord
Planning Consultant:	Barrie Davies, Asbri Planning Emma Harding, Asbri Planning
Local Authority:	Robert Lankshear, Vale of Glamorgan Council Vicky Robinson, Vale of Glamorgan Council Ian Robinson, Vale of Glamorgan Council

Chair:

Ewan Jones

Lead Panellist:

Toby Adam

Design Review Panel:

Kedrick Davies

Carole-Anne Davies, Chief Executive, DCFW

Jen Heal, Design Advisor, DCFW

Efa Lois, Place Advisor, DCFW