



DESIGN
COMMISSION
FOR WALES
COMISIWN
DYLUNIO
CYMRU

Design Review Report

Willowbrook West, Cardiff

DCFW Ref: 106

Meeting of 8th April 2016



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

Review Status

CONFIDENTIAL

Meeting date	8 th April 2016
Issue date	22 nd April 2016
Scheme location	Willowbrook Road, St Mellons, Cardiff
Scheme description	Residential Development
Scheme reference number	106
Planning status	Pre-application

Declarations of Interest

None.

Consultations to Date

This is the first opportunity that the Design Commission for Wales has had to review proposals for this site and the first of the housing partnership scheme sites to be reviewed.

It is understood that consultation with the local community is due to take place soon.

The Proposals

The proposal is for 193 homes including a mixture of flats and one to four bedroom houses. 61 of the units will be affordable and 132 will be for open market sale. This development is part of a housing partnership between Cardiff Council and Wates Homes which includes a significant investment from the Council. There are over 40 sites identified across the capital city with the potential to provide a total of 1,500 homes over ten years, in three phases.

Main Points

Approach

Cardiff Council's partnership with Wates represents a shift in approach to addressing housing need in the city, coupled with a clear ambition to achieve a better standard of development and quality of residential design. The Design Commission is very supportive of the principle of this approach. The following provides a summary of the key points addressed during the review and should be considered as the proposals are developed.

The concept

The presentation provided a useful background to the overall scheme, the thinking behind the proposed layout as well as the ways in which the proposals have positively progressed since the pre-review information was submitted. There was evidence of a design concept and rationale relating to movement, retention of existing trees and the creation of a heart to the development with density reducing further out from the centre of the development.

However, some of the clarity of that concept has been lost in the development of the layout. In particular the density of development is concentrated in the south east of the site rather than around the central space and the contribution of existing trees, hedgerows and field patterns is diminished by the number of trees that are to be lost or which are no longer in the public realm. There is a need to identify the strongest design concept and ensure that it is well executed rather than being compromised by conflicting ambitions.

Arrival and edges

The proposed layout positively addresses Crickhowell Road as the main access point to the site. However the same approach has not been taken to address Willowbrook Drive resulting in a length of side boundary facing the road which has the potential to attract graffiti as can be seen on other side fences along Willowbrook Road. The opportunity to improve the quality of Willowbrook Drive in this location by facing on to it should not be overlooked, particularly if there are proposals for highway improvements to Willowbrook Drive in the future.

The sequence of views and experiences moving into the site from the Crickhowell Road access requires further consideration. Currently the rear boundary of one of the properties is very prominent and the continuity and enclosure of the primary route is fragmented. Working in 3D with a model will help to test and refine this approach into the site and whether glimpses of the square will be strong enough.

Pedestrian routes

The introduction of a pedestrian route from the south is positive, provided that it is well integrated into the layout. A plan showing pedestrian routes through the site will help to determine whether the whole site is sufficiently well connected and whether desire lines to surrounding destinations, as identified in the analysis, have been accommodated.

Parking

The right parking strategy for this site is crucial to avoid unsightly, indiscriminate parking and management difficulties, which can occur if the parking provided is not convenient and closely associated with the properties that they serve.

Two parking spaces are provided for most properties but in many cases they are arranged one in front of the other on-plot. As this is somewhat inconvenient it is likely that people will instead park their second car on the road in front of their houses and if there is insufficient road width to do this they are likely to park on the pavement. The options for dealing with this need to be considered now and may include providing for

on-street parking or altering the on-plot parking arrangements to prevent issues later on.

The parking spaces for the flats are not closely associated with each of the blocks, which could create both management and social challenges in the future. For example units 50 to 58 only have four spaces in close proximity meaning that some residents will need to park some distance from their property.

Fences and boundaries

The commitment to brick wall garden boundaries is positive as it will provide a robust and long lasting solution as well as improved appearance for the site boundaries along streets.

Further consideration and detail is needed of the boundaries to the wetland area and the space within the central square. The height and type of boundary will have an impact on how accessible and usable these spaces are. A balance is needed, in particular in the central square, to keep the space safe but easily accessible. A palette of materials for boundaries and other elements of street furniture need to be developed.

Central space

As one of the most distinctive elements of the layout it is important that the form of the square is well defined. Currently the corners and the edge bounded by the flat blocks are weak and should be strengthened to provide a better sense of enclosure.

Trees

A definitive plan of the trees to be retained, lost and/or planted is required to support the planning application. This will also be helpful now to establish the scale of tree loss, the value of what is retained and where and the consequent impact on the quality and character of green areas.

House types

The Commission supports the bespoke approach for house types for this development however, there is currently insufficient detail to determine whether the design of the units will meet the aspirations for quality. Depth and texture is critical to a simple contemporary design in order to avoid bland, characterless properties. Currently there is not enough detail to determine whether or not this is being achieved; similarly, window and roofing materials have not yet been sufficiently explored.

Streets

The concept for the site - the hierarchy of streets and spaces - needs to be stronger. This can be reflected in the density, enclosure and form of the properties as well as landscape treatment, street design and parking arrangement. Further detail is needed on the proposals for the home-zones and it is important that there is a commitment from the highways department of the local authority to adoption and maintenance of these streets over the long term. The local authority highways team need to respond to the Manual for Streets and work collaboratively with development partners and the planning team.

Sustainable design

The energy strategy seeks to go beyond building regulation requirements and the orientation of buildings has been considered in the layout. We encourage an integrated approach to sustainable design and further evidence of how this has influenced proposals for the site is required. A clear sustainability strategy should inform design considerations from the earliest stages.

Next Steps

The Commission welcomes the opportunity to review this and future proposals as part of the housing partnership scheme, to support the aims and ambition of this and any future schemes. There were a number of points discussed at the review and summarised above which are significant and need to be addressed to improve the proposals. At this stage, due to limited information, we do not have full confidence in the architectural approach to the houses. The intentions are positive but there is a risk that poor detailing and materials could result in poor quality properties. As an exemplar scheme in this partnership, that will set the tone and direction for future sites, it is essential that a high level of quality is achieved. These matters can be explored further in future reviews and we encourage the local authority, developer and design team to utilise consultation through design review as a tool for strategic engagement to further improve the design approach for each of the more significant sites.

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. DCFW is a non-statutory consultee, a private limited company and 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

Architectural Designer:	Chris Wilkins, Architect, Pentan Andrew Hole, Director, Pentan
Development team:	Darren Eccleston, Wates Homes Teresa Boyle, HPP project manager, Cardiff City Council
Local Planning Authority:	Ross Cannon, Group Leader, Cardiff City Council Nick Beckley, Planner, Cardiff City Council
Design Review Panel:	
Chair	Alan Francis
Lead Panellist	Michael Griffiths
Panel	Elfed Roberts Jen Heal, Design Advisor, DCFW Amanda Spence, Design Advisor, DCFW
Observing	Carole-Anne Davies, Chief Executive, DCFW