

Design Review Report

Mamhilad Urban Village, Pontypool

DCFW Ref: 128

Meeting of 18th May 2017



Review Status

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Scheme location
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Scheme reference number
Planning status

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18th May 2017
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Pontypool
Residential masterplan
128
Pre-application

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.

None Declared.

Consultations to Date

The period of statutory public consultation has now been completed.

The Commission previously reviewed this scheme on 20th October 2016 and this report should be read in conjunction with the report of the previous meeting.

The Proposals

The site is located on the A4042, approximately 1.5 miles to the north-east of Pontypool and 6 miles to the north-east of Cwmbran. It sits close to the County boundary between Torfaen and Monmouthshire. It includes the vacant Parke-Davis site, the Grade II* listed former British Nylon Spinners factory and the Mamhilad Park site. The site also takes in greenfield land to the south and west of these built up areas. There are two existing access points off the Old Abergavenny Road and three bus stops on the A4042 in close proximity to the site, but pedestrian links to the site are limited. Public Rights of Way cross the site and run close to the site boundaries providing links to the surrounding countryside. There is a steep rise from the western boundary to the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal which marks the periphery of the Brecon Beacons National Park to the west.

The proposal is for the development of a mixed-use community, repurposing many of the existing industrial buildings and redeveloping vacant land and land cleared by demolition. Some of the industrial space is listed. A mix of different types and densities of residential accommodation, community, retail and commercial employment uses are proposed. Some of the existing office and industrial buildings are currently in use and there is an intent to keep many of these occupants on the site, either in their current buildings or relocated.

This review focussed on Phase 1 – the residential area and school to the south of the listed industrial building – and the emerging Design Principles document.

Main Points in Detail

The following points summarise key issues from the review and should be considered to inform work ahead of making a planning application and engaging in further review:

Legacy and innovative vision - delivering a sustainable community

The Commission welcomes the ambition of the client, recognising their long-term interest and their desire to maintain a positive legacy arising from the family ownership of the former factory estate. This, alongside the legacy of industrial structures (some listed, some not) and landscape that remain, offer the potential for this scheme to be an extremely interesting, distinct and exemplary sustainable community. The client's vision and ambition for the place must be captured, clearly communicated and translated into realistic design proposals so that this rare opportunity is fully realised.

The challenge for the design team is to respond sufficiently well to the ambition, build on the existing legacy from the site's industrial history and propose an innovative, sustainable community which must also be viable and deliverable. This means that the phasing and delivery strategy as well as the design detail provided at each stage are crucial. The work that is currently happening on the site is positive and the next phases must build on this.

In the context of the stated ambition, the material for Phase 1 presented at this review was somewhat generic and could have related to a suburban housing development anywhere. Given that this first phase will set a precedent for the rest of the development, we would expect to see a more innovative approach which reflects and incorporates the history and industrial heritage of the site. The Commission believes that the current approach to Phase 1 risks a dilution of the exciting vision and ambition for the overall project and diminish the value of the legacy. A braver and more innovative approach is needed to fulfil the vision and maximise potential for an exemplary development, capable of positively shifting perception and responding to the client vision.

Existing buildings, structures and patterns in the landscape could be retained, reused or reflected in the proposals for Phase 1 to give the scheme an authentic and distinct identity. We would like to see that all existing structures and landscape elements, both listed and non-listed, have been properly reviewed and considered for reuse. The reuse of buildings, structures and hard landscape is often a more sustainable approach than demolition, but this needs to be properly researched and assessed. Industrial buildings converted to residential use have an appeal which cannot be recreated through new-build. The proposed layout for Phase 1 does not relate to the existing occupation of the site which has a clear grid layout and could be used as a starting point for making this phase distinct.

The workers' heritage and past care of the Estate are important for local families and local history. People's memories and the social history of the estate make the site more interesting and distinct from other housing development sites. These assets should be taken advantage of to add value to the site and could be explored through more sophisticated arts, branding and marketing strategies. The Commission encourages working with professional and suitably experienced artists at the earliest stages so that

works become an integral and long-lasting part of the development. A creative strategy could help to make this next stage of development of the estate people-focussed and form part of a stakeholder engagement strategy for the long term. Public art does not necessarily have to be realised in the form of physical objects, but could incorporate performance and events to help engage local people and connect this development with its place.

Car parking and travel strategies

The perception of a relatively remote location means there will be a heavy reliance on car use by residents and for the employment uses. It is essential that clear strategies for parking and alternative travel options are designed in now and set out in the Design Principles document.

Designing the right combination of car parking solutions will be one of the biggest challenges for this scheme. The visuals in the documentation provided for this review show almost no cars, but the likely number of cars per household would have a significant impact on street scenes. A range of on-plot, on-street and small parking courts may be appropriate but the mix should relate to the desired character of the development.

Alongside a good parking strategy, a choice of alternative travel options should be planned for and promoted to provide an alternative to reliance on cars. Working with bus providers for all phases of the development to ensure sensible connections will be a positive step. The location and design approach to bus stops could be identified at this stage. Linking this development with the local authority's Active Travel Plan will also help to improve options for everyday journeys. Links with the train stations, secondary school and park and ride facility should be explored. Wider connections, such as with the canal, river and national cycle paths, need to be clearly communicated in all design material so that they are not lost through the phased delivery of the scheme.

Careful consideration needs to be given to how sustainable travel options can be included in this phase, without prejudicing future phases and how this can best be communicated in the Design Principles document.

Green infrastructure and street design

The existing green infrastructure on the site, such as the water courses and woodland, provide the opportunity to further contribute to distinctiveness and sustainability. The specific features of the site need to be identified and incorporated into the Design Principles so that the opportunities are not lost.

Maximising opportunities to integrate green infrastructure would be a positive step, adding value for the long term. This might include:

- Play spaces which are less formal
- Allotments
- Access to woodlands for education/leisure
- Incorporating routes for walking or cycling to school/work/shops

It would be good practice to produce an ecology plan for the whole site which integrates with other aspects of the design. Incorporating SUDs systems in the residential areas

and introducing hedge boundaries could help to make street scenes more 'green' and contribute further to sustainability.

Long term management of the green infrastructure, open spaces and any streets or lanes which are not adopted will be crucial to maintaining long term value. A viable management plan should be considered at this stage to ensure that the spaces which are delivered fit with the strategy. If management responsibilities are to be split between Johnsey Estates and affordable housing providers, this should be made clear so that all spaces are accounted for and clear parameters are set out. Management and stewardship of the whole site are especially important given the context of the family legacy.

The relationships between the new development, the existing road edge and the proposed roundabout need to be given further consideration. The roundabout will for many people, be the first impression of the site as it forms the main vehicle entrance. Roundabouts are typically not pedestrian and cycle friendly, and this should be addressed in the outline application design through consultation and collaboration with the local highways department and the planning authority. There are existing trees and a pond along the road edge of the site which could be incorporated. The principles for a design response to this edge of the development should be clearly set out.

Environmental performance and well-being

This scheme presents an excellent opportunity to deliver exemplar environmental performance and to make a positive contribution to the well-being of residents and workers. To achieve this environmental design strategies must be integrated and tested at this early stage to ensure they can be delivered cost effectively. The layout and orientation of buildings and community/district heating schemes will have an impact which needs to be addressed now.

Environmental sustainability and well-being go hand-in-hand, as highlighted by the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act. The local authority has a duty deliver better well-being and sustainability under the Act, and the ethos of the Act fits well with the ambition for the family legacy of the site.

The future developer may wish to consider Welsh Government's Innovative Housing Fund launched earlier this year.

Further Review

The Design Commission supports the vision for the proposed scheme and encourage the client and design team to maintain high levels of aspiration, quality and innovation. We would welcome the opportunity to review this scheme again, especially to focus on the detail of Phase 2 and its relationship to the overall masterplan. The team is urged to make early enquiries about future meeting dates due to high service demand. The Commission welcomed the offer of spending further time at site and will follow up on this shortly with the client.

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

Attendees

Agent/Client/Developer:	Peter Downes, Johnsey Estates
Architect/Planning Consultant:	Andrew Lucas, Planner, RPS Barry Williams, Urban Designer, Barton Willmore Clare Wilks, Urban Designer, Barton Willmore
Local Authority & Cadw:	Rebecca McAndrew, Torfaen CBC Stephen Thomas, Torfaen CBC
Design Review Panel:	
Chair	Jen Heal, Design Advisor, DCFW
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Observing:	Kym Scott, PINS Ben Terry, Monmouthshire CC Alexandra Lavagna, Bridgend CBC