



Design Review Report

Box Bush Farm, Capel-y-Ffin

DCFW Ref: N162

Meeting of 12th April 2018

Review Status

Meeting date
Issue date
Scheme location
Scheme description
Scheme reference number
Planning status

PUBLIC

12th April 2018
18th April 2018
Capel-y-Ffin, Brecon Beacons NP
Residential
N162
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.

Consultations to Date

This is the first time that the Design Commission for Wales has reviewed these proposals for this site.

The Proposals

The site is a 38.5 acre derelict hill farm in the Brecon Beacons National Park, north of Llanthony Priory. The farm comprises a modest cluster of buildings in an elevated position with open pasture below and rising woodland above. The stone farmhouse has been unoccupied for five years, the adjoining barn roof has collapsed, and the buildings are rapidly deteriorating. The site has a strong sense of place, being in a very peaceful location with dramatic views of the beacons and passed by a former drover road that runs past the house from the monastery and up the hill.

The existing buildings will be refurbished, linked and extended to create a residential dwelling and live-work studio for the owner. Modern additions will appear as such with flat green roofs, large glazed windows and use of corrugated metal to reference materials on site. A separate modern barn is intended at a much higher elevation on the land to power the scheme via solar and hydro – there is an aspiration for the building to function off-grid. The landscape potential has been considered and the site includes a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) which the owner is looking to restore with the help of Natural Resources Wales (NRW).

Main Points

The Design Commission welcomed the opportunity to review this interesting and ambitious scheme at this stage where a significant amount of thought had been given to the design but there is still plenty of scope for development and refinement in advance of a planning application. The aim of the project, as well as the design approach, was well set out and explained for this small but complex site.

The Design Commission strongly supports the reuse of this property which will save it from complete deterioration. Any planning policy restrictions should be appropriately considered, and tempered, in the context of the imperative to ensure that properties of this nature and in this condition, of which there are many across the National Park, are given a new purpose and lease of life which can ensure successful, sustainable occupation and use. The client's desire to be able to 'live and make a living' in this setting is an important consideration, indeed this scheme has the potential to be an exemplar for support of work and economic activity within a thriving National Park. The quantum of proposed development is appropriate for the site and proposed uses.

The following points should be taken into consideration as proposals for the site continue to develop.

Simplification

Many promising ideas for new additions and aspirations for preserving the existing buildings were presented in the current proposals but some of these are competing and over complicating the proposal. Taking a step back at this stage to edit some of the ideas will help to give more clarity and simplicity to the approach and settle it into its context.

Establishing a hierarchy of importance for existing elements will help to prioritise them and may lead to different decisions about how to treat some elements. The strategy for approaching the old and new elements of the development also needs to be settled. The restoration of the cottage is positive, and the intention of making the new elements deliberately new is a strategy that can work well, but currently the approach to the barn falls between these two approaches and confuses the picture. Is something that is adapted old or new? Raising the roof height of the barn with the glazed insert is appropriate but the vertical slot window and large glazed doors seem less successful. Considering whether the barn should be lime washed and how the openings should be approached will help to give clarity to the barn and a better balance between what appears old and what is obviously new.

The existing arrangement for linking the main house and barn is very simple in its form, utilizing a cat-slide roof. As reference is being made to this element in the proposals there would be value in considering whether the cat-slide roof is appropriate here too as the current extent of flat roof appears too dominant. This would need to be tested with the integration of the new structures and changes in level.

In aiming to reduce the complexity of the proposals to the rear of the house consideration should also be given to the arrangement of routes and spaces. For example, considering whether the access route from the parking area should connect to the new link between the barn and kitchen rather than directly into the barn. Views through can be maintained and the sense of drama when entering the barn can still be achieved but in a different way. This would need to be worked through to resolve the arrangement of uses but could provide greater clarity and avoid the need to create large openings in the barn and the existing 'boundary' wall specifically for this purpose.

We are supportive of the use of materials that are found on site, or similar, as they will enhance the character and authenticity of the development. However, the number of proposed materials is currently adding to the complexity at the rear of the property and

may also benefit from simplification. The rich colours of red oxide painted steel and corroding steel have a strong association with rural farm settings and are likely to work well here.

Kitchen Elevation

The proposed kitchen has the closest relationship with the adjacent landscape and the interaction between the two needs careful attention. The risks associated with glazing and wildlife seem to be understood and can be managed but visually this elevation doesn't work as well as it could. Consideration should be given to whether a stone base would be better than the curtain wall glazing coming right down to the ground alongside reconsideration of the relationship between the visually 'heavy' stone capping and lighter glazed elements below.

Landscape and Energy

Further work on the landscape approach is needed to ensure that the domestic elements of the scheme integrate well with the surrounding landscape. It is important to get the consultants with the right approach and experience involved to help with this now so that the design of the buildings and landscape can develop harmoniously. The landscape consultant must be able to consider the wider ecological and landscape management issues and not simply focus on garden design. The boundaries between the garden and agricultural land require further consideration to enable the transition to work effectively. A long-term plan for how the landscape will develop over 20 to 30 years would be beneficial.

It is encouraging that the renewable energy targets are ambitious and are being considered at this stage. It is important that the right expertise is brought in to advise on how this ambition can be realised and how the infrastructure required can be incorporated into the landscape plan.

Studio

The studio is likely to be a separate, modular building that will be located on the boundary of the site. Opportunities for consolidating other separate structures into the studio building would be welcomed to help reduce the number of new elements on the site. This could include the plant room and although this may involve adjusting the curtilage of the site this modification would be beneficial for the overall scheme. Consideration should be given to whether the studio should be the first element to be constructed on site as this could help with the logistics of further construction.

Wider National Park

This proposal is one of several interesting and innovative projects that are helping to bring new life and new ways to make a living into the National Park. It would be beneficial if the National Park Authority considered all these projects together to understand how they can be supported to help the restoration and preservation of the Park and ensure that its on-going life is actively supported and encouraged.

This scheme has the potential to be an exemplar project, both architecturally and economically, of how to work with buildings of this nature in a challenging environment. Recording the process and sharing it so that others can learn from it, potentially through the medium of film, would be very beneficial.

DCFW would welcome the opportunity to review the proposals again when the comments provided here as well as any from the NPA, including the archaeologist, have been considered. We urge the team to contact us about available dates as soon as possible.

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

Attendees

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Local Planning Authority:	Donna Bowhay, Brecon Beacons NPA
Design Review Panel:	
Chair	Ewan Jones
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