

Design Review Report

Sunnyside Wellness Village, Bridgend

DCFW Ref: N167

Meeting of 14th June 2018



Review Status

Meeting date
Issue date
Scheme location
Scheme description
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PUBLIC

14th June 2018
25th June 2018
Bridgend
Housing and healthcare
N167
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 and meeting Agenda items. Any such declarations are recorded here and in DCFW's central records.

It is understood that this scheme may be submitted to the Welsh Government's Innovative Housing Programme. Gayna Jones, Chair of the Design Commission for Wales, chairs the IHP Group. Gayna was not present in the meeting. All present at the review were content to proceed following the declarations.

Consultations to Date

DCFW reviewed and commented to Linc Cymru on the design quality of all the schemes submitted at the competitive tender stage of this project.

Pre-application consultation with the local planning authority is underway.

The Proposals

The site is close to Bridgend town centre, to the west of the Ogmore river. The existing Magistrates Court is to be demolished and the remainder of the site is disused car parking. There are playing fields and a leisure facility to the south and the Registry Office to the north of the site, although this may be relocated.

The proposal is for a mixed use residential and primary healthcare development. The brief is to create an innovative, vibrant, multi-generational community with a focus on integrating well-being into the design. The scheme aims to provide social housing, a primary healthcare facility and community spaces, including a village hall. It will provide 70 residential units through a variety of housing types.

Main Points

The following points summarise key issues from the review and should be considered to inform any further design work:

Vision and innovation

The ambitious and innovative vision for this project to be an exemplar mixed residential/healthcare/community place with wellness at its heart is commendable and the Commission is supportive of the principle of the scheme.

The challenge now is to deliver the vision and achieve design quality whilst addressing the complexities of the brief, site and procurement cultures of the affordable housing and healthcare sectors. In the scheme presented at the review the aims had been compromised by unresolved external influences including a prescriptive and illogical highway layout and the requirement to retain the existing Registry Office building. For this important scheme to be successful, the project team should be challenging these negative influences by proposing comprehensive strategies which have wider benefits and are of greater value for the long term.

At the same time, local stakeholders and authorities should not be compromising the value of this project by imposing un-coordinated demands. This project presents an opportunity for exemplary community engagement and collaborative working between stakeholders including public bodies and different departments of Welsh Government, as advocated in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act.

It is positive that the scheme aims to address local housing needs and test a cooperative model, whilst integrating other community and well-being focused needs. With so many positive and ambitious aims, good design quality is vital for their achievement.

Informative wellness research

In order for the vision and ambitions of the project to be realised, all aspects of the design need to be founded on an evidence base of wellness research and best practice. Along with sound site and context analysis, this should inform the design of the layout and orientation, landscape and public realm design, and design of the individual housing and community buildings. If this is not prioritised the vision will become diluted.

The presenting team mentioned the WELL Building standard, but there was little evidence that this had informed the site layout or building design. The well-being objectives which the team set out are not currently being fulfilled by the proposal.

Timescale for design quality

The programme and procurement process should allow adequate time for best practice for design quality, including:

- Time for getting design strategies right before planning
- Meaningful engagement which informs the design development
- Production of the right type and level of detail of information for the tender for construction, e.g. completion of RIBA Stage 4+ for design and build.
- Early contractor involvement where this could be beneficial to design quality and allow an earlier start on site without risk to quality

Strategic approach to layout

Overall, a more strategic approach to the planning and layout of the site is required. This should be informed by good analysis of the site and context as well as best practice and research in the field of design for wellbeing.

Routes and connections to surrounding communities and facilities, especially cycle and footpaths and Active Travel routes, should be designed strategically and are crucial to achieving well-being. The road layout currently proposed, and partly a result of the requirement to retain existing site access and access to the registry office, is inefficient and does not promote well-being or community cohesion.

Landscape and well-being are closely connected, so a landscape strategy will be essential to achieving the vision.

Further consideration should be given to how buildings can better address the surroundings, which are currently being completely ignored. For example, the key corner of the site currently accommodates a car park, and the new homes' relationship to the sloping edge of Glan y Parc Road is unresolved. In general, relationships between fronts and backs of new and existing properties needs better consideration.

The idea of building a new, better Registry Office building at the 'public facing' end of the site seems ideal as it could provide much needed active uses for any public square, and eliminate the need for public 'event' access to the north end of the site. Given that the function of the building includes some of the most important ceremonies in people's lives, a good quality landscape setting would be beneficial and contribute to the wider vision for the site.

Landscape and urban design

Design of the landscape and public realm is especially important in achieving the aims of the brief and should be a priority in meeting the duty placed on public bodies under the Well-being of Future Generations and Active Travel Acts. An alternative to obsolete highway engineering standards will be required, and all garden and public realm spaces should be defined and designed so that they make a positive contribution to the quality of life of the residents and local people. These issues and priorities are not reflected in the drawings.

There is a great deal of 'left over' landscape space at the corners and edges of the site and behind private gardens.

The new public square space will be a key feature of the development and should be designed to maximise opportunities for social interaction and building a sense of community. The ways in which buildings address this space will be important, and having public entrances off of the space will encourage more people to use it.

It is good that the local authority parking standards are being challenged, but this could be pursued further to ensure that streets are not dominated by cars, which is contrary to well-being. The following contribute to the justification for minimise car parking provision:

- Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act
- Active Travel (Wales) Act
- Proximity to the train station and bus routes
- Air quality concerns
- Use of the Manual for Streets
- WELL Building Standard
- Proximity to other community facilities and the town centre
- Less space for parking means more residential units could be provided, addressing housing need and delivery

A large area of car parking is required for the public/healthcare uses which could dominate the scheme. Consideration should be given to alternative uses for the space when parking is not required (i.e. outside of health centre opening hours) such as for

sports and community events and activities. The location of the car park and its relationship to its surroundings is important. There is a good case for combining parking and a public square as a single shared surface space that could have different (non-car) use in evenings and at weekends to make best use of space and maximise the land available for new homes.

The engagement of specialist advice on the design and incorporation of spaces for community growing and edible landscapes to ensure that they will be manageable over the long term would be positive.

Environmental strategy

With well-being and comfort so closely linked to energy and sustainability and at the heart of the stated ambition for the project, we would expect to see the whole project founded on an integral environmental strategy. This is currently absent from the material presented.

Building design

The deck access to apartments will need to be designed with great care to ensure shared areas encourage social interaction and not antisocial behaviour. Incorporating opportunities for residents to personalise the areas outside their homes is positive. The team stated that the layout of the homes was not resolved at the time of the review.

The design of the healthcare building needs to address a number of issues, including achieving good levels of privacy and daylighting whilst avoiding overheating. The ambition to have spaces 'closely connected to nature' is not achieved in the current plan. The entrance and pharmacy offer active uses which could positively contribute to public space but do not currently do so. The arrival sequence and experience should be carefully considered. Two entrances should not be needed, a single entrance, in the right location, is easier to manage for security and should be easier for visitors to locate.

Quality design of the village hall (and potential new Registry Office) is really important so that maximum value is gained from the facility. The design should be practical, robust and flexible, but also provide a comfortable and delightful environment for a variety of potential uses.

Next steps

There may be useful lessons to learn from existing schemes in the UK and beyond about what works and what doesn't. It may be useful to look at projects undertaken by HAB and how these have developed over time to address problems with earlier schemes.

The Commission would welcome further opportunity to review the scheme with the aim of improving design quality through constructive dialogue.

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

Attendees

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