

Design Review Report

Upper Cosmeston Farm, Penarth

DCFW Ref: N194

Meeting of 14th March 2019



Review Status

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

Public

14th March 2019
20th March 2019
Penarth
Residential
N194
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 scheme has not been previously reviewed.

The Proposals

The proposal is for the residential development of an expansion site south of Penarth, situated between the Severn Estuary and Cosmeston Lakes. The site is currently green fields, but is identified as a potential housing site in the LDP. The site is owned by Welsh Government. The site 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 emerging masterplan will include up to 576 dwellings with 40% affordable, a primary school, public open space, and community facilities.

Main Points

The Design Commission welcomed the opportunity to review proposals for this site at a very early stage when there is the greatest scope to contribute to the overall aims and objectives.

Vision

As landowners of the site the Welsh Government has a duty under the Well-being of Future Generations (WFG) Act to ensure that they are acting in accordance with the well-being objectives and ways of working. While this was mentioned in the documentation provided, there was little evidence from the client or design team that it had been given serious consideration at this stage, so the next stage in the process will be critical. Clear objectives for the outcomes desired should be articulated in the project vision not only in response to the Act but in terms of placemaking, active travel and securing long term public value.

The Design Commission is concerned that this development could become a standard, suburban housing estate falling short of the requirements set out in the legislation and the ambition of national planning policy. Whilst the desire to realise this potential and do something different was echoed by the presenting team, measures must be put in place now to ensure it happens. These measures need to be robust enough to counter an otherwise inevitably standard approach and ought to include the consideration of a non-standard procurement strategy.

The work undertaken to date to understand the constraints and parameters of the site has been thorough and is well presented. However, it is important that this does not become a constraints-led proposal. The application of urban design principles to the development parcels alone will not be enough to create a truly sustainable development and promote good placemaking. There is a need for a clear and defined vision for the site, out of which can come a framework that Welsh Government can assess proposals against.

We encourage the client and design team to look closely at precedents where an alternative approach to residential development has been achieved. It may also be helpful to look at these together with the local planning authority in order to develop a common understanding of what can be achieved and how. A clear vision will help to justify and protect decisions that may differ from a 'standard' approach, such as density, height, parking and highway design.

In preparing the vision, thought must be given to how people might live in the future and how the development of this site can support a sustainable lifestyle. Considerations will include, but are not limited to:

- How people will travel – movement and connectivity
- What people will do – mix of uses, desire lines to destinations, recreation space
- Where people will interact with others and develop a sense of community – house size and tenure mix integration, communal spaces, integration with the existing community
- How people might live more efficiently – environmental strategy, density, movement

Community Involvement

A key element of placemaking, and a requirement of the WFG Act, is the involvement of people. An ongoing strategy for how to engage with not just existing residents but others who may be residents of the future is necessary. The challenge of this is understood but a good starting point may be to actively seek to involve younger generations who may represent future residents.

Consideration should be given to what questions are asked at the planned consultation event on 1st April, and how the consultation process will develop over time. The principle of development has been established through the LDP process and simply asking people what they think of the proposal to develop the site is likely to be unhelpful. There is still scope to inform the vision and proposals for the site, so it may be more helpful to ask

people what they would like to see there. This may present some new opportunities such as a community use that could be considered on the site. Consideration should be given to engaging and retaining the assistance of specialists experienced in engagement strategies and activities specific to built environment proposals.

Disposal strategy

How the site is taken to the market or the process for selecting a development partner is critical to the success of the development and there is a key opportunity here with Welsh Government as the landowner. Any decisions must not be based purely on capital receipt – social, human and environmental value must be considered and prioritised if this development is to be successful. It was very encouraging to hear the Welsh Government support this principle in the review. The Welsh Government, along with the Local Planning Authority need to be guardians of the vision and retain control and stewardship to ensure it is delivered. The vision and objectives or development principles must be integrated into the outline application.

A range of development options should be considered including self-build, co-housing and local SME builders.

Key opportunities and risks

The potential cycle route leading directly to Penarth train station, the inclusion of a school, the network of green infrastructure and the potential connection to the coastal path and Cosmeston Lakes are the most obvious opportunities for placemaking at this stage. How they are integrated and designed into the proposals will be critical. The cycle route must be the focus of connectivity to promote non-car travel. How funding towards the improvement of this route is invested should be considered alongside the Local Authority. The potential for a future rail connection to be reinstated along the cycle route should not be precluded.

Identified risks to achieving the design quality and placemaking include potential parking requirements, challenges over density and highway design. The vision should be used to strengthen the case for an alternative approach and the desired and anticipated social, health related and environmental benefits that will result.

One of the biggest physical challenges for the development of the site will be responding to and resolving the topography. Best practice examples and the potential for innovative layouts that take advantage of the topography should be explored.

Next steps

This is an appropriate stage to work on the vision and framework for the development. We strongly encourage the team to allow the time and ensure that the right people and resources are employed to get this right. The vision and framework then need to be represented visually through the masterplan and a disposal/development strategy prepared to support it.

The Welsh Government needs to recognise the importance of their involvement as landowner at this stage. The duty towards the legislation is placed on them, not their consultants. The vision should articulate objectives toward the act and address its requirements but there is also an opportunity for higher level, strategic thinking about

how to approach land with Welsh Government ownership and/or influence, which would be beneficial for this and other sites/land assets over time.

An engagement process should be established alongside the masterplanning and disposal process to ensure that stakeholders and local residents have been involved in the process.

We welcome the opportunity to review the masterplan and emerging objectives again well before the planning application is submitted and encourage the team to arrange a date for this at the earliest opportunity. DCFW can provide follow up workshop time for the WG team to identify and flesh out strategic objectives.

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

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