Design Review

Report

A465 Dualling Section 2,
Brynmawr to Gilwern

DCFW Ref: N3

Meeting of 3rd December 2014
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PUBLIC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meeting date</td>
<td>3rd December 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue date</td>
<td>11th December 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheme location</td>
<td>Brynmawr - Gilwern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheme description</td>
<td>Highway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheme reference number</td>
<td>N3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning status</td>
<td>Draft Orders published Oct 14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Declarations of Interest

Martin Knight of Knight Architects, is a Design Commission for Wales Design Review Panel Member. He has been appointed as to the project design team as a specialist structures architect and has not been involved in this scheme as a representative of DCFW. All parties confirmed that they were content with this declaration, which has also been recorded in earlier correspondence and reports.

Consultations to Date

This scheme was first brought forward for early consultation with the Commission in May 2012. It was subsequently discussed at a meeting with the Commission on 31st January 2013. Following the January meeting, three DCFW review panellists made a site visit with Mark Young (Costain) and Paul Hopper (RPS). Further design development work was presented and discussed with the Commission on the 25th April. This report should be read in conjunction with letters and reports from the previous reviews.

The Proposals

This scheme forms part of the wider road infrastructure programme and is one of the last stretches of the Heads of the Valleys dualling project to be implemented. It will have a significant impact on the A465 from Brynmawr to Gilwern. To facilitate grade separation and new and improved junctions, the proposals include major interventions to the existing landscape, the construction of significant lengths of retaining walls and new bridges and structures along the length of the section. This is an area which includes the Clydach Gorge and is of considerable historical and cultural significance, bordering a World Heritage Site and National Park.

A public inquiry took place in April 2014. Draft Orders were published in October 2014, with a decision to proceed. It is anticipated that construction will commence early in 2015.
Main Points in Detail

The following points summarise key issues from the review, and should be used to inform further detail design work ahead of construction.

**Footbridges**
Overall, the Design Commission for Wales supports the design of the family of bridges, including the new footbridge at Gilwern. The early architectural design input has led to a coherent family of elegant bridge solutions. Now the detail design of these structures will be important in achieving the good quality the team aspires to. The weathering steel, for example, should be detailed to avoid unsightly staining. The Commission believes that the detail design is heading in the right direction.

Although it is not feasible to provide a ramp for wheelchair users at the new Gilwern footbridge, the team should consider providing wheeling ramp channels which would allow cycles and pushchairs to be easily pushed over up the stairs, making it overall more inclusive and accessible.

The Commission agrees that the ‘school’ footbridge might be treated slightly differently to the other footbridges, which are more rural in nature. For example, the lighting strategy and the handrail/barrier treatment might be different, but in-keeping with the design approach to the family of bridges.

**Lighting Strategy**
The scheme is still lacking a holistic, designed and well-justified lighting strategy. There are a number of conflicting requirements and objectives relating to lighting the road and associated bridges, which need to be balanced and resolved. These include road-user safety, pedestrian safety, bats, light pollution concerns, visual impact and delight, energy use and maintenance. Given the nature and significance of this site, the team should consider appointing a specialist lighting designer to develop an integrated, holistic lighting strategy which adds value to the scheme, rather than compromising quality.

The lighting columns should be shown on the visuals so that the visual impact can be properly assessed. It would be disappointing if the lighting detracted from the elegance of the bridge designs and the overall character of the completed scheme.

**Retaining Walls**
The Commission was disappointed that the concept of reflecting the geological strata and verticality of the road in the treatment of the retaining wall has been lost. We are concerned that the diagonally grooved concrete panels currently proposed will not meet the innovative, original design intent when viewed at close quarters or from a distance, especially on an overcast day. The team and local authority have adopted this new approach to minimise impact on distant views. However, the Commission believes that this new proposed approach will not meet those aims, and we would in any event question such aims given the scale and intrusion of the retaining walls in many surrounding views. The Commission considers that the earlier concept provided a creative and poetic solution which expressed the distinct qualities of the landscape, and that replacing that concept with a more mundane expression is a backward step.
The detailing of the retaining wall cladding will be important, especially the laying, jointing and mortar used for the natural stone. The trial panels, which the team are intending to construct, will be very helpful in getting the details right.

**New Ladder Deck Bridges at the Govilon Roundabout**
When this scheme was last reviewed by the Design Commission, it was intended that Bebo arches would be used. It is now intended that these will be ladder-deck structures. The Commission is disappointed that the detail for these structures was not available at this meeting, and recommends that they are treated as ‘bridges’ and included in the family of structures being designed by Knight Architects.

**Community Story**
The team stated their commitment to working with local communities. The Commission commends this ambition, but believes there are further opportunities for sharing and exploring the story of this significant engineering and landscape project with local communities, which have not yet been pursued. There are many ways in which creative arts, education and information ‘story-telling’ projects could add cultural value to this scheme, and leave not just a remarkable archive but a positive legacy.

**Comisiwn Dylumio 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 as a wholly controlled 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**

**Agent/Client/Developer:** Emyr Davies, Welsh Government  
Mark Jenkins, Costain

**Designers:** Martin Knight, Knight Architects  
Rob Wheatley, Atkins  
David Osborne, Atkins  
Jane Betts, RPS

Stuart Reid, NRW

**Local Authority:** Julien Atkins, BBNP
Design Review Panel:
Chair
Lead Panellist
Alan Francis
Ashley Bateson
Carole-Anne Davies
Amanda Spence, Design Advisor, DCFW