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Design Review Report

Braunton Crescent & Clevedon Road,
Cardiff

DCFW Ref: 105

Meeting of 14th April 2016



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

PUBLIC

Meeting date	14 th April 2016
Issue date	27 th April 2016
Scheme location	Braunton Crescent/Clevedon Rd, Cardiff
Scheme description	Residential Development
Scheme reference number	105
Planning status	Pre-application

Declarations of Interest

None.

Consultations to Date

This is the second of the housing partnership scheme sites to be reviewed by the Design Commission for Wales but the first time that this particular site has been reviewed.

It is understood that consultation with the local community is due to take place soon. As proposals for this site are now available to the public online as part of the consultation process, this report will also be made public.

The Proposals

The proposal is for 107 dwellings on 2.3 acres of land in Llanrumney. The development replaces a row of medium-rise blocks of flats and an area of grassed common space. 40 of the units are 'affordable'. 76 of the houses are in semi-detached pairs, there is a single row of 3 houses and the remainder of the units are apartments.

This development is part of a housing partnership scheme between Cardiff Council and Wales Homes with a £33m investment from the Council. There are over 40 sites across the city that are intended to deliver a total of 1500 homes over ten years in three phases.

Main Points

This was the second site within the Cardiff Housing Partnership scheme that the Design Commission has reviewed. The Commission remains supportive of the ambition of the initiative and the benefits to housing supply and quality that it should provide.

The proposed layout is positive in addressing the open space and streets with active frontages but a number of elements were identified which require attention to further improve the

scheme and resolve some of the current issues. We recognise the challenges of this site including the topography and limited property values in the area, as well as competing requirements in relation to the desired number of units, environmental ambitions and space standards. The following points should be considered in context of these challenges and with the aspiration of creating a high quality residential development that will be a positive place to live for many years.

Semi-detached house type

The scheme is dominated by semi-detached properties with a small number of terraces and flats. It is essential that the design of the semi-detached unit works well in this specific context as well as a general house type that is to be used in multiple. Adapting a terraced house type to be used as a semi-detached, as has been done here, has meant that the benefits of a semi-detached property have not been fully explored. For example, testing the option of a side entrance to the properties could bring benefits to the internal arrangement as well as the external approach to the property. This should be considered within the context of ensuring there is activity at the front of the properties.

The immediate context provides little architectural inspiration but that should not mean that the proposed houses do not have their own character and quality. The drawings and elevations provided to date do not clearly demonstrate what differentiates these properties from those in the surrounding 1960s context. There is clearly an ambition to provide a quality contemporary approach but the details of how this will be achieved are not yet available. A realistic image of what the houses will look like, taking into account the materials and details that are proposed such as the profile of PVC windows which are different to what is shown, will give a better understanding of what character will be created. Some of the precedent images used to accompany the proposals may be misleading and the architects must ensure that they have developed their own idea of the style and character of the dwellings.

Consideration should be given to how the porch space is likely to be used and whether this is the most appropriate use of this space. If it is likely to be used as a location for bins this should be built in to the space rather than becoming an unsightly afterthought. The previous inclusion of a side window within the porch space to reference the bay windows found elsewhere in Cardiff was an interesting idea but now that this is not to be included the design approach to this space may need to be reconsidered. Reviewing the location of the front door may resolve some of these issues.

Flat blocks

Little detail was provided on the design of the flat blocks but the roof pitch and arrangement of the blocks currently causes concern. The roof pitch indicated is very tall which could be inefficient and we question whether it will be built as indicated.

The flat blocks read like geometric shapes within a space rather than forming a strong building line that clearly distinguishes between public and private space and encloses the street. There is a risk that some of the issues associated with the flats that used to be located on the site could reappear if it is not clear who has ownership and use of the space around the building. Parking spaces should be tucked behind the blocks rather to the side if this is the proposed parking arrangement and should be closely associated with the blocks that they serve. Currently there are ambiguous spaces around the blocks that reduce the quality of the street and the setting of the flats.

The boundaries between the public open space and the private space around the flats should be carefully considered. In some locations it may be appropriate to have a less formal boundary.

Distribution of affordable units

The affordable houses are all concentrated on one street which is not usually considered best practice. The challenges of plot sizes and topography are acknowledged but the opportunity to integrate affordable units across the site should be explored further.

Open space

The red line of the site was questioned as it is in two distinct elements separated by the open space. Addressing the site as a whole may have provided opportunities for alternative layouts that integrate the open space in a different way and/or helped to retain existing trees in public areas rather than private gardens. However the topography is challenging and we recognise this may preclude alternative arrangements. Nevertheless, there may be benefits in challenging the site boundary and some of the requirements, such as numbers and mix of units, for future sites if there is potential to create a better scheme overall.

The relationship between the houses and the open space is important for making this a great place to live. A homezone arrangement is proposed and is still being developed for the streets between the houses and open space. The detail in the arrangement of the street design is important to ensure that this is a slow speed and inclusive environment. A 'safe zone' for pedestrians including children and those with visual impairments should be considered within the arrangement. Consulting with an access expert would help to identify all of the matters that need to be considered in the design of this space. The movement of vehicles reversing out of driveways should also be taken into account. It is understood that the team is working with the local highways authority to ensure that the proposed road arrangements can be delivered, adopted and maintained.

The proposed development will result in a loss of some open space and therefore improvements to the remaining open space would be expected; the delivery mechanism for this should be considered by the local authority. A landscape plan should be submitted with the planning application which clearly shows which trees are to be retained and proposals for the improvement of the remaining space.

Housing layout

The vehicular access point into the site from Clevedon Road is weak and unattractive with limited natural surveillance and parking dislocated from the flat block. Access through the site to the open space to maximise the accessibility of the open space for existing residents was discussed. The option of relocating the access point to a more central location may bring benefits for the sense of arrival by car as well as accessibility on foot. Consultation with local residents will help to determine where the desire lines are.

Corner properties should have windows to habitable rooms on their gable ends to provide natural surveillance of streets and spaces.

Exploring other build methods

It is understood that the intention is for the majority of the properties built within this scheme to be traditionally built based on the economics of this method in this area. Given the scale of

houses to be built under this scheme it is surprising that the option of alternative build methods has not been explored and we encourage this approach to be reviewed periodically as non-traditional build methods become more widely used.

Next steps

Involvement of DCFW at an earlier stage in phase 2 of the scheme would provide input on strategic thinking, given the number of sites potentially coming through this partnership and would offer a wider design perspective and opportunities to add greater value earlier in the process. We would also welcome further consultation on any other significant sites within this phase.

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

Attendees

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