

Design Review Report

DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

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

Monday 12 August 2013

Issue date

3 September 2013

Scheme location

Land at Rhyddyn Farm,
Hope and Caergwrle, Flintshire
Hope Primary Care Resource Centre

Scheme description

18

Scheme reference number

Planning status

Outline consent received - reserved
matters due before 31st August 2013

Declaration of interests

None recorded

Consultations to date

Outline planning consent for a Primary Care Centre on this open site between Hope and Caergwrle was granted in 2010, following the refusal of an application for development in an alternative location. A reserved matters application has been submitted. A public consultation was undertaken in June 2011. The proposal is in the public domain and this report will be publically available. This is the first time that DCFW has been consulted on the project.

The proposals

The proposal is for a Primary Healthcare Centre between the villages of Hope and Caergwrle in Flintshire, integrating a GMS practice and a local health clinic. The site is centrally located between the two villages off Hawarden Road, is surrounded by agricultural land and slopes at the rear by approximately 7m affording extensive views. Tall hedging shields part of the site from the road.

The current proposal suggests cutting into the land at the north end of the site, to reduce the impact of a two storey building whilst maintaining the views across the site to Wat's Dyke. A generous amount of car parking is proposed between the building and the road.

Summary

The Panel were pleased to review the scheme but considered the timing very late. An explanation of its evolution and planning history was provided, still the Panel was concerned that opportunities to add value may be lost at this late stage. However, the design team stressed

that, although the reserved matters application had been submitted, the designs were still being developed and design adjustments could still be made. .

The Panel appreciated the aims of the design team in trying to achieve a well designed facility, but felt the project was being compromised by concerns to 'hide' the building. The Centre would comprise a sizeable public building, with extensive associated car parking. Attempts to conceal its impact were unlikely to achieve the desired effect given the scale of the proposals and inappropriate given the public nature of the facility. This building should not be hidden and should be a well designed and proud addition to the local area; an asset to its location and its users.

There were several key points specifically identified by the Panel:

- The design proposes that the building is constructed on the North of the site, with car parking in front. The Panel thought this would present difficulties for users accessing the Centre, having to manoeuvre through the car park.
- The Local Authority explained that the rationale behind the location of the building attempts to maintain the view of Wat's Dyke and reduce its impact in relation to the two existing farm buildings. The Panel thought that, as an important community resource, the building should be more prominent and the layout of the site reviewed to increase the legibility of the building when seen from the road, reduce the impact of the car parking, and improve accessibility for patients and other users, especially those on foot.
- The impact created by the building was unclear. The Panel agreed that this is an important community facility and should be celebrated, to provide an asset that contributes positively to its location. This might be more easily achieved if the building were relocated in a more prominent location towards the front of the site, with some of the car parking and service facilities concealed from view at the rear.
- Consideration should be given to removing or reducing the height of the hedging along Hawarden Road to enhance the views across the site and views experienced by users of the facility. The Panel understood the LPA's concerns that the removal of the hedge would be resisted by the local community, but felt that by attempting to totally hide the new building behind the hedge the potential for it to provide a positive asset to the built environment was undermined.
- The Panel felt that the experience of those using the building had not been sufficiently considered, and opportunities for them to enjoy the surrounding vistas are not being fully realised. Views from the waiting room seemed to be dominated by the car park, and concerns were expressed about the lack of surveillance of the play area. The Panel would support changes to the design to improve the views of open landscape from within the building and generally improve the experience of its users, particularly in the waiting area.
- The landscape strategy was not clear and appeared to be undeveloped in response to its context and surroundings. The landscaping in the car park area needs particular attention. Efficient water management could be impeded by such an expanse of tarmac surface and this could be reconsidered to find more permeable materials and a better solution for this rural/countryside site.

- The requirement to achieve BREEAM Very Good involves security of the development. The Panel were keen to reiterate that this should focus on securing the building itself rather than erecting high fencing along the perimeter.

Discussion and Panel response in full

The Panel acknowledged the lengths to which the team had gone to identify a suitable site for the development and the history of opposition to development in a greenbelt location.

The site is open, with attractive views and surrounded by agricultural land. It is next to Rhydden Farm in the South and has buildings of local interest (previously Grade III listed) on the boundary. To the North East lies the historically significant Wat's Dyke.

The Local Planning Authority is keen for the buildings not to be in too close proximity to Rhydden Farm, hence the design favouring the buildings to the north of the site. However, the Panel felt that the location of the building would be improved if it was moved to the south West of the site, at a more prominent location. This is an important facility for the villages of Hope and Caergwrle and should provide a positive experience for users of the medical centre.

The ample parking at the front of the site is one aspect of the design that the Panel felt would improve the site if moved to the rear providing a safer access for pedestrians.

There is currently a high hedge that shields the site from the road and the Panel thought that a significant reduction in height would enhance the views into and out of the site.

The building is large enough to be obvious therefore attempts to hide it towards the back of the site may be more problematic in terms of access and community acceptance of the facility than if the development was presented as a proud positive improvement in community services. The Panel appreciated what the design was attempting to achieve and why it has been designed at the North East section, but felt that this was not necessarily the optimum position to gain the best from the development.

The experience of users should be paramount and the Panel felt that more could be made of the extensive and beautiful views around the site for patients waiting in the centre. The design should also ensure that there is a clear view of the enclosed play area from the waiting room. Access points should be obvious for all users.

The Panel thought that the landscape strategy did not reflect the surrounding areas and the maintenance and management of landscaping was not clear. There seem to be missed opportunities to utilise the landscape of the rural environment and create a more effective landscape on the site.

The car park was one specific area of landscaping that concerned the Panel. The car park surfacing was an area that the Panel felt could be reconsidered and improved in terms of permeable materials that may also present cost saving opportunities.

Whilst the Panel are fully appreciative of the security requirements contributing to BREEAM ratings, they were keen for this to focus on securing the building and to avoid the installation of a security fence along the perimeter of the site which would detract from the surrounding views.

The Panel understood the objections to developing on greenbelt land but thought that the benefits of the Centre could be better communicated and could inform planning negotiations with

the aim of achieving a good quality, prominent community resource that provides as pleasant an experience as possible for its users.

Overall the Panel was aware that the presentation of this scheme at such a late stage in the planning application process may narrow opportunities for the scheme to achieve its full potential or to reflect the Panel's observations.

However, as this is such an important community facility for the local villages, the Panel would encourage the design team to re-visit the design and make the building much more of a community hub and asset than the current proposal suggests.

The Panel acknowledges the views of the Local Planning Authority in trying to maintain the views through the site, however 'hiding' the building will have a negative effect on the design quality possible for this proposal and could result in a development that neither contributes positively to the built environment, nor maintains the open agricultural nature of the site as it currently exists.

We would encourage the team to consider the opportunities afresh and we wish them every success with the project.

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

Attendees

Agent/Client/Developer	Joe O'Donnell - Castlemead
Architectural/Urban Designer	Mark French - Ainsley Gommon Architects Neil McGill - Ainsley Gommon Architects
Planning Authority	David Glyn Jones - Flintshire CC
Design Review Panel Chair	Alan Francis
Lead Panellist	Angela Williams Roger Ayton Andrew Linfoot
Observing	Carole-Anne Davies - DCFW
Recording	Sue Jones - DCFW