

Design Review Report

Glan Afon School Site,
Port Talbot

DCFW Ref: N90

Meeting of 19th November 2015



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

Meeting date

Issue date

Scheme location

Scheme description

Scheme reference number

Planning status

CONFIDENTIAL

19th November 2015

1st December 2015

Port Talbot town centre

Mixed Use

90

Pre-application

Declarations of Interest

None declared.

Consultations to Date

An initial meeting with DCFW took place on 22nd October 2015 at a very early stage in the design process, although the programme is challenging and it is intended that a planning application will be made in January 2016. This report should be read in conjunction with the report of the October 2015 meeting.

The Proposals

A school currently occupies this town-centre site and will be in operation until summer 2016. One edge of the site runs along Station Road, one of the main retail streets in the town. The Victorian school building fronting, but slightly set back from Station Road, is of good quality, whereas the other existing buildings on the site are not deemed to be of significant value. Streets and back lanes of predominantly two-storey Victorian terraced housing are found to the north, east and south of the site. The site is close to main public transport interchanges.

The local authority and Coastal Housing Association have identified demand for a wider variety of housing types in the town centre, which is informing the proposals for this site. The Local Development Plan (LDP) identifies the site for mixed-use, and it is intended that some funding will come from the Welsh Government's Vibrant and Viable Places (VVP) scheme.

The scheme proposes retaining the building fronting Station Road to accommodate a mix of residential and retail/cafe uses. The other existing school buildings would be demolished and a new road introduced, matching the surrounding street pattern, and focusing on a new central public space.

Main Points in Detail

Positive progress has been made since the previous review and submission of the pre-review material. The following points summarise key issues from the discussion, and should be considered to inform work ahead of making a planning application:

Site Approach

The analysis of the site and the response taken to that analysis was made clearer through the verbal presentation during the review meeting. Thought has been given to how new development will address the different edges of the site. This should be made clearer in the drawings presented, capturing the story of the analysis of the site and its context and how this has contributed to the design development of the proposals in diagrammatic form so that it can be quickly and easily understood.

Whilst the existing long back lane to the east is outside the site boundary and the new development turns its back on it, the potential for future improvements to the lane should be considered in dialogue with the local authority. It would be advantageous for the lane to be improved and the hostile nature of the space reduced.

The selected option for treatment of the frontage to the retail development in the existing building would work better than the earlier kiosk option, especially in the way in which the building would contribute to the streetscape on High Street and related back to the existing façade of the school building.

The term 'gateway' should be used with caution, as it has a range of connotations. Whilst the three storey block is strengthening that corner of the development, it is not suggesting a grand entrance to the site

Movement & Parking

The layout for routes across the site is improved, although the feasibility of the strategy depends upon upcoming discussions with the local authority with particular regard to bin storage and access for collection. We welcome the proposals for shared space and a less highways dominant design for the road.

It is useful to inform the parking strategy with assessment of likely parking demand for this development. A reduced parking demand will make it easier to achieve a less engineered approach to the street design.

The decision to provide under-croft car ports rather than garages should encourage residents to actually use them for cars. However, the team should consider implementing a change to permitted development rights to prevent residents converting them into garages or rooms in the future. This should be discussed with the local planning authority.

Providing safe and efficient walking routes through the site would be a positive move. However, there is a fine balance to be struck between achieving safe routes, permeability, useable external spaces and creating a private feel within the development. In particular, the pedestrian routes between Station Road and the internal

courtyard and how these might be controlled/designed to ensure the above are important.

Public Realm

A diagram to explain ownership of the different external spaces would make it clear who will be responsible for the maintenance of each space and identify any potential problem areas, which can then be designed out.

The Commission urges the team to involve a landscape architect in the scheme quickly. Their skills will enable the comprehensive development of a landscape strategy to support the design development. Coastal's role in perpetuity as managers, owners and landlords is important, and a robust landscape scheme with lasting value as well as a well thought out approach to parking and the car ports would ensure that the development remains an attractive prospect for potential new residents in years to come.

The success of the proposed central courtyard arrangement will depend largely on the management and refuse collection strategy employed. If the local authority decides that the desired and proposed refuse collection strategy cannot be used, an alternative solution will have to be sought. This may require significant changes to the layout design if the quality of the public realm is not to be compromised by bin storage and the requirement for turning heads.

Having multiple entrance doors to the existing building will help to increase activity and natural surveillance in the public realm. The entrance strategy for the other apartments should be considered and refined, so that entrances relate well to the immediate context. The same applies to the positioning of windows and the treatment of site edges through landscape design. Comfort, privacy and security of internal and external spaces all need to be addressed. This will be particularly important for the edges which front onto existing back lanes.

Environmental Performance

The Commission would like to see how the team will use their 'fabric first' approach to exceed Part L requirements

External spaces and fenestration should be treated in relation to their orientation, so that north facing spaces and elevations are treated differently to those which face south, for example.

It is essential that options are tested for environmental performance and refined at this stage (before a planning application is made) so that optimum solutions can be identified. The environmental strategies should be clearly communicated diagrammatically.

Materials & Detail

Swift decisions need to be made about materials so that a clear and specific palette of materials can be defined ahead of the planning application. The Commission would like to see the ambition for the scheme extended to the selection of materials which will inevitably affect the perceived quality of the development.

It is important that the cost of materials is balanced against the impact on the public realm and relationship to the immediate context. The materials and items specified for the central courtyard space will have significant impact on what kind of space this becomes. Different materials will say different things about the space.

As far as possible, typical 'suburban' details, such as white UPVC fascias and rainwater goods, should be designed out so that the scheme is appropriate to its town centre location. A useful exercise would be to show the proposed street scenes in the context of the existing streets to which they relate; i.e. Station Road and Ty Draw Place, to demonstrate how scale and materials will successfully relate to the existing.

The team should ensure that there is sufficient budget for good quality materials and elegant detailing of the proposed glazed front extension to the retail units in the existing building. Commercial demands will need to be carefully balanced against the quality needed for this environment and the contribution made to the streetscape. The commitment to quality demonstrated by Coastal in other similar projects is reassuring.

Novation of the design team and the content of the employer's requirements will be important in carrying design quality through to the construction stages of this scheme where a design and build procurement route is intended.

Presentation

The design process and detail needs to be comprehensively documented and presented. The verbal explanations provided in the review must be captured in diagrammatic format. In particular, drawings explaining the following aspects would be useful:

- Movement through the site (vehicles and pedestrians)
- Ownership and public and private spaces
- Materials and detailing
- Environmental performance strategy
- Landscape architecture strategy
- Context, form and scale
- Parking strategy
- Refuse storage and collection
- Street scenes

The lack of context shown in the pre-review submission material made it difficult to test the relationship of the proposal to the surrounding urban fabric. It would be useful and revealing to show context in a series of site sections and elevations. This would allow the scale of the proposed development to be judged in relation to the scale of the context.

The Design Commission considers that the full value of the review was not achieved due to the lack of detail in the material presented. Detailed and accurate plans, sections and elevations submitted prior to the review would have allowed a more constructive dialogue during the review, making better use of the panel's expertise. Whilst we appreciate the speed with which this project is moving, we are always happy to review works in progress. However, loose conceptual sketches do not allow full appreciation and discussion of the proposals. Some important issues may have been unnecessarily missed due to the lack of detail.

In the future, we would encourage the design team to provide appropriate visual material which will allow their client to benefit fully from the Commission's Design Review Service.

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

Attendees

Client/Developer:	Dom Amirat, Coastal Housing
Architect/Planning Consultant:	Terry Morely, HMA Jacopo Franchini, HMA Scott Rooks, Strongs
Local Authority:	Ian Williams, Neath Port Talbot CBC
Design Review Panel:	
Chair	Jamie Brewster
Lead panellist	Jonathan Vernon-Smith Maria Asenjo Christopher Jones Jen Heal, Design Advisor, DCFW Amanda Spence, Design Advisor, DCFW