



Design Review Report

Ogmore Community Centre

DCFW Ref: 76

Meeting of 16th July 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

PUBLIC

16th July 2015
4th August 2015
Vale of Glamorgan
Community Centre
76
Pre-application

Declarations of Interest

None declared.

Consultations to Date

The team have carried out substantial consultation with the local community and local businesses.

The Proposals

The site is located below the main (coast) road in the village on green space leading down to the cliff top overlooking the beach at Ogmore. It is opposite the only shops/cafe in the village and has derelict public toilets on the site. This is an important part of the Glamorgan Heritage Coast with splendid views across the Bristol Channel to Exmoor, and the beach itself is very fine and one of the most accessible to visitors. A previous scheme was granted approval in 2002 but this permission has expired. There are no community facilities in the village which is undergoing substantial expansion with new housing.

The proposed building would be cut into the hillside immediately below the main road, and with a base 6 metres below the road level would protrude no more than two metres above the road level at its eastern end. However this would provide some view blockage over a short distance (principally to motorists) to what are currently unobstructed views of the sea.

The building would be broadly circular in form and two storeys in height. A glazed roof would slope down at the front to provide a lounge/foyer overlooking the sea and extendible out to a deck. A multi-purpose hall that could be used for a wide range of community events including sports, meetings, cinema, talks etc. is the key facility. This would be supported by a 37 sqm kitchen area, crèche area and toilets. On the second floor there would be an office space and a meeting room, and on the opposite side a multi-purpose space.

The construction would be based on a lime rendered straw bale wall with an internal rammed earth wall and a green roof comprising the back half of the building. The front half of the building would be glazed (including solar louvres) but with some stone faced walls to the toilet areas and a standing seam zinc roof with a band of glazing, and a lantern roof light to top-light the internal spaces.

External works would include 12 car parking places off an existing narrow access road, a significant forecourt for external seating and a children's play area.

Main Points in Detail

The following points summarise key issues from the review, and should be considered to inform work ahead of making a planning application:

Site and Context

Ogmore is an expanding community with few facilities. Therefore, the Design Commission supports the principle of developing a multi-purpose village hall for the local community.

The site for this project presents many challenges and opportunities which must be addressed through the design process. The level changes, difficult access and sensitive surroundings all create challenges which the design must respond to strategically. Despite the sprawling nature of the village and its lack of coherence, the site is important and demands an excellent quality design response.

The location, next to the coastal path, and the views from the site provide opportunities which can be captured by the design to add value to the project. If managed well alongside other facilities in the village, this building has the potential to be a magnet to village residents and to walkers using the coastal path.

Vision, Ambition and Feasibility

The Ogmore Village Hall Association has an ambitious vision and great enthusiasm for this project, which is commendable. They have carried out in depth research into funding possibilities, and have conducted thorough consultation with the local community.

In order to achieve the ambitions they have for this scheme, the building and associated landscaping should be designed with both capital and long-term running and maintenance costs in mind. This will require design and construction which efficiently accommodates the functions required, whilst providing a delightful place in this stunning setting. The proposed scheme involves a number of complex construction methods and non-orthogonal shapes which will add to the initial construction budget. Given the current funding gap, the viability of incorporating the range of design ideas and construction methods proposed is a cause for concern.

It is likely that limited income will be available for the running and upkeep of the building. Therefore, a low-energy strategy and robust, durable building materials will be crucial. The robustness of the materials currently proposed should be carefully

reviewed. The external materials must withstand the salty coastal conditions, whilst internal materials are likely to be subject to heavy wear.

The Commission is concerned that some of the materials currently proposed in the scheme presented at the review will not be durable enough, or will require an intense and potentially costly cleaning/maintenance regime. This includes the internal rammed earth wall render and glazing – particularly louvered glazing which can be a challenge to clean. Rammed earth can be beautiful and extremely durable. However, this and other decisions around materials and finishes would bear further consideration and testing.

Provision of attractive facilities which will generate income will also be important. The crèche is one such use, and should be designed to provide a functional, comfortable and delightful place within the building. A cafe facility which takes advantage of the views is also being considered. These spaces should be accurately drawn in section and perspective to demonstrate what they will be like to experience and their functionality carefully assessed.

The ambition for this project to be different and good quality is worthy of praise and encouragement. However, realistic short and long term costs will be crucial to achieving the community's vision. The scheme should be rationalised and refined in order to provide a feasible, sustainable facility which is an asset to the community. A costing exercise should be undertaken at this stage in order for the client team to understand the scale of costs involved in each of the design decisions. A good understanding of costs at this stage will help to prevent value engineering which may undermine the quality of the design at a later stage.

Form, Layout and Construction

The proposal presented at the review acknowledges the sensitivities of building on this site, and aims to minimise the obstruction of views to the sea from existing properties. Whilst the commission would not encourage the blocking of views, this will be an important community building and it might be beneficial for the building design to provide a visual presence on the main road so that the building can be more easily found and form part of the village centre.

The circular plan form creates a number of problems without adding value to the project, other than making it distinct from other building forms in the area. There is a desire to have a series of flexible spaces which can accommodate a variety of different uses. The most flexible spaces are usually orthogonally shaped. The circular plan is creating awkward side rooms, storage and stage spaces which will add complexity and cost without adding value and may require bespoke furnishing or fit out. Externally, the circular form means that there are curved wedge shapes of leftover space within and behind the building which could be unpleasant and could result in unnecessary maintenance burdens. The benefits and rationale of the circular form were not clearly conveyed in the review meeting and it is not clear how any benefits outweigh the issues cited above.

The team has been investigating materials which could be sourced cheaply or for free from the local area. This is an interesting idea and could help to attract funding for the project. The team might consider taking this idea further and maximising the use of

local resources. However, this approach must be balanced with the practicalities of construction.

For a building of this scale, the construction methods proposed are very complex. There is a danger that this will make the project unaffordable. Because a number of systems are proposed, there will be complex junctions to resolve where the different systems meet. One appropriate construction system might lead to a simpler more elegant solution which still meets the requirements of the brief for this exciting project.

Maximising accessibility to these community facilities will be essential. This should be carefully considered in relation to the second storey which will require a lift for full disabled access and wider equality of access to services and activities.

As the proposed roof level is close to the level of the main road above the site, it will be important to consider safety implications. If access to the roof is not planned, the design will have to make it impossible for people to get onto it. If it is proposed that people will be able to walk on the roof, the safety barriers must be carefully designed and integrated with the rest of the building and landscape strategy. If these issues are not resolved at this stage they might compromise the overall design and/or have an adverse impact on the setting.

In terms of layout, it may be beneficial to strategically organise spaces so that the most public spaces which people will spend most time in have the best views and good daylight levels, whilst service areas, such as toilets, kitchen and storage are located towards the rear of the building where it is naturally darker and does not have good views. The proposed layout shows the toilets toward the front of the plan. Although the team explained that this was to prevent overlooking of neighbouring houses, it prevents other spaces, such as the crèche, taking advantage of the views.

A servicing, delivery, storage and waste disposal strategy should be set out and reflected in the designs.

Highways, Access and Parking

There are already problems with parking and waiting vehicles along the main road above the site, and this scheme should not exacerbate those problems. It is unlikely that designated drop-off spaces on the main road will be feasible.

The amount of parking on the site will need to be carefully balanced so as to not create problems elsewhere in the village and to minimise the impact on the Heritage Coast setting. It would be good to encourage walking to the facility, and direct, accessible and attractive footpaths should form an important element of an integrated landscape strategy. An alternative route for the footpath through the landscaped area to the west of the building was discussed at the review, as a number of issues, including steepness, were identified with the proposed footpath wrapping around the building.

The possibility of a new pedestrian crossing and its location on the main road should be discussed with the local authority.

It will be important to get the access and parking right so that it does not compromise the realisation of the rest of the scheme.

Landscape Strategy

An integrated and well designed landscape strategy will be essential for this project to address the relationship between the topography and the building. It should consider the following:

- Landscape levels, cut and fill
- Visibility and integration of car parking
- 'Green' hard landscaping surfaces
- Planting
- Play area
- Accessible entrances and footpaths
- Boundaries, handrails and safety barriers
- The nature of the green roof

The pedestrian access ramp from the road above the site should be designed for disabled access and located to encourage walking to the site. It might also relate to the existing bus stop. The steepness of the ramp should take into account published guidelines and respond creatively to minimum standards, regulations and equalities guidance.

Traditional playground equipment would appear alien in the landscape so alternative designs should be considered. This might use natural materials and landform/landscaping to provide a creative and inspiring place for children to play.

The landscape strategy should extend to any green roofs.

The landscape strategy should be drawn to a level of detail and accuracy that is convincing.

Energy and Sustainability

There is ambition for this to be an environmentally sustainable building, which uses on-site renewable energy. However, more work is needed to define an integrated and holistic energy strategy for the project. This will require site investigations (if ground source heat is considered), environmental modelling and design testing, and should be carried out prior to a planning application being made. There are a number of energy related decisions which will have an impact on the external appearance, form and orientation of the building.

A simple, passive services strategy which is easy to operate and inexpensive to maintain is required.

A well-planned energy strategy could provide a facility with low running costs, which would be of long term benefit to the community.

Conclusion

This is an important community project with a clear commitment from the client group to build a high quality, unique building that is appropriate for the setting. The Design Commission fully supports the ambition and the move away from the standard, uninspiring design of the previous proposal which had planning permission. There are

many interesting ideas in the current proposal, however simplification is considered to be key at this stage to ensure that the building is affordable, practical and sustainable.

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

Attendees

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