



DESIGN
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FOR WALES
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Design Review Report

The Walks, Flint

DCFW Ref: 94

Meeting of 2nd December 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

NOT CONFIDENTIAL

Meeting date	2 nd December 2015
Issue date	10 th December 2015
Scheme location	Flint, Flintshire
Scheme description	Residential Development
Scheme reference number	94
Planning status	Planning application validated

Declarations of Interest

None.

Consultations to Date

This was the first opportunity that the Design Commission for Wales had to review this scheme.

Public consultation has been undertaken by the local authority and their development/design team.

The Proposals

Following the demolition of circa 150 maisonettes dating from the 1970s, a key site in the centre of Flint is to be redeveloped for residential use. The site will accommodate 92 dwellings with a mix of terraced houses and apartments. All units will be affordable with a mix of social rent and affordable rent.

A planning application has been submitted to the local planning authority.

Main Points

The importance of consulting the Design Commission much earlier in the process was acknowledged by all. Consultation at an early, concept stage and subsequently as the proposals develop will enable constructive discussion with the potential to have a positive impact on the design, adding value for the local authority and developer alike. As the planning application for this development has already been validated the opportunities for change are limited but the comments made on the proposals could be

informative for future development sites that come forward as part of the local authority's programme of regeneration and development.

This is an important development in the centre of the town that could help to change perceptions of the town and create a positive residential environment close to the town centre. The context provided in the regeneration strategy was helpful and identified how the development of the site fits with wider improvements and developments around the town. The following key points were raised in the review meeting and are relevant to this proposal but should also be considered for future phases of development. Many of the main points have management and maintenance implications and should be considered in light of ongoing costs.

Layout

The proposed layout creates a positive restoration of an historic cruciform street pattern in this location and is appropriate for the urban nature of the site. Although we recognise that some practical changes needed to be made, it is unfortunate that some of the clarity and sense of place that is evident in the 2013 development brief layout has been lost in the proposed layout through subtle changes, some of which are expanded upon below.

It would be beneficial to provide and/or present the urban design analysis of the site at a conceptual level, including analysis of the site's constraints/opportunities/character and analysis of the movement framework (pedestrians/cars/cycles) surrounding the site to help explain the rationale for the design.

Natural Surveillance

The majority of the 'Mews Court' through the centre of the layout and one side of the north eastern 'Estate Road' is fronted only by the side of units. This creates a poor sense of enclosure and limited active frontages and opportunities for natural surveillance which is an important aspect of creating a safe environment. In order to provide adequate natural surveillance the streets and pedestrian footpaths need to be overlooked by windows from active rooms within the properties and, ideally, have entrances to provide activity. Therefore, the side elevations of the units must have windows as indicated in the later scheme images. A corner unit would have better addressed the street and could be something that is developed for future sites.

Parking

The parking arrangement is not as refined as it could be which is eroding the quality of the streets and spaces. The amount of on-plot parking in front of houses creates a more car dominated appearance and reduces the sense of active frontage and enclosure provided by the properties, thus reducing the urban character and sense of place. The appearance of on-plot parking can be improved through the integration of landscape features such as low hedges and trees between plots. This landscape approach is outlined in the development brief but does not appear to carry through to the proposed layout.

The proposed parking courts are located on the edges of the blocks rather than to the rear which will make them less secure and more visually dominant. Smaller parking courts (shared by 5 properties or fewer) are easier to manage and should be a consideration for future schemes. A wider mix of some on-plot, on street and small

parking courts could produce a more refined parking approach where the car is less dominant.

Consideration needs to be given to how the parking that is shared between Castle Heights and the new apartment building will be managed to ensure that this parking court works properly. Ideally, the parking spaces for each scheme should be distinct from each other to reduce confusion and management issues which can often arise in relation to parking spaces.

Public Space

The proposed public space needs to be much better integrated into the overall layout, and could provide greater value for the development. The nature and purpose of the space needs to be defined so that it can be designed accordingly. The proposed location of the public space is very poorly overlooked by neighbouring properties and therefore has the potential to feel unsafe, with a risk of under-use and occurrences of anti-social behaviour. If the purpose, quality and surveillance of the space are not established it could also become a maintenance liability in the future.

The location of the public space, combined with the parking court opposite, reduces the enclosure of this important central junction and the space instead bleeds out. Greater enclosure by dwelling frontages would help to reduce vehicle speed and create a stronger sense of place. Further analysis and design consideration of these important incidental spaces would help to refine future layouts.

Corner Apartment Building

Setting out the urban design analysis and more detailed site analysis would help to explain the design rationale for this building including pedestrian desire lines, the most important views to the building and how the site relates to the archaeology of the historic walls.

The building sits somewhat uncomfortably on the site with awkward left over green spaces that will have limited amenity value and could create maintenance issues particularly between the building and the perimeter railings. It needs to be clear who these spaces are for and how they will be used. For example, will the space between the apartment block and the houses on Duke Street be an accessible amenity space for residents?

The need for some separation between bedroom windows and the pavement is acknowledged but this could be achieved more subtly, such as through landscaping, than with the 2 metre high perimeter railings proposed. This would help the building to better address the street. Alternatively, lower railings such as those illustrated in the 2013 development brief would also be an improvement.

The side elevations of this building are prominent from Duke Street and Chapel Street and therefore need to be well articulated and considered in the context of the view along the street. The detail of the building as a whole will be important to ensure that there is sufficient relief to the elevations and the use of the minimal palette of materials is well articulated.

Housing Unit Design

The development of a terraced house type is positive for this town centre location. The design of the houses, together with the layout and landscape strategy, should all combine to provide a sense of place and identity. The proposed material palette and unit design has the potential to produce an elegant and high quality form but would benefit from further refinement and simplification to achieve this. The addition of non-structural, decorative features such as the exposed steel trusses are could create a maintenance burden in the future. If money was to be saved on these features it could instead be invested in the quality of materials and design details, such as fascias, eaves and ridges to ensure the simple and elegant form.

Landscape Strategy

A landscape strategy should be developed alongside the proposed layout to support the quality, amenity, sustainability and identity of the development. This should include hard and soft landscaping and the input of a landscape architect, and would add value to the development. The strong line of trees along the edge and through the centre of the site as shown in the development brief has been lost in the current proposals.

Future Engagement

The Design Commission welcomed the opportunity to meet the developer and design team and begin discussions with the local authority on the programme of future developments. As discussed, this consultation will be more constructive and of greater value to the local authority, developer and design team if it is undertaken at an early stage.

Future design reviews would benefit from the inclusion of the following:

- Urban design and site analysis
- Sustainability approach and how this has influenced the proposals
- Landscape strategy

The Design Commission will be in contact to establish dates for future meetings.

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

Attendees

Developer: Ian Sharrocks, Principle Design Manager, Wates
Designers: David Halliday, Director, Halliday Clark Architects

Local Authority: David Glyn Jones, Senior Planner
Mel Evans, Senior Manager Housing Programmes
Andy Roberts, Planning Strategy Manager

Design Review Panel:
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Panel Jamie Brewster
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