

Design Review Report

Willowbrook Drive South Residential,
Cardiff Living, Cardiff

DCFW Ref: N223

Meeting of 2nd April 2020



Review Status

Meeting date
Issue date
Scheme location
Scheme description
Scheme reference number
Planning status

Public

2nd April 2020
16th April 2020
Cardiff
Residential
N223
Pre-application

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.

None.

Note on current operational context:

The Design Commission for Wales is operating during necessary public health measures due to the impact of the Coronavirus Covid 19 pandemic and this report follows the recent online review meeting.

Consultations to Date

No previous reviews of proposals for this site by DCFW. Design materials submitted pre-review were considered by DCFW and questions sent to the team to aid their preparation for full review.

The Proposals

The stated vision is for a residential development which accommodates a range of homes for both open market and social rent, incorporating flats and houses that respond to the site constraints and which increase the development density of the previously approved outline planning consent obtained in 2017.

The proposal consists of c40 to 50 tenure blind dwellings with 30% affordable housing in line with Cardiff Council's Adopted Local Development Plan. A new full planning application is anticipated as the scheme could not comply with the scale parameters established by the previous outline consent; a higher dwelling density is considered more appropriate and viable. The new development aims to improve the urban quality of Willowbrook Drive comprising flats fronting onto Willowbrook Drive and Crickhowell Road.

The site is owned by Cardiff Council and situated in the Trowbridge ward at the junction of Willowbrook Drive and Crickhowell Road. It is a relatively flat site, bounded on all sides by estate roads beyond which are residential neighbourhoods and a further development to the North of the site. The immediate neighbourhood is predominantly residential. The site is mainly grassed open space with some woodland to the central area of the site adjacent to a minor water course. Some of the trees are protected by a Tree Preservation

Order. There are a number of non-designated footpaths within the site which are proposed to be retained.

Main Points

This Design Commission welcomed the opportunity to be consulted on the proposals at an appropriate stage for review where there is scope to engage in constructive dialogue and add value to the proposals. The following points summarise the key issues arising from the review and should be considered to inform the further ongoing design development.

Strategic Context

The master plan was presented within the parameters of the site boundary selected for development and supported by a detailed analysis of the site constraints which have shaped the revised design proposals. Following discussion, it was agreed that the wider strategic context was not sufficiently explained and should have captured the following aspects:

- Cardiff Living Programme- Vision- Objectives- Outcomes
- Site Briefs arising from Cardiff Living Programme
- Statement from Cardiff Living explaining Client / Developer structure.
- Relationship with other housing schemes being delivered by Wates Residential & Cardiff Living in the immediate vicinity.
- Articulate an understanding of the needs of residents.

The Commission noted that although the site analysis was comprehensive, it would have been beneficial if it had captured key issues such as: wider demographic context; historical overview; relationship to transport routes & connectivity; relationship to local amenities; ecological profile of the area; justification of site selection; and overall neighbourhood planning strategy. These important aspects would have strengthened the presentation and provided essential context and background to support the proposals. From the materials presented the Commission was unable to discern that this was a Cardiff Living Programme proposal.

The proposals would benefit from a clear strategies for:

- Landscape design
- Architectural Design
- Phasing
- Long term maintenance strategy

The ownership and maintenance of the green spaces by Cardiff Council presents an opportunity to add public value rather simply accept the long-term burden.

Site Plan

The material presented has focused on the site constraints such as areas of sensitive woodland and landscape, existing pathways, watercourses, protected trees, and proximity to the highway and neighbouring properties. In response to these constraints, a range of similar site layouts have been generated outlining the pros and cons of each option. Unfortunately, as a consequence, the development proposals appear overly constrained, with some new homes provided with limited space for garden, amenity area or soft landscaping.

The acceptance of existing footpaths as a constraint to be accepted is holding back wider possibilities. The lack of a wider context analysis means that any understanding of the significance of the footpaths as routes to important destinations or as leisure routes is not demonstrated. Where do the footpaths go? Are they used well? Will they still be appealing once the site is developed? Would the whole site benefit if the routes of the footpaths were reviewed? The absence of testing of further options demonstrates an acceptance that these are a given and the possibility of an alternative future scenario has not been explored. The proposals would benefit overall from testing greater possibilities for routes and connections. This is a particular concern as the layouts give only partial surveillance of the routes and they may feel unsafe and result in further antisocial behaviour issues as experienced elsewhere in the local area. The footpaths need to be considered in conjunction with the woodland and an appropriate response to each developed.

Overall, the proposals contain an imbalance of soft and hard landscape which has the potential to undermine the quality of the development. There would be value in re-evaluating the balance between preservation of open space and woodland, to allocating more generous land area to support better design.

Architectural form and materiality

The design proposals illustrate new homes built with traditional masonry supported by an aspiration for offsite manufacture. It is acknowledged that the scheme is typical of other similar residential developments and is consistent with other schemes being delivered by Wates Residential South and Cardiff Living. However, the supporting computer-generated images are generic and not site specific or distinctive. It is understood that this will be resolved as the design material is more fully developed prior the planning application, however it suggests significant work is needed. There is also a need to consider supporting site sections, actual elevations, and 3D impressions of the development.

Community Engagement & Communication

The Design Commission noted that a Public Engagement Event is to be confirmed and may be scheduled for June 2020. There needs to be a strong and clear commitment to community involvement and engagement not just for this phase of new homes but for all Wates Residential South & Cardiff Living developments in the neighbourhood. In the context of the current public health measures it is important to re-evaluate the methods for involvement and engagement and ensure adequate time is allocated in the programme to achieve effective and meaningful communication prior to the planning application submission.

Safety and security

A sense of safety and security is important for any development. Secured by Design accreditation must be a consideration and how this certification can achieve a safer environment for future residents. It is understood that there can be a creative tension between satisfying SBD and promoting a more permeable public realm, and that creative and innovative design solutions responding to local safety challenges need to be embraced from the outset.

Currently the proposals are not rising to the opportunity of the site. We urge the team and the Council to push further to reflect the ambition of the wide Cardiff Living programme.

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

Attendees

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Agent/Client/Developer:	Cardiff Council, Cardiff Living Programme, Wates partnership
Local Authority:	Teresa Boyle, Mike Biddulph, Cardiff Council
Design Review Panel:	
Chair	Jonathan Vernon Smith
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