

Design Review Report

Plot D9b, SA1 Swansea

DCFW Ref: 284

Meeting of 3rd August 2022



Review Status

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

PUBLIC

3rd August 2022
11th August 2022
Residential
Swansea
N284
Post-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 and meeting Agenda items. Any such declarations are recorded here and in DCFW's central records.

Steve Smith, of Swansea Council, declared that he is a Design Review Panel member.
Carole-Anne Davies declared a commercial relationship with Geraint John Planning, outside of her work with DCFW.
All were happy to proceed.

Consultations to Date

No community consultation was undertaken in informing the reserved matters application.
DCFW previously reviewed proposals for this site as an Innovative Housing Programme application. The design team and proposals have since changed.

The Proposals

The proposals are for a Reserved Matters application for a waterfront plot in the SA1 regeneration area in Swansea. The site will provide 32 residential units, potentially comprising of 50/50 affordable and private units, although alternative arrangements including 100% affordable are currently being explored. The accommodation may comprise a mix of 1-, 2- and 3-bedroom family apartments and duplexes, as well as four townhouse units, although this is still being discussed.

The site was previously the site for a proposed IHP scheme, which was not realised due to viability issues.

Main Points

The Design Commission welcomed the opportunity to engage on this scheme.

Changes amongst the client team and their requirements for the site have resulted in a lack of a clear vision to steer the design. A stronger sense of ambition from the client needs to come through and help establish the principles for the site. In particular, the matter of single aspect dwellings is one that was raised by the panel as a significant concern and needs a clear steer from the client.

Principle of single aspect dwellings

As presented the scheme results in a large number of west-facing, single-aspect apartments which could face overheating problems and a number of east-facing apartments which would get very little daylight, neither would benefit from natural cross ventilation. These are issues that would impact on resident comfort and wellbeing and could be designed out at this stage, but to achieve this the scheme will require a fundamental rethink.

The panel examined the scope for recessed balconies, as the proposed external balconies are located on an exposed façade on an exposed site. The design team stated that inset balconies were perceived as being unviable on this site, though a different design approach might allow for this provision.

The lack of daylight in internal corridors and their narrow widths was highlighted as a particularly poor environment that does little to promote a sense of home or community.

Tenure mix

The client and design team clarified that they are currently exploring alternative tenure mixes to those that were originally proposed, potentially to become 100% affordable. The panel would encourage the client to explore how changes in the tenure will impact the communities living within the scheme, as well as how it will impact the energy strategy. A greater mix could add to a more diverse community within the scheme.

Residents having insufficient outdoor balcony space due to the space taken by individual heat pumps for each dwelling, as well as the noise/heat pollution for each unit on those balconies, are unacceptable impacts of decarbonising heat, and the design team and client should further explore how to avoid these negative impacts for residents.

The design team clarified that they do not have a dedicated sustainability consultant involved at this stage, and sustainability strategies from other Coastal Housing sites will

be used. Resolving the energy strategy and its impact on the design of the scheme is critical and should be integrated at this stage. Some tenure options could permit shared heat and ventilation infrastructure, saving cost and internal space.

While supportive of family apartments as part of the scheme, the panel would encourage the client and the design team to consider the design implications of family life in a 2nd/3rd storey flat, and to explore a 'day in the life' for these residents. This may help inform strategies around the design of communal areas and storage space, as well as consideration of lower duplexes, in order to ensure the best possible accommodation for families in this development. It is worth exploring how families will access communal and park spaces, as well as how arrival spaces could be adjusted to accommodate those movements. It is also worth exploring the potential noise impacts of a mix of residents including families living in flats, and how these noise impacts could be accommodated through the design.

Quality of ground floor

The quality of the ground floor is currently an issue, as it has blank facades and lacks natural surveillance. The relationship between the indoor and outdoor spaces on all facades needs further consideration and improvement. The courtyard, and in particular the under-croft parking area, could be a very bleak space that feels unsafe and unwelcoming for residents, and has no amenity or landscape character. There are very few windows overlooking the space to provide natural surveillance and no access into the building from courtyard or park edges for ease of access and to create a relationship between inside and outside. The ground floor design would benefit from an exploration of the pedestrian experience through a series of visuals – in particular, the process of using and exiting/entering the car park (particularly at night), the experience of the water's edge of the development at a human scale, and the experience of the park edge at a pedestrian scale. The scheme would also benefit from further testing of routes.

Floor to ceiling heights

The panel would encourage the design team to maximise room heights within the generous 3m floor-to-floor heights, as this is a resilient design feature when facing potential future overheating.

Simpler design approach

The strong design concept of a dockside character, with its scale next to open space, is a strong conceptual feature of this design. The strength of the original architectural concept has been diluted through the addition of the curved corners and the roof pavilions. The design would benefit from simplification, in particular the squaring of the

rounded corners, and better integrating top storeys. Focusing on a strong, simple warehouse form could also be more cost-efficient providing the opportunity for value to be added to the quality of the residential environment.

The narrow linear communal roof garden is unlikely to be used, due to users feeling that they are near private gardens. The development of the town houses layout could maximise the double aspect for ventilation, as well as residents' wellbeing. Simplification and refinement of the overall design will be beneficial to the scheme.

The panel would encourage the design team to look at how other schemes in the vicinity of this site have dealt with the water's edge, and how the level change can be used to an advantage to create a distinction between private and public space.

Next Steps

The client and design team clarified that they will further refine and test the viability of the tenure mix.

The Commission would welcome further engagement on this scheme once further design work has been undertaken to address the issues raised above.

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

Attendees

Agent/Client/Developer: Gary Roberts, Coastal Housing
Eleanor Havard, Coastal Housing
Kelvin Rees, Coastal Housing

Architect/Design Team: Terry Morley, Holder Mathias Architects
Dai Lewis, EDP
Laura Power, Geraint John Planning
Luke Grattarola, Geraint John Planning

Local Authority: Steve Smith, Swansea Council
David Owen, Swansea Council
Jeff Saywell, Swansea Council

DCFW Design Review Panel

Chair: Wendy Maden
Lead Panellist: Lynne Sullivan
Panel: Richard Woods
Jen Heal, DCFW, Design Advisor
Efa Lois, DCFW, Place Advisor
Carole-Anne Davies, DCFW, Chief-Executive

Observing: Hayley Kemp, Swansea Council
Marco Mancini, Swansea Council
Alys Smith, A-Level Work Experience Student