



DESIGN
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Design Review Report

Fairwood Terrace, Gowerton, Swansea

DCFW Ref: N285

Meeting of 18th August 2022



Review Status

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

CONFIDENTIAL

18th August 2022
24th August 2022
Gowerton, Swansea
Residential
N285
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 and meeting Agenda items. Any such declarations are recorded here and in DCFW's central records.

Steve Smith, who attended the meeting representing Swansea Council, is a DCFW panel member. Gareth Howell who attended the meeting as part of the design team is also a DCFW panel member. All were content to proceed following these declarations.

Consultations to Date

This is the first review of proposals for this site although wider proposals for a strategic site north of Waunarlyydd which is adjacent to this site have previously been reviewed by DCFW.

Pre-application discussions have taken place with the local planning authority.

The Proposals

The proposal consists of higher density housing at the centre of the site surrounding a newly created civic plaza at the station, with lower density residences toward the site periphery. Two and a half to four storey buildings enclose the central green space, with predominantly 2-3 storey homes elsewhere. Pedestrian/cycle routes run through the site linking the existing public right-of-way and bicycle routes to Gowerton Station, with additional connections to the east. The provision of a 50-space park and ride facility and new bus connection are also included.

Main Points

DCFW welcomed the opportunity to review proposals for this site at a relatively early stage. The following provides a summary of the key points raised in the review.

Placemaking Vision

This site presents a good opportunity to achieve many positive aspects of placemaking to a standard that is rarely reached in Wales. The opportunity comes from the proximity to the train station and the facilities of Gowerton which provide the potential for fewer car-based trips and therefore more active travel, higher density and a stronger sense of community. Currently this opportunity is not being fully grasped. A much clearer and ambitious vision is needed to help guide the design process.

It is positive that higher density development is being considered here, enabled by the location and movement potential. Overall a more urban conception of the place would help in the design. Currently the approach seems to still be suburban in nature with some higher density elements. There is potential to push this much further – to create a well-defined and enclosed plaza which has life and activity of its own, potentially with a mix of uses, people passing through to access the station and the local facilities, with indoor life spilling out onto the public spaces, a real heart to the development. The potential for higher density should be considered overall across the site rather than a concentration in one place and should be explored through form and typology not just height. Density and a mix of uses, particularly around the plaza will help to improve the use of the station, has the potential to support local businesses and will help to create a vibrant public space and sense of place.

The vision should encapsulate the distinctive features of the site that will help to give the development identity rather than being led by seeing these elements as constraints. This includes the natural heritage of the site with its current designation as a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) and the interesting history of the site which was referenced in the presentation but does not come through in the current proposals. There is the potential for an approach to biodiversity to be designed into all spaces within the development including the design for the park and ride.

As the vision is developed, a clearer picture of the make up of the community living within the development will emerge which should inform the design. Who is this place for? What are their needs? How do the proposals help to meet these needs? There is currently little sense of how the proposed development will integrate with the existing community both physically and socially.

Movement

Movement is critical to the success of this development and needs to be a much stronger driving design force. The proximity of the station provides a clear opportunity to approach movement in a different way but the masterplan still presents as a largely car-focused, highway-based design. The active travel routes identified would be positive additions but are not yet sufficiently designed in to the masterplan. The desired experience of walking and cycling should help in the identification of routes, allocation of space and future detailed design. Sufficient space should be provided for cycle parking both at the station and within the residential development as well as space to accommodate bike hire, car clubs etc in line with a comprehensive movement strategy so that they are integral not add-ons.

The ambiguity of the design of the park and ride facility at the station is not helping with the design of the site adjacent to this. Collaboration with Transport for Wales is critical to ensure that the two elements can be designed and delivered to the high design standard needed to support the quality of the development and deliver placemaking benefits. There is a risk that a minimum standards-based approach to the park and ride could downgrade the quality of the environment around it. The essential ingredients of a successful public plaza mediating between a station and residential environment should be known, understood and conveyed in a collaborative approach to the design of this whole space. A review of successful local transport hubs in residential environments both nationally and internationally would help to inform this. They regularly include retail, social and leisure spaces as well as necessary but well designed and integrated transport infrastructure. This

review will also highlight elements that this development should avoid, to protect it from becoming an unattractive, hostile place.

In designing the environment around the station it is important to consider the flows of people on foot and bike and how their needs can be met first with the highway infrastructure being designed to fit around this.

The need for a second road providing access only to the park and ride is questioned. It uses up limited space, creates a more road-based approach and does not seem to be good value for money. A clearer picture of anticipated car movements to serve the total 250 parking spaces at the station is needed to understand the potential impact on the existing and new neighbourhood. If the impact is relatively light, particularly given the emphasis to be placed on active travel, then the risk of 'rat-running' and the impact this is having on the design could be reviewed. A bus gate seems like a solution to a problem that could potentially be designed out at this stage. A certain amount of movement and activity should be expected in a high density residential environment in close proximity to a station and the vision for the place should align accordingly.

Integrated Environmental Strategy

Environmental and energy aspirations for the development need to be feeding into the design at this stage. It is positive that an all-electric approach is being taken. This should be confirmed and other elements around the use of solar power to reduce bills and EV charging. Transport is likely to be the major source of CO2 emissions, operationally.

Next Steps

This site presents an exciting opportunity for a different approach to residential development more aligned with the principles of Transit Orientated Development than the traditional suburban approach. We encourage the development and design team to fully grasp this opportunity. Taking a step back at this stage to really define the vision for the site based on all of the opportunities identified in the analysis would benefit the design process enormously. A clearer and more defined vision will help to inform and set design parameters for critical elements such as density, mix of use, movement hierarchy and integration, public realm design and the identity of the development – all of the elements of the Placemaking Wales Charter to which the local authority, developer and design team are signatories. We encourage the team to be inspired by developments of this nature elsewhere and aim high to deliver an exemplar development that can be celebrated and learnt from.

We would welcome a further review session as the proposals develop and encourage a slot to be booked early with DCFW to ensure this can take place at the appropriate time.

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

Attendees

Client/Developer: Kate Harrison, Persimmon Homes West Wales

Architect/Design Team: Philip Dascombe, EDP
Gareth Howell, EDP

Local Authority: Steve Smith, Swansea Council
Lucy Kelly, Swansea Council

DCFW Design Review Panel

Chair: Andrew Linfoot

Lead Panellist: Barny Evans

Panel: Steve Smith
Maria Asenjo
Efa Lois, Place Advisor DCFW
Jen Heal, Design Advisor DCFW
Carole-Anne Davies, Chief Executive DCFW

Observers: Hayley Kemp, Swansea Council