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Design Review Report

Llanwern Village Design Code,
Newport

6th November 2013



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

CONFIDENTIAL

Meeting date	Thursday 17th October 2013
Issue date	6 th November 2013
Scheme location	Llanwern Village, Newport
Scheme description	Design Code, residential
Scheme reference number	22
Planning status	Outline planning condition
Declaration of interests	Andrew Linfoot serves on the DCFW Panel

Consultations to Date

The residential scheme for this site was reviewed by the Design Commission for Wales (DCFW) as an outline application on 31st January 2007.

The Proposals

Outline Planning Permission for a residential development of up to 1100 dwellings and provision of primary school, village centre, public open space, landscaping and associated infrastructure works was consented on 1st October 2009 (LA Ref: 06/0845). The scheme will form part of the eastern expansion area as set out in the East Newport Development Framework SPG adopted May 2007, a significant urban extension of the City of Newport on a greenfield site to the east of the city.

Condition 04 of the outline planning consent requires a Design Code for the development of the site to be submitted and approved by the Local Authority. The Design Code is to ensure this multi-phase scheme follows an overarching and co-ordinating design ethos. The Local Authority no longer has an Urban Design Officer to review the Design Code, and requested the assistance of the Design Commission for Wales assist in their discharge of conditions process.

The site covers some 44Ha and is bisected by a minor road known as Cot Hill that links the small village of Llanwern to the Southern Distributor Road. A small stretch of inter-war development has been built on the north side of Cot Hill, but the site primarily consists of pasture land on a rolling plateau which is relatively steep in places. The site has a strong rural character with significant hedgerows and hedgerow trees. Views to the northern and southern hills are prominent. The land was allocated in Newport's

Unitary Development Plan (UDP) 2005. This is the most sensitive of the development sites identified in the UDP.

Summary

There were several key points specifically identified by the Panel:

- This is the most attractive site and a key residential development opportunity close to Newport. The Panel is supportive of the principle of such development.
- The Panel was concerned about several aspects of the Design Code, such as the practicalities of how the land will be parcelled up for sale to developers, and how this will be controlled and managed over time.
- The Design Code provides the potential to form a close partnership between the Local Authority, Developer and House Builders. The format and content of the Design Code should reflect this and must be a useful tool for all parties. The draft reviewed by the panel has not achieved this aim. It is essential that the Design Code provides clear, high-level guidance for developer clients which demonstrates the ambitions of Gallagher Estates and the Local Authority.
- The Testing Plan caused some concern as it seemed to show broadly uniform development across the whole scheme, without sufficient and explicit responses to the topography of the site and appearing to dilute the Character Areas. It was suggested that the parcelling of land be revisited, and that boundaries should not fall along roads, so that consistency of character could be ensured on opposite sides of roads.
- Although the team said that they did not want to be prescriptive in terms of architectural style, the illustrations used throughout the Design Code show a consistent application of 'developer vernacular', demonstrating a lack of design ambition.
- The Design Code provides a level of control which is too uniform across the development. It lacks detail of building character in the most important locations whilst limiting opportunities for variation and innovation elsewhere. The Panel suggested that the Code should provide for better control in important areas, such as the 'High Street', whilst allowing greater flexibility in others. This would provide greater opportunity for alternative delivery modes and housing types, such as self-build, live-work units or housing for mixed communities.
- The Panel is supportive of the commitment to affordable housing demonstrated in the Design Code. However, it is vital that this is maintained and enforced throughout all phases of development.
- The Design Commission would welcome the earliest opportunity to review the first phases of development, as these will establish a pattern and set a standard for future phases.

Discussions and Panel Response in Full

Presentation

Spencer Claye of Gallagher Estates introduced the scheme and explained that they would use the Design Code as a tool for sale of the parcels of land. The Code, which has been informed by engineering work, will define housing densities and design quality aspirations. It will also provide a tool for the Local Authority to assess applications for each of the parcels of development.

Craig Mawby of IDP Midlands explained how the Design Code had been developed. The Design Code tries to address the character and detail of the development described in the outline planning permission. Study of the surrounding buildings revealed no prominent character of built form for the Design Code to relate to. The team were keen that the Code should better integrate the school with the 'High Street'; give the 'High Street' a Regency Grandeur by increasing ceiling heights (this would also allow flexibility/conversion to retail in the future); define nodes of public realm and create distinct Character Areas which relate to the topography. The allotment area has been increased, and roads have been realigned to minimise excavation.

Andrew Linfoot of Halcrow explained how the existing landscape had informed the Design Code. Important hedges will be retained, and these inform the layout of the masterplan and the pedestrian routes. Defined open spaces are set around better quality existing trees, which will be retained.

Chapter 12 of the Design Code contains coding for each of the land parcels. Details in this chapter include materials, affordable housing ratios, gateways and densities. The team have produced a Testing Layout plan which demonstrates how the Design Code might be implemented.

Design Code Format and Use

The Panel enquired about the level of involvement of the Local Authority in the development of the Design Code, as this will be an important document for them. It was explained that there had been some discussions, but they had not been closely involved and there had not been a great deal of feedback. It was confirmed that the document will not have Supplementary Planning Guidance status, but it is a condition of the outline approval.

The Panel thought that it was important for the team to be clear about the purpose of the Design Code, who would use it, for what purposes and what it was aiming to achieve. The document is currently 237 pages long, rather unwieldy and difficult to penetrate. The team needs to consider how well people will engage with it, how it will be interpreted and applied. There will be two main users of the document: Gallagher Estates and the Local Authority. The Local Authority sees the Code as a way to coordinate development, setting common objectives for achieving design quality and delivery. However, after the planning condition has been signed off, Gallagher Estates will need to take ownership of the document to control and 'sign off' individual

developments. The content of the Design Code should be appropriate for this use. Gallagher Estates agreed that the document was too long and the first sections needed paring down, for clarity and application.

A discussion about the flexibility of the Design Code considered aspects of flexibility and the need to avoid over prescription whilst achieving robust principles for control and management. The Panel thought it was important that the format, size and content of the Design Code matched its intended use.

The Panel asked how far into the development Gallagher Estates will remain involved, and therefore to what extent they will have control over the development. Gallagher stated that they would retain responsibility for key infrastructure, open spaces and Section 106 Agreements. The Panel thought the Code should therefore set a clear trajectory for development, taking into account the influence and control of design quality standards over the lifetime of the development.

The Panel thought that, in its current state, the Design Code would not be effective in ensuring high quality design or as a useful tool for delivery. They suggested that Gallagher sets out a stronger design vision and brief, thinking about how they will present the document to housing developers, and how they will work with the Local Authority.

As developers, Gallagher will play a key role in achieving quality and value. They must ensure that the first phase is built to a high standard to set the bar for future phases. This will also raise the value of the site. The team were encouraged to bring the first phases of development for review with the Design Commission at the earliest opportunity to assist with this.

Design Code Content and Scheme Detail

The Panel was concerned about how the significantly sloping topography would be handled to provide attractive sites for house builders, and how this would affect the character and quality of the scheme. The Panel observed that the Code showed a similar approach to planning across the site regardless of the steepness of the slope. Gallagher agreed that dealing with the slopes was a challenge, and that they expected some dwellings to be split level. The engineers explained that infrastructure would be mostly contained in the east-west roads which are less steep, and that permissible gradients could be achieved without retaining walls.

The Panel thought that the character of the topography was not clearly conveyed in the Design Code. This is a prime site in a key location, and the setting is an important selling point which needs to be clearly communicated to house builders who will invest in the development. Gallagher agreed that this issue needs to be addressed, and would improve their sales approach and support their aims for the scheme. The Panel suggested that the parcel coding sheets could be used effectively to this end.

The Panel recognised that the team aimed to co-ordinate a coherent whole for the development by suggesting materials and 'vernacular' style for each of the Character Areas. However, they were not convinced that this would secure the high quality development to which Gallagher Estates aspired. The palette of materials shown lends

itself to generic indistinct house types, which would not encourage innovation or help to develop character.

Concern was expressed over the approach to the land parcels and that this would cause problems for Gallagher and the Local Authority in providing consistency and control over character. The parcels need to be considered as parts of an eventual whole and come together to create a village, rather than a collection of individual estates. The Panel suggested that parcels should not be split along roads as this would lead to different approach on each side.

It was clear that Gallagher saw the public realm and primary roads as important opportunities to enhance the quality and experience of the development rather than relying on the housing units to do this. The Panel suggested that indicative architectural drawings, showing street elevations would help to demonstrate the high quality expected in key places of the development.

The Testing Layout drawing highlighted areas that need much greater consideration such as on the south west corner parcel where fronts of houses look onto backs because they have been oriented to take advantage of views. The drawing shows that some elements of the plan do not work as well as they could, and they should be given further consideration to achieve the best possible approach.

The Panel suggested that the team consider alternative types of housing as well as volume house building. For example, the more difficult, steeper parts of the site could be allocated for self-build to achieve greater returns and live-work units could be used to add scale

The Panel was keen to emphasise the importance of delivering the affordable housing levels outlined in the Code, which reflect the commitment of the Planning Authority. The ratios of affordable housing in each parcel need to be maintained from the first phase, otherwise there will be extra pressure on future phases which will put off developers. The Panel thought the affordable housing should be mixed with other housing types and should cater for families. The Code should encourage good design which demonstrates innovation in meeting Development Quality Requirements (DQR) whilst adding value.

The 'High Street' has 500m² of space which could be converted to retail. The Panel thought this could cause problems through residents objecting to conversion, and wondered how the developer and Local Authority would address this. Gallagher explained that the area has different uses in the outline planning consent, but acknowledged that there could be challenges in practice. A strategy is needed to deal with this from the outset. The retail elements could contribute to amenities which may help the development become more of a community. The team might also consider the role of public art in the development, referring to TAN 12, section 5.15 for guidance on how this could benefit the scheme.

The Panel asked for further explanation of infrastructure items shown on some of the drawings, such as a large attenuation pond and two pumping stations. The engineer explained that the pond was to accommodate excess surface water flow, but would be dry most of the time, and used as a BMX park. This will be adopted by the Local

Authority. The foul water strategy requires the two pumping stations. These have not yet been designed in detail, but are likely to be underground with gantries over the top.

The Panel thought the BMX park, allotments and hedgerows were assets that were under sold in the Design Code. These aspects of the scheme will help develop character, reinforce the message about quality and should be given greater thought and emphasis.

Phasing of the works, including implementation of infrastructure, should be carefully planned to deal with construction traffic coming into and passing through the site. This management and delivery issues should also be given greater consideration.

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

Attendees

Agent/Client/Developer:	Spencer Claye, Steve Jay, Gallagher Estates Sarah Griffiths, Turleys
Architectural/Urban Designer:	Craig Mawby, IDP Midlands Andrew Linfoot, Halcrow Ellis Phillips (work experience observer)
Planning Authority:	Geraint Roberts, Newport City Council (joined review late)
Design Review Panel:	
Chair	Ewan Jones
Lead Panellist	Wendy Richards Martin Knight Elfed Roberts Kedrick Davies Amanda Spence, Design Advisor, DCFW
Observing:	Carole-Anne Davies – DCFW Mike Harvey – South Wales Police