



DESIGN
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Design Review Report

Highfields, Heath, Cardiff

DCFW Ref: 104

Meeting of 19th May 2016



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

PUBLIC

Meeting date	19 th May 2016
Issue date	2 nd June 2016
Scheme location	Heath, Cardiff
Scheme description	Residential Development
Scheme reference number	104
Planning status	Pre-application

Declarations of Interest

None.

Consultations to Date

This is the third of the housing partnership scheme sites to be reviewed by the Design Commission for Wales but the first time that this site has been reviewed.

Consultation with the local community has taken place.

The Proposals

The proposal is for 28 apartments and 12 houses on a 0.61ha site adjacent to Allensbank Road, Heath. The building that previously occupied the site has been demolished leaving the site vacant. It is located adjacent to The Oaks Garden Nursery to the north.

All of the dwellings are to be built to Passivhaus standards as a pilot for this form of development within the housing partnership scheme.

This development is part of a housing partnership scheme between Cardiff Council and Wales Homes with a £33m investment from the Council. There are over 40 sites across the city that are intended to deliver a total of 1500 homes over ten years in three phases.

Main Points

This was the third site within the Cardiff Housing Partnership scheme that the Design Commission has reviewed. The Commission remains supportive of the ambition of the initiative and support the exploration of the use of Passivhaus standards.

The following points were discussed in the review and should be given further consideration as proposals for the site progress.

Site layout

The process that led to the arrangement of the houses to the front of the site and three storey apartment block to the rear was discussed and the design team explained the rationale behind this. This decision-making process should be reflected in the Design and Access Statement that accompanies the application.

Access, circulation and way-finding

The requirement to retain access for visitors to the Garden Nursery car park and delivery point complicates the access and movement arrangements for the site. It is understood that separate access for this use has been explored but found not to work, therefore a suitable arrangement for directional signage, management and manoeuvring will need to be established.

It may be best to direct garden centre visitors into the site from the south rather than through the western access point as there is more scope to sensitively locate signage.

The need for the second vehicle access point to the west of the site was questioned and should be considered in more detail. The extra space gained could create opportunities for improvements to the layout and quality of external spaces.

Bin storage

A suitable storage area for bins for the houses needs to be established taking account of the number of bins that people will have. The most suitable location may be to the rear of properties where a space can be built in adjacent to the parking area enabling all bin collections be to undertaken along the central access road.

Bin stores for the apartment blocks need to be placed in a convenient location in order for them to be successful. The bin store to the north is somewhat isolated from the apartments and therefore may not be used properly.

Landscape strategy

There needs to be a clear and logical demarcation between the areas that are to be managed by property owners/residents and the management company. Diagrams to explain this arrangement would be helpful as it is currently unclear on the landscape plan. Measures, such as writing requirements into deeds, may need to be put in place to prevent the loss of features that are integral to the landscape strategy for the site. For example, the removal of boundary walls or planting along the rear edge of properties would have a significant impact on the character of the home zone.

The approach to hard and soft landscape design needs to balance the requirements for adoption of the highway with the desire to create an attractive and welcoming home zone setting for the dwellings. Currently the layout allows very little space for trees and soft landscaping within the street. Some minor changes to the arrangement of the space around the apartment block could help to create more meaningful and usable spaces potentially including some play space and more room for residents to comfortably sit out in front of their properties.

When considering how the space within the site will be arranged, the potential for retaining existing trees should be established and a realistic plan prepared of what will and won't be retained.

The spaces to the front of the houses are small which may make planting unrealistic. We would expect this boundary to be gated and a simple, but well executed, hard paving design may be most appropriate.

Orientation and overlooking

The corner properties need to provide overlooking of the route into the site and surveillance of the public realm particularly to the north of the apartment block. If there is not a door on this north elevation there should be windows from active rooms to help provide surveillance

Scale, mass and elevations

The row of terraced houses steps to accommodate a level change which also helps to break up the mass of the block to better reflect the semi-detached nature of the area. Options for managing the mass of the apartment block should also be explored. This may not be through a step in the roof line but through variation in the elevation. A central entrance with secondary entrances either side help to balance and break up the elevation. A three entrance strategy could also reduce the extent of internal shared corridors, leading to greater efficiency in the internal planning. These decisions would need to be balanced against the Passivhaus design requirements.

Further design development of the balconies is required. Using a 3D model to track the sun-path across the elevation will help to determine the depth, height and permeability of the walls that form the sides of the balconies on both the front and back of the block. The proposed solid form may prevent sunlight from penetrating the space and reduce daylight entering the properties. To the rear, the proposed form creates a frame that will focus the view onto the properties and back gardens of the houses to the rear of the site. An alternative arrangement could help to redirect or screen this view whilst capturing beneficial sunlight.

Visually the top floor of the apartment block seems divorced from the rest of the block. This is partly due to the windows, which look out from the circulation corridor, not responding to the fenestration arrangement below and also the change in material but no change to the profile of the building, resulting in a flat elevation. Pushing the top floor back could help to improve the roofscape.

Consideration should be given to the arrangement of the top floor as the corridor access doesn't seem to be the most efficient or effective access arrangement. Accessing these apartments from the three cores would be a better solution although management issues regarding the north core that would be shared between the affordable and private dwellings may need to be resolved.

Passivhaus design

Execution of the Passivhaus design is crucial and, thorough post-occupancy analysis, should be carried out to help the partnership to continue learning and improving for future schemes. Care should be taken with the internal arrangement of the houses if it

is likely that residents will predominantly use their back door. A hallway space has been provided at the front but not at the back and this could have an impact on performance.

Next steps

The proposed development establishes a good use of the site and we are very supportive of this approach and in particular the piloting of Passivhaus for the housing partnership. We would welcome seeing this scheme again prior to the submission of a planning application. This can be through a smaller meeting or desk-top review rather than full design review.

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

Attendees

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