

# Design Review Report

Land Adjacent to Dixton Roundabout,  
Monmouthshire

**DCFW Ref: N105**

Meeting of 14<sup>th</sup> April 2016



## Declarations of Interest

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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

Meeting date	<b>CONFIDENTIAL</b> 14 <sup>th</sup> April 2016
Issue date	5 <sup>th</sup> May 2016
Scheme location	Monmouth
Scheme description	Retail
Scheme reference number	N105
Planning status	Pre-application

## Declarations of Interest

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None declared.

## Consultations to Date

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This review has been accepted as a confidential, early consultation with the Commission as it will be the subject of a new planning application, not yet submitted or in the public domain. The local authority intends to inform neighbours and statutory consultees when the new planning application is submitted. The comments of the Commission will become public when the application is submitted, as explained in our published guidance.

## The Proposals

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The site sits on the north east edge of Monmouth, where Dixton Road, a minor arterial road leading north, meets the A40. Dixton Road (A466) is a residential road and includes a number of large villa style houses (mostly 1930s and before). Immediately south of the site and along Dixton Road lie school playing fields and Monmouth Comprehensive School. To the north and east of the site is the A40. This is a busy duelled trunk road linking Newport to the M50 and carrying high volumes of commercial traffic. There are a few isolated residential properties north of the site (Dixton Road) and a veterinary surgery.

The site is within the local authority development boundary. It is adjacent to a conservation area and in a C2 flood zone. A planning application for this site has already been submitted, but it is expected to be withdrawn when a new application for this scheme is submitted.

The most recent proposal is for a family pub/restaurant, two bulky goods retail units, 89 car parking spaces and associated landscape, including a new footway on the south side of Dixton Road.

The context for the scheme and the proposals were presented to the Design Commission by the local planning authority at this review meeting.

## Main Points in Detail

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The following points summarise key issues from the review and should inform work ahead of further review or submission of a planning application:

### **Design Concerns**

The Design Commission has a number of concerns about this proposal and the lack of evidence of an adequate design process properly informing proposals.

Although building this type of retail development on this site is appropriate in principle, there is little evidence to suggest that the proposal has been designed to address any of the constraints and opportunities provided by the site to achieve the best value solution.

The lack of site analysis, option testing and methodical and iterative design processes has resulted in an unsatisfactory proposal which requires significant further work to achieve good design quality and realise the opportunities of the site.

The local planning authority (LPA) expressed their concerns with the proposal at the review. Continued engagement between the LPA, the developer and their design team will be a valuable part of the design process.

It is crucial that time and resources are invested in a proper design process at this early stage to add value, otherwise significant future costs associated with poor quality design could be incurred.

### **Analytical Process**

Good quality design is informed by a sound analytical process. It is important that proper analysis of the context and site is undertaken by a competent design team so that it can meaningfully inform the proposals. Good design proposals can be justified by a good, informative analysis process. Investing time and skills in the analysis process will improve the design quality, avoid unnecessary costs and enhance the value of the delivered scheme.

*Site Analysis and Context Guide: Capturing the value of a site*, written by DCFW, is available to download on the Welsh Government website. It provides a useful guide to best practice: <http://gov.wales/topics/planning/policy/guidanceandleaflets/site-and-context-analysis-guide/?lang=en>

Good site analysis will:

- Provide an understanding of context including the architectural language of the area
- Make clear the physical and environmental qualities of the site
- Identify site constraints which need to be addressed through design
- Identify opportunities which can be utilised to add value to the scheme
- Provide an understanding of the planning context
- Highlight the sensitivities of the site and surrounding areas

Including discussion about site and context analysis and how it is shaping the design for this scheme in pre-application consultation will help the LPA to understand the rationale behind the proposals. Good analysis, underpinning design, will help give confidence to the LPA and other stakeholders that the proposal is appropriate and justified.

### **Addressing Site Constraints and Opportunities**

Once thorough analysis of the site and context has been carried out, constraints and opportunities can be identified and addressed through design. Mapping the significant constraints and opportunities will provide a framework for the design to work within. An iterative design process should follow, with different options tested against the framework and refined.

It is important that the whole site is considered and designed together as one, informed by the analysis. A masterplan and landscape strategy should consider building orientation, layout, where active frontages will be located and movement of pedestrians and cyclists as well as vehicles. Designing three individual buildings and filling in the spaces between with roads and parking will not provide the best value solution. Proposals should be designed to address and the site constraints and resolve these issues as far as possible. These constraints include, but are not limited to:

- Flooding risk and water management
- Noise from the A40 road
- Site levels
- Impact on setting of the conservation area

Other constraints will be identified through the analysis.

By making the most of opportunities offered by the site, the commercial value of the scheme could be improved. There will also be opportunities to minimise energy use/bills and therefore contribute to lower operational costs, improve the experience of visitors and staff and use green areas effectively for enhancing wellbeing, which may also assist dwell time. Opportunities might include, but are not limited to:

- Good views across countryside
- Volume of potential custom passing the site
- Convenient access
- Attractive setting (conservation area & landscape)
- The local authority's green infrastructure plan
- Local community and culture

Other opportunities will be identified through the analysis.

An example of exploiting a site opportunity would be to design an outside space for the food and beverage element which takes advantage of the views across the landscape whilst being sheltered from the traffic on the main road. The position within the site may have to be reconsidered to find the best option for doing this.

### **Nature of Development**

It is important that the nature of the proposed development is clearly defined, so that the right type of environment can be designed.

Once the nature of the proposed development is clear, the design of the arrival and site circulation, orientation and layout of buildings, parking, hard and soft landscape and visibility from the roads can be properly addressed.

The scale of the buildings and the materials, textures, elevations and roofscape should be considered in response to the analysis and intended nature of the development. For example, the pub/food beverage element might be at more of a domestic scale than the bulky retail goods, and this might inform how the facilities are set out on the site in relation to the surroundings.

It will be useful for the LPA, developers and design team to look at and visit precedent schemes to see how this type of development can be designed and operate successfully. Although they may not provide exactly the same function as is proposed for this site, the Ludlow Food Centre and Gloucester Services on the M5 may provide some useful examples to how this scheme may be approached. Precedent should help inform but not be copied. There is little value in directly copying existing successful schemes. Their success lies in the quality of their design process.

### **Site Circulation and Parking**

The access and circulation for vehicles, pedestrians, cyclists and deliveries needs to be reconsidered.

In line with the Active Travel Act Wales (2015), good practice would be to encourage and prioritise travel to the site on foot or cycle. Safe access and circulation within the site for pedestrians and cyclists should be designed in from the start. Some customers may wish to visit more than one of the buildings on the site, so safe and direct walking routes across the site should be considered.

Due to its location adjacent to the A40 many customers will arrive by car, so parking provision will be important. The design team should consider the best way to integrate parking for the site alongside a wider landscape strategy. For example, pub garden space may be most attractive to customers if it avoided overlooking a sea of parking.

### **Green Infrastructure, Energy and Wellbeing**

It is good that the local authority is committed to delivering their Green Infrastructure plan. The proposals for this site should be considered in the context of this wider strategy for Monmouthshire. The long term costs and maintenance of green infrastructure should be properly planned for. Carefully designed landscape can provide multiple benefits on this site, including improving biodiversity, creating attractive places for visitors/customers to use, providing acoustic and visual buffers to the trunk road and dealing with surface water drainage sustainably and effectively. A mutual agreement on a landscape strategy for the verges around the site is needed. Proposals should be coordinated through discussion with the authority that manages the trunk road.

It is best practice to integrate sustainable, passive design principles from the start of the design process. Adding expensive technology to deal with energy and environmental conditions later will be more costly in the short and long terms. By carefully planning the location, form, orientation, layout and positioning of openings of a building, energy efficiency can be enhanced at the outset and improved without added cost. The environmental conditions created through design will influence energy use and occupant health and wellbeing. These include thermal conditions, ventilation, daylight, sunlight and views. Well designed environmental conditions have been shown to improve staff productivity and will encourage customer dwell time. The Commission encourages early

environmental modelling and testing of design options to find the optimum solution. It is important that testing is carried out prior to a planning application being made.

### **Further Review**

The Design Commission always welcomes the opportunity to review schemes early and at successive meetings as design work progresses. It will be useful for another review of this scheme to take place prior to any planning application being made where the design team should be present to explain their design approach and the proposals for the site.

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

## Attendees

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Architect/Planning Consultant:	Not Present
Client/developer:	James Pearson, FD Avenbury Ventures (observing)
Local Authority:	Jo Draper, Monmouthshire CC Mark Hand, Monmouthshire CC
Design Review Panel:	
Chair	Jen Heal, Design Advisor, DCFW
Lead Panellist	Jonathan Vernon-Smith Amanda Spence, Design Advisor, DCFW Steve Smith Jonathan Adams
Observing	Carole-Anne Davies, CE, DCFW