

Design Review Report

Llanfoist to Abergavenny Footbridge

DCFW Ref: 118

Meeting of 17th November 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

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

PUBLIC

17th November 2016
30th November 2016
Llanfoist/Abergavenny
Footbridge
118
Pre-application

Declarations of Interest

Martin Knight, of Knight Architects is a member of DCFW's Design Review panel. All present at the meeting were happy to proceed following this declaration.

Consultations to Date

The local planning authority, Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and Cadw have been consulted. Public consultation has also taken place, followed by a design workshop involving local stakeholder groups.

The scheme was previously reviewed by the Design Commission in September 2016 and this report should be read alongside the report from the earlier review.

The Proposals

The proposal comprises a new footbridge over the River Usk to the east of the existing road bridge and connecting footpaths. The scheme aims to improve connectivity for cyclists and pedestrians between Llanfoist and Abergavenny town centre.

There are a number of statutory constraints on the site. The River Usk is a SAC and SSSI. The Abergavenny Bridge is Grade II* listed and a Scheduled Ancient Monument. The scheme falls within the Abergavenny Conservation Area boundary and is in proximity to two Historic Parks and Gardens (Abergavenny New Cemetery and Linda Vista Gardens). The Castle Meadows, which surrounds the site, is a SSSI. The site is within a flood plain.

Main Points in Detail

The following points summarise key issues from the review and should be considered to inform work ahead of making a planning application or engaging in further review.

Progress since previous review

A design-led approach has greatly improved the proposal since the previous review. The more logical approach to analysing and responding to the various constraints and opportunities has led to a proposal which is fitting for its context and represents good value. The rationale behind the siting and orientation of the crossing and the refinement of the proposed structural solution demonstrates good quality design.

It is now important that the design quality shown at this stage is carried through the detailed design stage, funding process and procurement so that the same good quality and good value scheme is delivered. Early consideration of the potential wider impact of the bridge and connections beyond the immediate site will further maximise the value of the scheme.

Bridge design quality

The design of the bridge structure itself has been significantly improved since the previous review. The proposals presented at this review have been rationalised whilst addressing the complex issues relating to ecology, heritage, landscape and flooding. The current proposal is more efficient, providing better value in terms of both construction and maintenance costs. The proposed location and alignment of the crossing has also been better considered.

Preventing cattle from crossing the bridge whilst maximising accessibility and ensuring safety for people is one of the most difficult demands of the project. It will be useful for the team to show that a variety of different options have been tested to provide reassurance that the best solution is proposed. Options should explore landscape solutions (such as mounding, ditches and hedges) and solutions at the end of the bridge and further out into the meadow.

It will also be useful for the design team to show that different options for the bridge landings and path connections have been considered and tested. This will demonstrate whether the best solution has been found. Safety, accessibility and convenience for cyclists and other users are important considerations, along with integration with the wider landscape.

The specification of materials and detail design of the bridge will be crucial to achieving quality and value. In particular, the cladding material and method will be important and should be seen as an integrated part of the overall design, rather than a purely decorative finish. The cladding is required to achieve the correct life-span of the primary structure, but will also be the visible face of the bridge and must be an honest reflection of the bridge construction whilst addressing its surroundings appropriately. It is essential that the quality of detail design and specification are locked in through the procurement process.

It would be good to see the team exploring the potential to procure the timber for the bridge locally. This will require early conversations with suppliers, manufacturers and contractors.

It is also important that the detail design of the underside of the bridge is well considered.

It is not currently proposed to light the bridge or connecting paths. In this location, the Commission fully understands why this approach might be appropriate. However, as the bridge may be used by commuters in the dark during the winter, it would be useful to see this decision fully considered. Retrofitting lighting at a later date could seriously compromise the quality and cost of the scheme. The impact on safety, wildlife and 'dark skies' should be factored in and fully considered in the decision.

Wider integration strategies

It would be beneficial for the bridge to be considered in the context of a wider masterplan and landscape strategy to maximise the value of the investment in the new crossing. A masterplan will provide clarity of the project vision and demonstrate how the aims of the scheme are being met. It will also help to show how the complex and sometimes conflicting demands of the scheme, including those relating to ecology, inclusive design, flood risk, life-cycle costs and heritage are being resolved.

Planning and allowing for future connections outside of the immediate bridge site will benefit a wider range of people and bring long term value. To do this, the team will need to consider work being done in relation to the local authority's Active Travel Act obligations concerning existing and proposed routes. There are also existing national cycle and walking routes which are used for leisure which could be tied into this scheme.

A wider masterplan and landscape strategy should show and respond to existing and potential future desire lines so that new connections are convenient, legible and user friendly. The masterplan should also inform the design of the bridge landings and how these connect with the wider landscape.

As identified by the design team, Castle Meadows is a valuable asset. A good landscape design strategy will ensure that the value of the Meadows is preserved and enhanced by the scheme. The landscape strategy should cover surface materials and boundaries so that these are an integral part of the scheme and not added in an ad-hoc fashion at a later date.

Communication of design process

It is important that the design process, including the analysis, testing of options and response to consultation, is clearly and succinctly communicated in the planning application, funding application and any further public consultation. Demonstrating that a thorough, rational and informative process has been undertaken will reinforce the argument for the scheme and give confidence that the best value solutions has been arrived at.

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

Attendees

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