

Design Review Report

Mamhilad Urban Village, Pontypool

DCFW Ref: 128

Meeting of 20th October 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	CONFIDENTIAL 20 th October 2016
Issue date	7 th November 2016
Scheme location	Pontypool
Scheme description	Residential masterplan
Scheme reference number	128
Planning status	Pre-application

Declarations of Interest

None declared.

Consultations to Date

The design team stated that Project Delivery Group meetings with Torfaen County Borough Council and attended by Cadw, are ongoing.

The Proposals

The site is located on the A4042, approximately 1.5 miles to the north-east of Pontypool and 6 miles to the north-east of Cwmbran. It sits close to the County boundary between Torfaen and Monmouthshire. It includes the vacant Parke-Davis site, the Grade II* listed former British Nylon Spinners factory and the Mamhilad Park site. The site also takes in greenfield land to the south and west of these built up areas. There are two existing access points off the Old Abergavenny Road and three bus stops on the A4042 in close proximity to the site, but pedestrian links to the site are limited. Public Rights of Way cross the site and run close to the site boundaries providing links to the surrounding countryside. There is a steep rise from the western boundary to the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal which marks the periphery of the Brecon Beacons National Park to the west.

The proposal is for the development of a mixed-use community, repurposing many of the existing industrial buildings and redeveloping vacant land and land cleared by demolition. Some of the industrial space is listed. A mix of different types and densities of residential accommodation, community, retail and commercial employment uses are proposed. Some of the existing office and industrial buildings are currently in use and there is an intent to keep many of these occupiers on the site, either in their current buildings or relocated.

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:

Overall Approach

The team presented an imaginative starting point for a potentially ground-breaking scheme. The use of good design to address social, business, economic and wellbeing needs will be required in order for the vision to be achieved.

The Commission supports the client and design team's ambition for sustainable reuse of the existing listed building, which has the potential to add value to the rest of the scheme. The Commission encourages further exploration of reuse of other buildings on the site to add further value.

This project is an opportunity for the landowner to leave a very positive legacy through innovative and good quality design. It is important that the innovation and quality are captured and fixed in the outline planning permission and early design work so that they are not diluted during delivery.

Development Business Plan

It is important that a sound 'business plan' is developed alongside initial design work to guide the scheme towards an exciting but viable outcome which will leave the quality of legacy desired. The business plan will inform design decisions, but will also be shaped by testing of design ideas. It should consider both immediate and future ambitions so that the scheme is deliverable and viable over the long-term.

The socio-economic principles behind the proposal, which the original factory was built upon, are extremely important and should be clearly defined along with the physical fabric of the buildings and public realm. These important non-physical ideas have the potential to make significant contributions to health, wellbeing and sustainability and to demonstrate exceptional stewardship by the landowners in partnership with the local authority.

The mix of uses provided for in the development will need careful planning based on market research and an analysis of the existing situation; this is especially important for the village centre. There may need to be some flexibility built into the business plan and planning application to provide future-proofing as commercial demands are likely to change over time.

The business plan should drive the specification level for refurbishment and the design of the public realm and simple low cost finishes may be appropriate in some places. Some low-cost, 'ordinary' industrial space might be appropriate and suitable to local economic needs.

It would be useful for all aspects of the business plan to be explored and communicated diagrammatically as part of a justified design process.

Delivery & Viability Over Time

The phasing of development will also have an impact on viability and will need to be included in the business plan. As some of the site is currently occupied by businesses, the first 'phase' might be usefully considered as changes to the existing situation to support commercial activity.

The first phases of development will set a precedent for the future so it is crucial that they make the right statement about quality, place and identity. This scheme lends itself to being broken down into numerous small phases which will allow initial progress to happen quickly to signify change and improvement. Temporary uses, particularly within the existing buildings, may be useful to test ideas and demonstrate potential change. Overall, a phased approach may appear ad-hoc and less clean, but would allow for flexibility and for viability to be tested to get the best value from the development over time.

The future of those parts of the wider site which are owned by another landowner will also need to be considered. Ideally, the outline planning application for this site would encourage good design and an ambitious approach there.

The potential for a 'custom build' model of delivery could be considered at this early stage. The site and elements of the proposal have the potential to be attractive to people looking for somewhere 'different' or innovative to live, which would suit a custom build model. However, the first phases of development will 'set the scene' and, if conventional houses are built in the first phase, the desirability could diminish. Early consideration will ensure that potential for this value-adding model of delivery is built in at the planning stage.

Sustainable Building Reuse

Achieving sustainable reuse of the listed factory building will be a positive outcome, but viable and appropriate uses will need to be found. In its current state, there are limited possibilities and further adaptation may be required. Modifying the robust building could allow for better access to daylight and natural ventilation, making it suited to a wider range of uses, including residential. The priority must be to find viable uses of the buildings even if some modification to the fabric of the listed structures may be necessary to achieve this.

As parts of the building are already occupied, a phased strategy to reuse, including temporary uses, may be most appropriate. Reuse of some of the smaller, less important buildings which are not listed should also be considered. An audit and viability study of all the existing space would be highly desirable.

It will be an important challenge to find an appropriate new use for the tower structure which is a beacon and symbol of the development. The innovation and collaboration demonstrated at the old Philips Factory sites in Eindhoven provides useful inspiration. <http://www.strijp-s.com/Introduction>

Retaining and reflecting the orthogonal, gridded layout of the wider site and where parts of buildings have been demolished would provide a useful organisational structure and give a strong identity to the new build elements. This strategy was proposed at the review for the northern part of the site but not the southern section, which is also an old

industrial site with the remnants of an orthogonal grid of buildings and roads. The team should consider what the southern part of the site should be like and how it fits with the 'brand', business plan and overall strategy for the development. The proposed curvy layout is not 'traditional' and it may be more logical to reflect the industrial grid layout to give the site an appropriate and distinctive identity.

Health & Wellbeing Strategies

It is important that health and wellbeing strategies are built into the outline planning application to reduce the risk that they are diluted by the time the scheme is delivered. Legislation in the Active Travel Act and Wellbeing of Future Generations Act support the case for health, wellbeing and sustainability to be given high priority.

The ambition to build in routes which encourage active travel is good, however, it is important that these routes are carefully planned and considered. To best encourage walking and cycling for everyday journeys, routes should feel convenient, safe and desirable. There are many factors which contribute to people being more likely to walk and cycle. Accessibility and inclusive design should be integrated, whilst a cycle hire scheme could make cycle possible for a wider range of people.

There may be useful education and heritage opportunities attached to the site (such as the history of the female workforce) which could be highlighted and integrated to add interest and value to the legacy this project will leave.

Value of School Design

Early collaboration with the local authority's education department will be important for the planning, design and delivery of a new school so that it can be correctly sized and integrated with the community.

A well designed primary school can make valuable contributions to the public realm, sense of place and community. It will be useful for aspects such as orientation, entrances, boundaries/security and drop-off strategy to be set out in the outline planning application as far as possible. At this stage, opportunities for providing community facilities within the school building and grounds should be explored.

The school may be able to occupy some of the existing factory building space temporarily or in the longer-term. This might also be arranged to provide flexibility to deal with changes in the number of pupils. This would need to be explored with the local authority's education and planning departments and form part of the initial proposals.

The landscape design of the school grounds should be integrated with the wider development and therefore requires early consideration and early input from landscape architects.

Layout & Public Realm

The layout of streets, buildings and spaces, as well as more detailed aspects of the public realm design, will have a significant impact on the overall success of the scheme.

The Commission would like to see the layout of the community designed and transport planned so that a place is created which is not dependent on the car. This will require careful consideration of the nature and layout of streets, paths and connections with

good access to convenient and affordable public transport. Potential connections with a future metro system should be taken into account.

The value of building the proposed 'green corridor' in the first phase of development should be tested, as this could set the scene for following phases of sustainable, wellbeing-focused development. Linking the green corridor with the spine road could encourage active travel within the site. Connections to the train station, Pontypool and the canal path should also be provided to encourage walking and cycling to destinations outside of the site. Links to the canal are essential and will add significant value to the scheme.

There will be a hierarchy of roads, streets and paths from the existing main highway through to a connecting spine road, side streets and foot and cycle paths. The nature and character of all streets within the development should be considered. Scale, density, surface finished and landscape design will all contribute to character and use.

The Design Commission encourages the team to consider Building For Life 12 assessment. Building for Life (BfL) 12 Wales is now available on the DCFW website <http://dcfw.org/building-for-life-12-wales/>. It has been endorsed by Welsh Government and DCFW and has been adapted to fit with the Welsh planning policy context. Built for Life accreditation would be an appropriate target for this development and consideration of the 12 questions now will ensure that it is achievable. DCFW offers Building for Life workshops and is also the organisation through which independent assessment for accreditation is undertaken in Wales. We recommend that a further engagement with DCFW on Building for Life is undertaken en route to assessment.

A good management strategy for the long term maintenance of public spaces and landscape should be considered in order to achieve long term value.

Local Authority Support

To be exceptional, this scheme will require collaboration and support from various departments in the Local Authority. Cross-discipline collaboration will be required to coordinate planning, education, public transport, highways, housing, Active Travel, health and wellbeing.

It would be useful for a senior figure in the local authority to champion the scheme and drive collaboration.

Further Review

The Design Commission would welcome the opportunity to review this scheme again once designs have progressed, but well before a planning application is made. The team is urged to make early enquiries about future meeting dates due to high service demand.

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

Attendees

Agent/Client/Developer:	(Not present)
Architect/Planning Consultant:	Andrew Lucas, Planner, RPS Barry Williams, Urban Designer, Barton Willmore Tom Macklen, Architect, Barton Willmore Roy Lewis, Heritage Consultant, Grover Lewis
Local Authority & Cadw:	Rebecca McAndrew, Torfaen CBC Stephen Thomas, Torfaen CBC
Design Review Panel:	
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