

Design Review Report

St Mellons Older Persons Independent
Living

DCFW Ref: N212

Meeting of 17th October 2019



Review Status

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

Public

17th October 2019
23rd October 2019
Cardiff
Residential
N212
Pre-application

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.

None.

Consultations to Date

No previous reviews by DCFW.

The Proposals

The proposed development is for independent living accommodation in 49 one bed and 11 two bed units on a brownfield development site previously occupied by community facilities and an education centre in St Mellons. The scheme will include new community spaces and landscaped gardens.

Main Points

The ambition of this scheme is welcomed and it is clear that the contribution this development could make to the wellbeing of residents and the wider area are being considered. We encourage the client, with the support of the design team, to maximise this opportunity, lead the way in design quality, and be bold in contribution of the development to the wellbeing of future generations.

The brief for the site has clearly evolved over time and different options have been tested. This moment should be taken as an opportunity to take a step back, review the aims and ambitions of the project and ensure the priorities are being fully met by the design. The primary considerations should be the needs of residents and long-term public value.

Site and Building Strategy

The site strategy has developed in a logical way based on the analysis of the available site defined by the red line. The Panel recommend that the DAS be strengthened by including other options that have been considered and their relative strengths and weaknesses. Greater weight and consideration should be given to the wider context, particularly in

terms of pedestrian links to surrounding uses, both existing and proposed. The Panel were pleased to hear that the car parking area, currently outside the red line might be brought into the development area. This would open up more options which should be considered.

The massing is appropriate for the site and the creation of the two courtyards is a positive feature to the development. The design of the courtyards should evolve based on the potential use of the space and may require some degree of flexibility at this stage given that the future tenants are unknown. The climatic conditions of the spaces should be treated appropriately including the potential for them becoming very warm being south facing and surrounded by hard and often dark surfaces with significant areas of fenestration and glass balcony guarding.

It is positive that each resident will be provided with some private external space using balconies. Whilst the Panel welcome the generous space standards and features of the design including large balconies, financial implications must be fully understood and accounted for. The risk that "value engineering" might undermine these aspirations should be addressed early. A resident engagement programme, potentially with the support of an artist in residence, could be initiated to design useful elements for the balconies such as planters or seating.

The north elevation faces onto what is currently a service road serving Tesco and the service yard to the rear of the shopping precinct. Design decisions such as slot windows on the ground floor and a lack of living space windows on the floors above have been made based on the current context but the design approach could be bolder in anticipating and leading the way as to how this might change in the future. Larger windows and more interaction between the inside and outside could help to change the conditions of the street and set up a more positive edge for potential future surrounding redevelopment.

Consideration of the environmental strategy was not discussed in detail but the opportunity for PV and solar thermal panels on the flat roofs was welcomed. Green roofs on the link single storey blocks would potentially be an attractive feature aspect for residents. The management and maintenance of these and the many attractive features proposed will need to be carefully assessed.

There is a large and growing body of precedent for similar developments. These should be reviewed to identify best practice in dealing with all aspects of design, with particular emphasis on public shared spaces within a development of this nature.

Internal Arrangements

Several areas should be considered further to improve the internal arrangement, support the ambitions of the project and respond to its context.

Further consideration of the location scale and nature of the communal facilities is encouraged to ensure there is sufficient concentration of activity. There is a risk of underuse, lack on interaction between residents and maintenance issues if they are too dispersed. Precedent review will also help with this.

There is potential for the spaces along the internal street to be more flexible and function less as separate spaces which may help break up the long corridor. The prominent location of the refuse store and bike and scooter spaces was particularly noted.

The site analysis suggests that the outlook to the south is positive, but the internal layout doesn't maximise this and the layout here could be further examined to maximise the views from living spaces.

Kitchen windows onto internal corridors can support a more active internal environment and off setting them will prevent direct overlooking into the kitchen opposite.

In the two-bedroom apartments more flexibility may be offered if one of the bedrooms could be accessed off the lounge as it could then act as an additional living space or a study.

There was concern that the mobility aspects of internal flat arrangements were not as good as they should be, with reference to entrance lobby spaces. Circulation along internal corridors should also be checked. It is positive that wayfinding is being considered at this stage so that it can be positively integrated.

Privacy, Daylight and Overheating

The amount of glazing and use of floor to ceiling windows should be reviewed in relation to the privacy of residents, arrangement of furniture, ventilation, natural daylight and the potential for overheating. Interaction is encouraged in many other parts of the development, but residents are likely to need a private space to retreat to as well.

Mobility

Car clubs and e-bikes are being considered across Cardiff Council's housing schemes and this location would benefit from the flexibility that this offers. While we support encouraging residents to use active travel and public transport, a lack of parking should not be a dis-incentive for people downsizing. Therefore, further exploration of the use of the adjacent parking area and how the development addresses this is encouraged. EV charging points should also form part of the parking strategy.

A large area is dedicated to mobility scooters which may not all be needed. Flexibility could be built into this space as storage for residents if it is not all needed straight away.

Next Steps

We encourage the team to review the proposals in the context of the wider area including proposed and potential changes. Changes to the red line boundary could also be added if these can be concluded in a reasonable time.

As the scheme emerges with the benefit of further precedent studies, financial checks and design development, the treatment of elevations, fenestration and materiality will need to be addressed as part of the process.

As this is a new approach for the local authority with further schemes to follow, we encourage the Local Authority to ensure sufficient time has been spent developing the concept, reviewing precedents and ensuring design quality.

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

Attendees

Design Team:	Michael Chichester, C2J Architects Robert Chichester, C2J Architects
Agent/Client/Developer:	Joseph Thomas, Cardiff City Council David Jacques, Cardiff City Council
Design Review Panel:	
Chair	Kedrick Davies
Lead Panellist	Simon Carne
Panel	Wendy Maden Jun Huang Chris Jefford Carole-Anne Davies, DCFW Jen Heal, DCFW