

Design Review Report

A465 Dualling Section 2,
Brynmawr to Gilwern

DCFW Ref: N3

Meeting of 3rd December 2014



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	3 rd December 2014
Issue date	11 th December 2014
Scheme location	Brynmawr - Gilwern
Scheme description	Highway
Scheme reference number	N3
Planning status	Draft Orders published Oct 14

Declarations of Interest

Martin Knight of Knight Architects, is a Design Commission for Wales Design Review Panel Member. He has been appointed as to the project design team as a specialist structures architect and has not been involved in this scheme as a representative of DCFW. All parties confirmed that they were content with this declaration, which has also been recorded in earlier correspondence and reports.

Consultations to Date

This scheme was first brought forward for early consultation with the Commission in May 2012. It was subsequently discussed at a meeting with the Commission on 31st January 2013. Following the January meeting, three DCFW review panellists made a site visit with Mark Young (Costain) and Paul Hopper (RPS). Further design development work was presented and discussed with the Commission on the 25th April. This report should be read in conjunction with letters and reports from the previous reviews.

The Proposals

This scheme forms part of the wider road infrastructure programme and is one of the last stretches of the Heads of the Valleys dualling project to be implemented. It will have a significant impact on the A465 from Brynmawr to Gilwern. To facilitate grade separation and new and improved junctions, the proposals include major interventions to the existing landscape, the construction of significant lengths of retaining walls and new bridges and structures along the length of the section. This is an area which includes the Clydach Gorge and is of considerable historical and cultural significance, bordering a World Heritage Site and National Park.

A public inquiry took place in April 2014. Draft Orders were published in October 2014, with a decision to proceed. It is anticipated that construction will commence early in 2015.

Main Points in Detail

The following points summarise key issues from the review, and should be used to inform further detail design work ahead of construction.

Footbridges

Overall, the Design Commission for Wales supports the design of the family of bridges, including the new footbridge at Gilwern. The early architectural design input has led to a coherent family of elegant bridge solutions. Now the detail design of these structures will be important in achieving the good quality the team aspires to. The weathering steel, for example, should be detailed to avoid unsightly staining. The Commission believes that the detail design is heading in the right direction.

Although it is not feasible to provide a ramp for wheelchair users at the new Gilwern footbridge, the team should consider providing wheeling ramp channels which would allow cycles and pushchairs to be easily pushed over up the stairs, making it overall more inclusive and accessible.

The Commission agrees that the 'school' footbridge might be treated slightly differently to the other footbridges, which are more rural in nature. For example, the lighting strategy and the handrail/barrier treatment might be different, but in-keeping with the design approach to the family of bridges.

Lighting Strategy

The scheme is still lacking a holistic, designed and well-justified lighting strategy. There are a number of conflicting requirements and objectives relating to lighting the road and associated bridges, which need to be balanced and resolved. These include road-user safety, pedestrian safety, bats, light pollution concerns, visual impact and delight, energy use and maintenance. Given the nature and significance of this site, the team should consider appointing a specialist lighting designer to develop an integrated, holistic lighting strategy which adds value to the scheme, rather than compromising quality.

The lighting columns should be shown on the visuals so that the visual impact can be properly assessed. It would be disappointing if the lighting detracted from the elegance of the bridge designs and the overall character of the completed scheme.

Retaining Walls

The Commission was disappointed that the concept of reflecting the geological strata and verticality of the road in the treatment of the retaining wall has been lost. We are concerned that the diagonally grooved concrete panels currently proposed will not meet the innovative, original design intent when viewed at close quarters or from a distance, especially on an overcast day. The team and local authority have adopted this new approach to minimise impact on distant views. However, the Commission believes that this new proposed approach will not meet those aims, and we would in any event question such aims given the scale and intrusion of the retaining walls in many surrounding views. The Commission considers that the earlier concept provided a creative and poetic solution which expressed the distinct qualities of the landscape, and that replacing that concept with a more mundane expression is a backward step.

The detailing of the retaining wall cladding will be important, especially the laying, jointing and mortar used for the natural stone. The trial panels, which the team are intending to construct, will be very helpful in getting the details right.

New Ladder Deck Bridges at the Govilon Roundabout

When this scheme was last reviewed by the Design Commission, it was intended that Bebo arches would be used. It is now intended that these will be ladder-deck structures. The Commission is disappointed that the detail for these structures was not available at this meeting, and recommends that they are treated as 'bridges' and included in the family of structures being designed by Knight Architects.

Community Story

The team stated their commitment to working with local communities. The Commission commends this ambition, but believes there are further opportunities for sharing and exploring the story of this significant engineering and landscape project with local communities, which have not yet been pursued. There are many ways in which creative arts, education and information 'story-telling' projects could add cultural value to this scheme, and leave not just a remarkable archive but a positive legacy.

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

Attendees

Agent/Client/Developer:	Emyr Davies, Welsh Government Mark Jenkins, Costain
Designers:	Martin Knight, Knight Architects Rob Wheatley, Atkins David Osborne, Atkins Jane Betts, RPS Stuart Reid, NRW
Local Authority:	Julien Atkins, BBNP

Design Review Panel:

Chair

Lead Panellist

Alan Francis

Ashley Bateson

Carole-Anne Davies

Amanda Spence, Design Advisor, DCFW