



DESIGN
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Design Review Report

A40 Llanddewi Velfrey to Penblewin

DCFW Ref: N144

Meeting of 13th February 2020



Review Status

Meeting date	13 th February 2020
Issue date	2 nd March 2020
Scheme location	Pembrokeshire
Scheme description	Road infrastructure
Scheme reference number	N144
Planning status	Pre-application

PUBLIC

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 and meeting Agenda items. Any such declarations are recorded here and in DCFW's central records.

Simon Power declared that his employer, Mott MacDonald, via a separate department to his own, working with Welsh Government Employers Agent Arcadis, in a minor a capacity. All present were content to proceed.

Consultations to Date

The scheme was previously reviewed by the Commission in June 2017, November 2018 and December 2019. This report should be read in conjunction with the reports from the previous review meetings.

The Proposals

The existing A40 runs through Llanddewi Velfrey, in part splitting the community. Provision for non-motorised users is limited to intermittent substandard footways. The landscape is formed of gently rolling countryside with wide shallow valleys divided by low ridges.

At Llanddewi Velfrey the existing A40 follows the crest of a ridge with relatively steep slopes falling to the north. A sequence of cuttings and embankments will be required across the ridge at the eastern end of the proposed scheme.

The proposed highway improvements will divert the trunk road to the north of the village. This allows all local access onto the trunk road to be rerouted to strategic junctions.

The new carriageway will be to a Wide Single (WS) 2+1 standard with a third lane providing safe unambiguous overtaking opportunities in both directions.

At the review of the 12th December 2019 further information became available as to the Western part of the scheme, and current consideration of consultation responses on Option 2B. This is also likely to come forward, ahead of Draft Orders scheduled for March 2020, but was not reviewed in full at the time.

Details of this part of the proposal were discussed at the February 2020 Review.

Main Points

The Design Commission welcomed the opportunity to be further consulted on this proposal as it continues to evolve and ahead of Public Local Inquiry scheduled for March 2020. The procurement and construction programme anticipate a 2021 start date. As previously noted, an opportunity exists to establish Welsh Government requirements as client, regarding expectations of quality and achievement of desired outcomes. These must be clearly identified and expressed in subsequent contractual arrangements within what is now likely to be a Design & Build process, and further consideration of this opportunity was raised at this review. The Commission credited the team for a comprehensive presentation and discussion, demonstrating their engagement with the process. However, there are still some challenges to be met. The following points summarise key issues from the review and should be considered to inform further work, preparations for Inquiry and procurement.

The Design Commission welcomed the updated presentation and visualisation materials and general arrangement drawings. There is still room for the publicly available materials to communicate a clearer and stronger story as to the need for, and wider benefits of, the scheme as a whole.

The Commission suggested an exercise akin to the preparation of a Design & Access Statement could be a useful framework for approaching this. We have previously stated the need for the design process to be used systematically to clearly demonstrate that each of the design objectives will be achieved and how. These exercises are linked and should inform procurement and detailed client requirements.

Communicating objectives above and beyond highway improvements and travel times remains important. The current cost benefit ratio is not sufficiently compelling as a justification and overall, the carbon output will be increased, rather than decreased, by the time the project is completed. Both these factors present challenges to the rationale for the scheme, given the legislative and policy context in Wales.

This again emphasises the need for the scheme to reach higher than the baseline of compliance requirements. Enhancing active travel routes, strengthening bio-diversity, landscape and air quality, reducing noise pollution and bringing wider public benefits to the adjacent village still loom large as vital objectives to be committed to and the conditions must be created to ensure they are fully realised.

As an important route given its context, the proposal for the A40 must be of the highest possible design quality, meeting obligations and ambitions of the Welsh Government and responding to the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act and Active Travel Act legislation. Our earlier reports note the need to exceed minimum design standards and this must be explicit in all materials to ensure that the delivered scheme, and in fact subsequent schemes, provide the greatest value from the substantial public investment. We continue to emphasise this as an obligation of a publicly funded project of this scale.

The 'joining up' with the de-trunking scheme is very positive and welcomed, however robust measures will be needed to ensure the active travel focus is followed through to high quality delivery. Alignment with partners and funding streams as well as the genuine

involvement of the community, perhaps as client in this instance, would help secure greater commitment to this value adding element and the considerable community/public benefit it could achieve. Consideration should be given to how to test which proposals best demonstrates ways of improving the environmental quality of the village, perhaps using relatively low cost, temporary interventions. Wider local planning considerations should be identified as well as SuDS requirements.

Whilst some of the Commission's earlier concerns were addressed in some areas of the evolving proposals, we suggest that the team revisit our earlier reports, engage in the 'Design & Access' exercise and genuinely test and explain the current response against the design philosophy and reasoning along with stated objectives.

We suggest that next steps should include:

- The benefits of the scheme being made more explicit with further steps taken to reduce a range of negative impacts. The current carbon performance from construction and emissions, is unacceptable not least given the Welsh Government declaration of Climate Emergency and decarbonization strategies. Demonstrating genuine attempts and the detail of ways to reduce this wherever possible is essential; particularly in tandem with other public sector bodies such as Natural Resources Wales and its forestry team. Consideration of the potential functions of the route over 5 - 30years or more in light of environmental, technological, automotive and other changes could prove to be a useful strategic exercise and potentially influence current considerations. The Design Commission would have welcomed, in particular evidence explaining the potential influence of electric vehicles over time along with consideration of the influence of other Welsh Government decarbonisation policies, on the data presented. The benefit cost ratio is another challenge requiring the benefits to be made explicit. It presents another opportunity to lead by example.
- The Redstone area is, in the Commission's view, over engineered as currently proposed, resulting in a heavy intervention which should be revisited and tested to determine whether this is the best solution given all of the opportunities and constraints that are now known. Local responses may so far have been constructive however we doubt whether there is a full understanding of the scale and nature of the proposals and their impact. There is still an opportunity to consider this further as part of the work undertaken on this section of the scheme. The Commission would have welcomed a greater detail on the access into Narbeth and connections to the scheme. Currently, details seem to be contradictory regarding how access is achieved to/from the town and the A40. As with the village there may be an opportunity to consider improvements away from the main preferred route. Whilst these may need to be delivered separately, they could be complementary to the main scheme and if identified and evaluated swiftly, could assist in strengthening the wider economic, social and environmental benefits of the scheme.
- The concept of a family of structures remains valid in our view and contributes to distinctiveness. Their elegance and lightness of touch is at risk from an absence of structures design input and dominance of engineered solutions. However, the structures currently proposed vary considerably conflicting with the aims of creating a family of structures. This should be revisited in the immediate timeframe to avoid diminished quality and a lack of distinctiveness across the scheme.

- A workshop in the very near future, with DCFW, to collaborate on the consideration of draft documentation informing and linked to the forthcoming contractor specification would be useful. This should also carefully consider two elements – the main proposals and the de-trunking. This should assist the design team with consideration of which elements of design can be established via performance specification (to provide genuine D&B flexibility) and which are essential requirements. Such a workshop would also be an opportunity to explore further mechanisms to ensure Active Travel measures within the village are delivered effectively and concurrent with the main highway works.

An early opportunity should be sought for the workshop given the pressures on both teams and the imminent inquiry.

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

Attendees

Agent/Client/Developer:	Welsh Government
Design Team:	Gary Davies, ARUP Mark Dixon, Welsh Government Tom Edwards, ARUP Andrew Sumner, RML
Design Review Panel:	
Chair	Jen Heal
Lead Panellist	Simon Power Kedrick Davies Steve Smith Efa Lois, Place Advisor, DCFW Carole-Anne, Chief Executive, DCFW
Observers:	Kenneth Brodie Taya Sellars Caren Shek