



DESIGN
COMMISSION
FOR WALES
COMISIWN
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CYMRU

Design Review Report

A40 Llanddewi Velfrey to Penblewin

DCFW Ref: N144

Meeting of 12th December 2019



Review Status

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

PUBLIC

12th December 2019
19th December 2019
Pembrokeshire
Road infrastructure
N144
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 and meeting Agenda items. Any such declarations are recorded here and in DCFW's central records.

Simon Power declared that a different office/team within his organisation Mott MacDonald, were supporting the Welsh Government Employers Agent Arcadis, in a minor capacity. All present were content to proceed with this declaration.

Consultations to Date

The scheme was previously reviewed by the Commission in June 2017 and November 2018 and 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 additional 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 this meeting.

Main Points

The Design Commission welcomed the opportunity to be further consulted on this proposal as it continues to evolve. We note the timing of Draft Orders and likely Public Enquiry in March 2020 with a pre-enquiry meeting in January 2020. Procurement and construction programme anticipate a 2021 start date. 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.

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 which were very helpful in addressing some gaps in the pre-review materials submitted. There is still room for the publicly available materials to communicate a stronger story as to the need for, and wider benefits of, the scheme as a whole. Communicating objectives above and beyond highway improvements and travel times will help garner support for a project that has the potential to go beyond the minimum requirements and enhance active travel routes, strengthen bio-diversity, landscape and air quality, reduce noise pollution and bring wider benefits to the adjacent village.

Setting the standard

We have previously noted that the A40 is an important route given its context and the proposal 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. Given the public investment in the scheme, the value of the road to users of all modes should be demonstrated that the objectives are being met beyond compliance. We urge the team to carefully examine the eight objectives set out and consider what will be needed in the next stage and in procurement to achieve more than minimum on each one. (See also previous report Nov 2018). The design process should be used systematically to clearly demonstrate that each of the design objectives has been achieved and how.

Exceeding minimum design standards should also take account of the recent declaration by Welsh Government of a Climate Emergency and its commitments in Prosperity for All: A low Carbon Wales¹. At a time in which Welsh Government was investigating zero carbon building provision we would expect to see consideration of a zero-carbon infrastructure scheme; both in terms of embedded construction carbon but also measures to offset carbon generated during its use. We acknowledge this may be beyond the immediate delivery ability of the Highways Act and the immediate client team, however the scheme is being promoted by Welsh Government and its other

¹ <https://gov.wales/prosperity-all-low-carbon-wales>

departments and agencies should collaborate and contribute to the delivery of carbon offsetting in parallel.

The opportunity presented by the unfortunate collapse of the client's former contracting partner, means this will be taken to inquiry as a 'traditional' consultant-led scheme. There should be advantages to this to allow more innovative approaches to inclusion of wider scheme mitigation within the project. It may also allow the development of a more prescriptive approach to quality to ensure that commitments made at this stage to finishes and design detail are carried through into the construction contract and into delivery.

User experience

The Commission welcomed enhanced methods of consultation and better communication techniques used to assist wider understanding of the project at human scale. It remains important to communicate such projects from the perspective of people who may not be familiar with design materials for project of this scale, and for users of the area affected by the scheme who may not use the A40 by car

Connectivity across the highway

As previously noted, a number of underpasses are proposed under the road to connect the communities at either side. The panel are satisfied that the location of these crossings has been well considered, however further work needs to be done to ensure they are attractive, comfortable and safe for those crossing. This requires them to be spacious, well-lit, with pleasant landings, open approaches at either side, opportunities for views and clear legibility.

In order to achieve the objectives, designs for these crossings will need to go beyond 'minimum' requirements and the Design Commission urges the design team to further explore and present the detail of these crossings and the user experience. Current proposals are inadequate.

The need for protected species provision, mostly bat crossings, may well necessitate a different approach to meeting the needs of pedestrians e.g. on lighting and further consideration is necessary.

Proposed overbridge

Given that this will be the only significant structure along this part of the route, further consideration should be given to ensuring it is of the highest design quality. Little or no material was presented on the day to explain or justify design choice, finishes and proposed integration within the landscape. The opportunity to ensure the highest possible quality should not be lost.

Pedestrians/Cyclists/Active Travel

This is a key opportunity to capture additional wider benefits and to work with partners to achieve an enriched rural corridor for active travel use, resulting from the old route. Widening, narrowing and other enhancements will assist this, and a collaborative approach is needed with the local authority partners and community. Proposals were presented for significant sections of separated cycle provision and pedestrian crossings etc. but the Commission were unable to ascertain to what extent these met existing or future journey needs. Analysis of context would be helpful to understand how people use (and could use) the study area in the future by these modes and how the proposed provision aided the journeys now and in future.

Earthworks/Landscape character and distinctiveness/finishes

There was little or no material presented from the landscape and visual assessment of the scheme which we understand has been undertaken but was not in evidence at the meeting. In particular the Commission would have welcomed the opportunity to have been taken on the journey from site context and analysis (including detailed reference to LANDMAP), through development of design objectives and their implementation, within the project. From these it would have been possible to have commented on the appropriateness or otherwise of the design response with the scheme; particularly any mitigation and enhancement. This would be something specifically the Design Commission would wish to assist in reviewing when the scheme is presented again. Without this analysis it is very difficult to comment on the design and any standard detailing proposed for example Pembrokeshire banks, woodland/tree replacement, choice of Species, details of stone/rock areas/landscape detail, balancing pond design and treatment, signage and lighting etc

It was suggested that the responses along the scheme were subtly different. This would be welcomed if evidenced as it would assist in both varying the user journey experience but more importantly help maintain an element of local distinctiveness. There is a real danger of an "identikit" response being taken to all of the bypass schemes on the A40/A477 in Pembrokeshire resulting in a very uniform journey experience. Although it is an old document the design team were referred to the former Welsh Office publication 1993² Roads in Lowland Areas – A Design Guide, the content of which still has relevance.

Sustainability strategy and report

We understand that ARUP are completing a sustainability report which would have been useful for the review meeting. In order to satisfy the objectives, such a detailed report, demonstrating the approach taken should be available for the Inquiry. We would be particularly interested in it stressing areas where the sustainability process as covered by the report, had made a difference to the outcomes, rather than simply reporting standard design and assessment processes. The Commission would also expect to see measures to offset carbon generated during its use, to be detailed in the report.

Wider Public benefits - enhancing the Village

A consistent theme of Welsh bypass schemes promoted by Welsh Government under the Highways Act brought before the Commission is the need to look holistically at mitigation and enhancement. By this we mean to look beyond what can be delivered as "Essential Mitigation" under the Highways Act within and immediately adjacent to the proposed highway works. It is important that opportunities to capture these wider public benefits are not lost.

As a result of the significant expenditure of public funds on the two proposed schemes (>£50m) there is a major opportunity for re-considering the village centre and opening up its potential. The possibilities of a shared surface/shared village centre could be considerable, and investment should be made in involving the community in a focussed engagement programme to this end Opportunities were suggested including improving walking and cycling access to a local village store and/or better use of the old de-trunked

² <http://bailey.persona-pi.com/Public-Inquiries/M4-Newport/C%20-%20Core%20Documents/10.%20Landscape%20and%20Visual%20Effects/10.1.2%20-%20Welsh%20Office%20-%20Roads%20in%20Lowland%20Areas%20-%20A%20Design%20Guide%201993.pdf>

highway. A focused urban design analysis of the existing townscape/public realm should be undertaken and opportunities taken to develop a programme of modest improvements, implementing any recommendations arising from such a study and/or public and community involvement.

The Design Commission urges the Welsh Government Highways to be as imaginative as possible to work with other Welsh Government departments to find ways to work together, and with Pembrokeshire County Council, to achieve the delivery of 'offsite' public realm improvements as part of this scheme. At the very least the considerable ERDF funding offered to the scheme should be viewed as a catalytic investment to enable a much wider conversation about the sustainable future of Llanddewi Velfrey.

Statutory bodies

Whilst we understand statutory consultees have raised objections to some aspects of the project it is important that they also recognise their role in contributing to a collaborative approach to resolving the items in question and finding ways to add value for the long term, within the bounds of the proposals and the challenges it presents.

We urge NRW and others to fully engage with the team to achieve constructive resolution with a view to the longer-term public benefit and achieving a collaborative response to questions of land and resource management, climate responsiveness, more sustainable active travel and de-carbonisation. Collectively, they have the opportunity to do what they require of others and to lead by example. The Welsh Government is in a unique position to accelerate progress toward the objectives of the WBFGW Act through this scheme and will need to examine internal and external collaborative working in order to do so in manner which helps capture the fullest public benefit.

Internally, de-carbonisation teams will need to fully engage with the project team with a view to collaborating on opportunities for the future including electric vehicle charging; consideration of filling station sites etc. These could arise out of the village urban design and futures review suggested above.

Next Steps

The Commission would welcome an early return of the scheme in the new year with a view to considering specifically, some of the points raised above, namely:

- Contextual landscape and visual analysis, design objectives and detailed design response and proposed treatments of landscape enhancement and built form/structures
- Analysis and review of 'offsite' mitigation and enhancement for residents and people using the area not via the A40; including a consideration of the public realm within Llanddewi Velfrey.
- Approach to carbon emissions reduction and changes resulting from the sustainability appraisal
- Further exploration of the concerns raised by statutory consultees and the approach and mitigation responses proposed

From a critique of these it would be anticipated that a more robust and justifiable case could be made for the approaches adopted. This would assist Welsh Government in preparing its arguments for the Spring 2020 Orders Inquiry, inform the final design of the western A40 Penblewin to Redstone Cross Improvements and crystallise the essential requirements that should be stipulated within the Employer's Requirements for

any future construction contract. Previous reviews of this nature have resulted in more cost effective and contextually sympathetic designs and treatments, allowing more creative uses of tightly constrained scheme budgets for achieving wellbeing objectives.

We encourage the team to return early in 2020 and as with all publicly funded projects the Design Commission for encourages the team to find opportunities to use the project as an opportunity to contribute to wider socially inclusive objectives and workforce diversification.

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

Attendees

Agent/Client/Developer:	Chris Nichols, Arcadis
Design Team:	Gary Davies, ARUP Mark Dixon, Welsh Government Tom Edwards, ARUP Andrew Sumner, RML
Design Review Panel:	
Chair	Kedrick Davies
Lead Panellist	Simon Power Simon Richards, Neil Williamson Efa Lois, Place Advisor, DCFW Carole-Anne, Chief Executive, DCFW