

Design Workshop Report

A40 Llanddewi Velfrey to Penblewin

DCFW Ref: N144

Meeting of 11th June 2020



Review Status

Meeting date	PUBLIC 11 th June 2020
Issue date	26 th June 2020
Scheme location	Pembrokeshire
Scheme description	Road infrastructure
Scheme reference number	N144
Planning status	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.

Consultations to Date

The scheme was previously reviewed by the Commission in June 2017, November 2018 and December 2019, February and April 2020. This report should be read in conjunction with the reports from the previous review meetings and it should be noted that it focusses upon key items arising from a workshop hosted by DCFW on 11th June 2020 as the proposals move through procurement stages.

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 proposals were discussed in brief at the February 2020 Review and subsequently at the April Review. The Redstone area remains a part of this project that has not been the subject of the same level of consideration and scrutiny as the core elements. DCFW recommended again at 11th June that this should be addressed, and the team should seek a swift opportunity to discuss it with the Commission.

Structure of the June workshop

The Design Commission welcomed the team back for this workshop focussing on design intent and procurement, as the proposal evolves, post-Public Local Enquiry held in March 2020, and as it moves through key phases of procurement to a construction programme anticipated for start in 2021.

The meeting of 11th June 2020 was specifically convened due to the opportunity to consider design intent, to fully establish Welsh Government requirements as client, regarding expectations for quality and the achievement of desired outcomes. The Commission and the design team had previously discussed the need to identify, express and reflect these in pre-qualification stages and eventual contractual arrangements.

Prior to the 11th June meeting and after the submission of materials the team were furnished with five key points upon which to focus their preparation for the meeting. The materials submitted included an unwieldy c250 page draft text, mixing detail of default regulatory requirements with strategy and for the workshop meeting, the team were guided toward communicating what had changed since previous reviews.

The Commission directed the focus to the distinctive aspects of the scheme i.e. what is not standard highway design, whether driven by response to the location / site or by client and design team aspirations. These characteristics are the key special features that the design intent and procurement processes need to address and protect. Further focus should be on how the important design characteristics described above, are to be procured and delivered. Clear responses in a 20 slide predominantly visual presentation, were requested addressing the points below, including conveying an understanding of what commitments are being made to ensure that stated aspirations are actually delivered by the contractor:

- Anything that has changed, been removed or diluted since we last met.
- Areas of special and distinctive characteristics that set the project apart – which would include the de-trunking and wider benefits to the village as well as the site and location.
- The scope of prescription or flexibility available to the contractor.

A structure around the following notes indicated the order of key items and the team focus was directed to the preparation of the following:

1. A brief overview of a draft design intent document avoiding a line by line account/contents and focussing on key elements where the Commission's input would be of value.
2. Integrating the de-trunking and off-site village works in this contract.
3. Consideration of the key areas of design uncertainty and risk, and how best to address them.
4. Consideration of Employers Requirements how they are expressed and how they are used to secure desired outcomes.
5. Consideration of client-side capacity and resources with regard to robustness and continuity of contract administration.

This steer was provided in the context of the expectation of the likely availability of the Inspectors Report in late June, and the knowledge that the Client is already engaged in a PQQ exercise which has the input of an Employers Agent.

Main points from the workshop

Introduction:

The Commission credited the team for a comprehensive presentation and discussion, demonstrating their continued engagement with the process.

The discussion at this meeting was comprehensive. The need for this project to achieve quality 'well beyond standard' has been well rehearsed in successive reviews and reflected in our previous reports.

The potential to secure and protect the design intent and quality will now result, or not, from two critical actions:

- a culture of quality being established and communicated in procurement, and
- exceptional contract administration with a suitably skilled team able to protect the client's interest, design quality and public value.

De-trunking and village benefits:

The Commission is encouraged to see this come forward within the contract as whole – it represents a primary innovation in the procurement context for schemes such as this in Wales. Our comments in previous reports as to securing the wider benefits and the quality of urban and highway design needed to be implemented if the full potential is to be realised. There is an opportunity to continue to engage with DCFW as de-trunking and village proposals become more detailed and are 'firmed up', as it were. Lessons drawn from this integrated approach should be captured and shared to help promote good practice.

Level of ambition:

On the matter of structures, beyond the default regulatory standards, consideration should be given to elements that offer scope to avoid a standard lowest cost, basic structure. Specifications could direct treatment of the structure as well as the banks, response to repair of the land over and above grazing monoculture and towards stimulating a more biodiverse opportunity. Details of longer-term aftercare responsibilities will be necessary and there may be special requirements for items such as the 'bat hop', for periods upwards of five years after construction.

Risk:

Ground conditions and water management are identified as risks which have been investigated and will need to be monitored.

Tender and contract documents:

Overall, the diagrams used in the presentation were very clear and helpful. They should sit alongside text in the project procurement documents as a primary method for explaining design intent – ideally in an easy to use and digestible summary document that collates, organises and refers readers on to all of the more detailed technical drawings, text and specifications. This clear story telling is essential as a means to communicate a valuable sense of the project's key issues and the client's priorities. This transfer of knowledge acquired in the preliminary phases, from the existing team to the contractor and delivery team will be vital.

Careful and detailed specification will be needed to prevent contractor delivery to a poorer level of quality nevertheless being interpreted as compliant with the contract. This will be especially important on the de-trunking where expectations as to quality must be explicit and high quality urban and landscape design skills evident in the team.

Emphasising key issues in the tender process is vital and it is critical that the procurement documents, design intent and specifications help to transfer current knowledge to the contractor/delivery team.

Contractor's proposed team:

Whilst proposed CVs will be assessed with contractors' submissions, they often convey little about team culture or the gap which exists between technical delivery detail and recognition of the qualitative considerations, particularly where quality and value rests in areas that are not easily measured or quantifiable.

An experienced landscape architect should be among in the team structure of any contractor. This is not a horticulture role, it is a key design discipline essential for projects of this nature and such a professional should be enabled and empowered to drive high quality, set critical, qualitative benchmarks and be able to inspect and take action at key stages in order to make a positive difference to protecting desired quality. This role should also be appropriately resourced by the contractor's team and enabled and involved in decision-making.

Given the de-trunking opportunity high quality urban design skills should also be evident in the team.

Whilst the tender appraisal will assess the skills and experience of key people, details of that assessment process provided to tenders at invitation stage must clearly communicate the drive for quality so as to illicit a suitable response.

Quality assessment in the tender process:

Design & Build is a very conventional procurement route and steps must be taken to ensure a culture of quality is established and communicated by the client in the procurement process so that it is reflected in the selected delivery team.

The tone of communication in tender invitations and will be crucial to ensure quality is meaningful and clearly established as an expectation. There should be clear quality assessment requirements for tender submissions, alongside a realistically high weighting of quality in tender assessments. To be clear, quality in this context is not about meeting ISO Quality Assurance standards for processes, it about the quality of the delivered product and the standard of design thinking used to achieve it.

A simplistic focus upon cost will not enable this, neither will it deliver maximum public value: such a focus usually translates as lowest cost. Great care in thought, clearly defined expectations and client team diligence will be needed to avoid this. The client will need to be mindful that their greatest leverage will be at the moment of contractor appointment.

Contract administration:

Contact administration must be more than an output driven audit trail: baseline certification of output and 'sign-off' will be insufficient. The contract administration team will need experienced landscape design skills in infrastructure constructed within sensitive environments and knowledge to scrutinise the contractors work and judge whether design and construction quality requirements have been met. They will also need to feel empowered by the client to take a strong position on design quality if, or when, time and cost are also under pressure. This may extend to effecting change if this enhances or maintains design quality and challenging value engineering where it does not uphold the design intent agreed.

There will be a tension between technical monitoring and qualitative design judgement. The Commission urges vigilance throughout as procurement brings about a shift from aspiration to delivery and the potential for design intent and quality to be knocked off course. There is a good deal to learn from other projects in Wales, and early attention will be needed this

time to be absolutely clear as to the skills on the contractor's side. Sufficient time and resources will also need to be available to the Employers Agent's team to oversee and uphold design quality on behalf of the Welsh Government.

Redstone Area:

The Redstone Cross area remains a concern for the Commission in terms of land, the western entrance to Narberth and its omission from the engagement with DCFW to date. We note the lengthy verbal response in previously submitted materials however this is not a substitute for review. We understand that local responses may so far have been constructive and that the proposals are at an advanced stage. However, a full consideration of the scale and nature of the proposals and their impact is necessary. This is the Commission's third and most recent request and offer of review opportunity. Our aim is to ensure this part of scheme benefits from the same iterative, collaborative and robust consideration as that afforded the major route and de-trunking proposals. We therefore welcome what we currently understand to be the team's intention to consult with DCFW on this area, early in July 2020.

Comisiwn Dylunio Cymru Design Commission for Wales is the trading name of DCFW LIMITED, a Private Limited Company established under the Companies Act 1985 and 2006, Company No: 04391072 incorporated in England and Wales as a wholly owned subsidiary of the Welsh Government. Registered office: 4th Floor, Cambrian Buildings, Mount Stuart Square, Cardiff CF10 5FL T: 029 2045 1964 E connect@dcfw.org. The comment recorded in this report, arising from formal Design Review through our Design Review Service, is provided in the public interest for the consideration of local planning authorities as a material consideration, and other users of the Design Review Service. It is not and should not be considered 'advice' and no third party is bound or required to act upon it. The Design Review Service is delivered in line with DCFW's published protocols, code of conduct and complaints procedure, which should be read and considered by users of the service.

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

Attendees

Agent/Client/Developer:	Welsh Government
Design & Client Team	Gary Davies, ARUP Tom Edwards, ARUP Andrew Sumner, RML Simon Lawrence, Project Engineer – Welsh Government Chris Nichols, Project Manager, Arcadis
Design Review Panel:	
Chair	Ewan Jones
Lead Panellist	Simon Power Kedrick Davies Jen Heal, Design Advisor, DCFW Efa Lois, Place Advisor, DCFW Carole-Anne, Chief Executive, DCFW