



DESIGN
COMMISSION
FOR WALES
COMISIWN
DYLUNIO
CYMRU

Design Review Report

Victoria Street, Cwmbran

DCFW Ref: N224

Meeting of 23rd of April 2020



Review Status

Meeting date
Issue date
Scheme location
Scheme description

Scheme reference number
Planning status

CONFIDENTIAL

23rd of April 2020
30th April 2020
Cwmbran
Residential development of 1- and 2-
bedroom flats.
N224
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.

Note on current operational context:

The Design Commission for Wales is operating during necessary public health measures due to the impact of the Coronavirus Covid 19 pandemic and this report follows the recent online review meeting.

Consultations to Date

None with DCFW. Some pre-application discussion with the Local Planning Authority has taken place.

The Proposals

The proposed scheme is for one and two-bedroom accommodation with building performance aiming to address the Welsh Government decarbonisation agenda for energy efficient properties.

The proposals will require the demolition of the former solicitor's office and club on the intersection of Victoria street and Ventnor Road in Cwmbran. The site is walking distance to the town centre, and approximately 100m from an existing car park. The site is located on a corner in an area of predominantly Victorian housing stock and retail units.

Main Points

Massing and Parking

The Design Commission welcomed the early stage consultation and is supportive of the principle of redevelopment of this site on Victoria Street and for appropriate residential use.

The Commission also supports building along the street line of Victoria Street, the primary street, and developing this vacant site to provide enhancement to the existing street.

However, there are some aspects of the current proposal which warrant further consideration including scale of the development. There is a spatial conflict between the number of flats needed make the development viable and the perceived need for parking spaces. This is having a negative effect, making the development too bulky for its site.

We encourage the local planning authority to consider much greater flexibility in currently suggested car parking numbers. The parking requirement runs contrary to the sustainability and decarbonisation agenda, is unnecessary given the relatively well-connected location and is having a disproportionately negative impact on the site potential. It should be borne in mind that the highways department is consultee to the consenting planning authority. Analysis of the likely actual car ownership in other Bron Afon developments could provide help inform actual as opposed to perceived need. It is unclear whether allocating such a high proportion of the ground floor for car parking is justified in the long-term life of this development. A reduction in car parking spaces also has the potential to remove the negative impact of parking on the Victoria Street elevation.

Internal Layout

As there is no lift in the building as currently proposed, having such wide corridors above the ground floor seems unnecessary (no wheelchair access). Narrowing/varying corridor widths at key points would provide more floor space to the flats, which would in turn improve the spatial quality for residents and make each flat more generous and pleasant. Narrower shared corridors might be enhanced by wider parts in specific locations where the extra space would be useful.

Although the flats are currently proposed to DQR minimum, the design would benefit from limiting the amount of north-east facing single aspect units, and the design of flats with low eaves. This would help improve quality of living spaces, access to good light and assist the need for heating and cooling. This along with wider sustainability and ventilation strategy for the building is unclear and would benefit from further testing to reach the optimum solution.

SUDS/ Drainage

The Commission is concerned by the need for much more information regarding the integration of drainage and water management. How rainwater is dealt with needs to be addressed. The creation of more amenity space may provide further options for enhanced spaces and integrated drainage – this could offer greater added value over parking provision.

Massing and the corner treatment

The proposal would benefit from further development of the building massing, and a simplification of the design and the materials palette. Refinement and simplification of the design could result in a building that more successfully integrates with the existing townscape. Party walls at roof level and slate clad walls are not widely characteristic of this part of Wales, but stepped roof forms are. Increasing the building massing at the corner of the site (perhaps considering 3 storeys plus pitched roof) and stepping down from that mass (perhaps considering and testing 2 storeys plus dormers then 2 storeys only) could better reflect the Welsh valley stepped roofscape and help to mediate the scale with the existing street scene.

Designing a building mass that would celebrate the corner would be justified in townscape terms. An illustration of placemaking and townscape enhancement options would be helpful in future design materials, especially during consultation phases.

The lack of outdoor amenity space could also be addressed during experimentation with the building massing. Some of the existing residential properties on Victoria Street are set back from the street, creating a boundary between public and private – this geometry might provide space for SUDS and provide better privacy for units on the busiest street frontage. Studying precedents for how contemporary residential buildings approach these ideas could help further inform the building design.

Elevational treatment:

The mix of materials in the elevations are complex and would benefit from simplification. It would make financial sense to invest more time and money into improving the massing of the building, as well as the internal layout. This would result in a stronger, more refined design. Some of the proposed materials are expensive and are not drawn wholly from the immediate context. A more refined, simplified material treatment coupled with a more considered building form would be beneficial.

Communication of ideas

There would be benefit as a design tool to explore drawing the building in 3D as it would be seen from real established viewpoints along the streets, as the full elevation views cannot currently be seen in real life. 3D drawings would be a useful design tool to develop massing and use of materials in elevations, with the benefit that sketches and design development in this manner would be useful for the Design and Access statement.

In summary the Design Commission welcomed this early consultation and a useful constructive dialogue with the client, design team and local planning authority. The Commission would be happy to welcome the team to return with further evolutions prior to planning and Social Housing Grant application processes.

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

Attendees

Agent/Client/Developer:

Greg Jones, Bron Afon HA
Gary Colston, Bron Afon HA

Architect/Design Team

Karl Lewis, LeTrucco Design

Local Planning Authority

Helen Smith, Torfaen CBC

Chair:

Ewan Jones

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Design Review Panel:

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