

Design Review Report

Curran Embankment, Cardiff

DCFW Ref: N222

Meeting of 10th December 2020



Review Status

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

CONFIDENTIAL

10th December 2020
16th December 2020
Cardiff
Mixed-use
N222
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

DCFW considered pre-review material and provided questions in advance of design review in March 2020 but the review did not go ahead due to cancellation by the design team and rescheduling. Previous proposals for the site that have been brought forward by other potential developers/consortia have been reviewed in previous years.

The Proposals

A masterplan is being developed which for proposes mixed use redevelopment of the brownfield site of approximately 15ha. The proposed development would include residential, office, commercial and retail/leisure/food and drink accommodation.

Main Points

The Commission welcomed the comprehensive approach to this significant site within the city and the work that has been undertaken to set out key urban design considerations for the site. The following points are important in the further development of the proposals.

Identity

Many urban design principles are well reflected in the proposals, but further work is needed to make the proposed development distinctive to Cardiff and/or Butetown. There is very little that distinguishes this development from any other place. Adding a further level of identity and meaning to the proposals will help to firmly ground it in its context. This will require further site, context and historic analysis as well as community engagement and involvement. It is important that a sense of place that is unique to this area of Cardiff develops here.

While the existing buildings on the site may be considered to offer little architectural merit, they are a strong reflection of the history of the site and still offer accommodation to a range of businesses and employers that activate the site. Given that the site will take some years to develop completely we strongly recommend one or more of the buildings is retained to offer flexible meanwhile and/or long-term space to support local businesses. As office, retail and residential markets change (particularly given the recent impact of COVID-19) this would allow a more place-led and iterative approach that retains life and activity and makes the site more distinctive. There are many precedents that support this as an approach to a site of this scale and nature. Retaining some of the buildings will also help to ensure that the development is distinctive and remains part of Butetown.

Movement and Public Realm

The proposed grid of streets is logical, but it is important to ensure that it does not become too homogeneous. The design of the streets should reflect their expected use in terms of the range of activities present and the how busy a route it is likely to be. Some routes will be busy with a concentration of activity whereas others will be quieter with much lower footfall and this should be reflected in the design. An important element of this will be landscape and planting and there may be opportunities to enhance the contrast between planting and buildings to increase the ecological value and provide some drama. Sufficient space needs to be allowed for this.

Street widths, distinctive buildings and landmarks will also be important for legibility. Exploring this as a journey through the site would be helpful.

We welcome consideration of flexibility of parking spaces that may not be needed in the future as travel habits change. This flexibility should be built into the proposed parking structures.

The delivery, management and maintenance of the public realm will be key to its success. Ensuring that key elements of the public realm are delivered with each phase of the development is necessary through planning conditions. A management plan should coordinate all aspects including privately managed spaces, adopted highways, SuDS and publicly managed open spaces.

Activity

The proposals include a mix of uses that will help to bring life and activity to the place. This would be further enhanced through greater diversification of the range of residential sizes and tenures. The proposals for the public realm include play spaces but there are very few larger residential units (28 town houses) that would accommodate families. A dominance of one and two bed apartments will not create a diverse community and we encourage further review of how to integrate good provision for family living in a development of this type and density. This type of provision is currently very scarce in Cardiff and could be a distinctive and attractive feature of this development.

Form

High density development is, in principle, appropriate for this location with good connections to the city centre and public transport. The proposals present an appropriate balance of development density with public and communal spaces. However, the riverside location where the individual buildings are too deep seems overcrowded and warrants further review. This arrangement erodes the connection to the riverfront and will be made

more complex with access requirements to the buildings. Freeing up this space would allow more diversity within the riverside park.

Taller buildings in key locations are appropriate in principle as part of the townscape but must be well integrated at the ground floor level and the rationale for their height and location clearly set out. Any taller structures will need to be of the highest design and construction quality.

Energy Strategy

The energy strategy for the site needs further development even at this stage. A fabric-first approach is positive, but consideration also needs to be given to the provision of heat and power for this significant development. Orientation should also be considered to optimise natural solar gain and avoid overheating.

Next Steps

Reference could usefully be made to the Placemaking Wales Charter and guidance document that can be found on the DCFW website www.dcfw.org to help inform the development of a sense of place. A comprehensive engagement and involvement strategy should be set out to include the ongoing development of proposals for the site as well as during construction. We would welcome the opportunity to review the proposals as they develop beyond the outline planning stage.

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

Attendees

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Louise Robinson, Vastint

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Huw Jones, Turley
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Michael Westlake, Supervene Architects
Alexandra Chairetaki, Planit
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Local Planning Authority

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Simon Gilbert, Cardiff Council
Ross Cannon, Cardiff Council
Amanda Sutcliffe, Cardiff Council

Chair:

Jonathan Vernon-Smith

Lead Panellist:

Steve Smith

Design Review Panel:

Lynne Sullivan

Jen Heal, Design Advisor, DCFW

Efa Lois, Place Advisor, DCFW