

Design Review Report

Ty'r Rhedyn, Llansteffan

DCFW Ref: 313

Meeting of 9th November 2023



Review Status

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Issue date
Scheme description
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Planning status

Public

9th November 2023
16th November 2023
Residential
Llansteffan, Carmarthenshire
N313
Application Submitted

Key Points

- We support the sustainability ambitions of the project and the range of alternative building methods being explored.
 - The housing need and lack of affordable options within the settlement were clearly set out.
 - The planning policy position is fundamental to being able to realise a dwelling in this location. Within this context the proposed development seems to be trying to do too many things and does not yet demonstrate the highest quality design required.
 - We appreciate and support the aspiration of the applicants to deliver an affordable and sustainable development on this site but find that the realisation of the designs does not yet match up to that vision.
 - The affordability narrative suggests a humble, gentle, simple building set within the site but the proposed design does not reflect this.
 - The material provided is thorough but the proposed design and response to key issues do not come across clearly.
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Consultations to Date

This is the first design review of proposals for this site by DCFW.

The Proposal

The proposal is for a single local needs dwelling comprising 3 bedrooms and associated spaces for home working and woodland management.



Proposed Site Plan

Context

The site is situated at the lowest extent of Allt Parc Y Coed, a North East facing hillside of partially regenerated woodland. The proposed site sits at the end of Mill Pond Lane, on the outskirts of Llansteffan. The site is at an elevated position above the lane. The site is situated in an area of relative clearing, bounded by woodland and significant trees.

Main Points

We welcomed the opportunity to review the proposed dwelling. The background to the affordability context and sustainability-led design thinking was clearly presented.

This is a challenging site both in terms of the characteristics of the site itself and the planning policy context the location presents. Added to this, the client-architect has very strong sustainability aspirations which are to be commended. These three key aspects require a design approach that is of the greatest quality but that will have to balance competing demands.

Affordability context

Permission is being sought for the dwelling outside of the development limits of the settlement under the Local Needs policy of the LDP. This comes with a range of criteria set out in the LDP including the need to be affordable in perpetuity. It is not the role of DCFW or the design review process to determine whether an application meets policy requirements, this is for the LPA to determine. However, there are aspects of design which relate to the interpretation of policy as well as general design considerations relevant to the site which were explored in the review.

The availability of alternative sites for residential development was discussed and it was reported that there are no suitable sites within the development limits of the village.

The overall size of the dwelling is relevant to the affordability assessment. While other, larger properties have been permitted under the Local Needs policy and the schedule of accommodation seems reasonable for a long-term family home, the arrangement of the building adds circulation space that adds to the overall floor area. Alternative layouts that reduce the circulation space and rationalise the layout could be considered. This will have the dual benefit of making the design simpler and more affordable.

Another aspect of the design which seems at odds with the narrative of affordability and sustainability is the resultant apparent complexity of the house. Both the affordability and sustainability approach would suggest a simple, economically designed building but the proposals present a much more complex form. This does not mean that the building can't have comfort and delight and we support these as important elements of good design. It is understood from the discussion that some of this complexity comes from the no-dig solution, the L-shape of the building to capture the benefits of southerly aspect, and the desire to achieve a courtyard form to reflect local farmsteads. It may be that one or more of these ideas need to be dropped or reinterpreted in order to balance competing demands. We would suggest a number of open-minded explorations be undertaken to explore different strategic spatial arrangements for the building and, should you return to design review, we would welcome reviewing these with you.

We appreciate that there is a conflict between some aspects of sustainability and affordability both now and in the long term.

Responding to the site

The panel struggled to appreciate the experience of the proposed dwelling set within the woodland. There could be a much stronger, concise description of the house in the setting, including the arrival experience as well as the relationship with existing trees, boundary treatments and views.

The arrival on Mill Pond Lane and journey up the hill, whilst not the most convenient, is accepted by the applicants as a point of compromise. However, future needs of family-life, older age and/or future occupants should be considered, and a very clear design response developed to reduce this as a barrier or impediment to sustainable, affordable living in the house. Lighting should be included in these considerations. There are also challenges in terms of construction and future maintenance that need to be addressed.

We strongly encourage a more formal arrangement to be put in place to secure long-term parking and access to the site across third-party land.

Clarity

The material provided is extensive and detailed but somewhat impenetrable. It should be much easier to get a clear sense of how the narrative has informed the design and what the proposed house and its surroundings will actually be like. Build up diagrams, explaining how each consideration has adjusted the plan/form may help here. There may also be benefit in appointing a planning consultant to help distil the required information and navigate the planning process. Taking a step back from the design as client-architect to get a fresh perspective and help prioritise some of the design ideas could also help at this stage.

Next Steps

As previously stated, it is for the LPA to determine the live planning application. However, there are design aspects highlighted in this report that would more strongly support the affordability argument. This will require review of the layout as well as clearer presentation of ideas and how they respond to the policy requirements. We believe that a high quality and very sustainable solution can be delivered, but there are further design iterations to find the optimal solution.

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

Attendees

Design Team: Gwyn Stacey
Client: Lauren Stacey
Local Authority: Charlotte Ford, Carmarthenshire County Council

DCFW Design Review Panel

Chair: Craig Sheach
Panel: Angela Williams (Lead Panellist)
Kedrick Davies
Richard Woods
Clare Wilding
Carole-Anne Davies, Chief Executive, DCFW
Jen Heal, Deputy Chief Executive, DCFW
Max Hampton, Design Advisor, DCFW
Observers: Tracey Kearns, TFW

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.

None.