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Design Review Report

Porthcawl Waterfront Masterplan

DCFW Ref: N329

Meeting of 12th February 2025



Review Status	Public
Meeting date	12 th February 2025
Issue date	26 th February 2025
Scheme description	Mixed-use masterplan
Scheme location	Coney Beach and Eastern Promenade, Porthcawl, Bridgend
Scheme reference number	N329
Planning status	Pre-planning
Planning status of DCFW comment	Material Consideration

Key Points

- The delivery strategy will be fundamental to the successful realisation of the vision and design quality of the development. The Design Commission recommend further engagement with us on the delivery strategy.
- Detailed testing of the project commercial viability, development packaging and phasing strategy is required.
- The plan would be strengthened by demonstrating a strong commercial underpinning.
- The masterplan needs further microclimate testing to ensure the design responds to the wind and sea storms.
- The amount, location and design of the car parking should be tested. A more concentrated approach should be explored that reduces the dominance of the car parking, enables more development and improves the townscape.
- The amount and quality of public open space should be further tested. There should be a focus on quality over quantity of public space.
- The masterplan should create a strong townscape throughout the development, not just along the sea front, with further attention needed on the main street through the centre of the development.

Consultations to Date

There has been previous engagement with the Design Commission on the proposed Porthcawl Waterfront Masterplan in October 2024, as well as an earlier workshop in 2019 exploring the development opportunity.

Bridgend County Borough Council has undertaken informal engagement with the local community. Concerns raised include the proposed number of homes, height of certain buildings, loss of public car parking, loss of holiday homes and space for mobile homes, and pressure on local infrastructure and services.

Pre-application consultation with the local planning authority is planned to be undertaken imminently.

The Proposal

The Porthcawl Waterfront Masterplan aims to create a vibrant coastal community, thoughtfully designed spaces that connect the town to the coast promote well-being and a strong sense of community. The plans seek to support local businesses and encourage local integration with spaces that are accessible and cater for diverse activities throughout the day and evening. The waterfront proposals seek to foster water-based and land activities, with easy movement between spaces and engaging street life.

The Local Development Plan has allocated the site for 1,100 homes. The plan proposes providing 600 public car parking spaces. The western and central part of the site is proposed to have a mix of uses, with the northeastern area more residential in character. The residential area includes a mix of traditional houses with gardens and more contemporary designed homes with access to communal amenity space.

The masterplan includes a 65% increase in open space since the previous strategy. The open space is proposed to be distributed across the development. There was an option to concentrate the public car parking in a multi-storey car park opposite the bus station, but the masterplan instead proposes to distribute the car parking across the site. An area to the south of Newton Primary School has been reserved for education use, but the details of what this will be are yet to be determined.



Proposed Masterplan

Context

The Porthcawl Waterfront site covers approximately 32 hectares of land to the east of Porthcawl Town Centre. The site spans a curved area around Sandy Bay and includes Hillsboro, Salt Lake, Griffin Park, Coney Beach, Former Monster Park, Sandy Bay (former caravan park), Newton Primary School, and the Relic Dunes. The site is bordered by Porthcawl Town Centre to the west and northwest, Trecco Bay to the east, Coney Beach to the south, and residential areas to the north.



Site Location Plan

Main Points

Vision and Delivery

The masterplan and supporting material presented set a strong vision for Porthcawl Waterfront and provides the basis for a high-quality development in what is a unique opportunity, integral to Porthcawl's future.

The delivery strategy will be fundamental to the successful realisation of the vision and design quality. The Design Commission encourages Bridgend County Council and the Welsh Government, as landowners, to explore different delivery mechanisms to ensure they retain control of the design quality.

We encourage exploration of a master developer or development consortium approach, rather than disposing parcels to different developers. We also encourage enabling opportunities for smaller, local developers and self-builders to be involved. Overall, we encourage an approach that prioritises quality.

The current proposals envisage a public sector-led outline planning permission (with EIA etc), with most matters reserved, in order to secure confidence for development partners, with the masterplan associated or connected to the outline permission. This can present challenges when subsequent viability and delivery work post-consent suggests significant modifications to the espoused vision, undermining confidence in the masterplan as currently presented. The place outcomes, land use mix, enabling infrastructure, public open space and affordable housing percentage can all be affected by the inevitable iteration and testing associated with actual delivery and implementation phasing when the developer is in post. Bridgend Council and Welsh Government may wish, therefore, to explore subtle variations on the approach presented. For example, to test if passing a greater burden of the planning and design to the development consortium, but under the aegis of a development brief or similar as landowner, may result in a planning permission by the developer for a masterplan that more closely aligns to a truly deliverable proposition.

A strong vision for the place has the potential to drive values and benefits. The phasing of development can act as a catalyst for quality, with the early provision of education, community uses and high-quality public spaces.

The Design Commission's Placemaking Guide includes a case study from Portishead on how the planning process can be used to control the design quality of a development: [PlacemakingGuideDigitalENG.pdf](#). The local planning authority used a S106 agreement to require design workshops and sub-area masterplans that provided time-for-design that was crucial to the success of the project.

Now is the time to explore all options for delivery, learning from case studies and drawing on expertise in the field. DCFW can provide further assistance with this.

Microclimate Testing

Further evidence on the local microclimate and testing of the masterplan is needed to understand how the design protects the development from the wind and sea storms. We have concerns that the orientation of the streets in the residential part of the development lacks protection from the sea. The central part of the scheme also has quite large open areas along the road through the site that lack shelter. Given the site's coastal location, robust testing of the masterplan is needed to understand what the different parts of the development will be like at different times of the year. Particular attention is needed as to what the streets and public spaces will be like in winter. The testing should inform the design, including the orientation of the streets, buildings, entrances and public spaces, as well as the materiality of elevations.

Movement and Car Parking

The masterplan includes large amounts of car parking. We recognise the area has significant visitor numbers arriving by car in the summer and that there is a local desire to retain public car parking. However, the amount, location and design of the car parking, as proposed, is likely to be quite dominant and affect the quality of townscape and density of development. We understand the cost implications of building a multi-storey car park, but concentrating car parking in a smaller area would enable the development of more housing and improve the townscape. Micro-mobility and shared-mobility options should also be explored.

The existing roundabout has been identified as a potential gateway. The roundabout is very large and presents a visual and movement barrier between the site and the town. We encourage further engagement with the Highway Authority to explore alternatives to the roundabout.

Public Open Space

We are concerned about the large amount of public open space proposed in the masterplan. Public space is important to the success of the area as a destination and a place to live, however we encourage focusing on quality over quantity of public space. We strongly encourage challenging the agreed amount of open space that the development should include and interrogating the masterplan to ensure the open spaces proposed are of an appropriate scale, enclosed, overlooked and have a purpose. For example, the main public plaza is extremely wide, could feel quite bleak on a quiet winter's day and would benefit from having a stronger relationship with the beach.

The delivery and maintenance of public open spaces needs to be understood to ensure they are deliverable, the quality is maintained, and they don't create a maintenance burden for the Council or residents.

Overall, we encourage further consideration of the balance between buildings and open spaces.

Townscape

The masterplan seeks to create a strong townscape along the sea front, but in places turns its back on some of the internal streets with large areas of car parking and open space. The main street through the site has particularly weak edges, with no buildings fronting onto the street, and will lack a sense of enclosure and shelter. Further consideration should be given to what the different streets will be like, whether buildings can face onto the main street and how the landscape can support a stronger sense of enclosure and shelter.

Community Building

The community building overlooking the entrance to the marina needs to be of high-quality design. We encourage focusing on creating a simple, elegant building. This community building could be a catalyst for expanded community work and language initiatives, and would benefit from coming earlier in the phasing of the development. The brief for this building will be important and there is the potential for further engagement with DCFW on the development of the brief to support design quality through the process.

Education

The land allocated for education use has not yet been defined. Consideration needs to be given to how this allocation impacts on walking distances from the residential area to New Road and Newton Primary School, as well as the relationship of the proposed housing with the education development. Consideration should be given to whether the masterplan can create a more direct route for people walking and cycling.

Next Steps

The Design Commission recommend further engagement with Bridgend County Borough Council and Welsh Government on the delivery strategy. We encourage the team to contact us early to find opportunities for further engagement on the delivery strategy and other aspects of the project.

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

Attendees

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DCFW Design Review Panel

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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.

There were no conflicts of interest.