



DESIGN
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Design Review Report

Maes Gwern, Mold

DCFW Ref: 117

Meeting of 6th June 2016



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 Agenda items. Any such declarations are recorded here and in DCFW's central records.

Review Status

CONFIDENTIAL

Meeting date	6 th June 2016
Issue date	15 th June 2016
Scheme location	Maes Gwern, Mold
Scheme description	Residential Development
Scheme reference number	117
Planning status	Pre-application

Declarations of Interest

None.

Consultations to Date

This is the second scheme within the SHARP partnership programme to be reviewed by the Design Commission for Wales but the first time that this particular site has been reviewed.

The Proposals

The proposal is for residential development consisting of 144 units on 5.7 hectares of greenfield site on the edge of Mold. The land is currently vacant and has not previously been developed.

Under the SHARP programme, Wates Living Space has been appointed as the Development Contractor for Flintshire County Council.

Main Points

We welcomed the opportunity to review proposals for this site at an early stage, following the DCFW training workshop with Flintshire County Council on design briefs which touched on the future of this site.

The site has a number of challenges being located on the edge of the settlement with limited opportunities for making connections into the existing development. However it also has a range of opportunities which can be captured to create a distinctive place.

Site and Context Analysis

The pre-review material demonstrated that some analysis of the site and its context has been undertaken, but there is a gap in the interpretation of this information and its application to the design approach. Some of this interpretation was described in the discussion but needs to be recorded in a series of plans and diagrams which will inform the layout and framework for the site. The Site and Context Analysis Guide published recently by the Welsh Government provides further information that will be useful in undertaking this process

<http://gov.wales/topics/planning/policy/guidanceandleaflets/site-and-context-analysis-guide/?lang=en>

Vision

The team set out their ambitions to create a distinctive place that raises the standard of residential development in the area. We support this ambition which will require a clear vision and some strong design ideas as well as the application of good urban design principles. Reference to 'Garden Village' was made by the team as a design ambition and this is welcomed. An understanding of and reference to precedent and case studies should be made to inform design development. We emphasise that realising the ambition will require a sound design approach.

Initial Layout Plan

We welcome the early consultation on proposals for this site as there is still scope to influence the design and layout for added value. A layout was provided with the pre-review information which later emerged to be a testing layout to determine the number of units that might be accommodated on the site. Whilst this gave us something to talk around it can be misleading and can cloud the realities of what is proposed for the site. An early framework or concept plan that identifies initial ideas for the main design elements such as footpath connections, street hierarchy, frontages, location of public space and building orientation would provide a better starting point for discussion.

A danger of the testing layout is that elements creep into the final layout without due consideration. The layout as it stands has a range of design issues that would not be acceptable as a final layout but, on the basis of assurances that this is not the proposed layout, these will not be discussed in detail.

Connections

Pedestrian and cycle routes through the site need to be considered on the basis of where people will be moving to and from. The creation of a pedestrian link to the north west is positive and should be well integrated into the layout so that it is a safe and attractive route.

The potential for a connection to the school via the playing fields should be explored as this will significantly reduce journey times for those living on the site. This may require a management approach where a gate/access provision is opened and closed at certain points of the day.

The benefits of a second access point into the site for vehicles should be explored. A hierarchy of streets will help to improve the legibility of the site and the design of streets can be used to increase character, identity and attractiveness.

Boundaries

The development should positively address its edges rather than being inward looking. Rear boundaries alongside public spaces are unattractive and do not create a secure boundary to the properties. Consideration should also be given to the best approach to addressing the woodland edge of the site.

Public space

The location and function of the public open space should be considered in the context of the vision for the site and the demographics of likely occupants. Well designed and integrated public and amenity space can enhance the setting of properties and add character to the development.

A landscape strategy will help to integrate existing features, such as the woodland, with the proposals including the potential for a footpath to the south perimeter of the site. The strategy should also take into account management and maintenance requirements and who will be responsible for what areas.

Topography

The site levels are to be looked at in more detail. We support the aim of reducing the number of retaining structures and, where any do occur, using appropriate materials for the location. The benefits of the topography, including views, should be maximised. The option of split-level housing to manage the change in level should also be considered. In this regard; the team's confirmation that the application of standard house-types was not a requirement of the scheme is welcomed.

Sustainable design

The approach to sustainable design should be considered from an early stage so that the orientation and other considerations fit with the approach. A sustainability strategy should inform both the site arrangement proposals and the development of dwelling types. It is important that the right expertise is available to achieve the desired sustainable performance. There is the potential to set a new standard in sustainable residential design in this area.

Noise

Traffic noise was identified as a potential issue and the approach to dealing with this needs to be built into the design once the monitoring has been undertaken.

Building for Life

The development should be aiming to achieve green for all of the 12 questions, although public transport connections may prove unachievable. The following points should be considered in relation to the Building for Life criteria.

- Connections: create safe and attractive pedestrian connections and consider how the development relates to the surroundings at the edge

- Facilities and services: connection to the school and other local facilities to be as direct as possible
- Public transport: how can links to bus stops be improved?
- Character: what will give the development a sense of character and distinctiveness in the layout? Can the design of the units respond to the local context in a contemporary way?
- Working with site and context: respect views, overlook woodland and open space and integrate the woodland
- Creating well defined streets and spaces: test the enclosure of the streets provided by the buildings. Do the buildings turn corners well?
- Easy to find your way around: establish a hierarchy of streets as well as legible routes through the development for all users
- Streets for all: consider how street design will prioritise pedestrians and cyclists
- Car parking: can a blend of approaches be used to minimise the dominance of cars?
- Public and private spaces: the public spaces and footpaths must be well overlooked and rear boundaries must be secure

Next Steps

DCFW would welcome the opportunity to review the scheme again prior to a planning application being submitted as proposals for the site have not yet been seen. We encourage the development and design team to allow enough time for the design process which will require testing and iterations to establish the best approach. All of the points highlighted above should be considered as the design progresses and we would expect to see this process documented in a series of design development drawings. We support the ambition for this to be an exemplar of residential development and we look forward to seeing how the proposals develop to meet this ambition.

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

Attendees

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Andy Roberts, Service Manager Strategy

Design Review Panel:
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Carole-Anne Davies, Chief Executive, DCFW