

The Design Review Panel

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Site	Yelland Quay, Yelland, Devon, EX31 3HB
Proposal	Regeneration of Yelland Quay Power Station
Local Authority	North Devon Council
Applicant	Yelland Quay Ltd
Agent	Woodward Smith Chartered Architects LLP
Review Date	17 th May 2019

This is the first time the Design Review Panel has reviewed a proposal for this site. The session was booked by Matthew Steart of Woodward Smith Chartered Architects LLP. The session included a site visit.

The expertise of Panel members for this site visit and design review panel session included two Chartered Landscape Architects, an Urban Designer, a Chartered Town Planner, an Ecologist and two Chartered Architects.

Paragraph 129 of the NPPF states: -

“Local planning authorities should ensure that they have access to, and make appropriate use of, tools and processes for assessing and improving the design of development. These include workshops to engage the local community, design advice and review arrangements ... In assessing applications, local planning authorities should have regard to the outcome from these processes, including any recommendations made by design review panels.”

The Panel raised the following points: -

The extremely clear, comprehensive, and professional presentation was welcomed by the Panel. It is felt that this comprehensive and professional presentation was of benefit to the design review process. Notwithstanding how much work has already gone into the design proposals presented, it is noted that the design process is still at an early stage; it is considered this was the correct stage at which to engage with the design review panel process. Furthermore, it is considered that the site visit was an extremely useful exercise in helping the Panel to appreciate the unique site location and characteristics.

Generally, subject to the comments within this feedback document being addressed, the Panel is supportive of the applicants stated aspirations and the proposed extent of development. It is

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considered that the site is very special and unique and represents an exciting opportunity of both local and regional significance; that is to say the site deserves a very high-quality design response.

Notwithstanding the above, the Panel is not currently supportive of the design proposals, and there is a concern that the proposals presented are not yet doing justice to the site. It is felt that the design of the masterplan may have evolved as a response to a series of constraints rather than a positive response to the many opportunities that it is felt exist. It is considered it would be beneficial for the development to be a bolder and aspirational led development. It is also noted that the design review panel is only being asked to comment on the masterplan, scale and massing and it is felt that this may in itself demonstrate that the proposals are not currently well-rounded.

In a spirit of helpfulness, it is suggested the proposals would benefit from the production of a constraints and opportunities appraisal which would then lead to a clear and strong design concept, which may in turn inform and empower a better proposed layout rationale. It is suggested that aspects of the illustrative masterplan a parameter plan and key elements from the design and access document should inform a design code; that is to say it is considered that there is still a lot more information that should be produced in order to support a planning application. It is considered that a design code should now be produced.

It would be beneficial for landscape to play a more prominent role in the development of the design, and it is considered the proposals should to be landscape led. Furthermore, it is suggested that there may be an opportunity to provide innovative green buildings and an overlap between built form and landscape design. The stated aspirations regarding the proposed planting species palette is welcomed, however this is considered to be very vague. Generally, it is considered that another level of detail is required regarding proposed landscape.

The external lighting design should be coordinated with the landscape masterplan at an early stage, so as to ensure that the landscape is not compromised at a later stage.

The Panel is not supportive of the solid fence being proposed regarding bird protection, and it is felt that this approach would benefit from further consideration, as this would not be in keeping with the landscape character and may be detrimental. It is suggested that there may be a softer, greener way of achieving the same level of protection that may also incorporate glimpsed views, both inwards and outwards.

Regarding ecology, the Panel feels that the mitigation proposals are generally good. It is noted that dark corridors are proposed to be provided along the estuary frontage, which is supported. Notwithstanding the above, the proposed ecological measures may be too focused on one part of the site; it is suggested there may be an opportunity to integrate ecology and wildlife measures throughout the site more generally. Furthermore, it is suggested that careful consideration should be given regarding recreational access to the foreshore and the potential impact upon birds.

There is a concern that the potential large numbers of people that may utilise the area of open space may change the character of this space to more of a 'parkland'. This aspect should be carefully

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considered to ensure overuse does not negatively impact upon the biodiversity management of this part of the site; wardening should be carefully considered and managed.

The stated aspiration to provide footpaths is supported, however it is felt that this is too generic, and it may be helpful to provide more specific proposals or a clearer statement of intent in this regard.

It is noted that the site does have an allocation and the Panel is supportive of the proposal to develop the site, however it is felt that it is not currently clear what the proposals are for; that is to say the Panel suggests it would be beneficial to take a step back and for the applicant to provide a clearer vision of what the place will be, and who it is intended will occupy the site.

It is considered that it would be beneficial to demonstrate credibility/viability of the proposals; for example, there is a concern that the proposed shop may not be viable, due to the size of the housing development? The proposal to provide a hotel is supported, however, in a spirit of helpfulness, the Panel suggests it is important to ensure that the completed development will be enough of a destination to be viable. The aspiration to provide wider community benefits for Yelland are supported, however it is suggested that it would be beneficial to demonstrate wider links and routes between the site and potential outside end users, to ensure the aspiration is practical.

If the aspiration is to create a new coastal village, there is a concern that the layout does not currently reflect this aspiration; it is felt that the imposed geometric shapes do not demonstrate an understanding of the site rationale. The Panel is supportive of the Silver Lake precedent, quoted by the applicants, however it is suggested that this may feel more like a resort than a village. If the aspiration is to create a tourist destination, then it is felt that this requires a clearer articulation within the proposals.

The Panel is supportive of establishing a link back to the use of the site as a power station. However, there is a concern regarding the proposed form and massing of the proposed central blocks that are proposed to be located on the former turbine hall footprint, in that it has not yet demonstrated any local distinctiveness. The Panel suggests that currently this may be being done in too literal a way (although the Panel recognises the early design stage). The Panel suggests that this aspect should be further developed in a more subtle way, for example using forms that are more perforate. It is suggested that another approach may be to reference to the industrial heritage in other ways, for example, such as through retention of salvage features from the site and re-use as play equipment.

It is suggested it may be beneficial for the proposals to take design and master planning cues from different settlements along the estuary, albeit interpreted in a contemporary way. The proposals would also benefit from demonstrating an understanding of the wider character area. Regarding the proposed typologies, it is considered that these are not yet leading to a distinct identity, and the proposals feel ubiquitous. As above

Whilst it is noted the proposals are at the master planning stage and the detailed architecture has not yet been developed, based upon the outline information presented, the Panel suggests it may be beneficial for the form and styling of the buildings to be approached with a lighter touch. As above, it is not yet clear what community the proposals are aimed at, and this lack of clarity is

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reflected in the design proposals; that is to say it is felt that the design should reference the unique sense of place, location, site and proposed function.

The provision of a storey height plan is welcomed by the Panel as is the emergence of intention regarding height variation across the site, and it is suggested this should be further developed. The Panel is supportive of the approach regarding horizontal layering, although it is suggested that there may be opportunities to also incorporate some vertical elements within the proposals so as to create a greater sense of robustness, using height scale and density. The historic height and massing uses on the site may provide design cues. Furthermore, it is suggested that it would be beneficial for the proposals to generate a greater sense of density and connection between the proposed built forms; currently there is a concern that the proposals feel like a series of unrelated individually developed sites.

It is noted that the existing jetty is outside of the proposal site redline area, however notwithstanding this, it is felt that this structure is significant and should be taken into account within any proposals. It is suggested that this may represent an opportunity in the long term; that is to say the Panel considers that the proposals should consider what alternative uses the jetty may provide in the long term should its current function become unviable.

In a spirit of helpfulness, the Panel suggests various potential opportunities that it may be beneficial to further consider: -

- sustainability; there may be an opportunity for the proposals to respond to solar orientation so as to benefit from passive solar gain
- the layout of the proposal should not be dictated by road layouts
- road layouts should not be overengineered
- there may be an opportunity to incorporate combined heat and power
- there may be opportunities to penetrate (visually) the existing boundary so as to utilise the fantastic outlook
- there may be an opportunity to better address the Tarka Trail providing enhancements for end users
- there may be opportunities to introduce leisure uses that are specific to the sites unique assets, such as facilities for eco-tourists, walkers', cyclists, artists, twitchers etc

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS, (to be read in conjunction with the above).

In summary the main conclusions of the Panel are: -

- The Panel is supportive of the applicants stated aspirations & the proposed extent of development
- The Panel is not currently supportive of the design proposals
- There is a concern the design of the masterplan may have evolved as a response to a series of constraints, rather than a positive response to the many opportunities
- A design code should now be produced

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- It would be beneficial for landscape to play a more prominent role in the development of the design
- External lighting design should be coordinated with the landscape masterplan at an early stage
- The Panel is not supportive of the solid fence being proposed regarding bird protection
- The ecological mitigation proposals are generally good
- There may be an opportunity to integrate ecology & wildlife measures throughout the site more generally
- Ecological wardening should be carefully considered & managed
- More specific proposals regarding footpaths should be incorporated
- It would be beneficial to take a step back & for the applicant to provide a clearer vision of what the place will be
- It would be beneficial to demonstrate credibility/viability of the proposals
- There is a concern the proposed form & massing has not demonstrated any local distinctiveness
- There is a concern the proposed typologies do not result in a distinct identity, & the proposal feel ubiquitous
- The horizontal layering is supported, although there may be opportunities to incorporate vertical elements
- The utilization of the old turbine hall footprint should be undertaken in a less literal way
- The jetty structure should be taken account of within the proposals
- It may be beneficial to further consider the various site opportunities that exist, not just the constraints

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NOTES:

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