

Carlton Fields Masterplan, Penrith

Reviewed 4th October 07

Synopsis



Penrith is a market town with a population of 14,700. It is situated on the east side of the Lake District. To the east of the town is Carlton, once a separate settlement and now an area that has seen the most growth of housing in the past 30 years. There is the large High Carlton housing estate which was started in the 1960s and is still growing.

As a further urban extension, this is a strategic masterplan from a private sector client for 570 to 600 houses on a site further east of Penrith town centre approximately a mile outside of the centre and up the fells.

The scheme will attach itself along the west side of the existing housing development of free standing houses set in a meandering suburban landscape. To the north east of the new estate there is a steeper slope up the fells for agricultural grazing, bordered at the top by Beacon Road leading up to the Penrith Beacon.

The scheme was reviewed in October 2007 at full panel review and again in March 2008 at internal panel.

Recommendations of the Places Matter Design Review report

- The masterplan was broadly supported by the panel, in lieu of further development of the housing types.
- The retention and reconstruction of the existing hedgerows and features of the farmland were seen as a very positive gesture in terms of retaining existing bio-diversity, with a more detailed understanding required of the ecological viability of the hedgerows' biodiversity function when deprived of their neighbouring field layer of vegetation.
- Some concerns were expressed in terms of sustainability – around the north facing aspect of some of the housing and the 2:1 car parking provision.
- The panel were not convinced that the mix of facilities (community building / shops) on the layout at this stage would discourage residents from using their cars or provide for a community of this size.
- A robust management and maintenance plan for maintaining the green spaces and elements should be developed.
- There needs to be more consideration of the views into and of the site.
- The main road in the site appeared to be a road to nowhere and needed to provide a link

through to the wider area, at least for public transport access and further consideration needed to be given to pedestrian and cycle routes.

- The panel felt that the lack of focal points / destination factor could lead to the development lacking a sense of place.

In March 2008, the internal review report stated its support for the incorporated changes and commended the gradual tightening of the urban grain, resulting in greater clarity in the masterplan. It also suggested there was still work to be done around the definition of the green spaces and community facilities and that it would be important at the next stage of detail to be more explicit about how the sustainability intentions will be expressed in built form.

Evaluation

Both the Local Authority (LA), Client and Designer have responded to our evaluation.

The LA representative described the process as valuable and both the Designer & Client described the process as helpful. Both the Local Authority and Client said they would use the service again, but the Designer felt the Client may have lost confidence in the process due to a later development which involved the LA employing a design advisor who disagreed with the views of the panel. This clash of design advice has caused frustration for the Designer and Client and they feel it has undermined the Design Review process.

In response to the recommendations, several changes were made including:

- The development of a movement framework which provided a local bus route along the village lane, through Carlton Meadows.
- A reduction in car parking provision from 2 spaces per dwelling to 1.8 spaces per dwelling.
- Development of a hedgerow concept identifying how the hedges could retain their biodiversity function and become integral planting elements within the streetscape.
- Further definition of the location of a convenience shop and crèche and provision of a community facility.
- Development of the layout and urban structure in relation to landscape, topography, movement and townscape character – balanced with exploiting the suns aspect, along with further development of the landscape framework with a clear character and identity for spaces including a clear hierarchy of streets. This also integrated spaces allowing visual connection to orientating features.

The first phase of this scheme has been submitted to planning in April 2008, however no decision has yet been made.

Recommendations for improvement of the process

This scheme highlighted the importance of engaging all parties fully in the Design Review process in order to attain buy-in from all parties into the design advice given. Although an LA representative was present, it was not the case officer which the client felt would have helped. The client also suggested that links with the LA's need to be strengthened for the panel advice to carry weight and influence the decision making process. The Designer felt it would have been useful for the panel members to see the site prior to the review as it was suggested by the LA design advisor that the lack of a site visit led to a lack of understanding on the part of the panel. The designer also suggested that the Design Review process might offer some small enabling role in addition to Design Review.