

Statws/Status:
Cyhoeddus (Public)



Adroddiad Adolygu Dylunio:
Design Review Report: 10 February 2005

Dyddiad Cyfarfod / Cyflwyno'r Deunydd:
Meeting Date / Material Submitted: 2 February 2005

Lleoliad/Location: Ely Bridge, Cardiff

Disgrifiad o'r Cynllun
Scheme Description: New residential community with ancillary community facilities and employment

Cleient/Asiant:
Client/Agent: WDA:
[Mike Cuddy, Tim Howard]

Pensaer/Architect: Llewelyn Davies:
[Amanda Reynolds, Ben Hignett]

Awdurdod Cynllunio:
Planning Authority: Cardiff County Council:
[Peter Kingsbury, Janet Davidson]

Statws Cynllunio:
Planning Status: Outline application submitted

Y Panel Adolygu Dylunio/Design Review Panel:
John Punter (cadeirydd/chair) Lyn Owen
Cindy Harris (swyddog/officer) Ed Colgan
Douglas Hogg Kieren Morgan

Sylwedyddion/Observers: Gillian Wulff (DCfW)
Tim Webb (Cardiff CC)

Cyflwyniad/Presentation

The scheme is based upon a well prepared document setting out broad and ambitious design principles. Alongside these, is a planning masterplan for a mixed-use scheme located on the former Arjo Wiggins Paper Mill site. A part-occupied office building on the southern part of site will be retained but the rest of the site has already been cleared. The initial WDA brief required 1200 new homes, new employment opportunities and neighbourhood facilities. The proposals tabled show a reduction to 900 dwellings because the site no longer includes Cardiff County Council land to the south.

The constraints and opportunities of the site were outlined, considering the mainline and Valley Line railways to the north east which cut the site off from Victoria Park and Canton, and the disconnection from the suburbs of Ely and Caerau to the east because the canalised River Ely forms the boundary to the south west of the site. Council owned recreational grounds and allotments are located to the south and west of the site. Mention was made of the proposed Ely Spur link between Ely Bridge and the PDR, which might in the future provide access to the site from the west. A suggested railway halt is proposed as demarcated in the Unitary Development Plan.

The proposals seek to establish a distinctive development, while responding to the site and developing links to adjacent residential areas to the north and open space to the south. The site will be served by two access roads, one entering from the west at Cowbridge Road adjacent to Ely Bridge, and the other from Sanatorium Road to the east. These entry points will be linked by a spine road, providing a through route for buses, but preventing through car traffic by means of a bus gate. There is a network of minor access roads designed for speeds of 20 mph. A circuitous road along the side of the river Ely is designed to allow good site penetration while reducing traffic speed. Pedestrian connections to the north will be provided by means of upgrading existing rail underpasses and overbridges, but link options eastwards from the suggested rail halt are limited. A dedicated pedestrian and cycle route is provided along the river and a footbridge across the Ely will provide a route to the adjacent public open space. Green streets with shared surfaces, quality landscaping and public realm are key elements of the scheme.

A sustainable approach to development is taken by de-canalising the river and creating an eco corridor, incorporating sustainable drainage measures and grey water recycling, emphasising energy efficient homes and the use of local and recycled materials. The re use of brownfield land and the retention for use of the existing office building are viewed as sustainable elements. Contrary to some publicity, there are no proposals to make this a 'zero energy' scheme. A node of community facilities is envisaged next to the proposed train station and live-work units are projected along the spine road. It is the intention to implement the masterplan by means of a Design Code.

The development form suggested is based on a mix of housing types from semi detached, through short terraces of houses across most of the site, to live/work units along the spine road, and some flats. Construction work is planned to take place in three phases, starting at the north west end of site with buildings of 1-2 storeys, progressing to three storeys in the centre, and reducing in height again

towards the south east. Four storey buildings will be located along the spine road and in key locations or intersections. A range of densities is proposed across the site. It is intended to commence development in advance of decisions on the proposed Ely Link Road and the development of land west of the river Ely.

The County Council supports the concept of a mixed-use, sustainable scheme at this location. They are eager to ensure employment on site and job opportunities for local residents. The proposals to serve the site with its own bus route and the improvement to east/west pedestrian connections are positives. The commitment to sustainable development is welcome, though it was felt that aspirations for high levels of energy efficiency might not be deliverable. It was pointed out that the suggested railway halt is not included as part of the application. The proposed density is not considered a problem. Concern is expressed with the lack of on-plot parking and the possibility that the route along the river, however tortuous, will still be used as a short cut. The public open space and cycle network is supported, though emphasis should be placed on maximising safety. The local planning authority is awaiting consultee comments on the masterplan and these may influence their assessment of the scheme.

Ymateb y Panel/Panel's Response and Discussion

The Panel began by stressing the importance of close collaboration between the WDA (and its designers) and the County Council in order that a coherent solution be delivered on both the site in question and in the surrounding areas, which are ripe for redevelopment. With this in mind, clarification was requested with regard to the public open space to the south. It was confirmed that all the land within the masterplan area is WDA owned and the proposal no longer includes County Council owned land to the south. Developing an extra 300 units on this land was considered, but this would require the provision of the Ely Spur Road to serve the site. The funding for the provision of this road was no longer available. It was affirmed that the masterplan would not preclude development of these areas if further road access is provided. Clarification was also sought regarding the future use of the old industrial sites and the allotments to the west side of the river. Any changes to their use could significantly impact on access.

The Panel expressed concern over the collapse of the joint approach to the area and particularly the Council's failure to commit to the provision of the Ely Spur Road. This rendered access to the site highly problematic, especially from the north where the junction with Cowbridge Road West was clearly unworkable. Furthermore, all the improvements to pedestrian access from the east, and the provision of the suggested railway halt, would require the extensive involvement of the Council.

The Panel felt that better highway access to the site from the Ely Spur might render the masterplan unsustainable because it would further encourage use of the private car. The Panel positively supports the creation of a new rail halt, notwithstanding the location of an existing station 800 metres away, but is very concerned about its deliverability. The Panel has a great deal of sympathy with the WDA in their efforts to facilitate development of this site without any degree of certainty about the provision of these key pieces of transport infrastructure. These are issues which need urgent attention.

As for the masterplan itself, the Panel welcomed the mixed-use nature of the scheme. We were informed that more work was needed to determine the viability of the live/work units. The design/development team are currently liaising with local enterprise trusts and housing associations about the deliverability of this.

The Panel questioned the location of the feeder road along the river edge, and associated car parking, particularly on the west side of that road, where it would create an intrusion to the riverside landscape. We were not convinced that the retained office building had been adequately integrated into the riverside landscape, though we could see the difficulty of doing this. There was some discussion about the three half oval extensions of the riverside landscape that dictate the line of the feeder road and the layout at large. While the scheme does well to bring these green spaces into the layout, and to reinforce them with street landscaping, their positioning has two problems. First, they leave the office block isolated and discordant. Second, the southern-most green space would be bisected by any future road connection to the Ely Spur. The latter must be addressed in a revision to the layout. We also make the comment that the value of these three spaces is not reflected in appropriate enclosure by the housing blocks (see on).

Some concern was expressed at the dependence on on-street parking (together with some parking courts) but on balance the Panel accepted that the idea was consistent with the popular Victorian Edwardian terraces of Victoria Park to the east and should be tried. Nevertheless, the panel would like evidence to support the notion that on-street parking can provide a safe, high quality public realm, and requested working examples as reference for consideration.

The Panel noted that there was a tension between the provision of small housing blocks and a very permeable street layout, and the lack of enclosure of the blocks, particularly on the corners where it was most needed to reinforce legibility and continuity of the public realm. It was argued that this site provided the opportunity to reinterpret Cardiff's wonderful typology of terraced housing and to recast it in a modern form. Although the Panel recognises that the masterplan has considered some form of terrace and seeks to provide a range of house types (and tenures), it was considered that some of the resulting forms shown on the masterplan still seem arbitrary and out-of-context.

Materials were not discussed in any great detail and further information will be required with regard to their appropriateness, source and sustainability. The need for a well considered Design Code was emphasised as essential in order to ensure that consistency and quality are maintained during each phase of the master plan.

Concern was expressed with regard to sustainability, particularly energy efficiency. Although the layout minimises north-facing gardens, and provides some southerly facing balconies, no recognition is given to the orientation of the buildings for active or passive solar gain. The Panel strongly recommends that opportunities for solar gain are addressed in the masterplan and in the layout itself, giving the streets a purer east/west orientation. The provision of a district heating system would seem appropriate for a development of this scale and nature, and the WDA is advised to investigate this further at the next stage. We would encourage the masterplan to aspire to achieving an 'Excellent' Eco Homes rating. Use of materials needs to be considered at an early stage, to reduce embodied energy and source local and renewable products. The developer intends to commission further work in this area

and subject the findings to peer review. Whilst the Panel respect that the WDA wish to develop a scheme that is deliverable by private and volume house builders, sustainability aspirations are considered a necessity for a site of this size and scale.

Crynodeb/Summary

The Panel commends the developer for bringing forward positive proposals for this important brownfield site. There are many positive features set out in the design principles prepared for the scheme. Elements worth supporting include:

- the mix of dwelling types and uses, including live/work units,
- pedestrian links to and across the site and possible public transport links,
- opening up the riverbank and the open space
- the awareness of the sustainable design potential of such a large site.

However, we have the following significant reservations:

- We have fundamental concerns regarding the uncertainty of developments around the site. There appears to be a lack of coordination between the agencies involved, particularly Cardiff County Council and the WDA. It is crucial that the two bodies develop a close cooperation to ensure that these uncertainties are resolved as soon as practicable. The former should give a clear indication of their intentions concerning major road access and the provision of public transport, particularly the railway halt. The bus link should be confirmed from the outset.
- This is not a self-contained site and is currently very isolated as the masterplan makes clear. The establishment of links and connections in all directions is vital, but since almost all of these depend on actions and investments off the site, a partnership approach is vital. The masterplan indicates many, but not all, of the improvements which must be delivered with the development of this site.
- The panel strongly welcomes the commitment to a detailed masterplan to be implemented by a Design Code backed by Contractual Obligations. But it is critically important that the masterplan resolves the ambiguities about sustainable layouts and proposed building forms that are evident in this proposal, and provides a firm basis on which to develop the Code.
- While the block shapes and sizes are satisfactory, greater attention must be given to corner treatments and enclosure of both the streets and the attractive open spaces, and the terraced form more fully developed.
- The orientation of buildings should be reconsidered to maximise the opportunity for active and passive solar gain. Consideration in the masterplan should be given to resource efficiency and the achievement of an 'Excellent' Ecohomes rating should be specified in the Code.
- We remain open to the claimed advantages for on-street parking and would be interested to see the experiment implemented, monitored and evaluated.

Diwedd/End

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