

**Statws/Status:**

**Cyhoeddus / Public**

DESIGN  
COMMISSION  
FOR WALES  
COMISIWN  
DYLUNIO  
CYMRU

**Adroddiad Adolygu Dylunio:**  
**Design Review Report:** 13 April 2005

**Dyddiad Cyfarfod / Cyflwyno'r Deunydd:**  
**Meeting Date / Material Submitted:** 6 April 2005

**Lleoliad/Location:** Cwmbran Town Centre

**Disgrifiad o'r Cynllun**  
**Scheme Description:** Mixed Use

**Cynllunio:**  
**Consultants:** GVA Grimley,  
[Ben Lewis, Tim Gent]  
Halcrow, [Howard Davies]

**Cleient/Asiant:**  
**Client/Agent:** Torfaen County Borough  
**Council** [Ellie Harper]

**Pensaer/Architect:** Holder Mathias  
[Stephen Hill; Wilcoe  
Stekkinger]

**Awdurdod Cynllunio:**  
**Planning Authority:** Torfaen CBC

**Statws Cynllunio:**  
**Planning Status:** Local Development Plan:  
Planning Policy Options Paper

**Y Panel Adolygu Dylunio/Design Review Panel:**

Alan Francis (cadeirydd/chair) Howard Wainwright  
Cindy Harris (swyddog/officer) Ewan Jones  
John Punter Lyn Owen

### Cyflwyniad/Presentation

The presentation gave an overview of the team structure and their involvement in the project over the past year. The team outlined their evidence-based approach, which they are confident is both deliverable and viable, benefitting from strong client involvement with Torfaen CBC.

The presentation outlined the need for a strategy for Cwmbran town centre which is currently vibrant and diverse with a very successful retail core and small office, leisure and community elements. The study area covers the 1960's shopping precinct and adjacent free standing supermarkets and retail park, and has been extended to include areas to the northwest (to include the canal) and south (to include the primary school site). The town centre is essentially defined by its four corners (roundabouts) and extends towards the railway station to the north east. The vision is for an improved and expanded town centre, with a significant mixed use offer comprising retail, leisure, office, employment and residential uses; enhanced and meaningful areas of public open space; and a high quality environment with fully integrated sustainable and accessible transport provision.

The Planning Policy Options Paper, sponsored by Torfaen CBC and the WDA, forms the first stage in developing proposals for Cwmbran town centre. These proposals will be included in the Torfaen Local Development Plan (to 2016). They take account of the possible relocation of County Hall to the town centre and the possible release of the the Brookfields school site to the south.

The team identified that there is a clear need for planning policy to help manage future growth in order to maintain the performance of the town centre, enhance the town centre offer and accommodate significant development pressures. It was highlighted that there is a live central government strategy for new office development in Cwmbran, which gives the option to shape the town centre further. To support the study a 'healthcheck' on current activities, a commercial market assessment, retail capacity study, transport and accessibility analysis and consideration of urban design issues, have all been completed.

Six strategic options have been considered for possible patterns of development to achieve the vision. Options 1, 2 and 4 have now been taken forward, which all show a shift in the town's centre of gravity towards the north east. Each involves the removal of Glyndwr Road so as to remove a barrier to the eastward extension of the centre. Stronger pedestrian links across the town centre and a relocated bus station are also major features of all the options. A new County Hall is proposed for the north east or, as an alternative option, moved to the school site to the south. Residential is suggested as another possible use for that school site.

In addition, a number of urban design principles are proposed which include: the creation of strong corners to the town centre; a strengthened urban grain through the linking of spaces; landmark features; defining and bolstering the southern edge, including the enclosure of Llantarnam Grange; exploring the potential of the canal; and the integration of the town centre with its surroundings.

Torfaen CBC is now consulting on these policy options and the response to date has been considered very positive.

### **Ymateb y Panel/Panel's Response**

The Panel began by exploring the planning status and process. It was confirmed that the work would be fed into the Local Development Plan and although it could not at present form supplementary planning guidance, it would be used as a guidance for Development Control. Strategic design guidance or coding will apply as it is developed. In particular, policy backup is needed for a more comprehensive approach to sustainable development and the relocation of County Hall.

The Panel questioned the proposed extent of the town centre and the appropriateness of the scale of expanded areas. It was considered that the initial priority should be to focus on the central shopping area, especially the southern edge and the linking area towards the railway station.

The Panel welcomed the mixed use nature of the emerging plan and encouraged a greater residential component. We were informed that the demand for town centre private residential accommodation was not expected to be significant. The Local Authority stated that the 5 year plan for the Sebastopol site adjacent to the town centre would meet much of the housing requirement. The Panel nevertheless considered that even some modest residential provision in the town centre would help to increase the vitality and security of the area.

The Panel was pleased to see the formation of well articulated design principles. Our major concern, however, rested with pedestrian movement, particularly east/west. At present the proposed pedestrian network is convoluted, with a number of right angled turns that do not allow for easy movement and the emerging plan suggests that some areas of the extended centre, especially to the north east, will reproduce that pattern. Greater focus should be given to the creation of a simpler grid with a less intricate sequence of spaces. A space syntax study should be carried out which will look beyond the current site boundaries to the key desire lines connecting to residential areas on the edge of town. Distances and changes in level will also impact on movement patterns and should be analysed.

The Panel was concerned with the proposal to build a level podium to the north east, as the base for future development, rather than reflecting the natural landform. Other examples of this approach have not worked well. A greater understanding of the level changes needs to be demonstrated through extensive section drawings. Overall, the Panel considered the creation of a raised plinth deck inappropriate, given that the land continues to fall away to the east, especially as this decision prevents a phased development of the new north east sector. In addition, Llantarnam Grange, which sits at a lower level, would be surrounded by walkways and its special character might be lost as a consequence. The Panel questioned whether the desire to provide a one-level link to the railway station was the right driver, and whether pedestrian and traffic uses should be creatively integrated rather than separated. The suggested removal of Glyndwr Road was supported, although it was recognised that the impact of this on capacity and access needs careful consideration. It was suggested that St Davids Road could be turned into a boulevard but it was noted that this is a very busy road, which would be more so if Glyndwr Road is removed, so that the conflict between pedestrian and vehicular traffic may limit what is achievable.

The Panel encouraged the team to consider what existing design elements of the town centre may be worthy of retention, including some of the distinctive 1960's design, and also to consider the qualities which makes the town centre as it is today so successful. For example the continuation of weather protection in future developments should be considered. The potential to draw on dramatic views of rural hills to the west was raised, along with the opportunity for the creation of public open space and a public art strategy. The possibility for an update or replacement of the present drab library building should also be examined.

The Panel was pleased to learn that the Council have already secured funding for a circular bus route between the railway station and the town centre, and that the ground floor of the proposed bus station will have active frontages [although this was difficult to discern from the plans - again, section drawings would be appropriate]. The provision and integration of cycle routes, though not specifically discussed, should be a part of any transport strategy.

The Panel welcomed the commitment of the Local Authority (as client) to sustainability and reiterated that sustainable design guidance should be included in the proposals as design codes or design briefs are developed.

### **Crynodeb/Summary**

The Panel supports the principle of mixed use development and the commitment to sustainable development in this scheme. We commend the quality of the work done so far and we would welcome the opportunity to comment on the future development of these proposals. We recommend that the following fundamental points are addressed in future design development:

- The pattern of movement should be more closely analysed in the existing town centre and its effect on the proposed extension towards the north east, with a view to increasing permeability and ease of pedestrian access
- The Panel questions the appropriateness of the high-level plinth and suggests alternative ways of dealing with the interface of pedestrians and vehicular traffic be considered.
- It would be particularly useful to have extensive section drawings of relevant parts of the site
- While recognising the importance of looking at peripheral sites and agreeing the directions being pursued, we suggest priority be allocated to the existing shopping area, its southern edge and the extension north east towards the railway station.
- More work is needed to identify the best features and qualities of the existing centre worthy of retention or enhancement, and how they can inform the design of new development
- Some town centre housing, even on a modest scale, should be encouraged
- We strongly support the recognition of the special quality of Llantarnam Grange and the need for new development in its vicinity to be sympathetic and of a high standard
- Further clarification of the potential of the nearby canal should be considered

**Diwedd/End**

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