

Statws/Status:

Cyhoeddus / Public

DESIGN
COMMISSION
FOR WALES
COMISIWN
DYLUNIO
CYMRU

Adroddiad Adolygu Dylunio: Design Review Report:	12 May 2005
Dyddiad Cyfarfod / Cyflwyno'r Deunydd: Meeting Date / Material Submitted:	5 May 2005
Lleoliad/Location:	Bargoed town centre
Disgrifiad o'r Cynllun Scheme Description:	Masterplan
Cleient/Asiant: Client/Agent:	WDA [Claire Dauncey]
Pensaer/Architect:	Camlin Lonsdale [Huw Morgan, Robert Camlin, Chris Loyn]
Awdurdod Cynllunio: Planning Authority:	Caerphilly CBC [Rhian Davies]
Statws Cynllunio: Planning Status:	Pre-planning
Y Panel Adolygu Dylunio/Design Review Panel:	
Alan Francis (cadeirydd/chair) Cindy Harris (swyddog/officer) Geraint John Kedrick Davies	Wendy Hall Ewan Jones Phil Roberts Lyn Owen

Cyflwyniad/Presentation

Bargoed is an ex mining community with a traditional valleys town centre, based around a linear shopping street and busy road, and serving a wider catchment area than its population would suggest. It is the most visited town in the upper Rhymney

valley and has suffered for many years from a lack of inward investment. Previous studies were undertaken in 1995 and 2002 and these have resulted in planned infrastructure improvements, notably the new relief road to be built on the valley bottom to the east of the town centre. This provides the stimulus for substantial regeneration of the town centre and this new study was commissioned from Camlin Lonsdale, with a brief to bring vitality back to the centre and to 'make a difference'.

The study under consideration is in the form of a final draft to be submitted to Caerphilly CBC after a public exhibition on 19th-21st May. Community engagement has been carried out in the course of developing the current proposals. These constitute a dramatic intervention, involving large scale demolition of existing buildings [40-50 retail or business units, some with accommodation above] and major works including:

- A new market square at the south end of the town centre
- A two-level plateau to the east of the new square to accommodate large scale retail and parking
- A greater mix of uses including small office use, residential and arts/leisure
- A 'town wall' [actually a six metre high retaining wall] separating the upper level from the major roadworks, railway line and landscaping below.
- A transport interchange at the northern end of the high street with train and bus links
- Improved east/west pedestrian links
- 'Threshold' areas at the entrance to the town at the north and south ends, with a landmark building on the southern approach

The designers stated that movement, topography, and investment are the three main areas to be tackled. In particular, the difference in levels across the site from east to west is a challenge. The proposals are based on using demolition and land grading to establish plateau levels, accommodating a large market square flanked by a superstore, other units and parking. The superstore would have an innovative folded roof to add design interest.

The delivery will be phased as a series of development packages, probably over the next 10-15 years, and will include targeted funding for upgrading properties as well as building new. A public arts strategy is included.

In terms of the planning policy context, Bargoed town centre is an allocated retail development location, and is seen by the local authority as part of a wider redevelopment project, including new housing on the plateau across the valley to the east, which in turn links into the country park. It is intended that this masterplan will inform the LDP and SPGs as they are developed.

Ymateb y Panel/Panel's Response

The Panel recognised that there is much to be welcomed in these substantial proposals, such as an increase in mixed use; a combination of infill, upgrading and new development; the public transport and pedestrian friendly linear street; the cross links; and upgraded station area. However, the scale of the proposed development requires consideration of what role and catchment area is realistic for a relatively small town. The suggested demolition of a large number of business properties, including a post office and garage, some with residential accommodation, as well as a modern clinic and library, most of which appear to be structurally sound, also requires a more thorough justification. This could prove a

controversial element of the proposals and involve difficult, lengthy and expensive procedures, which could disrupt the scheme as a whole. In reply, the designers and the council representative all felt that the scale of development and demolition was a realistic proposition, on the back of a £41m investment programme already committed to, and as a stimulus for further regeneration in the area. The Panel thought that phasing and planning options for a flexible implementation strategy should be developed, prioritising the most important works and allowing alternative approaches if key properties were not available for redevelopment.

It was agreed by all that the decline of Bargoed town centre had to be arrested and that continuing the status quo was not an option. The designers stated that although the proposals are radical, the process of redevelopment will be gradual, evolving and sensitively managed. It will be important to avoid blighting any area or properties, but the local traders association has expressed support. There will be opportunities for new businesses and for relocating existing traders to the new development, with a range of different sizes of retail units available. The current study is seen not so much as a masterplan, as a design-led investment model for a town of modest means.

The Panel considered that there was a lack of information and analysis - for instance a series of sections showing the different levels would have been extremely useful. Also, an analysis of the present character, features and buildings of Bargoed worth retaining or reflecting in the new development. A clear statement on the scale of the demolition proposed, and how relocation would be handled, would have been helpful in understanding the proposals. The way in which the food store connected with the market square was unclear. The highways drawings that were produced during the course of the review revealed much more of the relationship between these proposals and the new bypass. It is vital that the new highway system is shown on drawings of the town centre proposals - in plan and in section. Some of the images shown, while seductive, were unrealistic. A model would also help in the public presentation of the scheme.

Some doubt was expressed by the panel about the size and use of the proposed market square, which is not a traditional feature of Welsh valleys towns, and may be a questionable use of scarce and expensively obtained flat land. The proposed scale also brings with it the difficulty of ensuring that that the square is used sufficiently so that it remains a lively and active place. The option of a smaller square requiring less demolition, but which could still provide an open frontage to part of the new development, with some development to the rear of refurbished buildings, is an alternative approach which could be considered. This would help reduce costs and possible blight.

The new bypass will have a substantial visual impact and an extensive planting strategy will be required to integrate the scheme into the dramatic valley landscape setting in order to mitigate this. It was not clear that this was in the scope of work for the masterplanning team, but it should be co-ordinated with all the proposals for the town centre. The construction materials and detailing of the retaining walls for the plateau, and managing their visibility from the new bypass, will be critical to the success of the valley landscaping. Again, we questioned how achievable the images of a 'forest garden' really were.

The Panel requested assurance that quality will be fundamental to the scheme's development. It was pointed out that public sector funding will be necessary for all phases and that should provide some quality assurance. Camlin Lonsdale will be commissioned to stay on the project panel as advisers. Deliverability remained a

major concern for the Panel, for example with regard to the folding roof and the likelihood of a major food retailer taking this on. We would like to see more independent verification for the economic viability of these proposals.

Crynodeb/Summary

In general we welcome the vision being developed to regenerate an entire town centre, and many elements of the emerging proposals. However we remain to be convinced that the scale is appropriate, and that implementation based on such extensive demolitions is feasible. A scheme including all or most of the same elements, but on a more modest scale, could be considered as an alternative more likely to achieve the vision in reality. When a deliverable scheme has been more fully justified, and shown to work on a functional level given the challenge of topography, as well as being fully committed to high design quality, then we would be happy to support it.

In particular:

- We welcome the commitment to public engagement and consultation and urge that this be continued throughout the development. Consultation material and discussion should seek to achieve understanding and support in order to minimise any blight effects from the process of developing and implementing the scheme.
- The future role and significance of Bargoed needs defining more clearly and should inform the scale of the development including any landmark building
- A more rigorous testing of the viability and achievability of the concept and the concrete proposals is necessary.
- We remain to be convinced on the size and use of the proposed market square and suggest an alternative option of a smaller square, less demolition, and new development partly fronting the square and partly to the rear of old development, be considered
- More information, section drawings and a model will be necessary to aid public understanding of the proposals - and would have helped our own understanding and assessment
- We suggest a review be undertaken of the present qualities of Bargoed and an identification of what is worth preserving and enhancing.
- We consider that the design procurement process will be crucial to achieving the desired quality
- We welcome recognition of the importance of a public arts strategy, but think that too much detail is specified for this stage of development

Diwedd/End

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