

**Statws/Status:**

**Cyhoeddus / Public**

DESIGN  
COMMISSION  
FOR WALES  
COMISIWN  
DYLUNIO  
CYMRU

<b>Adroddiad Adolygu Dylunio: Design Review Report:</b>	<b>20 January 2006</b>
<b>Dyddiad Cyfarfod / Cyflwyno'r Deunydd: Meeting Date / Material Submitted:</b>	<b>11 January 2006</b>
<b>Lleoliad/Location:</b>	<b>Lower Chapel, Powys</b>
<b>Disgrifiad o'r Cynllun Scheme Description:</b>	<b>Residential</b>
<b>Cleient/Asiant: Client/Agent:</b>	<b>Bywyd Developments [Sam Organ]</b>
<b>Pensaer/Architect:</b>	<b>CO2 Architecture and Design [Tim Organ]</b>
<b>Awdurdod Cynllunio: Planning Authority:</b>	<b>Powys CC [Julian Edwards, Chris O'Brien]</b>
<b>Statws Cynllunio: Planning Status:</b>	<b>Outline exists for four units Full application submitted for six units</b>
<b>Y Panel Adolygu Dylunio/Design Review Panel: Richard Parnaby (cadeirydd/chair) Cindy Harris (swyddog/officer) Elfed Roberts Ann-Marie Smale</b>	<b>Phil Roberts Kieren Morgan Lyn Owen</b>
<b>Lead Panellist:</b>	<b>Lyn Owen</b>

### **Cyflwyniad/Presentation**

The village of Lower Chapel has a mix of residential properties, ranging from bungalows, to ex-council houses, to new detached residences and therefore, it was

stated, no predominant design character. It is set in lush rolling countryside on the B4520 running north/south from Builth to Brecon. The site is bordered to the west by private gardens and the Old Vicarage which front on to the B4520, and to the south by the back gardens of houses which front on to Tynewydd Lane. The site slopes from east to west, offering good views of the wooded hillside to the west. Access is from a new road junction to the north of the vicarage, leading to a tight courtyard to the north of the new houses, with the minimum turning area.

The design intention is to maximise the sustainability of the development, and the site layout reflects the availability of solar access, views, and the relationship of the houses with the natural topography, while maintaining privacy. The houses will be timber framed and clad, with a low pitched, monopitch stainless steel or zinc roof and south facing conservatories. They will be insulated to high standards and heated with wood pellet or chip boilers. Provision is made for rainwater, and possible grey water, collection and recycling. Solar water heating and/or photovoltaic panels are shown on the plans, although their installation would be optional for householders.

The communal area beyond the gardens to the southwest is available to the residents [and possibly the village] for amenity use, such as allotments, children's play area etc, and a line of trees will be planted on the southern boundary. A settlement line borders the site to the north. There is a footpath to the west leading to the main road and the village, but no bus service along that road.

Outline planning permission exists for four houses, of which two should be affordable. The current proposal is for six detached houses, of which two are affordable. There has been considerable local opposition to this proposal, on the grounds of over-development and unsympathetic design. The Local Authority is likely to recommend refusal on design grounds. While they support energy efficient, sustainable developments in principle, they think that there is a common built form in the village, for instance in terms of roofscape, which this proposal does not respect.

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

The Panel was informed that the settlement boundary to the north is set out in the UDP and the site area of 0.35ha will not be increased in the foreseeable future. The access point was defined by Highways as the safest option and the access road will be private but built to adoptable standards, with all the necessary visibility splays. The land outside the individual sites will be managed by a management company made up of residents and communally owned.

The Panel noted that the issue of whether the site should be developed for housing was already settled. We recognised that it is a sensitive location, because of its prominence in the landscape and proximity to existing housing. The innovative and sustainable aspirations of the scheme were supported. The quality of the drawings as presented did not adequately convey these aspirations (in particular the absence of accurate sections and comprehensive site and context plans), although the model which accompanied the presentation was much more useful in this respect.

The design of the scheme and its relationship to the context were discussed. While the Panel considered that the reference to agricultural buildings was unhelpful, we had no stylistic concerns about these proposals. The styling and materials provide a

contemporary but acceptable design solution. We considered that a wide variety of stylistic approaches could be acceptable in this situation (including designs drawing on the "modernist tradition"). However, we did not consider that in its present form it related well to the context.

The relationship to adjoining dwellings should be safeguarded. The relationship to the dwelling named the Vicarage was examined and the developer stated that, although there was proximity, the existing dwelling presented a blank wall, with only one frosted glass window, to the site. Within the site, the detailed positioning of the houses raised issues of overlooking and some minor repositioning would provide a better solution. In particular, three of the larger house types overlooked each other to an unacceptable degree. The relationship of the two affordable houses should also be improved, possibly with a physical link. The no 5 house should be brought further south to increase privacy and make better use of the space.

Site boundaries should be of a high quality with existing hedges to the west retained [as proposed] and with quality walls, hedges or fencing along the other boundaries, rather than post and wire fencing, or fencing left to others as currently indicated.

The Panel had no objection to the principle of a monopitch roof of metal as proposed, but also suggested that the residents' and Local Authority's concern with the roof finish might be met by using a 'green' roof [turf or sedum] while keeping the low monopitch. The developer was concerned about the cost implications of this. We recommended that an Eco-Homes assessment be carried out on the design, which should achieve an Excellent rating. It was confirmed that timber would be sourced locally, although this might be difficult for Western Red Cedar

The developer stated that sustainability considerations were inseparable from good design and that global environmental problems would eventually lead to a new kind of architecture. The Panel agreed with this sentiment, but considered that the developer had not demonstrated that these matters had been convincingly dealt with, either in the material submitted or the presentation.

The seminal work of Aldington, Craig and Collinge was quoted as a precedent. The Panel agreed that it offers an excellent model for housing cluster design. Unfortunately, this proposal does not come close to matching the quality of that work, particularly in the complex and subtle relationship between internal and external space and the masterly handling of materials (for example the three houses at Turn End, Haddenham).

### **Crynodb/Summary**

The Panel welcomes the opportunity, both to review this specific scheme, and to debate the principle of the architectural character of new buildings in a rural settlement. Designing with sensitivity to the context has little to do with the adoption of any particular architectural style, and much more to do with response to the particular location and the relationships of form, surface, colour and texture. The Panel wish to commend the innovative and sustainable aspirations of the design approach, but also wish to register our concern that the scheme should not be approved in its present form. In general, we consider this proposal to be an acceptable response to the site and the brief, while requiring further, relatively minor, revisions. In particular:

- The proposed site layout could be adjusted to minimise overlooking and improve the relationship of the affordable dwellings, in order to offer higher levels of privacy and better use of private and shared external space.
- The claims to sustainability need to be clearer in terms of what can be delivered. We recommend that an EcoHomes assessment process is begun which could include the evaluation of a 'green' roof finish. Solar or photovoltaic panels could be included rather than simply being provided for.
- We would like to see an improved quality of site boundaries.

**Diwedd/End**

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