

# Addroddiad Adolygu Dylunio Design Review Report

## Review Status: **Public**

Meeting date:	24th June 2009
Issue Date:	6th July 2009
Scheme Location:	Burgess Land, Welshpool.
Scheme Description:	Residential
Planning Status:	Full application submitted April 2009

## Part1: Presentation

The site on the edge of Welshpool has been allocated for residential use. There are open views to the south and it is surrounded on the other three sides by residential development from the 1970's, 80's and 90's. The site layout shows access roads following the contour and level plots are created by high gabion walls on the steeply sloping site. 112 residential units are proposed with 30% affordable built on site. A playing field and children's play area lie either side of the main access road from the south.

The Local Authority is still awaiting a full traffic assessment. They are keen to work with the local architect and have already agreed some design changes, but they would like to see the cul-de-sacs connected into the wider road network. The planning officers welcome the individual house types proposed, but think that the structural landscaping needs further consideration. 60 objections have been received from local people who are concerned about density and appearance. Ownership of the land lies with the Burgess Trust whose membership largely overlaps with that of the Town Council.

## Summary of key points arising from discussion, to be read in conjunction with Part 2 of this report.

The Panel was pleased to review this scheme but we think the design is seriously compromised by the density, access arrangements and poor sustainability aspirations. We are unable to support this proposal for the following reasons:

- The proposed density is too great and is causing other major urban design problems. However, we are encouraged by the suggestion that this could be reduced and would like to see this option pursued.

- A good site layout is prejudiced by the access arrangements and the lack of connectivity within and outside the site. We would like to see a more flexible approach from Highways to enable a number of access points to smaller discreet pockets of development.
- A site-wide sustainability strategy should be prepared and a commitment made to Code for Sustainable Homes [CSH] Level 3 as a minimum. Given the greenfield nature of the site, we would strongly encourage a commitment to CSH Level 4.
- The level of resolution in the material is inadequate for an application of this size and importance, and for a full (detailed) planning application. Views of the proposal from across the valley should be included.
- The development of the design would be aided by 3D sketch models.
- Given the extent of our concerns, we would like to see the plan for this site thoroughly reconsidered to enable all of our comments to be addressed. If the concept of a “green heart” was developed, combined with our other comments, this might provide a suitable starting point for a new concept for planning the development.

## **Part 2: Discussion and Panel Response in Full**

The ‘cut and fill’ approach to the site layout, together with the density which is greater than surrounding developments, has led to major design problems with this proposal. Flat, level gardens have been created at the expense of huge retaining walls up to 5m high. It is likely that some gardens will be overlooked and overshadowed, with a consequent loss of amenity. The size of gardens is also compromised where roads move closer to the site boundaries.

We consider the density is too high for this site and context. We were told that the proposed density was flexible and could possibly be reduced, given the nature of the land ownership and the public interest remit of the Town Council. This should improve opportunities for landscape and pedestrians and allow greater variety in planning, all of which will significantly improve the proposal.

Pedestrian access across the site is difficult, largely owing to the topography, and access to the public open space and the town would not be easy for less mobile residents especially those living at the top of the slope. An existing bus route runs along the eastern side of the site and it is hoped to extend this through the site, although this would be unlikely without a through route being established.

The current access arrangement, with roads coming in from the south east and north east was arrived at after access from the west was discounted, largely due to problems with land ownership, although these were not clearly explained. In addition there are visibility issues further down these roads on Red Bank, but these could possibly be managed by reducing speeds. Having designated the site within the strategic development plan for the town, a flexible approach from the Highways Department is needed to arrive at the best practical solution for this site. A greater number of access points could enable discreet pockets of development, which might be more appropriate than a large estate and could tie the new development into the neighbouring areas. Currently the access arrangement is compromising a good urban design layout.

Despite the claims of the Design Statement, the images presented show a street scene which is essentially suburban. The cul-de-sac based layout leads to a highly road-dominated development, with little variation in identity. We would like to see a far greater reference to the principles contained in Manual for Streets, including the use of shared surfaces and reduced road widths.

The claim for a 'green heart' to the development is undermined by the fact that the open space is not actually central in the site, and is bisected by the access road from the south east. Natural surveillance should be greatly improved here, with footpaths and frontages overlooking the play and recreation areas.

The sustainability strategy is not sufficiently resolved for a full planning application. A site-wide energy strategy should be prepared which examines the main options for increased energy efficiency and renewable generation. A rating of Code for Sustainable Homes Level 3 or 4 should be committed to and the Local Authority stated that they are keen to see compliance with the forthcoming TAN 22. Such a condition could be contracted into the sale of the land.

The confusion over the North point on different versions of the site plan betrays a lack of clarity in the site planning, and in fact most houses appear to face east or south east rather than due south. Solar water heating panels need a southerly orientation for optimal efficiency and this is not achieved by varying the roof lines and pitches. Although the desire to vary the design and orientation of houses in order to introduce variety was understood, this could be better achieved by addressing the different areas of the site (with their differing slopes and orientation) as individual sub-areas. There is no sustainable drainage strategy [SUDS], despite this being a greenfield site and drainage attenuation is proposed by the use of larger-than-normal diameter pipes. Although this has been agreed by the EA we would have preferred a solution which uses porous surfaces and areas for stormwater retention.

The commitment to using local materials should be taken to mean materials genuinely occurring and sourced locally. We thought that the predicted life of the softwood gabion structures was unlikely to match the lifetime of the buildings.

A high quality and more detailed landscape strategy is needed which demonstrates a softer integration of this scheme into its surroundings. The street lighting is likely to be dominant and care should be taken to avoid light pollution.

At this stage we did not review the design of the individual dwelling types in any detail due to our overwhelming concerns about the site layout.

**The Design Commission for Wales Design Review Panel and staff welcome further consultation and will be happy to provide further feedback on this report and/or where appropriate, to receive further presentations. Thank you for consulting the Commission and please keep in touch with us about the progress of your project.**

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

## Appendix 1: Attendees

Asiant/Client/Datblygwr:  
Agent/Client/Developer

Walker Sheppard

Pensaer/Architect:

Hughes Architects [Doug Hughes,  
Jen Smith]

Consultants:

Thomas Consulting [John Sumner]

Awdurdod Cynllunio/  
Planning Authority

Powys County Council [John Pearson,  
Andrew Paddison,]

Y Panel Adlygu Dylunio:

Design review panel:

Ewan Jones [Chair]

Cindy Harris [Officer]

Ann-Marie Smale

Martin Knight

David Harvey

Ed Colgan

Ashley Bateson

Lead Panellist:

David Harvey

Sylwedyddion/Observers:

Eleanor Marks [WAG, DE&T]