

**Statws/Status:**  
**Cyfrinachol / Confidential**



<b>Adroddiad Adolygu Dylunio: Design Review Report:</b>	<b>14 July 2006</b>
<b>Dyddiad Cyfarfod / Cyflwyno'r Deunydd: Meeting Date / Material Submitted:</b>	<b>5 July 2006</b>
<b>Lleoliad/Location:</b>	<b>Aberystwyth</b>
<b>Disgrifiad o'r Cynllun Scheme Description:</b>	<b>Masterplan</b>
<b>Cleient/Asiant: Client/Agent:</b>	<b>WAG [DEIN] [Steffan Roberts, John Williams] Ceredigion CC [Philip Ellis]</b>
<b>Pensaer/Architect:</b>	<b>LDA Design [Frazer Osment]</b>
<b>Awdurdod Cynllunio: Planning Authority:</b>	<b>Ceredigion CC [Rosemary Rhys]</b>
<b>Statws Cynllunio: Planning Status:</b>	<b>Pre-planning</b>
<b>Y Panel Adolygu Dylunio/Design Review Panel: John Punter (cadeirydd/chair) Cindy Harris (swyddog/officer) Michael Griffiths Howard Wainwright</b>	<b>Ewan Jones Phil Roberts Kedrick Davies</b>
<b>Lead Panellist:</b>	<b>Kedrick Davies</b>

## **Cyflwyniad/Presentation**

The masterplan was commissioned by the ex-WDA, now DEIN, and Ceredigion County Council, in view of the number of imminent developments that were being planned for Aberystwyth, and the recent developments that have taken place without the benefit of a planning framework. It was felt that a more integrated approach was needed and that specific issues such as parking and traffic management should be addressed. The masterplan is intended to be a strategic spatial plan, giving a direction for future developments over the next 20 years. A steering group has been appointed to oversee the work of a multi-disciplinary team headed by LDA Design. The first phase is the strategic vision, the draft of which is the content of this presentation. Phase two will be a framework for delivery and will form the Area Action Plan, which will be part of the emerging LDP. Finally, a prioritised delivery plan will outline how these aspirations can be realised.

A study of the historical development of Aberystwyth shows a compact old town around the port with buildings subsequently spreading up the hills of Penglais and Pendinas. Until the 1990s there was very little development on the valley floor along the River Rheidol. At that time a new access road from the south east [Park Avenue] was built and opened up the flood plain to development, which now includes large retail stores as well as the site for the WAG regional office and a new office for Ceredigion CC. There are active proposals to develop the Mill Street car park at the north western end of Park Avenue, and this area adjacent to the old town is considered appropriate for planned expansion. If the railway station were to be moved back along the line to the south east, this would allow the creation of a new street grid and the creation of greater permeability and accessibility within the 'new town', particularly across the valley floor. The football pitch situated along Park Avenue is likely to be moved to a site further out of town, and the hospital on Penglais Hill may have to be relocated at some point, presenting further redevelopment opportunities. A new relief road is planned to divert traffic from the centre of Llanbadarn.

It is important that, in the context of pending development, the distinctive character of the town is recognised and maintained. There is a very good retail base within the town of small independent traders demonstrating long term viability. However, the quality and coordination of recent development has been poor. This strategic plan identifies particular areas within the town, each with its distinctive morphology and character and particular combination of uses. Extensive community consultation has been carried out as part of this study and certain key issues and opportunities have been identified largely as a result of community input. These are:

- Peripherality: acknowledging the town's geographical isolation and making a positive feature of it, with a strong sense of arrival.
- National centre and cultural capital, building on the presence of the university and the National Library.
- An exemplar of sustainable development and high quality community facilities.
- An exceptional built and natural environment including hills, river corridor and seafront.
- Conscious minimisation of resource use and road transport.

- A diverse economic base with an emphasis on local production of energy and food.
- Improved accessibility for pedestrians and cyclists within the town, along with transport links to other centres. Through traffic should be taken out of the town centre and Llanbadarn.
- The town to be developed as a quality tourist destination.
- The vision will be driven by community groups as well as business and other public bodies.

The Local Authority commented that it was useful to have the views of DCFW at this stage of the masterplan's development.

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

The Panel asked for clarification on the status of this document and how it relates to planning policy. We were told that the vision will have to be delivered by the planning system and the document will have planning status, but the exact nature of this is not yet determined. Although it is too late to be attached to the UDP, it could be developed as an area action plan and link into the future LDP.

The Panel applauded the concept of the 'New Town' close to the town centre on the valley floor, but otherwise found little appraisal of what was distinctive about the character areas and how that distinctiveness might influence future development. There are no principles to define the desired 'quality' in each area, and we found the implementation mechanisms and phasing to be weak and unconvincing. We were told that this analysis had not yet been completed.

The question of how planning obligations should be dealt with appears to be unresolved. The transparency of the community consultation exercise, and how the views expressed were translated into the policy document, should be made more explicit. The Panel would like to see specific reference to the importance of public art and how that might complement the vision.

It was generally recognised that a strategic plan such as this, had it been developed ten years ago, might have prevented some of the worst recent developments, particularly the sprawl eastwards. It was regrettable that WAG and CCC should locate their new offices on the periphery of the town, although we understood that these were the only available sites of a suitable size, without large scale reorganisation of the town centre. It is hoped that a high quality, landmark office development on Park Avenue will form a gateway entrance feature to the town.

The aspirations for an exemplar sustainable community in the future are welcomed, but need to be linked to mechanisms for delivery. The Panel noted that the development of a heliport was not compatible with a low carbon transport policy. However, we acknowledged the existing low carbon footprint of the town and the significant number of small and medium environmental businesses in the area. Both these attributes need to be nurtured as the basis of economic development and environmental improvement.

The Panel queried whether sufficient economic and commercial analysis had been done to justify the quantum of development. We were informed that the relevant experts had been involved and that there was a high level of retail and residential

demand. Office and commercial demand was also showing signs of growth from a low base. These data needed to be incorporated into the report and realistic rates of development projected, located and phased.

The Panel recognised that the proposed New Town development was central to this vision and expressed concern that the relatively large urban blocks could be used for retail sheds, resulting in a loss of a fine urban grain which is one of Aberystwyth's defining qualities. Differing opinions were expressed about the possible relocation of the railway station which, while allowing better vehicle and pedestrian connections across town, would also make the town centre and the rail station less accessible to pedestrians. In terms of other proposed relocations, the Panel was told that the football ground needed to be moved in order to meet European stadium standards, and that the hospital would require a new site if it was to be rebuilt. The opening up of the hospital site would allow the university campus to be brought closer into the town. The proposal for new boulevards was considered inappropriate in terms of weather protection and inappropriate to the character of the town, but it was pointed out that some already exist in the old town.

The Panel advised that the new town development should be compact, grid based, mixed use and urbane close to the old town. On the edge of town there should be a concerted effort to create a new urban structure that was less car-oriented and more compact and sustainable. The edge of town settlements of Llanbadarn and Penparcau should be treated as distinct focal points rather than be allowed to sprawl. We were informed that the new relief road would have benefits not just in terms of relieving traffic congestion, but also in restoring the centre of Llanbadarn village to pedestrians, giving it a new focus and providing a new gateway to the town.

### **Crynodeb/Summary**

The Panel welcomed the strategic thinking evident in this document, along with the strong urban design input. We considered it a valuable exercise in terms of creating a vision to control and enhance the quality of future development in the town, and to enhance its sustainability credentials. However, its proposed planning status needs to be clarified in order to build confidence in the deliverability of the desired outcomes. The following specific points arose from our discussions:

- We are concerned that the strategy should be seen to have political backing from members and at the very least is adopted as supplementary planning guidance.
- The intended investment in transport and other infrastructure, and its phasing, should be clearly identified, including the proposed relief road which widens the area of potential development.
- There should be an analysis of key land holdings and how these might be affect implementation.
- We think the character framework provides a good starting point but needs further development and considerably more detail.
- We strongly support the aspirations for an exemplar sustainable community, which should form the basis of all future decisions.
- We applaud the level of community consultation, but would like to see the mechanism made more transparent.

- This document should be seen as the framework for coordinating and informing development briefs and strategic planning policies.
- Once the general framework is established, the focus should be on bringing forward a set of development or regeneration opportunities relating to: the new town and station; the valley floor; and the peripheral settlements.

**Diwedd/End**

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