

# Addroddiad Adolygu Dylunio Design Review Report

## Review Status: **Confidential**

Meeting date:	17th November 2010
Issue Date:	30th November 2010
Scheme Location:	Bargoed
Scheme Description:	Public realm
Planning Status:	Pre-application

## Part1: Presentation

Bargoed is one of the five principal towns identified in the Caerphilly LDP for regeneration. The Local Authority has already invested in the relief road, the retail plateau, a park and ride facility, and the library renovation. The aim of this public realm scheme, with a budget of £8.3m, is to create an uncluttered and pedestrian friendly public realm, and to introduce greater permeability and variety into the linear High Street. Pedestrian links between the upper town and lower plateau will be reinforced and new ones created. Phase 1 of the public realm works – the new bus station – is currently on site.

The High Street will become one-way for vehicular traffic including buses, leaving more room for footpaths which will generally be wider on the eastern side, with room for parking bays and delivery areas. Where T junctions occur to the west of the High Street, the eastern pavement will be set back to allow adequate turning space, and a meandering streetscape will provide traffic calming. In general pavements will be 3.5m wide with a 25mm upstand, as requested by local access groups.

The palette of materials has evolved from the Heads of the Valleys Public Realm Design Guide prepared by Powell Dobson and reviewed by DCFW in October 2008. Pennant stone and granite setts will be used for pavement and road surfaces respectively, and robust street furniture will be used, with a more contemporary finish on the lower plateau. Bollards will be minimised and furniture used to define spaces and control access. Differences in paving materials will denote preferred routes and key buildings. Tree planting possibilities are limited due to underground services and basements, but it is proposed to install some trees in planters and others where underground services permit.

## **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 proposal, having reviewed the retail plateau and supermarket proposals on three occasions, most recently in September 2010. We think that good progress has been made in developing the scheme so far. However, a number of major issues remain to be resolved. In summary:

- Strong, well integrated connections between upper and lower towns and retail plateau will be key to the success of the whole regeneration project for Bargoed. A rather wider strategic framework needs to be developed, linking the pedestrianisation of the High Street to the creation of a new north–south pedestrian route along the plateau, and accompanied by significant tree planting and landscape to improve amenity.
- The eastern promenade along the town wall should be developed so that it links to the new public space at the rear of the library and the bus station, and begins to form part of a circular route.
- Improvement of the rear elevations of existing properties facing east across the valley will be necessary to attract visitors into the town. We support the proposed grant scheme to enable this and we hope to see it extended to support improvements to shop fronts, signage and façades on the High Street. A colour palette might be advised.
- The design of the public realm, including surface finishes and furniture, should be guided by principles of continuity, simplicity, restraint, and decluttering.
- The palette of materials should be reduced so that it is compatible with quality, supply and long term maintenance.
- Planting trees in containers on the High Street should be avoided, and trees should only be grown where there is sufficient space to accommodate mature specimens with room for growth.
- Lamp standards should be removed and street lamps located on building facades. A lighting strategy should be developed.
- We are concerned that the 25mm upstand on pavements would be a trip hazard.
- We were pleased to learn details of planned uses for Hanbury Square and we emphasized that it should be a pedestrian dominated space, with the paved roadway omitted in favour of an uninterrupted ‘square’ on the east side. The idea of linking this paved area with the new space above the supermarket was welcomed.
- In general we wanted to see more investment in tree planting below the town wall and at the back of the properties on the plateau. There are opportunities here to create a tree-lined pedestrian route to link the bus station to all the steps that lead up to the High Street.
- We advised the Local Authority to consider using the CEEQUAL environmental assessment method. Opportunities for laying additional services under the High Street, such as a district heat main or fibre optic cables, should be explored at this stage.

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

A significant level of information was missing from the presented material, which should have been there to provide a connection between a strategic vision and objectives for

regeneration on the one hand, and details of finishes and furniture on the other. This intermediate level would be concerned with developing a design concept for the whole town centre and retail plateau, tackling the challenging topography and illustrated by wide site sections. It would begin to show how the divide between upper and lower towns, and between the town centre and the valley, can be overcome.

The relationship between the two sides of this divide is compromised by the shabby appearance of the rear elevations of the buildings on the High Street, which might well discourage potential visitors from entering the improved town centre. In view of this, the Panel was pleased to learn that an envelope programme to renovate the rear facades was under consideration, and we would like to see this extended to include the shop fronts on the High Street.

From a commercial point of view, it is important that the High Street and retail plateau are well connected and do not develop at the other's expense. For development to be mutually beneficial, ease of access between the two levels is of paramount importance. Frequent pedestrian links and opportunities for full DDA access need to be introduced at different points along the High Street. We were told that partial DDA access [not 24 hour] is provided through the renovated library, and improvements will be made to Hanbury Steps and Chisholm Lane. There will be direct access, via steps, from the bus station to the High Street and buses will travel one way along the High Street. Visual links across the valley from the High Street are also important and contribute to the sense of place.

The Panel thought that the promenade running alongside the 'town wall' on the eastern edge of the lower plateau, should link through to the enhanced public space at the rear of the library and to the bus station ramp. The route should be shown as part of this scheme and the existing budget should be used to establish this link and provide hard landscaping.

The possibility of fully pedestrianising the High Street was discussed, but we agreed with the team that some vehicular movement was desirable to support activity and viable uses.

With regard to the proposed materials and finishes, we thought that the intensity of detail might be overkill for a small town. A more subtle and discreet approach, while maintaining the desired quality, would be preferable. In general, a multiplicity of different materials and a complex design means greater costs and maintenance implications, and a reduction in quality. We were encouraged to learn that suppliers will stockpile materials to ensure like for like replacement when maintenance is carried out, and that robust construction details will be used to reduce pavement damage from vehicles and protect the quality over time.

The Panel did not think that tree planters would be a robust and durable solution. Trees should be planted where there is sufficient space, for example in Hanbury Square, on the slopes below the town wall, or along the rear of the east-facing gardens of properties fronting the High Street, to act in tandem with the programme to refurbish the rear facades.

While we understand the demand from access groups for a 25mm upstand on pavements, we are concerned that this could become a trip hazard, even though there will be a visual contrast. The quality of construction will be critical if this detail is to work for the benefit of all users.

The re-design of Hanbury Square needs to address the slope and deliver sufficient usable space at the lower level for social activity. This should be pedestrian dominated with the through road indicated on the drawings omitted, and vehicular access (for market stall holders etc) controlled. We suggested that it should be linked with the new square to be provided by the private sector for occasional large scale events such as concerts or markets, and generally to achieve a greater critical mass of pedestrianised space at the south end of the High Street. Resources should be concentrated on developing key public spaces for active outdoor uses, accompanied by a managed programme of activities.

The Panel noted the lack of a public art strategy and we were informed that a brief has been developed for an artist to work with the local community to develop such a strategy.

A lighting strategy should be brought forward which minimises lighting columns and instead locates lights on building facades, for maximum decluttering. This could be accompanied by provision for Christmas lights and banners, for example, so there is flexibility and no need for future street clutter to creep back in.

The Local Authority has no formal assessment procedures for evaluating the environmental impacts of building materials, but in general they will favour locally produced materials. We advised them to consider using the CEEQUAL evaluation method. Although new gas and water mains have just been laid under the High Street, we thought that funding may be available for a district heat main, in an area with a good mix of uses and significant anchor loads, and given the Arbed project which aims to reduce CO2 emissions from the existing building stock. If this were possible it may also be advantageous to install a fibre optic network, in anticipation of this service coming to the area.

**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	Caerphilly CBC [Roger Tanner Allan Dallimore]
Pensaer/Architect:	Capita Symonds [Gareth Howell, Greg Vaughan]
Consultants:	n/a
Awdurdod Cynllunio/ Planning Authority	Caerphilly CBC

Y Panel Adlygu Dylunio:

Design Review Panel:

John Punter [Chair]

Cindy Harris [Officer]

Martin Knight

Simon Hartley

Andrew Linfoot

Ed Colgan

Michael Griffiths

Lead Panellist:

Martin Knight

Sylwedyddion/Observers:

Kieran Gandhi [student placement officer]