

Statws/Status:

Cyfrinachol / Confidential

DESIGN
COMMISSION
FOR WALES
COMISIWN
DYLUNIO
CYMRU

Adroddiad Adolygu Dylunio:

Design Review Report:

10 August 2005

Dyddiad Cyfarfod / Cyflwyno'r Deunydd:

Meeting Date / Material Submitted:

3 August 2005

Lleoliad/Location:

Ceidrych House, Bethlehem

**Disgrifiad o'r Cynllun
Scheme Description:**

Development of 3 eco-homes

Cleient/Asiant:

**Cennen Homes
[Kedrick Davies, Jim Cornick]**

Pensaer/Architect:

Dewi Evans Architects

**Awdurdod Cynllunio:
Planning Authority:**

Brecon Beacons National Park

**Statws Cynllunio:
Planning Status:**

**Pre-planning
Outline consent exists for plot 1**

Y Panel Adolygu Dylunio/Design Review Panel:

John Punter(cadeirydd/chair)

Ed Colgan

Cindy Harris (swyddog/officer)

Lyn Owen

Howard Wainwright

Lead panellist:

Cindy Harris

Sylwedyddion/Observers:

Gerard Ryan [DCFW Commissioner]

Allan Boyd, Richard Baker
[WAG Estates Division]
Peter Roberts, Gill Wulff [DCFW]

Cyflwyniad/Presentation

This proposal is for a small residential development of three dwellings on the site of Ceidrych House, Bethlehem, near Llandeilo. The site is located on the very edge of the Brecon Beacons National Park and lies in an outstanding landscape setting. There is currently one residential unit on the site, which has no architectural merit and is in a dilapidated state. Outline consent exists for an additional dwelling to the north east of the existing house (known as Plot 1).

The proposal has been made by Cennen Homes, a small development company that seeks to create well designed and highly sustainable developments. The design quality of recent development in Bethlehem has generally been mediocre and of a suburban character. This proposal is intended to set new standards of development in the area, both in terms of design and sustainability.

The existing local vernacular consists of buildings with simple, orthogonal floor plates, and rendered walls set below slate roofs. This proposal is intended to reflect this character, while also creating highly energy efficient houses that exploit the solar orientation with large south facing windows. In order to maximise heat retention, north facing windows are small and the dwellings will be highly insulated.

The proposal consists of three, 4-bedroom detached dwellings within the curtilage of the existing property, which would be demolished. The dwellings are set back from the road to varying degrees, and the gaps between them offer rural views. On Plots 1 and 3 the ridgeline of the properties runs parallel to the road, while on Plot 2 the house fronts onto the road with its gable end – an arrangement for which there are local precedents.

The houses will be timber framed, and the roofs made from pre-fabricated structural insulated panels (SIPs). Car ports on Plots 2 and 3 will have sedum roofs. Solar water heating will provide an excess of hot water in the summer and space heating [only necessary on the ground floor] will be via a ground source heat pump.

Ymateb y Panel/Panel's Response

The Panel was informed that Brecon Beacons National Park (BBNP) Authority do not enter into pre-application discussions and as such the developers have no confirmation that the Local Authority would consider three residential dwellings to be acceptable on this site. The principle of intensification has however been set by the consent given to the additional dwelling on the site.

BBNP are currently in the process of re-writing their design guidance with an increased emphasis on sustainable development. The Panel considered that this development would prove a useful exemplar and create a standard that future development could aspire to.

The Panel welcomed the intention to create highly energy-efficient dwellings and supported the arrangement and alignment of dwellings in line with solar orientation. However, the internal layout for Plot 2 should be revised so that all habitable rooms face south [or SE/SW]. We were pleased to hear the developers' commitment to the re-use of demolition materials from the existing structure of Ceidrych House and suggested that demolition rubble be used as hardcore in the new foundations to minimise transport of waste off site.

The Panel would like to see the use of a district heating system, possibly with a CHP boiler and/or run on biomass, to serve all three dwellings. Although we recognised the potential management issues this might bring, we thought that 'eco-homes' residents would be likely to cooperate on this. Given the financial and environmental benefits that this would provide, the Panel encouraged the developers to reconsider this aspect of the scheme.

The Panel expressed concerns over the blank facades to the east and west elevations, particularly for Plots 1 and 3. While we understood the possible problems of overlooking, we thought that the external and internal design quality would be greatly improved, without any significant heat loss, if extra fenestration was provided especially where this capitalised on views. The developers agreed to consider this.

The Panel found the layout of the site to be too suburban, and not in keeping with the rural village character of Bethlehem. The large driveways in front of the houses on Plots 2 and 3 exacerbate this problem. The Panel felt strongly that the requirement that all driveways should allow for traffic turning circles was over-restrictive for a class 3 highway subject to a 30mph speed limit. We would encourage the highways department to reconsider this requirement as its relaxation would greatly improve the site layout. Dwellings could then be moved closer to the road, allowing increased private amenity space and the retention of more of the hedgerow, creating a softer boundary more in keeping with the National Park.

If this proposed change is not possible, the Panel suggested that the approach adopted for Plot 1 be applied to all three plots. We would also like to see Plots 1 and 2 brought closer together with a car port bridging the gap, so as to create consistency through the scheme. We thought that the property on Plot 2, with its gable end frontage, should be brought closer to the road, increasing its impact and sense of entry to the village.

The Panel considered that the elevational detailing of the properties should include more reference to the local vernacular. In particular, the roof overhangs at the verges are modern and suburban in style and do not reflect the context. Similarly, we considered it acceptable and appropriate that the fronts of the properties should be architecturally distinct from the backs. This would allow the front elevations facing the public realm to reflect the traditional cottages of Bethlehem more closely, while the rear elevations could continue to take advantage of their southerly orientation through a more modern architectural form. The design of the porches should be reconsidered so as to provide a visible entrance to the dwellings.

The Panel questioned the sustainability of the proposed location and it was conceded that residents would be car dependant, with Llandeilo, the nearest reasonably sized town, being 4 miles away and the local bus service running infrequently. It is however the intention to create dwellings with a BREEAM rating of 'Excellent' and as the location performs poorly with regard

to location, other elements of the scheme will have to achieve high scores in order to meet the intended target.

Crynodeb/Summary

The Panel applauds the ambitious objectives of this scheme, to create a well designed, sensitive and highly sustainable development using low carbon technologies. We consider that these aims have the potential to create an exemplary development and set a precedent that could help raise the standard of residential design within the Brecon Beacons National Park. We consider this to be a timely proposal given that the authority are currently revising their design policy.

The Panel's support comes with the following recommendations:

- Every effort should be made to achieve a BREEAM Eco-Homes rating of 'Excellent'
- The degree of insulation included, and the materials used, should be investigated further so as to achieve the most sustainable solution
- The inclusion of the infrastructure for a district heating scheme should be considered at an early stage
- The internal layout of Plot 2 should be revised to take best advantage of passive solar gain
- The north facing elevations should better reflect the local vernacular, while the southern elevations are rightly driven by environmental considerations
- The site layout should be reconfigured in order to reduce the suburban site planning, and the houses should be brought closer to the road
- We urge the highways department to relax their requirement for a turning head within the curtilage. Whether or not this is possible, every effort should be made to change the layout of driveways so that they become less dominant and there are less impermeable surfaces.
- Windows should be included in the gable end of Plots 1 and 3 so as to enliven the blank walls and improve the quality of internal spaces.
- Existing hedgerows and vegetation should be retained and extended as much as possible to retain biodiversity and soften the landscape impact.

Diwedd/End

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