

Statws/Status:

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DESIGN
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Adroddiad Adolygu Dylunio: Design Review Report:	16 November 2005
Dyddiad Cyfarfod / Cyflwyno'r Deunydd: Meeting Date / Material Submitted:	2 November 2005
Lleoliad/Location:	Coed Darcy, Llandarcy
Disgrifiad o'r Cynllun Scheme Description:	Area 1, residential
Ymgynghorwyr Cynllunio: Planning Consultants:	Alan Baxter Associates [David Paddon]
Cleient/Asiant: Client/Agent:	WDA [Philip Morris] Edward Ware Homes [Edward Ware]
Pensaer/Architect:	Robert Adam Architects [Robert Adam, Robert Down]
Awdurdod Cynllunio: Planning Authority:	Neath Port Talbot CBC
Statws Cynllunio: Planning Status:	Outline permission for mixed use exists
Y Panel Adolygu Dylunio/Design Review Panel: John Punter(cadeirydd/chair) Cindy Harris (swyddog/officer) Elfed Roberts	Ed Colgan Paul Vanner Douglas Hogg
Lead Panellist:	Paul Vanner

Sylwedyddion/Observers:

**Zhaohua Deng,
Design Review Assistant
Robin Shaw,
Director, Transport Wales**

Cyflwyniad/Presentation

The whole Coed Darcy site covers 270 hectares and the siting of new development is constrained by existing infrastructure, areas of high ecological value, and the steep topography. With this in mind, two distinct areas have been identified for development: the first in the 'central bowl' and the second on the southern edge of site. The latter area forms part of a strategic link between Swansea and Neath and is the location for Area 1, a proposed development of 150 residential units.

The Area 1 site is defined as a 'neighbourhood edge' area and borders on Llandarcy Village, developed in 1925 as housing for key workers, and now a conservation area. The proposals for Area 1 follow the masterplan which sets out the conditions for the development of a sustainable community, with a blend of uses and varied densities. The Town Code has been developed as a design control mechanism, and as a way of defining which issues are mandatory [mainly relating to the public realm] and which are aspirational. The site layout reflects the topography which slopes sharply from north to south and which defines the main streets.

The design team has found the masterplan and town code sensible tools to work with. They recognise the huge importance of the precedents set by this first development, and the need to set high standards of urban design and housing for the rest of the project. The site lends itself well to a distinctive design and the steep topography adds character as well as creating the opportunity for views. The layout shows a permeable road and pedestrian network, with some key landmark buildings, and the streets each have their own identifiable character. A low-energy design approach shows building orientation, fenestration and internal layout responding to solar access. Although not present at the review, landscape architects form part of the team and this is reflected in a high quality planting and open space provision. Public consultation revealed one particular issue of major concern, relating to the boundary between the proposed site and the conservation area. As a result, the site boundary has been redrawn to exclude a piece of land [known as 'the green strip'], and the designers are approaching the consequent change in layout and access positively.

Although unable to be present at the review, NBT planning authority have sent in their comments. In particular: "one of the challenges that the applicants need to address is the impact on the adjacent Llandarcy Village Conservation Area and its setting." The LPA are currently considering an outline planning application for the wider scheme as well as a full application for the southern access road.

Ymateb y Panel/Panel's Response

The Panel recognised the local and national importance of this proposal, and acknowledged the quality of the teams which have produced the masterplan as well as the scheme under consideration. In terms of urban design, we considered these proposals to be an excellent solution and the following concerns and reservations should be seen in the context of a very positive overall endorsement.

The Panel did have concerns about the context and the architectural relationships with Llandarcy village, which is a reasonably good example of an Arts and Crafts model village. The designers stated that it was not their intention to reproduce the village's architectural style, which would not be a good precedent for the rest of Coed Darcy and would not enhance the conservation area. The character of the existing village should remain distinct. On the other hand these proposals are generically similar, being a broadly traditional approach which embodies consistency with some variety. One of the most significant distinguishing characteristics will be in the use of materials, and a palette of local materials is proposed including stone, render and slate, together with brick and pantiles. Equally significant will be the use of several different building types, and the way in which buildings address the street. Local architectural references are picked up in key buildings which act as landmarks in the streetscape. The aim is to interpret and continue traditional forms, rather than reinvent new versions, and to raise the expectations of a market already attuned to appreciate good historic buildings.

It was suggested that there may be too much variety of building form and elevational treatment and too much variety in architectural detailing, and that this would raise criticisms of a pastiche approach and be in danger of creating a residential theme park. That said, it was acknowledged that great care had been taken to design a range of different house types and styles, and to fit these together creatively in the townscape.

The question of deliverability was discussed and the developer expressed his confidence that the current proposals were commercially viable. He paid tribute to BP and the other partners, who structured the bid process to enable relatively small developers to succeed. In the end the appointment was made on quality rather than cost criteria alone. The properties will be promoted as exemplars of good design and sustainability, and will be sold at comparable prices to standard housing in the area – from £100,000 to £350,000. It was emphasised that every building and building type has been evaluated for cost effectiveness. Although Edward Ware Homes are not on the shortlist for Phase 2, they are assured that the town code will be applied and adopted as SPG (they are likely to partner one of the development teams).

Doubts were raised concerning the quality of the lane and parking courtyards between Middle and South Street which does not deliver the same high quality of environment as the east/west lanes. The design team acknowledged that this area had caused them most difficulty, partly due to the change in levels. The aim was to locate all parking within the building curtilage, and to provide sufficient natural surveillance through pedestrian traffic and overlooking. However, this arrangement has implications for the relation between fronts and back of each property and the Panel were concerned that the area outside the curtilages remained attractive, well used and cared for, while wishing to limit the possibility of it becoming gated in the future.

The Panel considered that the original scheme for South Street was a far better piece of urban design than the amended proposal, and succeeded in creating a positive and traditional relationship with the village and its setting. We did not think that the retention of the green strip would benefit the conservation area. It was noted that the boundaries of the conservation area were not even defined at the time the masterplan was produced, and that the constraints now imposed are very

recent. Although we acknowledged that the issues raised by public consultation do have to be addressed, the Panel did not agree that this boundary change was necessary or desirable. We did consider that the extra housing units on North Street added to the coherence of the scheme and improved the urban design solution, creating a better enclosure of the proposed public space at the bottom of the slope.

While acknowledging the inclusion of some passive solar design features, the Panel requested further details of sustainable design and performance. It was confirmed that the intention is to achieve EcoHomes 'Excellent', that local materials will predominate, and that sustainable drainage systems will be used. Consultants from the Welsh School of Architecture are assisting the design team in identifying sustainability measures which are economically viable.

The development of local facilities and public transport systems will be crucial to the long term sustainability of this scheme. The Panel encouraged the early establishment of bus routes through the area, perhaps even before the necessary critical mass is reached.

Crynodeb/Summary

The Panel is delighted to see the quality of the urban design as presented in this scheme. We consider it to be exemplary in the quality of public spaces, the layout, diversity, permeability, and the way in which it responds to the topography and to the conservation area. The vital importance of this first development setting the right tone and value for subsequent development, is emphatically recognised and supported. In the context of this strong support we would make the following observations:

- There is arguably too much stylistic diversity in these proposals and too many variations in materials. This could be addressed by a more limited palette of materials, more rooted in the locality.
- The Panel were not entirely convinced by the use of 'local' historical architectural references, and were concerned that too many historic references and revivalist styles would create another development in the Poundbury mould that might undermine the value of the project as a Welsh exemplar of quality residential design. This would set an unwelcome precedent that could weaken the status of TAN 12, inasmuch as it relates to local character.
- The Panel would like to see the issue of the boundary change and the release of the 'green strip' to the conservation area re-negotiated, as delivering the initial design would greatly improve the overall urban design and the edge treatment facing Llandarcy village.
- We were disappointed at the lack of detail available to support the claim that this development will be an exemplar of sustainability. An EcoHomes 'Excellent' rating should definitely be achieved and we consider this to be as important as the urban design issues.

Diwedd/End

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

