

Statws/Status:
Cyfrinachol / Confidential



Adroddiad Adolygu Dylunio: 13 April 2006
Design Review Report:

Dyddiad Cyfarfod / Cyflwyno'r Deunydd: 5 April 2006
Meeting Date / Material Submitted:

Lleoliad/Location: Crickhowell

Disgrifiad o'r Cynllun Residential
Scheme Description:

Cleient/Asiant: Powell Design Ltd
Client/Agent: [Geoff Powell]

Awdurdod Cynllunio: Brecon Beacons National Park
Planning Authority: [Maxine Lewis]

Statws Cynllunio: Pre-planning
Planning Status:

Y Panel Adolygu Dylunio/Design Review Panel:
Alan Francis (cadeirydd/chair) Kedrick Davies
Cindy Harris (swyddog/officer) Jonathan Adams
Mike Biddulph Douglas Hogg
Ewan Jones Wendy Hall

Cyflwyniad/Presentation

A local Housing Needs Action group in Crickhowell recently carried out a survey which showed an immediate need for 64 homes in the area, with two thirds of those expressing that need, aspiring to buy. There is currently approval within the town for 24 homes for rent, and therefore this scheme has been developed with a view to the properties being sold. The estimated build cost per unit [excluding the land] is £74,000. The average salary in the area could potentially fund a house purchase of up to £120,000, given a 50% shared

ownership option. The development would be owned and run by a Housing Trust which would manage the site and act as client in the process of development. Houses could be sold to buyers on a freehold or leasehold basis, but the Trust would ensure that the properties remained affordable.

There are currently allotments on the proposed site, which is owned by Powys CC. This scheme would allow for £200,000 to be made available to relocate the allotments, with improved facilities and possibly a nature reserve, onto land attached to Upper House Farm, near the televillage. Land for People is negotiating a community land acquisition of this land. The designer and the National Park would prefer to see residential development on the town centre site, which would reduce the need for private cars, and the relocated allotments would be more acceptable to residents of the televillage.

This is an illustrative scheme for 20 houses, mostly 3 bedroom with some apartments, laid out in a staggered format to maximise solar gain. Mews walkways provide good pedestrian permeability and echo the layout of the televillage. Communal facilities include a creche and an outdoor entertainments area. Parking is provided off street at a ratio of 2:1, and could be used by non-residents during the day. The scheme is designed to be highly sustainable, with solar thermal for domestic hot water and solar PV panels for electricity. Ground source heat pumps could provide space heating and it is anticipated that the gravel basin under the site should be suitable for bore holes. The main aim is to build houses that are cheap to run and it is accepted that this will mean a 'frontloading' of costs. The construction method will be poured concrete in polystyrene permanent formwork, which it is claimed gives three times better insulation than current Building Regulations require. The main facade materials will be render, slate and stone.

The Local Authority confirmed the urgent need for affordable homes and their preference for the central site. The policy context is compatible with the proposed use. Any concerns they have would be to do with the design and the impact on adjacent properties.

Ymateb y Panel/Panel's Response

The Panel began by commending the enthusiasm and commitment of the designer who has progressed the scheme thus far. We strongly supported the aims of delivering sustainable, affordable housing, in a range of unit types, with energy efficiency measures factored in at the outset and an accepted frontloading of costs.

However, we were not convinced by the proposed staggered layout, based solely on the consideration of maximising solar access, which does not seem to have any local precedents. The Panel thought that the layout should take other factors into account and also consider ways to limit solar gain in midsummer. For example, terraces or courtyard blocks could be aligned with the site boundary to the south west. We were unhappy with the repetitive housing form, and in particular with the view from the south west of multiple staggered gables, and we thought there should be a greater diversity of building footprints and plan forms. A different and improved layout could deliver a higher number of units without loss of quality.

The Panel expressed concern at the likely impact on Greenhill Way of a row of 90 degree car parking between the houses and the street. The designer explained his aim to create a tree-lined 'boulevard' environment on Greenhill Way, but we thought that the predominant local pattern of strong buildings fronting directly on to streets, should be respected.

The Panel had reservations about the proposed mews walkways. These are wider than those in the televillage, which in any event is not a town centre site and so not directly comparable. There appeared to be some confusion of fronts and backs and an unnecessary degree of overlooking, resulting in a lack of privacy. We thought that there should be a reassessment of public / private space and boundary treatments within the scheme. We suggested that this site could accommodate a higher density of dwellings placed closer together, with well defined fronts and backs.

The Panel regretted the lack of any outdoor play space, especially around the creche. The designer pointed out that there were other play areas and green space in the immediate vicinity, but we would still like to have seen more structured community space within the scheme, including a small supervised play area. This could be designed without compromising security. We thought the performance space should be multi-functional and be more integrated within the site. To meet these concerns, a landscape architect should be involved in the design development as soon as possible.

While applauding the effort to incorporate as many renewable technologies as possible, the Panel expressed caution with regard to the affordability of photovoltaic panels in particular. We suggested that a community heating system fuelled by biomass might be an economic alternative to ground source heat pumps. Other low carbon solutions would include individual micro CHP units, producing heat and electricity. Solar water heating panels are generally affordable with a good payback, but we queried the proposal for 8 square metres per house as probably oversized. The current east facing position of these panels would limit their efficiency.

It was confirmed that this site is within the conservation area.

Crynodeb/Summary

The Panel are very supportive of the philosophy and the commitment underpinning this scheme. We consider the proposed site appropriate for a development of sustainable affordable housing. However we consider the proposed layout of houses and public spaces to be an unacceptable response to the site and the brief. In particular:

- The layout should be rethought and not determined solely by the requirement to maximise solar access.
- The design should respond to the existing car park with a view to improving links with the town centre. The possibility of negotiating a re-alignment of the site boundary with the car park, should be explored.
- Consideration should be given to the development of a denser scheme, more similar to the historic pattern of local housing
- Public spaces should be better integrated into the overall pattern of development and use. An analysis of likely movement patterns should inform the design of the public realm.
- Effective back gardens should be provided and well defined boundaries given a high quality treatment.
- A landscape architect should be involved as soon as possible.
- The chamfered corners of the houses have no local reference and could cause problems with the detailing of guttering

- Low energy performance of the houses should be ensured by focussing on one or two sustainable technologies. The benefits of a community heating system should be explored.

Diwedd/End

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