

Comisiwn Dylunio Cymru Design Commission for Wales

Design Review Report: 27 April 2004

Meeting Date / Material Submitted: 15 April 2004

Location: Penallta Colliery,
Caerphilly

Architects / Design Team: Mason Richards Architects
Roger Ayton

Client: Redrow Homes,
Keith Annis

Scheme Description: 800 unit residential scheme

Public/Other Body: Caerphilly County Borough Council
Rhian Davies, Roger Waters

Planning Status: Outline planning for residential use
exists

Design Review Panel Members: John Punter, Cindy Harris, Mike
Biddulph, Ann-Marie Smale, Ed
Colgan, Richard Weston, Richard
Parnaby

Presentation

The proposal is for a residential development of approximately 800 units of varying sizes and types, adjacent to Penallta Country Park and the old colliery buildings being regenerated by the Phoenix Trust. This includes conversion to residential and employment uses, with the Headframes retained as landmark features. The remainder of the site (25.4 hectares) will be developed as follows:

- Residential/highways 17.5 ha
- School 1 ha
- Employment 1.22 ha
- Public Open Space 4.5 ha
- District Centre 1 ha

The panel were informed that an affordable housing component is not included or formally required by the local authority in this scheme.

The site is approximately 1,150 metres long and 200-360 metres wide, running north/south along a river valley. The site's topography falls some 20 to 30 metres west to east towards the river Rhymany, with Penallta Road on the western boundary climbing steadily from south to north.

Highways and other off-site works will be taking place over the next twelve months, and so, despite the existing permission, this development is still at an early stage.

Redrow Homes have not yet acquired the site.

Panel's Response

The Panel began by discussing the transport strategy and applauded the general intention to create a grid of streets where the housing could enclose and civilise the streets. It was questioned whether the two roundabouts for the major entry points were necessary and appropriate. The Caerphilly Highway Engineer's view was that the roundabouts were justified by the need to accommodate heavy lorry traffic to the industrial estate to the north and provide safe access to the development. The panel would prefer traffic lights on at least one of these junctions in the interests of pedestrian safety.

A bus route has been accommodated running along the western edge of the site, linking the retail development, colliery and school. There was some discussion as to whether the bus route should be made more central, but this was thought to be impractical and unnecessary, as all parts of the development are within 350 metres of a bus stop. Street parking will be provided, with additional spaces to accommodate peak requirements. On the eastern side of the development the streets are through routes only for pedestrians and there is the opportunity to create home zones. The perimeter block approach and the strongly enclosed streets were considered to offer a secure environment for the future residents.

There was some uncertainty regarding plans for the Village Green, largely because the Phoenix Trust has not yet been consulted as to the details of its scheme. Some Panel members expressed concern at the way the Village Green seemed to be cut off from the rest of the development by both the principal access road and the significant difference in levels. It was clear that there was a need for more enclosure of the village green, and its integration with the retail elements to the south and the housing to the east. There might be an opportunity to increase the densities to achieve this.

The developer stated that, in terms of architectural language, the majority of buildings would be of traditional style, with a mix of 2-3 storey buildings. Closer to the pit there would be some four storey housing that might reflect a more contemporary approach. The Panel were keen to see a concerted effort to build on local distinctiveness, and a debate ensued on the alternatives in terms of layout and landscape (linear-irregular/offset grid, formal-informal, tree planted or building enclosed). The quality of the scheme depends on the designer being able to compose a set of standard house types into a series of coherent streets, and a variety of house types and elevational treatments will be required to achieve this.

The need for a sustainability strategy was expressed. The developers pointed out that employment opportunities were available close by, and that the incorporation of the school, retail uses and adjacent outdoor heritage/leisure facilities would all help foster diversity. It was suggested that energy use targets should be exemplary rather than standard, and that locally sourced materials should be given preference. There is great potential to increase the bio-diversity of the site through landscaping the margins and emphasising the three east-west green corridors.

Summary

The Panel were delighted to see this scheme at such an early stage, were excited about the potential of the site with its valley side location between two country parks and its imposing industrial archaeology/colliery heritage.

A constructive dialogue with the Phoenix Trust is imperative to the successful and mutually beneficial integration of the two schemes. A more integrated plan, including retail within the residential, and providing flats around the village green, which might be lowered in elevation at least in part, was considered to be the preferable solution. The current plans could be used as the basis for a development brief and to reinforce the Local Authority's commitment to the principles behind more compact, diverse and accessible housing developments.

In subsequent discussion, the Panel advocated a solution that made the most of the topography of the site, exploiting the hill top position and scale of the colliery buildings and the changes of level into the valley. An emphasis on the north-south linearity of the site might complement this approach, without recreating the long straight streets of the industrial valleys. The ideas of boulevarding the cross streets and developing a water course were positively endorsed, as were the ideas of home zones on the eastern margins. However the cross routes should link clearly with the footpath pattern off site and have ecological connections. At present the scheme does not appear to have responded fully to the huge potential of the site and ample scope exists for the development of a more locally distinctive approach. The panel welcomed the developer's aspiration to create a place of distinctive regional character but expressed the need for the team to broaden the models identified as sources of reference for the Penallta scheme.

Finally the issue of retail provision needs to be given careful thought, and its contribution to the project assured. Currently there are few community facilities provided as focal points for social and community activity and the retail might be used to complement the heritage attraction both in design and visitor attraction terms.

The Panel would be pleased to comment on this project again as the design develops.

End.