

**Comisiwn Dylunio Cymru**

**Design Commission for Wales**

**Design Review Report:**

**8 September 2004**

**Meeting Date / Material Submitted: 2 September 2004**

**Location:**

**Cwm Calon, Penallta ,  
Caerphilly**

**Architects / Design Team:**

**Capita Percy Thomas  
Neil Embleton**

**Client:**

**Redrow Homes  
Keith Annis, Peter Taylor**

**Scheme Description:**

**Residential with school and  
employment areas**

**Public/Other Body:**

**Caerphilly County Borough Council  
John Forrester**

**Planning Status:**

**Full permission with conditions to be  
discharged**

**Design Review Panel Members:**

**John Punter (chair),  
Cindy Harris (officer),  
Geraint John,  
Ann-Marie Smale,**

**Paul Vanner  
Mike Biddulph  
Richard Parnaby  
Alan Francis**

## **Presentation**

This is a re-presentation of a scheme first brought to the Panel last April. Since then there has been progress on the main link road into the site which should be finished within 12 months, and the school is scheduled for opening in September 2006. The outstanding planning conditions relate to details of the masterplan and design briefs, but the Local Authority has had no input into the number of units or density of development.

The current design is largely based on the Mason Richards masterplan. The north / south linearity which forms the dominant grain, has been strengthened, together with good east / west routes forming 'green corridors'. Small offset squares have been introduced to calm traffic. Cycle and pedestrian links have been added to existing routes on the dismantled railway line and to Penallta Country Park. The main boulevard around the large central public open space carries an existing water course. Of the two roundabouts initially planned, the northern roundabout has been changed to a T- junction.

The difference in levels at the two main entrances merge at the south west corner of the village green, which runs at the same level as the road for half its length. The merging of the two entrance roads, just west of the central open space, forms a nodal point and the layout encourages a flow of traffic towards the centre.

The elevations of the 2-3 storey housing blocks will be a mix of white render and brick, with roofs predominantly of slate and some with red tile. Blocks opposite the power house facing a four metre retaining wall, may rise to 4 storeys. Most of the site, including housing and employment areas and the school, are now in Redrow's ownership, but this does not include the proposed village green area.

### **Panel's Response**

The Panel are encouraged by the way in which our earlier comments have been responded to, especially with regard to strengthening the north / south linearity. The offset squares appear to work well as traffic calming devices and landscape features. The panel is reassured that the levels across the site are as they were when we last saw the scheme and drop gently at first, then more steeply, from east to west .

We welcome the positive integration of this scheme within its context. Cycle and pedestrian routes are well laid out within the site and direct connections with surrounding areas have been established, especially to the country park via bridges and a tunnel. The local residents group has been consulted about links with the site and a liaison group has been established with members of the Planning Committee and local residents. The removal of one of the roundabouts will be a bonus for pedestrians and cyclists.

The Panel appreciates the block structure with rear vehicular access and well screened and secure open spaces. Street activity should be maintained, owing to the narrow width of street (10 metres at its narrowest) and allowance for visitor parking in areas where the street 'billows out'. The back lanes will include some houses or flats over garages and we would encourage more housing to be located in these areas. The proposed road layout has been approved by the Local Authority's Highway Engineers, who have taken a positive and flexible attitude. Lessons have been learned from a similar scheme at Dickens Heath, Solihull.

The main house types used here are eaves fronted, with a flat face. This is seen as a template rather than a standard pattern. The external finish will be variable and a diversity of materials is encouraged. Comparisons were made to Poundbury, and the question was raised of how appropriate the architectural language of an English village was in this Welsh context. It was stated that architectural references can be made in the details, rather than re-interpreting the neighbouring housing forms of urban terraces or council housing.

The Panel is doubtful about how well the central open space and adjoining houses will work. The relation between this space and the village green is not clearly expressed and the treatment of the latter is outside the scope of this scheme.

The design team were asked to outline their sustainability strategy and described it themselves as 'modest'. The moderately high density (35-45 units / hectare), the mix of uses and the regeneration of a derelict brownfield site, all foster sustainable development in a wider context. However, no environmental impact assessment has been carried out; there are no plans for including small retail units (a 'village shop'); and materials with a high environmental impact such as uPVC windows, and artificial slates will be used.

### **Summary**

The Panel are pleased to be presented with this revised scheme and to commend its excellent urban design aspects. The emphasis on linearity, permeability especially on the east-west axis, boulevarding of streets, and incorporation of footways and cycle ways are all positive features. The offset squares appear to work well and the variation in street width should avoid the danger of dead frontages. We find the rear access and treatment of the back lanes convincing, although these areas would benefit from more housing. The landscaping of the eastern edge of site, together with a significant programme of tree planting, are to be welcomed, but we would advise the preparation of a full landscape plan for this site.

We are less convinced by the central oval space, in terms of its size, shape and location. The design of the housing blocks fronting this space needs more resolution, and may be difficult to integrate successfully, with the difference in levels leading to broken rooflines. We support the suggestion for 4 storey buildings to face the power house. The quality of detailing of materials and construction will be crucial to the ultimate success of this project and we consider it vital that the architects are retained for the detailed design work for all the housing blocks, through all the phases.

We find the approach to sustainability issues disappointing, in terms of the use of materials and conventional standards of energy performance on what is an exposed site. The developers agreed to look again at the orientation of buildings, but were unwilling to change their materials specifications, for reasons of cost and maintenance. The panel remain disturbed and unconvinced, and hope that this could be looked at again.

The treatment of the village green is very important in terms of how well it relates to this development and we trust that negotiations with the Phoenix Trust and Pinocraven will reflect this. In particular, the levels of the green should correspond with the adjacent road as far as possible. . A village shop may well be viable and the provision for at least one small retail unit is strongly recommended.

In some ways the proposed employment areas are the 'achilles heel' of this scheme, and if not handled well could be a serious detraction in an otherwise excellent development. The eventual use of these areas needs to be resolved at an early stage, and the possibility of mixed use (including housing) could be further explored. At the moment they seem abandoned on the edge of site. It is important that the area to the west addresses the village green, reinforces the east/west link along its northern edge, and that any car parking is well screened.

We particularly welcome the appointment of a design team with the necessary skills and experience to deliver an intelligent and workable scheme. We are somewhat mystified by the decision to grant full planning permission in the absence of any details on layout or density. Continuing communication with the Highways Department and members of the Planning Committee is important to ensure that the best features of this scheme are not lost or diluted.

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