

**Statws/Status:**  
**Cyfrinachol / Confidential**



**Adroddiad Adolygu Dylunio:** 25 January 2006  
**Design Review Report:**

**Dyddiad Cyfarfod / Cyflwyno'r Deunydd:** 11 January 2006  
**Meeting Date / Material Submitted:**

**Lleoliad/Location:** Old 45 Yard site,  
Ebbw Vale

**Disgrifiad o'r Cynllun** Affordable housing  
**Scheme Description:** 120 units

**Ymgynghorwyr Cynllunio:** RPS Group [Jim Sharp]  
**Planning Consultants:**

**Cleient/Asiant:** Redrow Homes  
**Client/Agent:** [Lee Hawker, Jane Carpenter  
Trevor Wright, Glyn Mabey]

**Pensaer/Architect:**

**Awdurdod Cynllunio:** Blaenau Gwent CBC  
**Planning Authority:**

**Statws Cynllunio:** Outline permission exists  
**Planning Status:** [Appeal pending on condition  
New application imminent]

**Y Panel Adolygu Dylunio/Design Review Panel:**  
Richard Parnaby (cadeirydd/chair) Phil Roberts  
Cindy Harris (swyddog/officer) Kieren Morgan  
Elfed Roberts Lyn Owen  
Ann-Marie Smale

**Lead Panellist:** Elfed Roberts  
**Sylwedyddion/Observers:** Charlie Deng

## Design Review assistant

### Cyflwyniad/Presentation

Redrow have outline permission for this site [Sept 04], which is conditioned by a requirement for a minimum 21.3 metres distance between front windows. They applied for this to be deleted under section 73, which was refused at committee, and an appeal will be heard on 14th February. For this reason, the Local Authority thought it inappropriate to attend this review. These proposals relate to a new full planning application which Redrow are about to submit and on which they would like our view. Obviously this would have to be reconsidered if the appeal failed.

The Panel had an introduction to the Debut concept in relation to another site [Nov 05]. The scheme offers affordable homes for sale, and affordable occupancy based on energy efficient construction and reasonable management charges which combine fuel and maintenance bills. Off site manufacture helps to keep construction costs down, and matches the sustainability agenda which includes communal heating and water conservation. An Eco-Homes 'Excellent' rating is being targetted, but not guaranteed. The homes are not for sale to investors and this restriction applies to re-sale. Assisted finance is available if necessary. Following a public exhibition, names have been placed against one third of the properties.

The site is long and narrow and bounded by a Grade 2\* listed blast furnace wall to the east and the River Ebbw to the west. There are easement distances established along these two features, of 8m and 7m respectively. The site is included within the Llewellyn Davies masterplan for the old Corus site. It is sustainably located, within acceptable distances to all major services. A regular bus route runs along Steelworks Road and a new rail link to Cardiff is due to be opened in 2007. There will be a slight modification to the junction off Steelworks Road.

The layout of residential blocks addresses the linear nature of the site, with a street frontage running along the river and footpath linkages across the site. The buildings are 2-3 storey, formed into terraces and square blocks, with a key building at the site entrance. Externally, there is brickwork to the ground floor [which will be matched with existing bricks in the blast furnace wall], and cement particle cladding to the upper floors, which could be replaced with render. Roofs will be of prefabricated slate effect panels. Doors and windows will be uPVC. There will be high quality public amenity space arranged around three communal courts.

### Ymateb y Panel/Panel's Response

It was confirmed to the Panel that the Llewellyn Davies masterplan will have the status of SPG. A development brief also prepared by Llewellyn Davies [April 2005], proposes that this site be used for affordable worker housing and provides an opportunity for "compact urban forms to be achieved and sustain higher dwelling densities".

The ownership of the 8m easement along the wall has been transferred to the council. A full structural survey is to be undertaken by the developer and the council will then apply for lottery funding for its refurbishment.

The Panel welcomed this initiative to secure affordable housing but felt that this should not be at the expense of quality of design for the dwellings and their surroundings. Developments should be at densities appropriate to their particular sites and local circumstances. In this case, the Panel had some reservations as to whether acceptable standards of privacy and amenity could be achieved at this density. We would urge the developers to consider some reduction or to secure sufficient improvement to the layout, especially of amenity and parking areas, to make such a density acceptable.

The Panel thought the pedestrian links to the town centre across Steelworks Road were not easily accessible or user friendly. Redrow are in the process of securing the factory unit site to the south, which will increase permeability from this site. They have considered traffic calming measures on Steelworks Road, but have been advised against pursuing this by Blaenau Gwent CBC. Redrow acknowledges that the quality of linkages needs improving, but that will depend on what happens elsewhere, eg the possible footbridge by the Lever Hall site and the planned hub by the station square.

The Panel's view of the planning condition specifying a 21.3m distance between properties is that it is inappropriate to this site and the type of development planned and that, if applied, it would stunt any future development of this site. It also runs contrary to the spirit of building to higher densities, as recommended in various planning policy documents and the development brief for this site. We are convinced that it is possible to design housing with acceptable standards of internal and external privacy with face to face dimensions of significantly less than 21.3m. However, we thought that the proposed level of density is only acceptable if good provision is made for noise abatement and acoustic insulation, as well as properly maintained open spaces with good natural surveillance.

The quality of the amenity spaces was discussed and the Panel thought that the parking should be kept away from these areas as much as possible. It was not clear whether the communal courts were intended as informal protected spaces, or something more structured. In any event we questioned the impact of car parking on external spaces and feared that the parking would dominate other amenities. This is particularly important given the lack of any private external space. The Panel were informed that in the case of the completed Debut scheme in Rugby, a 100% parking ratio had been provided but only 80% had been taken up, and this aspect would be continually monitored by Redrow. We thought there was the possibility of conflict between pedestrian and traffic movement.

It was suggested that some communal areas could be developed as children's play areas, but the developers pointed out that as yet, other Debut schemes were not being used for family accommodation. Nevertheless the Panel considered that the detailing of the amenity space should take account of the possibility of future children on the site, and that safety features along the river bank should be considered.

The Panel appreciated the innovative approach to site layout but thought that there was potential for a more coherent and sophisticated urban design strategy. The road running along the river should allow for greater priority for pedestrians and we suggested that paving materials from the courtyards be allowed to 'bleed' across the road. We considered that the key to the success of this scheme will lie in the quality of materials and landscaping. Some of the drawings presented are misleading in that they do not sufficiently convey the significant changes of level across the site and the verticality of the elevations.

While we welcomed the rigorous approach to achieving sustainable construction and communities, especially the communal heating and efficient use of internal space, the Panel was disappointed in the team's lack of certainty concerning the Eco-Homes Excellent rating. It was suggested that timber frame construction might be more sustainable than steel frame, and that uPVC windows and doors were not an indicator of sustainability or quality. Timber composite windows on the other hand, would be high quality, low maintenance, and cost competitive.

It was suggested that Cadw should be involved in the protection of the Grade 2\* wall and in maintaining its visibility from the road.

### **Crynodeb/Summary**

The Panel commends the concept of providing affordable housing to relatively high densities on suitable sites such as this. We strongly support the developers in their efforts to reduce the minimum distance between dwellings and we trust that, if they succeed at appeal, that decision will help to reform policy in this area. We consider these proposals to be acceptable with minor revisions. In particular:

- Pedestrian linkages with the town centre should be improved as far as practically possible
- The level of density proposed, while acceptable, makes it even more important to ensure privacy between dwellings and a high quality external environment
- The communal courts should be made more distinct and separate from the parking spaces, which could possibly be reduced in number.
- Greater priority should be given to pedestrian routes throughout the site and in particular on the riverside road
- While we applaud the current commitment to a genuinely sustainable development, in construction and in use, we regret the lack of a complete commitment to an Eco-Homes Excellent rating.

### **Diwedd/End**

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