

corner of the site, facing Brynmawr, has been left open. One hundred and eight dwellings are proposed for this three acre site, giving a medium density of 32 dwellings per hectare.

A thorough landscape analysis was supported by plans and photographs showing the context and topography of the site. The visibility of the site was analysed and it is not particularly prominent being overlooked at distance from the north and south. The school to the north is on higher ground and is very prominent in the landscape, a situation hardly eased by the coniferous planting to the north. The argument was made that the landscape analysis clearly shows that this site is clearly within the urban zone of Brynmawr despite having been included within the National Park. Nonetheless, it is an important edge of town/edge of Park site that demands careful site planning and design

On the site itself the housing has been sited to the south west to leave the eastern end as green amenity space, an extension of the open country to the north, linking the hillsides across the valley. Existing vegetation on the steep banks to the south and southwest, between the site, a side road and the A465 Heads of the Valleys road, will be maintained and extended, though part of the bank to the south west will be lost for road widening when the A465 is improved.

Representatives from BBNP pointed out that there was no defined need for housing in this area within the UDP, and no representation had been received from Blaenau Gwent CBC in support of a residential scheme here. Planning officers would therefore have to make it clear why they were going against their own development plan, if they were to support these proposals. It would be possible to treat this application as an exception because it is a brownfield site and within the urban envelope of Brynmawr but a demonstration of housing need would be necessary from Brynmawr, and a high quality of design would be required at this entrance to the park. The National Park officers would insist that the proposed development be constrained by the principles of the masterplan and these would have to be translated into conditions on any outline permission. With regard to social housing, the forthcoming UDP suggests a 20% minimum, and this may be an important consideration in gaining planning approval.

Blaenau Gwent CBC support the principle of housing in this location, providing that the development is well integrated with its surroundings, and has good pedestrian links back into town. The authority is open to non-traditional design solutions and welcomes the potential of innovative sustainable development.

The developers pointed out that there is no other likely use for this site other than housing. Although part of the justification for redevelopment is the regeneration of Brynmawr, marketing would seek to associate the scheme with the Abergavenny / Crickhowell market. A lot of site remediation work is necessary with WDA funding being sought, and the owners anticipate actual development to be some time away.

Panel's Response

This site is severed from its immediate community by the main road and the difference in levels, and this will obviously impact on the relationship between the new development and the town. It is therefore particularly important to establish good pedestrian links into the town. But it is equally important to connect up with and to improve local footpath networks and connections with the open countryside. This should include allowing for a link to a

possible new footbridge to the south if one can be secured as part of the Heads of the Valleys road widening.

The layout draws on precedents like Poundbury in Dorset, and offers considerable sensitivity to the site. However the Panel considered that more attention should be given to the exposure and altitude of the site and questioned whether the layout was ideal for this Head of the Valleys location. The avowed approach to produce a more sustainable development include ideas about waste reduction, off-site fabrication and modular construction, with energy performance depending on high levels of insulation rather than technologies such as solar water heating.

The Panel were interested in how this scheme would sit in its landscape, particularly with reference to the idea of three storey massing on the south west corner and the possibility of the creation of a landmark in the landscape. There was no consensus on this point and although some preferred a development largely hidden by landscape others agreed that appropriate building forms could be developed that would fit with local traditions and fit into the landscape. The reservation of the east side of the site as open land and its feathered landscaping were welcomed as appropriate.

The Panel thought that the important architectural references should be the more immediate terraces of the valleys rather than the villages of Powys, and the immediate neighbours of Llanelly Hill and the Blaenavon World Heritage Site should be given full consideration. However, we were more concerned to develop a set of generic principles that could be used as planning conditions to control the detailed design.

Summary

The Panel agrees that this is an urban site that can be developed for housing and that a density of 32 dwelling units per hectare is quite acceptable. It commends the quality and depth of the landscape analysis and supports all its conclusions. It welcomes the decision to retain the open land to the east as green space, and to incorporate play and recreational facilities. It endorses the design principles underlying this proposal of a more innovative and intimate layout where traffic is naturally calmed and the landscape can dominate the buildings. The Panel would encourage a greater commitment to sustainability, exploiting the southern orientation, taking advantage of and reinforcing the shelter provided by the surrounding vegetation, and fitting in with the vernacular of the valleys and the park edges. A contemporary approach to house design would be possible and the panel would like to see energy saving features incorporated into the construction and servicing of the housing.

The panel would like to see a good mix of house sizes and types on this site, and would want the Planning Authorities to thoroughly consider the need for an affordable housing component.

The Panel is concerned that the quality of design promised on this scheme will not be delivered if the site is sold on to a volume builder. It would like to see any permission tightly constrained with conditions to ensure a sustainable, innovative and sensitive development utilising the above-mentioned points. It would encourage the developer to persevere with the development of this project and to try to provide Brynmawr with a project that can set new standards in the Valleys.

End