

Addroddiad Adolygu Dylunio Design Review Report

Review Status: **Confidential**

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| Meeting date: | 15 October 2008 |
| Issue Date: | 29 October 2008 |
| Scheme Location: | Heads of the Valleys |
| Scheme Description: | Public Realm Guidance |
| Planning Status: | Pre-application |

Part1: Presentation

This guidance document has been prepared to assist the five Local Authorities in the Heads of Valleys Programme Area and their partner organisations. It draws on the full range of existing advice, including Manual for Streets, and applies it to this context, building on local knowledge and experience. It seeks to facilitate the delivery of safe, attractive, vibrant and distinctive streets and town centres.

Summary of key points arising from discussion, to be read in conjunction with Part 2 of this report.

The Panel is strongly supportive of the aims and principles of good street design as set out in this guidance, including pedestrian priority, low traffic speeds and 'decluttering' of signage and street furniture. We are however concerned about the effective implementation of this document, and to what extent it will influence actual planning applications and permitted development. This major and other minor concerns are summarised below:

- The finally agreed document should be adopted by all five Local Authorities, either as Supplementary Planning Guidance [SPG] or general policy, but with a view to ensuring incorporation of these principles into all relevant proposals.

- This should be followed up by training for all relevant Local Authority officers and members, to ensure a coordinated and consistent approach to delivery, with identified 'Champions' at a Corporate Director level.
- Individual town character should be respected within a consistent approach to the whole area.
- A pilot exemplar scheme in one of the towns without any special status would focus attention on the transforming potential of good public realm design.
- We fully agree that materials should be durable, local and sustainable, using indigenous supply chains. Joint purchasing and stockholding would ensure that appropriate materials were used in repair work. Strict control of repair works by utility companies will be essential to maintain quality.
- We do not think that the cover photograph conveys the right impression of an attractive piece of public realm that we would wish to see emulated.

Part 2: Discussion and Panel Response in Full

The Panel fully supports the aims and ambitions of this guidance document but we have concerns about its implementation, and were discouraged to learn that it will not necessarily be adopted as SPG by all the participating Local Authorities [although it may be adopted as Council policy].

Although it is possible to condition the grant aid from Welsh Assembly Government which enables the delivery of some public realm projects, it is nevertheless important that these principles should become embedded in the culture of Local Authorities. In particular highway engineers, regeneration teams and planners need to be involved in developing a multi-disciplinary approach to street design, and training should be offered for both officers and members. Local Authority insurers should also be involved and encouraged to 'buy in' to these principles. We would like to see a 'Streets Design Champion' in each Local Authority with the necessary authority to ensure delivery of the required quality of townscape.

The widespread adoption of this guidance would present the opportunity to enforce better standards from utility companies when carrying out repairs, and to set up joint purchasing arrangements and stockpiling of critical materials which are not easily available.

It will be important to respect the particular character of individual towns, and ideally to demonstrate this in a pioneer exemplar project in one of the 11 towns. This should be over and above the commendable improvements that have occurred in Blaenavon as a result of its World Heritage status. Whilst considering an exemplar project, the opportunity for Town Improvement Grants and investment in building facades would also be encouraged as they form an important part of a town's character.

Public realm strategy needs to reinforce the strategic aims of town centre regeneration and provide good access, adequate parking and sustainable transport. Although the principles outlined here are primarily concerned with town centres, they could be applied equally to smaller communities and residential areas.

It was agreed that the format of a manual may be appropriate in its final version and that checklists and flow charts will be included. A key feature should be simple and concise information, provided in a way which is easy to access.

The Design Commission for Wales Design Review Panel and staff welcome further consultation and will be happy to provide further feedback on this report and/or where appropriate, to receive further presentations. Thank you for consulting the Commission and please keep in touch with us about the progress of your project.

Please note that DCFW's Design and Access Statement Guide is now available on our website www.dcfw.org

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

Appendix 1: Attendees

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| Asiant/Client/Datblygwr: Agent/Client/Developer | Welsh Assembly Government [Graham Morgan] |
| Pensaer/Architect: | Powell Dobson Urbanists [James Brown] |
| Consultants: | Anthony Jellard Associates [Tony Jellard] Capita Symonds [Jon Fox] |
| Awdurdod Cynllunio/Planning Authority: | Five Authorities represented by Rhondda Cynon Taff [Jessica White] |
| Y panel adlygu Dylunio: Design review panel: Ewan Jones [Chair] Cindy Harris [Officer] | Lyn Owen Wendy Richards Ashley Bateson |
| Lead Panellist: | Wendy Richards |