

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



<b>Adroddiad Adolygu Dylunio: Design Review Report:</b>	<b>29 March 2007</b>
<b>Dyddiad Cyfarfod / Cyflwyno'r Deunydd: Meeting Date / Material Submitted:</b>	<b>14 March 2007</b>
<b>Lleoliad/Location:</b>	<b>Dowlais, Merthyr</b>
<b>Disgrifiad o'r Cynllun Scheme Description:</b>	<b>Residential</b>
<b>Cleient/Asiant: Client/Agent:</b>	<b>Merthyr Tydfil CBC [John Brooks] DEIN, WAG [Tim Raine]</b>
<b>Developer/Datblygwr:</b>	<b>n/a</b>
<b>Pensaer/Architect:</b>	<b>RPS Urban Design [Chris Wilson]</b>
<b>Cynllunio/Consultants:</b>	<b>WSP Group [Richard Allen] Alder King [Lee Burman]</b>
<b>Awdurdod Cynllunio: Planning Authority:</b>	<b>Merthyr Tydfil CBC</b>
<b>Statws Cynllunio: Planning Status:</b>	<b>Pre-application. Outline application expected March/April 2007</b>
<b>Y Panel Adolygu Dylunio/ Design Review Panel: John Punter (cadeirydd/chair) Cindy Harris (swyddog/officer) Charlie Deng (swyddog/officer) Carole-Anne Davies, CEO, DCFW</b>	<b>Phil Roberts Douglas Hogg Ashley Bateson</b>
<b>Lead Panellist:</b>	<b>Douglas Hogg</b>

## Cyflwyniad/Presentation

This regeneration proposal for 440 residential units has been developed by the joint clients, DEIN and Merthyr Tydfil CBC to respond to a shortage of housing in Merthyr. An outline application is due to be submitted in the near future, with a detailed proposal for Heartland House, a listed foundry building on which the team have been advised by Cadw. The primary vehicular access will be from Gwernllwyn Road to the south east, with a secondary access from Station Road to the south west.

The site is an old ironworks site and the legacy of its former industrial use is still reflected in the topography, including a change in level of 7 meters across the site. A 7m high retaining wall on the south west boundary will be lowered to a height of 1.2m to allow a better relation with the perimeter street and improved natural surveillance and public safety. An embankment runs centrally on an east/west line across the site, enclosing an old watercourse which it is intended to open up, in order to create a linear green park that will link with the green space line along Muriel Terrace to the east. As well as offering ecological benefits, this will also serve for rainwater attenuation together with a new pond on the south east corner of the site. A screen of mature trees on the north east boundary will be retained. New pedestrian linkages will be established to the retail units to the west along Victoria Street and to other heritage buildings.

The traditional built form of the terraced house and perimeter blocks will be repeated in the site layout. A high environmental performance will be specified, namely EcoHomes Excellent. The proposed density will be 40 units per hectare.

Public consultation has been carried out and the next step is to agree a delivery method based on a design code, along with a strategy for implementation. The client will aim for a single disposal, and they believe this is likely. It would include Heartland House which could be developed to include a communal use such as a library, as well as residential on upper floors.

## Ymateb y Panel/Panel's Response

The Panel noted that very little of the former industrial character of the site remained in this predominantly barren upland landscape. The exception is the Grade II listed foundry building, and the Panel was pleased to see that the proposal includes the renovation of this building for new uses at an early stage of the development. We thought that it would not easily lend itself to residential use, because of the wide window spacings, and that this might be the only opportunity for introducing an element of commercial use on the site. Opportunities to link the use of such units for creative and/or cultural industries, SME's etc as per the National

Assembly Creative and Cultural Industry strategies, or the Heads of the Valleys Strategy, should be further explored. The team stated that they had explored A3 use and there was some potential for that. The Panel thought that a more formal setting for the building would allow it to be better integrated into the new development. An imaginative design approach might include glazed extensions, and the use of some external area as an events space.

The Panel recognised the existing planting to the north east as an important feature and we were pleased to see that this line of trees will be retained. We regretted the loss of trees to the south west, along with most of the retaining wall and the features incorporated within it, which are redolent of the character and industrial heritage of the area. We were informed that its partial demolition was necessary for safety reasons. A structural survey found evidence of a slender construction, built over several decades and backfilled with molten slag, which is now the main consolidating element. It was judged that the site could not be disposed of with that liability.

The Panel would like to see if the wall could be consolidated but the project team stated that major issues of safety remained, and that even if back gardens rather than house frontages were to adjoin Station Road this would mean transferring the structural risk to private mortgages.

The Panel strongly endorsed the terraced housing form, the idea of the linear park and the re-opening of the old watercourse. We found the road layout rather complicated but were informed that this was partly a result of level differences. We would like to see the grid pattern more strongly asserted. We thought that the connectivity with routes outside the site and permeability within could be improved, but were reassured by the discussion of each external link. A third access to the east had been resisted by community groups, although this could still be used for emergency vehicles. We advised that any focal points needed to be planned and incorporated early on.

In order to improve the site layout the Panel recommended that the design team look at turning the corners of the terraced blocks, thereby creating more enclosure in exposed areas. We suggested that the street design and parking arrangements could benefit from a 'Home Zone' approach, using chicanes and other devices to design in traffic calming measures. The car parking alongside the linear park was not favoured and the Panel considered that car parking should be close to houses and under surveillance.

The Panel supported the proposed use of design codes to enshrine exemplar sustainability standards. In addition to EcoHomes Excellent, we suggested that the code could specify a fixed improvement [eg 10%] on the target carbon emissions required by the Building Regulations. Following the example of Ely Bridge, separate energy targets could be set over and above those required by BREEAM. This would appear to be an appropriately sized scheme for the installation of a district heating system, which could include CHP. Other conditions might relate to sustainable,

locally sourced materials including FSC timber, or to sustainable waste management. We were reassured to be told that the client was aware of the financial implications of requiring an EcoHomes Excellent rating. The team pointed out the potential environmental advantages of selling to a single housebuilder and noted that a recent Redrow development nearby had sold well. The Panel advised that it was vital to ensure that design quality and sustainability measures were carried through all stages of the development and the EcoHomes rating should be based on a post-construction assessment.

### **Crynodeb/Summary**

The Panel was pleased to review this scheme at an early stage and to note the air of optimism which informs the approach to the regeneration of the area. We think this has the potential to be a successful scheme, and we recommend the following points be used to inform the future development of the proposal:

- We support the retention of the listed foundry house and its incorporation into this scheme. We think it should be used to provide an element of commercial, retail or community use in this predominantly residential development.
- We reluctantly accept the lowering of the retaining wall as the best feasible option.
- We are reassured by the degree of pedestrian and cycle provision within the scheme and the connectivity with the rest of the town.
- We support the concept of the linear park, the reinstatement of the watercourse and the attenuation pond, which will add value to the scheme as a whole.
- We suggest a home zone approach to street layout and design which gives priority to pedestrians. The car parking arrangements should be revised to improve natural surveillance and ensure that cars are kept away from the green edge.
- We support the terrace form but we think that some aspects of the block plan need revising and refining, to create more enclosed spaces and a stronger urban form and perimeter block overall.
- We are delighted to see a strong commitment to ambitious sustainability targets, evidenced by an EcoHomes Excellent rating based on a post-construction assessment. We think this needs to be carefully embedded in the design code in precise terms, following guidance from DCLG. A palette of sustainable local materials could also be included, along with a requirement for district heating.
- We are less optimistic than the project team about the prospect of a single housing developer and if there were to be several developers, the importance of a robust design code and a guarantee of its implementation would be increased.

**Diwedd/End**

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