

# Design Review Report

South Sebastopol, Torfaen

**DCFW Ref: 61A**

Meeting of 18<sup>th</sup> February 2016



## Declarations of Interest

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Panel members, observers and other relevant parties are required to declare **in advance** any interests they may have in relation to the Design Review Agenda items. Any such declarations are recorded here and in DCFW's central records.

### Review Status

### PUBLIC

Meeting date	18 <sup>th</sup> February 2016
Issue date	2 <sup>nd</sup> March 2016
Scheme location	Land at South Sebastopol, Torfaen
Scheme description	Residential
Scheme reference number	61A
Planning status	Outline Permission Granted

## Declarations of Interest

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None declared.

## Consultations to Date

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None made know to DCFW.

## The Proposals

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An outline application for the residential development of the site was submitted to the local planning authority in 2001. There was a resolution to grant consent to that scheme subject to a S106 agreement dating back to 2004. However, due to the time elapsed, a new outline application was developed and reviewed by DCFW in November 2010. A masterplan for the wider site was then developed in 2011. In 2012, a framework document was produced for appeal. A new outline application, responding to local concerns regarding access, was submitted in early 2014 and granted permission. The application was accompanied by a Development Brief intended to set the standards for the application. The overall masterplan site sits between Sebastopol and West Pontnewydd, and includes a section of the Brecon & Monmouthshire Canal, as well as some existing farmhouse buildings and barns, some of which are listed.

In September 2014, a further DCFW review considered a reserved matters application for the development of the first parcel of land associated with the South Sebastopol masterplan, comprising approximately 200 houses and known as Ty Brychiad.

This review focussed on the Development Brief and preparation for a reserved matters application for the second parcel of land associated with the South Sebastopol masterplan – the 'Village Core'. It comprises approximately 150 houses and a small mixed-use centre around the existing canal basin.

This report should be read in conjunction with DCFW's reports from the previous reviews.

## Main Points in Detail

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The following points summarise key issues from the review, and should be used to inform work ahead of making a reserved matters application on this phase. The principles of these notes should also be considered when design work begins on areas of the masterplan to be developed in the future:

### **Character Areas**

Early proposals for this scheme divided the site into five 'character areas', and there is a desire from the design/developer team for each of the areas to be distinguishable in appearance. It would be useful if the overall aims and parameters of the different character areas could be clearly defined now, before further detailed design of individual areas, so that design decisions can be made in line with the stated aims. The aims and parameters should not be arbitrary, but should relate to the existing topography, adjacencies, planned routes and the type and quantity of development required.

Once what is meant by 'character areas' has been defined, meaningful decisions can be taken about varying the character between the areas.

There are many ways in which character can be varied without necessarily changing the house types or materials. These include:

- Surface materials
- Boundary treatments
- Soft landscape/planting
- Layout, grain and street patterns
- Density
- Plan forms
- Response to topography and landscape

Some parts of the masterplan area are steeply sloping. The overall layout and detail design should deal positively with the site topography. A strategy for dealing with changes in level (for each character area) would be useful. Relating proposals to the immediate landscape contexts will help to develop character for the different parts of the scheme.

Care should be taken when using the term 'traditional' to describe building character. Building traditions vary significantly from place to place, so the term can imply different things to different people. If a truly traditional character is desired, local building traditions should be researched. The value of directly 'copying' the features of old buildings for new buildings, which must meet different performance standards, should be considered.

The primary route through the masterplan offers an opportunity to increase the building height and density and/or create a different character type to the rest of the scheme.

### **Landscape, Layout and Character**

The existing landscape on and around the site can be used to add value to this scheme. Current proposals are not capitalising on this. It is encouraging that large areas of

woodland and fields are being retained, but more could be done in the design of the scheme layout, and character, to benefit from these green assets, as well as the canal.

It was not clear what might define the differences between the five character areas. What was clearer was the strength of influence upon layout and character that could be derived from the variety of different landscape edges to the development, for instance:

- woodland edge
- canal-side
- field edge
- mountain view
- natural water course

If designed well, properties fronting onto these natural assets could be more desirable or valuable. It would be useful to map or diagram potential areas where this should be achieved.

Where having views to the surrounding mountains are important, they should be tested through accurate photo montage, drawing or 3D modelling.

### **Relationship to Canal**

The existing canal offers a chance to add value to this part of the scheme in particular. In order for this to happen the relationship between the canal and the proposed development will need to be well considered.

It is important to consider this site in the context of a wider chain of events already happening along the canal and proposed for the future. The design and development team need to work and communicate with the relevant people in the local authority to ensure that mutual benefits are maximised.

The scale and nature of any buildings and events proposed at the canal basin need to be appropriate to this location, and should be designed to maximise people's engagement with the waterway.

The canal and adjacent tow path offer the potential to bring visitors to the site. However, the existing bridge location is not conducive to visitors using facilities surrounding the proposed public space. A new bridge taking people directly into the neighbourhood centre from the easterly tow path would assist in making any commercial activities more viable.

The Local Authority's canal, regeneration and tourism strategies should be feeding into the planning of this development, especially at the local centre.

### **Local Centre**

The village core or local centre offers the opportunity for a different type of development and density. More design time and testing will be required to get this part of the scheme right compared to the areas which are purely housing. This is a crucial part of the scheme, and it should be a vibrant and viable place. Coordination with the local authority will be important.

It will not be easy to predict how much commercial activity on this site will be viable, and this may change over time as the rest of the scheme is implemented and other local projects and regeneration take place. It will be useful to allow for flexibility so that the local centre can respond over time to use patterns. Scenarios for one year, five years and 10 years from completion should be considered.

One way to achieve flexibility would be to start with temporary solutions which can be easily tested, changed and replaced with permanent solutions over time. This could provide a cost effective way to test for viability.

Walking and cycling routes to and from the local centre should be attractive and well planned to encourage active travel. Inclusive design should be considered from an early stage so that access for all is provided without compromising the overall vision for the space.

### **Public Open Space**

Both the design and management of all the public open spaces will be important.

The nature of the public space at the neighbourhood centre will be especially important and will need to be designed to accommodate the uses intended for it. A realistic brief for the space, which includes a strategy for curating and managing events, should be clearly defined so the design can respond to it. It should be clear who will have the responsibility for the space.

There are many benefits to green public space, and this scheme has extensive green space, but maintenance costs can be significant and need to be planned for so that benefits can be maximised.

A realistic management strategy for all public spaces should include community input and should cover cultural and ecological aspects, as well as physical.

If there are links from this key public space to the public green spaces, these should be carefully considered. The relationships between the canal, local centre, playing fields and car parking are important.

### **Environmental Design and Management**

As stated in the review for the first phase of this development, we would like to see good environmental design practice shaping the scheme. The Welsh Government's, *Practice Guidance: Planning for Sustainable Buildings*, written by DCFW gives a clear overview of best practice.

Good environmental design requires early consideration of plan layout, orientation and form and cannot be effectively added on at a late stage in the design process. Early planning for sustainable design is more cost effective and better value.

Good environmental design relates to energy and water management. It is not apparent that these issues have been considered in any detail or have significantly informed the scheme design up to this point. The Design Commission strongly urges better integration of sustainable design principles when future phases of the scheme are brought forward.

There can be a strong link between the design of the public realm, including routes, and good water management. Case studies by Sustrans and Welsh Water demonstrate effective, integrated solutions can be achieved and add value.

### **Future Phases and Further Review**

The Design Commission would welcome the opportunity to review future phases of this scheme as designs are developed. We would hope to see the design principles covered in this, and previous reports, considered in the planning and design of future phases or character areas.

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

## Attendees

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Agent/Client/Developer:	Ben Thomas, Taylor Wimpey (PM)
Designers/Contractors:	Jon Whitehead, WPM Consulting Jon Wilks, Asbri Planning Martin Douglas, PAD Design
Local Authority:	Richard Lewis, Torfaen CBC Helen Smith, Torfaen CBC
Design Review Panel:	
Chair	Ewan Jones
Lead Panellist	Toby Adam Steve Smith Steven Smith Andrew Linfoot Amanda Spence, Design Advisor, DCFW Carole-Anne Davies, Chief Executive, DCFW
Observing:	Desmond Anderson