

Statws/Status:

Cyfrinachol / Confidential



Adroddiad Adolygu Dylunio: Design Review Report:	17 April 2008
Dyddiad Cyfarfod / Meeting Date:	9 April 2008
Lleoliad/Location:	The Works, Ebbw Vale
Disgrifiad o'r Cynllun Scheme Description:	Mixed use regeneration
Cleient/Asiant: Client/Agent:	WAG [Steve Spode] Blaenau Gwent CBC [Richard Crook]
Developer/Datblygwr:	n/a
Masterplanners:	Alan Baxter [David Paddon, Gesine Junker]
Cynllunio/Consultants:	Savills [Carolyn Puddicombe] ESD [Tim Crozier-Cole] Blaenau Gwent CBC
Awdurdod Cynllunio: Planning Authority:	
Statws Cynllunio: Planning Status:	Outline planning permission granted Feb 2007
Y Panel Adolygu Dylunio/ Design Review Panel: Wendy Richards (cadeirydd/chair) Cindy Harris (swyddog/officer)	Lyn Owen Ed Colgan

Charlie Deng (swyddog/officer)

**Phil Roberts
Ann-Marie Smale**

Lead Panellist:

Lyn Owen

Sylwedyddion/Observers:

**Karen Thomas, WAG
Jeff Perren, WAG
Clair Stonelake, WAG
Tom Bourne, WAG
Gareth Beer, WAG
Jennifer Richards, WAG
Christian Cadwallader, BGCBC**

Site Visit

Prior to the review, the panel were given a guided tour of The Works site in order to get a thorough understanding of the scale and complexity of the scheme and inform the session.

Cyflwyniad/Presentation

The sustainable development framework was outlined by the project team and we were told that it underpins every aspect of the scheme, beginning with the site remediation. This is being done biologically and all materials will be reused on site, apart from the steel reinforcement which will be sent for recycling. There is a strong commitment to using local labour [currently 50% of the labour force is local] and local materials [a minimum 30% of all materials will be sourced locally].

There will be a 10 year programme covering all the phases and the Design Code has been developed to ensure a consistent approach. The code sets out general and detailed design principles for blocks, streets and squares.

The sustainable energy strategy establishes a target of 60% carbon reduction [compared to Part L, 2006] for the site as whole. Specific targets are set according to development type and phase. All residential development will meet Code for Sustainable Homes Level 4 and all others will achieve BREEAM Excellent. A communal energy system will be based around four energy centres on the site and an energy supply company [ESCO] will be set up to operate it.

Ymateb y Panel/Panel's Response

Having studied the background material and following a site visit, the Panel proposed that the discussion be centred round three main areas:

- **Process and delivery**

The Panel commended the enthusiasm and commitment of the project team and asked whether there was similar engagement from the Local Authority, Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council (BGCBC). We were told that this was a joint venture between the Welsh Assembly Government and the Local Authority, and that political 'buy-in' from the LA had been critical in gaining support from WAG from the beginning. The LA had taken responsibility for ownership of the site. The Partnership Board was chaired by the leader of BGCBC and five executive members of the council received regular briefings from the project team. The Panel stated the importance of full involvement of all council members to ensure the widest understanding and support for development to the highest standards as envisaged in the masterplan.

The Panel requested details of the status of the documents accompanying the outline planning application. None have been adopted as SPG, but the Masterplan, Design Codes and the Energy Strategy are tied to the outline planning permission through conditions. Given the dual role of the Local Authority in this project, they have been careful to maintain a clear line between their different functions, as landowner/developer and planning authority.

The project team was confident that the business plan is sufficiently robust to ensure the desired quality and the deliverability of their vision. It was clarified that design briefs would be prepared for all the different sites within the development, both public and private. The design briefs for private led schemes would be produced alongside development briefs addressing financial and other matters.

The Panel asked how flexible the proposed phasing and detailed allocations would be, and it was agreed that some changes would be likely, but that the impact of any proposed change on the underlying principles would be evaluated at each stage. The types of mixed use considered most appropriate will evolve throughout the development process, but there is an overriding concern to protect and enhance the existing town centre and establish good physical links with this site. While not commenting specifically on the proposed quantum of accommodation, in general the Panel would like to see a maximisation of housing opportunities, to take advantage of the unique and sustainable location, and an appropriate balance of mixed uses.

- **Sustainability / access**

The Panel welcomed the sustainable energy strategy and the communal energy system in particular. It was agreed that the targets for carbon reduction relating to different phases of development would need to be updated to reflect WAG's 2011 target for zero carbon buildings and the Renewable Energy Routemap. It was acknowledged that, while four separate energy centres was not the most efficient solution, it had been made necessary by the phasing and the need to provide some de-risking for the private sector. In future these separate systems could be linked

together. We would also like to see more innovative solutions explored, such as the use of a basement area as a heat store with solar water heating panels grouped together on top, rather than on individual roofs.

A sustainable development management system applies to resource use and material specification for the whole site and the team will aim to maximise use of materials with the lowest carbon footprint. A sustainable drainage system will be developed including porous surfaces, and rainwater attenuation incorporated into the landscape treatment.

It is the team's intention that the proposed funicular railway will be operational by 2012, to coincide with the opening of the Learning Campus. Five options for the railway design and operation are currently being examined. There is a commitment to running a bus service from 'day 1', as soon as the first developments on the Northgate site are completed. When the Christchurch link becomes operational, there will be the opportunity to form a loop, linking back to the town centre. Buses will also be diverted into the site to serve the hospital.

The Panel would like to see the commitment to cutting edge sustainability solutions maintained throughout the project in order to make this an exemplar of good practice and effective delivery in Wales.

- **Design codes**

The Panel questioned the architectural approach that appeared to be advocated, with residential buildings appearing traditional, and commercial and public buildings more contemporary. The designer stated that their intention was for the Code to be generic rather than prescriptive, and the Design Brief for each phase as it came forward would then offer more detailed guidance. He indicated that the recent development at Upton, Northamptonshire, delivered by English Partnerships and the Princes Foundation, was a good example of what they were trying to achieve. Nevertheless, the Panel was concerned that all the illustrative street scenes were of a traditional architectural style.

It was emphasised that the importance of facilitating a more open approach was not the message that was coming through from the Design Code, which may be the source of some confusion to volume house builders at a later stage if this was not made clear within the individual development briefs. In terms of achieving sustainable development, we thought that this was not compatible with a 'pattern book' approach, but demanded a site-specific and sensitive response to the vernacular. The Panel emphasised the importance of Phase 1 setting a high standard which would act as a precedent for further phases.

The team was confident that BGCBC Development Control were capable of enforcing the Design Code and Briefs when determining the reserved matters applications, and did so during the application for the hospital. The selection process for developers of individual phases as they come forward will assess, through the use of matrix scoring,

issues of design and quality before the bids are revealed, and design issues will be given a weighting of more than 50%. We were informed that Stride Treglown have been appointed as architectural advisers to the whole project.

On the proposed block structure for phases 1 and 2, the Panel suggested that the block size could be enlarged to allow for mews type blocks. We were informed that block sizes had been determined to maximise street frontage and permeability, the latter having already been constrained by 'Secure by Design' requirements. The first phase will include 50-60 residential units.

Crynodeb/Summary

The Panel was very pleased to have the opportunity to review this important scheme and we anticipate that, as an exemplar of design quality and sustainable development, it will become a crucial part of DCFW's advocacy work. This will need to be underpinned by regular contact and updates, and we agreed to feed back to the project team our thoughts and reactions on an ongoing basis. To summarise:

- We commended the quality of the presentation material and the ambition and commitment of the project team. We were encouraged by what we were told concerning the similar commitment and involvement of the Department of the Economy and Transport at WAG, the Local Authority and the Partnership Board.
- We welcome the commitment to preparing design briefs for all parts of the development and see that as an ongoing opportunity for flexibility on allocations and detailing, in response to changing circumstances. Such flexibility should of course remain within the broad framework of the masterplan and design code and constantly aspire to high standards
- We welcomed the sustainability strategy and carbon reduction targets, and agreed that the latter needed to be flexible to respond to increasingly stringent environmental standards. We strongly supported the public transport strategy and the emphasis given to establishing close links with the town and surrounding communities
- We questioned the misleading imagery provided in the Design Code and would like to see a more appropriate architectural response encouraged, in terms of sustainability and response to locality.
- We would like to receive a further presentation at Design Review when the preferred developer is appointed for Phase 1, and well before any reserved matters application.

We are aware that due to limited time there are a number of issues which we were unable to explore, specifically:

- Parking; standards and location.

- Use of basement areas. It is noted that there are strong ambitions to retain and reuse about nine basement areas. We support this ambition in principle subject to viable long term uses and maintenance proposals being developed .
- Mix of housing types – affordable component?
- Microclimate - It should be recognised that the microclimate of the site could influence the success of the development. Apart from positive benefits from solar orientation there are benefits from mitigating other effects especially wind and rain by the use of shelters, the orientation of streets and buildings, and possibly landscape belts to reduce wind effects. These could be addressed where appropriate in design briefs.
- Public Art Strategy – Whilst the aspirations of the public art strategy are very positive, the commitment to deliver and the aspirations for temporary and permanent artworks will require a coordinated approach from within the team and delivery through professional commissions which are integrated through the phases as they are released. The aspirations are not followed through to the Design Codes, where locations have already been selected for ‘art’ within the public realm. DCFW supports the integration of public art in the built environment through a coordinated design process, not as an add on.

Diwedd/End

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