

Statws/Status:
Cyfrinachol / Confidential



Adroddiad Adolygu Dylunio: 21 September 2006
Design Review Report:

Dyddiad Cyfarfod / Cyflwyno'r Deunydd: 6 September 2006
Meeting Date / Material Submitted:

Lleoliad/Location: Corus steelworks site
Ebbw Vale

Disgrifiad o'r Cynllun Masterplan
Scheme Description:

Cleient/Asiant: WAG/DEIN [Richard Crook,
Client/Agent: Hamish Munro]

Pensaer/Architect: Alan Baxter Associates
[David Paddon, Sophie Noble]

Cynllunio/Environmental Consultants: ERM [Steve Matthews,
Geraint Bowden]

Awdurdod Cynllunio: Blaenau Gwent CBC
Planning Authority: [Richard Crook]

Statws Cynllunio: Pre-planning
Planning Status:

Y Panel Adolygu Dylunio/Design Review Panel:
Alan Francis (cadeirydd/chair) Jonathan Hines
Cindy Harris (swyddog/officer) Lyn Owen
Wendy Richards Ed Colgan
Richard Parnaby

Lead Panellist: Lyn Owen

Cyflwyniad/Presentation

An earlier version of the masterplan was first reviewed by DCFW late in 2003. The Learning Campus was reviewed in March 2004 and Blaenau Gwent Hospital in May 2006. The site has now been purchased and the first phase of reclamation and remediation is nearly completed. Environmental best practice is being followed and will set the precedent for all future works. The need for adequate resourcing has been recognised and a multi-disciplinary team has been put together to develop the overall strategy for development in a holistic way. The partners not present include ESD who are producing the sustainable energy strategy; Savills who are working on the business case; and FIRA as landscape architects. It was emphasised that sustainable development principles will inform every design and development decision made. These principles are based on: achieving economic benefit to Ebbw Vale and the surrounding area; maximising social benefit to the community; improving the natural, built and historic environment; and efficient resource use combined with minimal environmental footprint.

The present team support the proposed mix of use in the original brief but have since been advised that there is greater opportunity for leisure and tourism uses, than previously identified. A major aim is to address the historic severance between valley and town, and to integrate the site with its immediate context by establishing walkable neighbourhoods with a fine urban grain.

The realignment of the Peripheral Distribution Road linking the A4046 to the south with the B4486 Steelworks Road to the north, leading to the A465 Heads of the Valleys road, is based on an options analysis. It will be developed as an urban route and landscape corridor. Running centrally through the site and linked to the PDR at both ends, Main Street will be a strong tree lined avenue. There will east/west linkages including a new 'green' bridge across the rail line and PDR for pedestrians and cyclists. Indicative block plans show street widths, junction spacings, shared surfaces, buildings enclosing and framing the street, and residents parking either within the curtilage or in rear courtyards.

The Christ Church link on the western boundary will be a vehicular and pedestrian route, with a new gateway square at the junction with the A4046, and a terraced slope linking to the town and drawing the urban grain down into the valley. Another mode of integration will be the 'Learning Link' steps at the northern end linking the Learning Campus with the town. Existing basement areas will be brought back into use as leisure spaces in a 'basement park'.

A Design Coding document will accompany the outline planning application and is intended to be a tool for the LPA and landowner to help deliver the goals of the masterplan. A Development Brief will be attached to the sale of each development block dealing with site specific issues. This masterplan is seen as more than a land use exercise, and is rather a way of setting out the future of the area in a holistic way, addressing health, housing and education needs. The consultants have a remit to educate and train the Local Authority staff in accordance with best practice, and the fact that the lead consultant is an environmental organisation is indicative of the project priorities.

Ymateb y Panel/Panel's Response

The Panel enquired about timescales and was told that consultation on the revised masterplan was just beginning. A Design Statement for the whole site will set down the overarching principles of development, and be incorporated into the Design Codes which will accompany the masterplan. It is hoped that this will be adopted by the County Council as an SPG in December 2006 and an outline planning application will be submitted in January 2007, with a decision expected by April 2007. Detailed applications for the hospital and residential areas are expected to follow in May 2007 and for the Learning Campus by the end of 2007. The EIA work will be ongoing until January next year and a sophisticated consultation exercise is a large part of this. A Transport Assessment is also being worked on. Development briefs for the hospital and Learning Campus are being prepared, in conjunction with their project teams. It was pointed out that full reclamation of the site is not due to be finished until May 2008.

The Panel requested information on how this proposal related to the strategy for the whole area, the Wales Spatial Plan, housing numbers and types of business use. We were informed that the Local Authority are concluding work on a housing needs study including affordable housing. Savills are working on a detailed breakdown of uses as part of the business plan, and high end B1 use will be promoted. The Panel expressed concern that the effects of businesses moving on to this site might be detrimental to the town centre. We were assured that the aim was not to create another town centre or affect other regeneration activities, but to cater for future demand. It was acknowledged that there is as yet no office market in this area and this has to be created. Retail provision will be limited to corner shops. The mixed use elements are likely to be 85%:15%, residential:non-residential, or even 90:10, so the actual numbers of businesses will be relatively small.

Public transport provision will be established at an early stage and will complement the phasing. There will be a bus interchange at the northern end of site with circular bus links extending southwards to include the hospital and Festival Gardens. The Christ Church link and Learning Steps, including a funicular, will provide linkages to existing communities, including a visual connection from the town to the old general office building. The Panel queried whether combining the PDR and rail link would have the effect of splitting the new community. We were informed that the green pedestrian bridge would be built first, before adjacent developments, and that by combining road and rail, this would limit the degree of severance and make the bridge easier to build. It was also pointed out that the community to the east of the road, around the new primary school, is at considerably lower levels than the central part of the site. It was confirmed that the project team will determine the route of rail link.

The site of the new primary school has been the subject of much research. The provision of a new school would result in the closure of an existing school with inadequate facilities, and the new school would therefore need to be located close to the community served by the older one. It was also considered that its proximity to the wetlands would provide a good educational opportunity.

The Panel was pleased to see that a landscape and public space strategy was being developed and requested information on how it would be implemented and managed. We were informed that a management company would be formed to carry out maintenance, and this may be a social enterprise carrying out training. Already a community based tree nursery has been formed to supply the site and participation from local schools and training

centres has been encouraged. New squares and public spaces will either be tied to large users or will incorporate existing basement structures. Public sector funds will cover the infrastructure for all other public areas. The basements will be graded to different levels, from 2 metres deep to the original two storey depth. These will be unique features and ideas for future uses include climbing walls and allotments.

The Panel raised the possibility of de-culverting the River Ebbw and we were told that this had been part of the original design, in order to create an open wetland area. However, it was found that the river has a low base flow but is subject to flash surges of water which could sweep away most of the proposed wetland. Based on whole life costings for the two options, it was decided to leave the river culverted in order to protect the wetlands and this was supported by local environmental groups. Inverts and access points will be repaired or renewed and the wetlands will become effectively a sustainable drainage system.

A site-wide sustainable energy strategy is being developed and will be incorporated into design briefs with specific building performance standards to be achieved. Three district heating systems will serve the whole site and some form of renewable energy generation is being considered.

The density of development will be highest around the Learning Campus to the north, based on the commercial appraisal by Savills. Building heights around the Main Square will be 4-6 storeys, and it is considered that the steep slope linking to the town will accommodate buildings of this height. A 3D CAD model is being prepared. The Panel attempted to establish the size of development blocks. We were informed that street provision will be linked to numbers of dwellings, so that a maximum number of 15 will trigger the provision of an access point.

The Panel was told that the basic design idea was to create patterns of movement that would support neighbourhoods and places that could evolve over time, with a distinctive character and urban grain which did not reproduce the nearby town but reflected the local typology of streetscapes. We questioned whether the layout was over-complicated and suburbanised by the over-provision of trees. It was affirmed that the intention was to create simple through routes and cross links, using design codes to bring character to different areas.

A quality-led selection process will be used to identify preferred developers and capital receipts will not be a priority. It is intended that this procurement process will set the required quality standards from the outset.

Crynodeb/Summary

The Panel was pleased to review the proposal for this important site and to note the commitment and enthusiasm displayed by the team. We consider the proposal an acceptable response to the brief and the site, although much more work needs to be done to convey a true impression of what is envisaged. In particular:

- We would have liked to see a more in-depth analysis of block types and layouts. Given the dramatic level changes throughout the site, cross sections will be necessary to inform this analysis.

- We applaud the links already being established with schools, training centres and other community groups, together with the commitment to a genuine consultation process
- We support the sustainable development objectives and aspirations for carbon neutrality and look forward to seeing the delivery mechanisms
- We are greatly encouraged by the commitment to a quality led procurement method and the use of design codes and development briefs to protect design quality
- We look forward to further consultations as the masterplan and design codes are developed. We would specifically like to review the proposed design codes.

Diwedd/End

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