

# Design Review Report

## Repost Status: Public

Meeting date	12 September 2012
Issue date	20 September 2012
Scheme location	Swan Meadow, Abergavenny
Scheme description	Preswyl/residential
Scheme reference number	77B
Planning status	Application submitted June 2012
Declaration of interests	n/a

## Summary

It was disappointing that this scheme was not referred to DCfW at an earlier stage, when our comments would have been more effective in positively influencing the design development. On the basis of the material with which we were presented and the current status of the proposal, we consider that the desired outcome expressed by the LPA, of a scheme which sits well in its setting and provides a desirable level of accommodation, to be at risk. In summary:

- The Panel is satisfied that the proposed use of the site is appropriate.
- However, we think these proposals represent an overdevelopment of the site which is leading to other problems of amenity space, internal layout and general livability.
- The treatment of the southern elevation should consider the potential for future development (20 years hence) on the bus station site. The 2.5m boundary strip is not an adequate setting for the building and may not meet the requirements of fire regulations.
- The main entrance for residents and visitors should be more legible especially on the approach from the south.
- It is disappointing that no additional sustainability measures are offered over and above the statutory minimum. The visual impact of air source heat pumps (ASHPs) will depend on their location and needs careful assessment.

## **Discussion and panel response in full**

The Panel thought that this was a good site for the proposed use and should deliver an enhancement of the adjacent park, which is currently compromised by an unused and semi-derelict building. The status of the proposed pedestrian routes to the west (towards the town centre) and the north (towards Swan Meadow) needs to be clarified with the local authority, along with any necessary improvements.

Our main concern is with the level of development on what is a constrained site. This in turn is affecting the quality of the external amenity space, which is minimal. The quality of internal spaces is also affected, especially by the narrow frontages in the southern part of the building, leading to some very narrow and inconveniently shaped rooms which barely fulfil their function. The resulting architectural expression has led to an over-complicated facade and roof treatment.

The developer commented that the density was typical of this type of development and that the internal layouts was based on market research. While we accept that this density may be appropriate on other sites, the constricted nature of this site combined with the high density results in very poor quality interior spaces in some of the flats, and an extremely awkward entrance sequence under the corner of the building.

The design approach makes reference to locally distinctive features and precedent buildings within Abergavenny. However, we commented that a historical vernacular approach, developed in the 18th century for short frontage, two and three storey houses facing streets, does not translate well to a long three storey building of the 21st century.

The Panel raised no objection to a three storey development per se, or to a continuous line of development along the east facing frontage. The division of the building into two sections, one two storeys in height and the other three storeys, separated by a single storey section, seems arbitrary. In our view the benefit that results, offering a view of the church tower from Swan Meadow, is outweighed by the serious inconvenience in internal planning, and thus livability, that results. We suggest that alternative forms and layouts should be explored.

The design team need to demonstrate that the current proposal is the best solution for the brief and the site, having considered other options. In particular we thought the costs and benefits of not relocating the sewer, and therefore delivering a much smaller scheme on the southern part of the site, should be re-assessed.

The scheme will meet CSH level 3+, but no further improvements in carbon reductions are offered. We noted that MVHR (mechanical ventilation with heat recovery) units will be fitted and ASHPs will be located either by the substation or on the roofs.

The local authority's requirement for affordable housing is 20% provided on site, but this has yet to be agreed and the applicant cited the costs of sewer diversion as a major factor in the viability assessment.

It will be important to ensure that any future development on the bus station site is not adversely affected by this development, and this impact will be increased by the level differences. The protected area boundary to the south of the site should provide a better setting for the building and may need increasing in width to satisfy fire regulations.

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***Mae copi iath Gymraeg o'r adroddiad hwn ar gael ar ofyn.  
A Welsh language copy of this report is available upon request.***

## **Appendix 1**

## **Attendees**

Agent/Client/Developer	McCarthy Stone
Architectural/Urban Designer	The Planning Bureau (Madalitso Alfazema, Matthew Shellum)
Consultants	Townscape Solutions (Kenny Brown)
Third Party	n/a
Planning Authority	Monmouthshire CC (Kate Bingham, Simon Robertshaw)
Design Review Panel Cadeirydd/Chair Swydog/Officer Prif Banelydd/Lead Panellist	Wendy Richards Cindy Harris Richard Parnaby Simon Carne Angela Williams Gerard Ryan

