

**Comisiwn Dylunio Cymru**                      **Design Commission for Wales**

**Design Review Report:**                      **11 November 2004**

**Meeting Date / Material Submitted:**   **3 November 2004**

**Location:**                                      **Penarth Heights**

**Scheme Description:**                      **Residential development**

**Consultants:**                                **David Lock Associates**  
**[Andy Hiorns]**

**Client:**                                        **Vale of Glamorgan Council**

**Planning Authority:**                      **Vale of Glamorgan Council**  
**[David Foote, Mark White]**

**Planning Status:**                          **Pre-planning**

**Panel:**

<b>John Punter (chair)</b>	<b>Paul Vanner</b>
<b>Cindy Harris (officer)</b>	<b>Ed Colgan</b>
<b>Douglas Hogg</b>	<b>Nigel Hansen</b>

**Declaration of Interest:**                **Howard Wainwright withdrew**

### **Presentation**

The Local Authority have received four tender bids for development of the site at Penarth Heights, with supporting material relating to design and financial aspects. They would like to receive comments from DCFW on the pros and cons of each scheme in terms of their design content. A design evaluation report has been prepared by David Lock Associates and is being consulted on at the moment. Comments from the authority's Highways and Landscape departments in particular are being sought. A selection panel will meet on 18<sup>th</sup> November and make a recommendation on the four initial conceptual schemes to the cabinet of the local council.

The planning brief envisages "a low-rise, high-density development, reflecting many of the urban qualities already evident in Penarth". It is estimated that about 450 new homes could be developed on this site, based on a traffic impact assessment, with a suggested mix of 60% flats; 40% houses. There is a requirement for 20% affordable housing to be pepper-potted through the site in clusters of no more than ten, and to be indistinguishable from sale homes. Other requirements include:

- The highest possible design quality
- A contemporary design approach, coupled with a sense of place
- The promotion of a cohesive and integrated neighbourhood
- Specific sustainable development measures

The proposals will be evaluated according to four main criteria:

- Overall layout
- Building Design
- Transport and access
- Quality of the team

Brief presentations were given on each of the four bids:

1. Barratt Persimmon with Wyn Thomas Gordon Lewis

This proposal exceeds the requirement for 450 homes with a suggested 531 units of which 64% would be apartments. So the scheme is very urban in its scale and street enclosure, but the traffic implications are considerable. The scheme offers a traditional layout which is mostly compatible with the brief, characterised by the central section of mainly 4 storey town houses. Apartment blocks to the east reach six storeys and at the west end of the site reach eight storeys in a block in the shape of a double axe head. This form is said to be dictated by the desire to deflect prevailing winds. Natural ventilation is specified in much of the housing culminating in conventional chimneys which add interest to the rooflines. Pedestrian routes are developed through the use of back lanes running north/south. Chichester Road would be closed, High View Road retained and Paget Road extended on to High View Road.

2. Bellway with RMA Architects

437 units are accommodated, of which 65% are apartments. The most detail has been provided for phase 1 at the western end of site which includes three apartment blocks set perpendicular to the cliff, with 3 storeys at street level, rising to 6 or 7 storeys as they step down the hill to the north. To the south, long lines of townhouses form the opposite side of the street, with car parking behind overlooked by a second half and full blocks. Regrettably the drawings are not entirely consistent and we have some difficulty deciding which is the actual submission. The scale of development and linearity of the townhouses pose some questions, as does the parking and garages at the front of the town houses, which is also in evidence on the street overlooking the 'bowl'.

However the benefits are seen at the east end of the site where low rise, sinuous crescents to the east, set into the slopes, will not obstruct views from the housing behind. However, the plans for this area are undeveloped and not entirely convincing.

As for landscaping a bold approach is taken at the Bowl with a balancing pond and wetlands around the walkways [presumably elements in a sustainable drainage scheme]. The way that the apartments merge into the trees and encroach on the slopes towards the cliff was positive.

3. Crest Nicholson with Edward Cullinan Architects

This scheme provides for 440 units, of which 34% are apartments. The centre west part of the site features 3-4 storey, C-shaped urban blocks, formed to take advantage of the sun to the south and the views to the north. To the south and east pavilion blocks, each made up of four corner houses, form two north facing crescents and one row to the rear of the allotments. Taller 6-7 storey pavilions are interspersed to create minor landmarks. To the west a semi-circular crescent of townhouses with south facing external courtyards culminates in 6-8 storey apartments.

The plan shows a detailed allocation of house units with interior layouts and a very fair allocation of affordable units. Indicative street elevations are provided though these were

not a strength of the scheme, and a community building is included. Car parking is mostly on street and this was a major concern, undermining the elegance of the site plan and the more imaginative house types. The Arcot Street Triangle is well handled but the direct route to the Bowl could be given more prominence. The treatment of Plassey Park is rather less convincing.

Phasing is properly considered.

#### 4. Lovell George Wimpey with Powell Dobson Architects

This scheme accommodates 459 housing units, of which 70% are apartments. It is based on a fairly traditional layout of boulevarded streets and townhouses with gardens at the western end. Car parking is problematic though the tree planting does screen some of this. A 15 storey landmark apartment block at the west end is bordered on one side by a public square. The block was considered to be too tall on this ridge.

More apartments are located at the east end of site in four separate blocks of three to six storeys. The layout here is not very convincing though it ensures some street views while blocking others for the preexisting houses. Arcot Square is a major feature of the layout and is carefully oriented to take advantage of views up the Taff and Ely Valleys It also has strong and direct pedestrian links with the Bowl.

#### Panel's response

Specific comments were made addressing each proposal:

**Scheme 1.** The overdevelopment contained in these proposals, as compared to the brief, is not felt to be justified and the impact of this on highways and transport is not sufficiently addressed. It creates a definite urban (Georgian?) scale throughout that is denser than the adjoining areas, though it works particularly well as a frontage to the cliff. The mass and bulk (though not the height) of the double axe head tower block is problematic, together with the blank nature of some of the side walls.

The grid layout works well, is admirably permeable to reflect existing street patterns, and the density associated with the back lane development is appropriate. The townhouse elevations are promising and the chimney features interesting, although the associated claim concerning natural ventilation is unremarkable in domestic buildings. Other elevations are restrained but capable of development to provide a coherent but varied streetscene. The street/ground floor interface is hampered by the number of garages at street level. The landscaping is standard and needs more development.

**Scheme 2.** The Panel appreciate the dropped heights achieved in many of the blocks, using the topography of the escarpment. The resulting increased density at the western end allows for low scale 2-3 storey blocks through the rest of the site, to good effect, and will be particularly appreciated by the existing residents behind. The Panel found the skyline attractive. The landscape plan is impressive, particularly in the area of the Bowl and in the relation of the apartment buildings to green spaces. However, the link between the Arcot Street triangle and the Marina is less convincing, and the number of garage doors fronting streets creates hostile road frontages.

However, the plans are far from complete and in places contradictory, so we cannot be sure that all the ideas will work up successfully.

**Scheme 3.** This proposal offers an elegant site plan, and a diverse and attractive range of house types with good locations for the affordable elements. Regrettably it is let down by the architecture of the indicative elevations. The biggest problem is the extent of 90 degree, on-street and forecourt parking which we feel would undermine the quality of the layout, which otherwise is both interesting and innovative. Pedestrian and landscape links between Arcot Street and the Bowl, and north from Plassey Square are not well developed. The Panel appreciated the only specific reference to a community building.

**Scheme 4.** This scheme develops the best pedestrian/public space relationship between the Arcot Street triangle and the Bowl. But other aspects of the layout are less convincing. Certainly the west end tower block is far too tall, and the apartments to the east are rather formless and have too much parking in high amenity locations. The boulevard and north/south streets are dominated by car parking.

### **Other relevant issues**

In general discussion, the Local Authority made it clear that the brief is the baseline, and that only those proposals deemed to satisfy the brief would progress to financial evaluation. Whatever proposals are made have to be properly justified within the scope of the brief.

The weighting allocated to different aspects, eg local landscape, transport links, sustainability measures, was debated. Alternative methods of transport were included in the traffic assessment. An Eco Homes rating of 'Good' is a minimum requirement of the brief, and schemes 3 and 4 have offered to achieve 'Very Good'. The local community has been consulted in a series of evening meetings, and more are planned.

### **Summary**

The Panel appreciates the opportunity to comment on the bids for this scheme on what is arguably the most prominent site in the Cardiff region. The Panel sees the crucial issues as being:

- the massing of the various blocks
- the appearance of the skyline
- car parking
- pedestrian links and the public realm
- landscaping
- sustainable development measures
- the track record of the design team.

Overall, there was no absolute consensus, and the Panel felt that they would have liked more time to assess the scheme. They do however have every confidence that the consultants and the officer team are evaluating the project thoroughly and fairly, and that the criteria they are using are broadly the right ones. The best way of summarising our responses is to highlight the features that, combined, would give the best scheme.

**Scheme 1** is not favoured on traffic grounds, though its site planning for that density is very convincing. It also has positive aspects in terms of design and elevational treatment.

**Scheme 2**, where it is detailed, shows a positive use of topography and landscape at the western end and in the Bowl, and protects the views of existing residents at the eastern end. It has a very sensitive skyline.

**Scheme 3** has the team with the best track record and design skills, the most elegant site plan and interesting house types. But its on-street and forecourt car parking are overwhelming, and its elevational treatment needs a fundamental rethink. It commits to a 'Very Good' Eco-Homes rating.

**Scheme 4** develops the most useful future for Arcot Square and creates the strongest links between the Bowl and the rest of Penarth. It also commits to a 'Very Good' Eco-Homes rating, but its apartment tower at the western end is far too tall and at the eastern end the layout needs more work

The Panel would be happy to offer advice again at a later stage.

End