

# Design Review Report

Ty Du, Masterplan, Nelson, Caerphilly

**DCFW Ref: 254**

Meeting of 27<sup>th</sup> January 2022



## Review Status

Meeting date  
Issue date  
Scheme location  
Scheme description  
Scheme reference number  
Planning status

## PUBLIC

27<sup>th</sup> January 2022  
16<sup>th</sup> February 2022  
Nelson, Caerphilly  
Residential  
N254  
Pre-Application

## 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 and meeting Agenda items. Any such declarations are recorded here and in DCFW's central records.

Stephen Smith of City and County of Swansea Council is a serving DCFW Panel Member and was present in that capacity at this meeting and the previous one. His declaration that the Council works with some of the parties on the client and design team in the natural course of their work strands. All present at the meeting were content to proceed.

## Consultations to Date

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Proposals for this site were previously considered by DCFW through design review in May 2021.

Public consultation took place in December 2021 and materials for pre-application consideration by the local authority were submitted just prior to this meeting.

## The Proposals

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The Welsh Government (WG) currently owns the majority of the Ty Du site and has invited United Welsh/Harmoni Homes to promote and deliver an innovative housing scheme following strong placemaking principles. At the time of the previous meeting with DCFW the scheme was viewed by the WG as a potential 'exemplar' development and the materials stated that it aspires to be a model for future WG housing land releases.

The Design Commission understands that this ambition has not changed, however it is now likely that site will be acquired by United Welsh/Harmoni at the market rate. The ambition is to be protected by an agreed 'MoU' setting out expectations for mixed tenure; space standards; off-gas zero carbon design, construction and performance; use of modern methods of constructions via Wales based Celtic factory; a minimum of 40% affordable homes with an aim of 60%; and an overall high quality distinct and differentiated offer in affordable and market homes offer. At the time of this review meeting detailed viability, maintenance and management items were not yet resolved.

The materials provided for this review meeting state that the scheme *aspires* to develop:

- Circa 13 acres for residential development (to be verified).
- Up to 220 dwellings with current plans looking to provide 170.
- Mixed Tenure housing comprising up to 60% affordable housing & market sale housing.

- Applying Placemaking Principles.
- Embracing Passive House principles & Toward Net Zero Carbon development.
- Beautiful Homes (DQR) Standard Houses with space standards adopted across all tenures.
- Innovative house design to consider post Covid-19 requirements.
- Building resilient communities through emphasis on 'placemaking'.

No representatives of the Welsh Government or the Local Authority were present at the meeting of 27<sup>th</sup> January 2022.

## Main Points

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The Design Commission again welcomed a thorough presentation. We also recognise the team's comment that there is still a great deal of work to do. We restate here some of the items which remain unresolved, and which must be addressed as part of that work if the site is to meet the stated ambition and achieve a differentiated offer. The Commission strongly urges the Welsh Government and the Local Authority to actively collaborate with the design and development team to find ways to achieve a proposition which meets the stated ambition.

It is not yet clear to us what the responses from the December consultation were and how they are being responded to. It is likely the findings have some value in shaping the vision and ambition and establishing the overall narrative for the proposals still needed to provide a picture of the place as a whole, and how the growth of the village has been considered.

### **Sustainability of the location and essential collaboration**

The location of this site means that it is naturally likely to encourage car dependency. The Design Commission strongly urges the Welsh Government and the Local Authority to work closely with the design and development team to maximise the genuine application of a placemaking approach and ensure both public transport and active travel facilities can be secured early to support a modal shift away from car dependency.

Physical and social connections will be paramount, and we again urge a thorough 15-minute neighbourhood analysis of the existing facilities and active travel routes in Nelson. This should examine potential pedestrian routes, as well as other active travel and public transport routes and shared amenities. The team referred to walking routes having been identified, however the Design Commission has not seen the evidence or application of findings that would accrue from such a detailed study in either review so far and we urge that it be carried out. For example, how attractive and safe do the identified routes feel and what improvements could be implemented outside the red line of the site to support active travel?

As previously noted, this study should be about more than controlled crossing points that aid permeability and should tackle the severance and environment of the vehicle dominated A472 to create an active and social street, encouraging connections between the new development and the existing settlement. Precedents from other locations that turn busy routes into mixed function streets should be reviewed by the Local Authority, Welsh Government, Developer and Design Team to make this project an exemplar of active travel and community integration. Given its size, it is important that the new development becomes a part of Nelson and is viewed as an extension to the village, linking more effectively with existing uses, all of which will be aided by the study.

## **Greening/natural woodland capital/green infrastructure**

The Design Commission further encourages the full consideration of how green infrastructure at all scales could contribute to making this a distinctive place.

The industrial estate spine road is a particular challenge and detailed consideration is needed with the input of the local authority to identify opportunities for green infrastructure, SuDS features and potential narrowing in places to help reduce speeds, reduce severance and improve the environment of this part of the site. Details provided at this meeting suggest easement allowances risk significant 'sterile' boundaries which need further consideration with the input of the Local Authority.

Woodland assets cover a large part of the site and provide potential for high quality amenity and other environmental benefits including carbon capture as well as air quality. It is important that the team consider whether to include them in public and/or private amenity space and consider and long-term maintenance implication. These considerations should again be explored with the Local Authority to identify fresh approaches that could be taken to achieve a greener development that maximises the use of existing green assets and contributes to the realisation of the stated ambition.

## **House types and construction methods**

There is currently a lack of information about the design process and selection of materials within the MMC approach, particularly in relation to achieving site-wide placemaking ambitions and distinctiveness alongside high performance in use. This project should test the balance between variation and repetition of 'units' and how this can be manipulated to create a successful place and pleasant living environment.

Materials should be selected for their sustainability and longevity as we have previously stated. At this review meeting the Design Commission specifically notes the reference to PIR (polyisocyanurate) insulation being under consideration for the dwelling units. We urge very, very careful consideration of the use of this and similar products for their appropriateness in the context of risk and the implications of building and safety regulations, now and in the future.

## **Sustainability**

The Design Commission encourages the design team, Welsh Government and the Local Authority to work together to fully identify a site-wide carbon strategy including house types, ways of living and movement. A detailed carbon strategy with clear targets and methodology is needed for design and delivery.

## **Summary**

The Design Commission welcomes the continued engagement and recognises the commitment of the design and development team, who were candid about the work still to do prior to the submission of a planning application and formal site acquisition processes. This project will need to benefit from public investment in some form and the Design Commission wishes to be clear that the responsibility for achieving the stated ambition sits as much with the Welsh Government and the Local Authority as it does with the design team and United Welsh/Harmoni Homes.

There is value in all parties contributing to a renewal/refinement of the 'MoU' with Welsh Government and coming together to discover what can be done differently to achieve different and more ambitious outcome – in terms of carbon and climate as well as housing

provision, place integration and placemaking. This process needs to reflect best practice in the Ways of Working of the Future Generations Act given the input of public bodies and public funding. At present this is not evident we have the impression that this is handed in its entirety to the architecture and development team. If, given the housing and climate imperatives, a different and better outcome is expected then all parties need to play a role in bringing it about. This is particularly important given the challenges of this peripheral site with an otherwise default to car-based movement.

We refer all parties to the items identified in our earlier report, in particular regarding ensuring a commitment to placemaking and following through during the design and development processes. At this meeting we recognised the work of the design team in tackling and making progress in some aspects but not all. There is still a great deal to do. It is important to invest time in the design process now to test and prototype ideas before progressing to a planning application.

It remains unclear what is fixed or still flexible and what responses have been drawn from and addressed through the consultation process. The realities of the location and the nature of the site need more detailed consideration including a realistic approach to car ownership and parking. The desire for 'on plot' parking presents several challenges in delivering the continuity and enclosure that well designed streets require. Approaches to integrating and incentivising active travel and convenient alternative transport modes are best resolved with the input of the Local Authority.

More in depth work is still needed on the 15-minute neighbourhood analysis and application of findings to the design approach. It is disappointing that early ideas of a wider mix of uses for the site have been lost as this could have brought more vibrancy to the development. The changes to the mix of uses need be worked through the design, for example testing whether the 'square' still works as an identifiable piece of townscape with the current scale and mix of uses.

Landscape and green infrastructure work will benefit from the input of the Local Authority to help weigh up the long-term management implications against environmental benefits.

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

## Attendees

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Agent/Client/Developer:	Teresa Boyle, United Welsh
Architect/Design Team:	Bernadette Kinsella, Powell Dobson Sara Ifan, Powell Dobson Bethan Thomas, Powell Dobson
Other Consultants:	Matt Russell, Vectos Simon Brewster, Solstys Brewster, Landscape Architects
Planning Consultant:	Robin Williams, Asbri Planning
Local Authority:	Not Present

### **DCFW Design Review Panel**

Chair:	Jen Heal, DCFW, Design Advisor
Lead Panellist:	Stephen Smith Steven Smith Maria Asenjo Carole-Anne Davies, DCFW, Chief Executive Efa Lois, DCFW, Place Advisor
Observers:	Joshua Morgan, City & County of Swansea Council