

# Design Review Report

South Sebastopol,

Torfaen

**DCFW Ref: 61A**

Meeting of 25<sup>th</sup> September 2014



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

### Review Status

Meeting date	25 <sup>th</sup> September 2014
Issue date	8 <sup>th</sup> October 2014
Scheme location	Land at South Sebastopol, Torfaen
Scheme description	Residential development
Scheme reference number	61A
Planning status	Outline submitted

### CONFIDENTIAL

## Declarations of Interest

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None declared.

## Consultations to Date

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None made known to DCFW.

## The Proposals

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An outline application for the residential development of the site was submitted to the local planning authority in 2001. There was a resolution to grant this scheme subject to a S106 agreement dating back to 2004. However, due to the time elapsed a subsequent outline application was developed and reviewed by DCFW in November 2010. A masterplan for the wider site was then developed in 2011. In 2012, a framework document was produced for appeal. A new outline application, responding to local concerns regarding access, was submitted in early 2014, and a decision is expected on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2014. The application is accompanied by a Development Brief intended to set the standards for this application.

This review considers a reserved matters application for the development of the first parcel of land associated with the South Sebastopol masterplan. The scheme is adjacent to the main access road and comprises approximately 200 houses. The overall masterplan site sits between Sebastopol and West Pontnewydd, and includes a section of the Brecon & Momouthshire Canal, as well as some existing farmhouse buildings and barns, some of which are listed.

The landowner has been involved in the design process, especially in relation to the use of woodland and green spaces. It is important that this potential first phase of development sets a good precedent for the rest of the masterplan area.

## Main Points

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The following points summarise key issues from the review, and should be used to inform work ahead of making the reserved matters application and any further work on the wider masterplan area.

### **Concepts, Diagrams and Graphic Communication**

Based on material made available to us we consider some of the intentions of the masterplan documents to have been lost or compromised in the drawings for this phase. It will be useful for the team to refine the concepts in diagrammatic form and detail these at the scale of this phase in the Design Brief, now. This will help to rationalise the design and add logic to the design of the access networks and green spaces, considered below.

Clear diagrams are a good way to quickly communicate ideas to the client, stakeholders, the Local Authority and general public.

### **Character Definition**

The site represents a significant woodland setting, enhanced by the undulating land form and canal. Taken together these provide the framework for a delightful place. The design team recognises this potential, but there is still more work to be done in binding the development into the coherent woodland setting that should underpin the character of the development.

The development brief document is critical to defining the particular character of the first phase and how this will be delivered. It should set out clear frameworks for the detailed design and specify the distinctive qualities of the development in this phase, to give the Local Authority confidence in what they can expect to be delivered. One way of distilling the particular character of Ty Brychiad might be to draft out the development brief for the adjacent Wren's Nest area, so that the design team and the Local Authority can usefully compare and evaluate the evolution of the principles across the site.

The design team has an aspiration for the development to have a 'controlled randomness', reflecting a settlement pattern that has evolved over time. Delivering this will require rhythm, richness and variation along the main routes, and might be difficult to achieve through the developers' conventional procurement route. However, we support the principle, and the developers could explore opportunities for small clusters of individually designed housing, to achieve variety in building form and plot arrangement. The promoter would remain as master designer, with small packages set out for separate architects to design in detail within the adopted site frameworks and development briefs.

The demographic mix within the development should influence its character. A settled, resident community will include both daytime and evening activities, with social, welfare, pre and post school activities, community and seasonal events adding richness to the living environment. Accommodating these social interactions as well as supporting work from home, can help create 'destinations' within the site. Routes, spaces and building variety can help foster quality of life and a sense of neighbourhood. DCFW would expect to see this reflected in the emerging design.

## **Hierarchy of Streets**

The masterplan showed a main loop route through the scheme, accommodating public transport, with two access points off the existing road. However, the drawings for the current proposal show a departure from this concept. The drawings, which the team acknowledged, represented work in progress, indicates a homogeneous development in terms of street hierarchy, density and the relationship between buildings and streets.

The masterplan previously showed a more defined, and in some cases, more connected frontage, to the main access route than is apparent in the reserved matters information. The design team should reconsider the merits of the original plan, as it could help provide greater variety in the character and function of parts of the street network, currently lost in the latest iteration of the scheme.

The Commission noted that the short route connecting the two road access links, for example, provides the opportunity to investigate better road design incorporating the needs of parking, cycles and pedestrians in the character of the public realm.

## **Cycle and Pedestrian Routes**

The team's objective to prioritise walking and cycling was not clearly conveyed in drawings or in the design of junctions and streets. The absence of a framework showing connections across the project, providing a permeable fabric for cyclists and pedestrians, is a key weakness in the present proposal. These should provide convenient and safe routes to destinations such as shops, work places, schools and community and leisure facilities to encourage commuting by foot and bicycle.

The team should consider innovative solutions to prioritise walking and cycling over car use. Cycle routes and foot paths should join up and be continuous, both within the site and to existing and proposed networks outside the site. The key to the success of these facilities is often how the crossing points with road infrastructure are handled, and this site has opportunities for exemplar solutions to be employed.

A specific example is evident in Bevans Lane, which graphically appears to have been forgotten. Bevans Lane has the potential to add valuable character and a useful cycle and walking route to the scheme. It is important that detail and ideas about this route are committed to and fixed in the drawings.

Ideally, cycle lanes should be clearly differentiated and of sufficient width to provide safe routes alongside other vehicles and pedestrians. Shared pedestrian/cycle facilities should only be considered if other, more appropriate, solutions are not achievable.

## **Parking Strategies**

In the absence of careful planning, the parking strategy will have a negative impact on the streets. Providing adequate on-plot parking and designed-in street parking is essential. There may be different strategies used in different parts of the site, and the Design Commission would encourage the team to explore and test different options. Drawing the cars on plan, section and perspective view drawings will help.

The Design Commission encourages the use of current guidance such as Manual for Streets when designing parking strategies, and vehicle, cycle and pedestrian routes.

## **Green Infrastructure**

The design team talked about the aspiration to create a sequence of green spaces throughout the Ty Brychiad development linked to the woodland setting. To be successful, this idea needs to be designed and delivered with conviction. Each of the green routes and spaces should be clearly defined and have a purpose. The team should prepare a public green spaces network diagram in order to test and refine the idea.

The discussion on the value of a green space, south east of the listed Ty Brychiad, requires the rationale of the process above. The Commission was not convinced by the present solution and suggested this should be reconsidered in the context of the analysis outlined above.

## **Management Strategy**

A planning condition requires that a management regime for the woodland, parks and green space is set up. It was proposed this would involve a management committee with a representative resident trust. Third party responsibility, Groundwork and Community Land Trust were being considered, as well as The Local Authority. It was intended that each household would contribute a small service fee, initially supported by a fund established by the site promoter. We acknowledge the importance of a robust and sustainable regime for the good management of the public green spaces in the long-term.

## **Integrating Sustainability**

For this scheme and future developments, the Design Commission encourages the developer, design team and Local Authority to refer to Welsh Government's *Practice Guidance: Planning for Sustainable Buildings*, which provides good practice guidance on design and planning approaches to delivering integrated sustainability.

## **Delivering Good Quality Detail**

Delivering good quality at a detailed level will be important. The design team and developer have presented some interesting initial ideas on this and should strive to take control of the detail rather than leaving decisions to the builders on-site. This will be especially important where the topography is more steeply sloping, and the detail at boundaries and level-changes is more difficult to resolve. The local authority may wish to insist that the detail for walls, gates and other features are included in the Development Brief due to their importance in the overall design of the scheme.

The team should consider how 'clutter' at the front of houses, such as service incomers, meter boxes and bins can be best accommodated. Boundary treatments might help with this, as might locating these items away from the frontage where appropriate.

We were disappointed that the provision of chimneys was entirely cosmetic and had not emerged as a necessity of a carefully planned energy strategy.

## **Further Engagement**

The Design Commission for Wales welcomes the opportunity to review this scheme and would welcome further opportunities to review progress on this and future phases.

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

## Attendees

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Agent/Client/Developer:	Gareth Hawke, Taylor Wimpey
Designers:	Martin Douglas, pad Design Andrew Wilkinson, Waterman Emma Shaw, Soltys Brewster Jon Wilks, Asbri Planning
Local Authority:	Helen Smith, Torfaen CBC Richard Lewis, Torfaen CBC
Design Review Panel:	
Chair	Roger Ayton
Lead Panellist	Toby Adam Steven Smith Amanda Spence