

# Design Review Report

Penrhys Masterplan

**DCFW Ref: N339**

Meeting of 14<sup>th</sup> May 2025



**Review Status**

Meeting date  
Issue date  
Scheme description  
Scheme location  
Scheme reference number  
Planning status  
Planning status of DCFW comment

**Confidential**

14<sup>th</sup> May 2025  
27<sup>th</sup> May 2025  
Mixed-Use Masterplan  
Penrhys, Ferndale, CF43 3PT  
N339  
Pre-planning  
Material Consideration

## Key Points

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- We welcome the clear passion and drive to support the community at Penrhys.
- More work is needed to demonstrate that the significant challenges the community has historically faced can be overcome with the proposed development.
- A robust analysis is needed of all the reasons why the original development failed. The proposals need to fully address the lessons learnt from the past as well as understand what issues are likely to continue to be a challenge in the future.
- Important aspects of the proposal need to be clear and robust, including the vision and narrative, the existing and proposed public transport services, the community facilities, the mix and location of affordable and private housing, and the phasing of the development.
- The project needs to put the community at the heart of the design and decision-making process. The community should be empowered with honest, open and meaningful dialogue, as well as involved in the co-design of key spaces.
- The proposed use of the Tai ar y Cyd affordable housing pattern book needs further testing to demonstrate if it can successfully work on this steep site or if a more site responsive design is needed.
- The proposals need to be underpinned by a robust business plan.

## Consultations to Date

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This is the first engagement with the Design Commission for Wales.

The project team stated that they are engaging regularly with the existing residents, including monthly drop-in sessions with the community, and the feedback has been that people living in Penrhys want to stay. Residents want to be close to their neighbours, family and the school. There are also people who previously lived in Penrhys who attended the engagement sessions and want to move back. The school and church have been identified as the heart of the community. The engagement has identified that there is local demand to start-up new businesses.

## The Proposal

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The proposal is to completely redevelop Penrhys. It will involve demolishing the existing properties and rebuilding a new development with around 1,000 homes. The project aims to provide better homes for existing residents, bring in new residents and increase the population back to its original extent. The project aims to create a mix of uses to support the housing, including a replacement primary school, church, community facilities, shop and new commercial spaces. The proposed masterplan also includes green spaces for walking and cycling, recreation, play and biodiversity.



*Proposed Framework Masterplan*

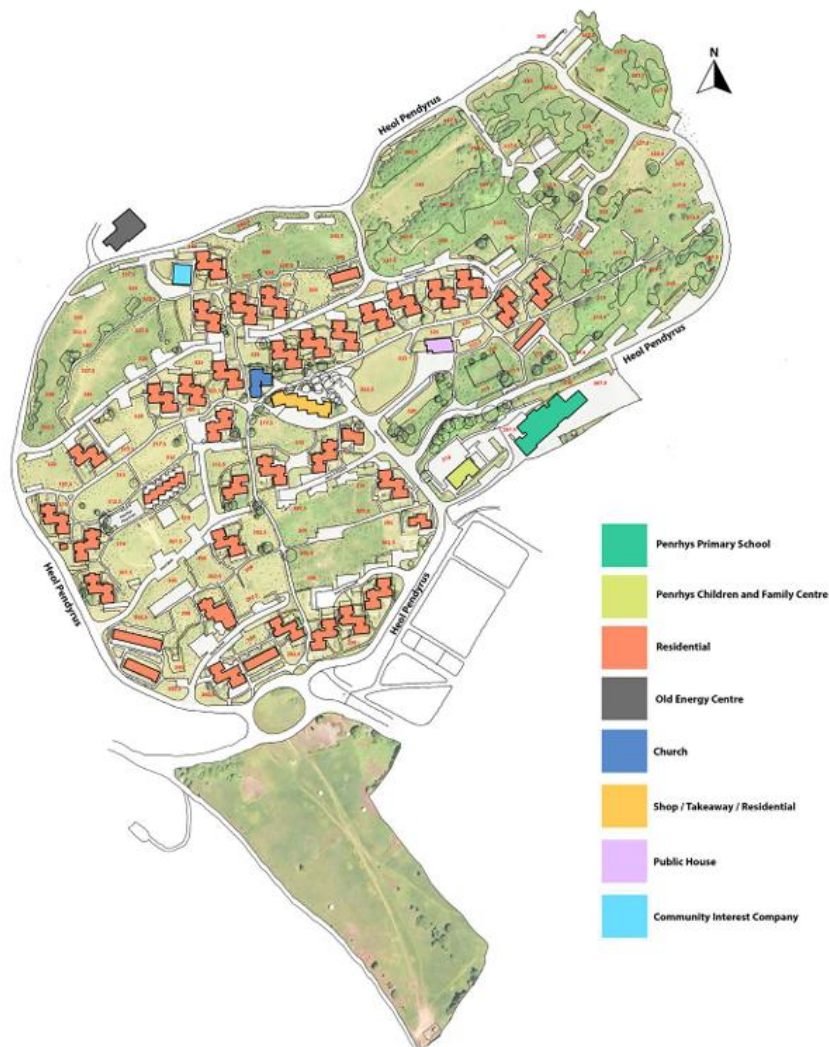
## Context

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Penrhys is a community located towards the peak of the Rhondda Fach and Rhondda Fawr Valleys at the centre of the Rhondda Cynon Taff Borough. The community was originally built as part of a large council housing development of around 950 homes in the 1960s.

The original development and management of the area created a concentration of economic and social deprivation. The area has suffered from crime, drug use, and antisocial behaviour. There have been problems with deterioration of the buildings and the centralised heating system. Many of the homes have been demolished by the council and there are some boarded up properties with no one living in them. As a result, there is lots of vacant land mixed in and around the remaining homes.

There are now only approximately 300 properties remaining, including some empty properties, with around 550 people living there. Nearly all the remaining properties are affordable housing, with only ten owner occupiers. There is a small primary school and community facilities.



*Existing Site Plan*

# Main Points

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## **Location**

The site is brownfield land and is proposed to be a strategic site in Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council's Local Development Plan. As such, the principle of development is accepted by the Local Planning Authority. However, given the history and decline of the original development, strong scrutiny and a robust case is needed to build a successful significant new housing development in this location again.

Penrhys is relatively isolated from nearby towns and amenities as a result of the site's location at the peak of two valleys. Its remoteness makes access to education, employment, shops, and services difficult. The site's location towards the top of the hill also means it is exposed to the elements. The location makes living there in extreme weather challenging and has likely contributed to the deterioration of the buildings. These challenges need to be addressed directly.

## **Analysis**

The presentation provided a thorough analysis of the failings in the modernist design of the original properties. It is clear that the original design did not reflect what is now recognised as good practice in urban design. However, the material and discussion did not answer all our questions around the wider socio-economic and management issues. We are still unclear why some properties were demolished, some have been left vacant and others have remained. It was also not clear why some people have moved out and others have stayed.

Further analysis and explanation of the history of the estate is needed to fully understand why the original development failed and to build a stronger narrative of the place. This analysis needs to also identify what the remaining issues are in Penrhys and whether or not they can be addressed by the proposed redevelopment. Ultimately, the challenges need to be recognised and a clearer understanding developed of how the scheme will address them to create a sustainable community.

The analysis should also demonstrate empathy and acknowledgment of the mistakes made in the past and the effects this has had on the communities. Furthermore, the residents should provide a clear steer of what they think went wrong in the past.

## **Retrofit**

While we understand the remaining homes suffer from cold, damp, and structurally poor housing conditions, it is good practice to first consider the re-use and retrofit of existing buildings and infrastructure before demolition. Based on the information presented, there

appears to be a strong case for demolition, but we would encourage a thorough analysis of the potential for retrofit. This should include seeking the views of the people living in the homes as well as assessment of the physical infrastructure.

## **People**

We welcome the emphasis placed on engaging the local community. The material presented and described in the review suggests the estate has a strong sense of community and that there is a desire for existing residents to stay and that other people who used to live there want to move back.

Involving the community is essential to build trust and create a successful place that meets the needs of the residents. The stated commitment of Trivallis to co-production is promising. Local people should be at the heart of the design and decision-making process as much as possible, being mindful that the area has been neglected by the authorities in the past and communities may not feel empowered to provide an honest and open dialogue about how they feel.

Meaningful conversations and contributions from the community is needed, using an asset-based approach, where people are made to feel valued and an important part of the process. Co-design of key spaces with the residents should be encouraged, such as the parks and landscaping.

We understand that the existing residents are proposed to be moved into the first phase of the new development. It is essential that these residents have a strong say in this move. They should be presented with clear options about whether they stay, move into the new housing or move elsewhere. If existing owner-occupiers are moved, they should not be financially disadvantaged if there is a gap in the cost of their existing and new home. Consideration needs to be given to how to retain the sense of community when moving people and the impact of concentrating existing residents in one part of the site.

## **Movement**

A clearer picture is needed of the existing and proposed walking, cycling and public transport infrastructure and services. An understanding of car ownership levels of existing residents is needed to understand travel behaviours, use of public transport and implications for residents' mobility.

Our understanding is that a contributing factor to the estate's decline was its remoteness and residents' difficulty accessing education, employment, shops, and services without a car. However, in the meeting it was suggested the bus services are actually quite regular. Nevertheless, the material presented states that it is the intention to improve the bus

services. Improving bus services is usually difficult in practice and clarity is needed about engagement with bus providers and how this will be achieved.

Ystrad Rhondda railway station is about a 30 minute walk and, with the topography, cycling would be challenging. Many people will need to drive or use buses to get to the railway station. Electric bikes may offer a potential alternative means to get to the station and should be considered as part of a comprehensive movement approach to the redevelopment of the site.

The proposed scheme seeks to create a pedestrian and cycle friendly environment within the development and to improve wider active travel infrastructure. Creating a good environment within the development is important and improvements should be made to connect Penrhys to the neighbouring communities, but realism is needed about the implications of the topography.

Overall, good quality bus services are essential to the success of Penrhys and for its residents to have travel choices and prevent people feeling isolated. The impact of potentially higher car ownership of future residents should also be considered and managed.

### **Mixed Use**

We welcome the ambition to create a mix of uses within the development, with new retail, commercial, sports, leisure and tourism opportunities highlighted. It is also promising to hear that there is local demand to start-up local businesses.

A mix of uses is important for community development, local business growth and access to local jobs, services and facilities. However, these stated ambitions need to be realistic and robust to ensure what is promised is delivered. Consideration needs to be given to the viability of these proposed facilities and whether there will be a sufficient population to sustain them. A robust business plan is needed to demonstrate how the proposed mix of uses will work in practice.

### **Housing**

Penrhys has historically been primarily a council housing estate with a concentration of economic and social deprivation. We understand that only ten of the existing approximate 300 properties are currently owned by the occupiers. The stated ambition is to retain the number of affordable housing at around 300 properties (30%). It is important the community is socially mixed, with a mix of housing types and tenures, and as such we welcome the intention to provide a mix of affordable and private housing to help create a diverse community. Market analysis is going to be important to ensure there is demand

for private housing in this location and that the proposed tenure mix is realistic and based on a robust business plan.

It is important that affordable housing is mixed with private housing across the site and not concentrated in one part of the site. If the existing affordable housing is intended to be moved in the first phase, it is unclear how this will be mixed with private housing. It is also essential that the affordable housing is located close to the bus stops and not on the periphery of the site. A clear plan of where the affordable housing is proposed to be located and how it will be mixed with private housing is required.

In the meeting it was suggested that the houses for sale would not seek to replicate the terraced housing in the surrounding valleys and that the development would instead seek to create more four bedroom detached houses with multiple on-plot parking spaces. Compact development forms, such as terraced housing, have many design, placemaking and sustainability benefits that should not be overlooked.

The scheme proposes to utilise the Tai ar y Cyd affordable housing pattern book for phase one. There was very limited time to look at the specific proposals for this phase in the review. The use of the pattern book needs testing to better understand how it will work in practice in response to the site and its context. The topography of Penrhys will make the use of the pattern book challenging and the material presented in the review showed the need to adapt the housing layouts and incorporate features, such as bridge accesses, raised external walkways and stepped gardens, that could negatively affect the quality of the living environment. Further testing of the use of the pattern book on the site is needed to establish whether it is appropriate on this steep site or whether a more site responsive design solution would work better in this circumstance.

## **Phasing**

Clarity is required about the timings of the construction and in what phases the site will be developed. If the development is planned to be built over 10 or 20 years, what will the place feel like to live in the short to medium term? How will the phasing affect the provision and viability of transport and community facilities? The timings need to be reflected in the masterplan.

The proposed first phase is to the north of the site. Consideration should be given to whether this would be better located towards the more accessible entrance to the site. We urge that sufficient time is taken to undertake the necessary wider analysis, testing and design work before progressing with the first phase of development.



We welcome the stated intention to front load the provision of community facilities. Having local facilities from the start is important for the first residents living there and building the sense of community. Penrhys benefits from already having some of these community facilities and these should not be demolished before the new facilities are built. This aspect of the proposal needs to be clearer and supported by a robust phasing and business plan.

### **Learning from Elsewhere**

We encourage a thorough exploration of other examples of council housing regeneration projects and what can be learnt from these. Although other examples will differ from Penrhys, it will be helpful to understand what has and hasn't worked well elsewhere.

## **Next Steps**

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We strongly recommend further Design Review sessions for both the masterplan and the more detailed design of the different phases. We can arrange longer sessions to allow time to cover the proposals in sufficient detail. Please contact us to arrange this as soon as possible to ensure we can secure sessions at the right time.

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

## Attendees

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Client:	Louise Attwood, Trivallis Kathryn Evans, Trivallis
Design Team:	Liam Hopkins, The Urbanists Jamie Donegan, The Urbanists Caroline Walsh, The Urbanists Robert Bathgate, Stride Treglown Jacqui Pollard, Stride Treglown
Local Planning Authority:	Chris Jones, Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council

### **DCFW Design Review Panel**

Chair:	Jen Heal, DCFW Deputy Chief Executive
Panel:	Aisha Ali, Lead Panellist Clare Wilding Jonathan Adams Simon Carne Carole-Anne Davies, DCFW Chief Executive Max Hampton, DCFW Design Advisor
Observers:	Laura Norman, Transport for Wales Louie Vaughan, Transport for Wales

## 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.

Mark Hallett is a Board Member at Trivallis and a Design Commission Panel Member but has no involvement in this project on behalf of the Design Commission.