

Brynmawr Town Centre Visioning Report For Link Sites

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1.0 Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to set out the rationale for public sector intervention in acquiring the Link Sites. Having set out the rationale, the redevelopment potential of the site is examined, setting out the form of development which could be brought forward at the site.

The Link Sites include NMC, Bus Depot and Deri Holdings and are the key sites between the existing town centre and the Lakeside development.

1.1 Background

In 2001, the decline of Brynmawr was identified as a concern by the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) and Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council. In response, Macgregor Smith in association with DTZ were commissioned to produce an Urban Design Strategy and Masterplan for the town. The strategy set out a framework to shape the future regeneration of Brynmawr, which was based on addressing the following issues:

- To retain existing employment and commercial activities within the town;
- To create a high quality environment meeting the requirements of the town's existing and future generations;
- To provide a general quality of environment which helps to improve the overall image of the area to potential investors and visitors;
- To facilitate and support new investment in the town which strengthens and diversifies the town's economic base; and
- To provide accessibility for all to, and within the town, and make the town a safe and attractive living and working environment.

In response to the above issues, the following objectives for the strategy were developed:

- To engender the revitalisation of the town centre;
- To create a unique and attractive destination for visitors and local residents, with a distinctive sense of place;
- To integrate the existing communities of Brynmawr, with the emerging communities of the Lakeside Development through social interaction, improved permeability and accessibility;
- To provide a robust and seamless network of public realm, parks and open space which enriches the public environment and provides facilities for the local community at every level; with particular emphasis on the shared use of public open space facilities to integrate new and existing communities;
- To review traffic management and parking issues to ensure optimum efficiency of traffic movement and use of the car park areas;
- To provide improved public amenity facilities for the local community, in particular for young people; and
- To identify opportunities for future economic development within the town.

The strategy identified that it was important to create effective linkages between the town centre, the Lakeside housing development and the Asda store and adjacent retail units which are now developed out and known as Lakeside Retail Park.

1.2 Current Policy Context

Any future development proposals will need to be brought forward within the policy context set out in the documents below as well as the original Urban Design Strategy and Masterplan.

1.2.1 The Wales Spatial Plan

The Wales Spatial Plan provides a framework for the future spatial development of Wales. Blaenau Gwent, along with neighbouring authorities, has been identified as part of the South East – Capital Network Zone. The vision for the Capital Network is:

'An innovative skilled area offering a high quality of life – international yet distinctively Welsh. It will compete internationally, be increasing its global viability through stronger links between the Valleys and the coast and the UK and Europe, helping spread prosperity within the area and benefiting other parts of Wales.'

The strategy for the Wales Spatial Plan for the Capital Network is:

'To strengthen and reintegrate the existing system of towns and cities within South East Wales so that the area functions as a coherent urban network, and can compete internationally. Integrated transport is crucial to this; and

To work with our partners to develop an ambitious programme of joined up regeneration action along the Heads of the Valley corridor which will complement the upgrade of the A465. The aim of this will be; to improve the quality of life, retain and attract residents, and increase prosperity of the whole area focusing, initially, on unlocking the potential of Merthyr Tydfil and Ebbw Vale'.

1.2.2 People, Places, Futures: The Wales Spatial Plan 2008 Update Consultation

The Vision for the South East region has not changed. The aim of the Spatial Plan is to try to increase the network strength into a super-region where by the population is large enough to compete with other EU centres for investment and growth. Furthermore, it is identified that the region is separated into three distinct sections.

- **City/coast:** includes main cities of Cardiff and Newport and smaller distinct communities
- **Heads of the Valleys plus:** an area compromised of Upper Valleys of South East Wales facing serious challenges as a result of economic restructuring following manufacture dedine.
- **Connections corridor:** Mid-Valleys and rural South East Wales under pressure for economic and housing development as urban overspill. Challenges of deprivation and focus on role are a connecting strip between city growth and major concentrations of deprivation in the valleys.

The plan also sets out 14 key hub settlements in Wales that have a critical role to play in the city region. However, Brynmawr does not form one of these hub centres in Blaenau Gwent. Three further Strategic Opportunity Areas (SOA) have been identified:



- Developments linked to dualling the Heads of the Valleys Road
- The area around Llantrisant and North West Cardiff
- Development in the Vale of Glamorgan linked to the St Athan military academy

1.2.3 Heads of the Valleys Strategy

'Heads – We Win' is the consultation document for the Strategic Framework for the development of the Heads of the Valleys area.

The vision of the Strategic Framework is that, by 2020, the Heads of the Valleys area will be:

- A culturally rich, dynamic network of vibrant, safer communities;
- A place where people want to live, work and play-with a sustainable, high quality of life and a thriving population;
- Helping to drive the success of South East Wales as an internationally recognised Capital Region.

This was followed in June 2006 by 'Turning Heads.... A Strategy for the Heads of the Valleys 2020'. The strategy builds on the framework and provides a context for regenerating communities in Blaenau Gwent. The focus of the strategy is on 5 priority themes:

- An attractive and well-used natural, historic and built environment;
- A vibrant economic landscape offering new opportunities;
- A well-educated, skilled and healthier population;
- An appealing and coherent tourism and leisure experience; and
- Public confidence in a shared bright future.

1.2.4 Local Development Plan Issues Paper, July 2007

The document identifies that Blaenau Gwent's population has been declining since 1921 and during the period 1991 to 2001, the County experienced the third highest net out commuting in Wales (3%). Current issues in terms of population are identified as:

- Underlying population decline
- Losses of 200 per annum as a result of natural change
- Net out migration in the 0-45 age group
- An ageing population structure
- High proportion of houses built pre 1919
- High proportion of private houses in poor state of repair
- High vacancy rate

Issues for next 15 years:

- The need to stem out migration
- The need to create a more balanced population
- The unknown impact of international migration patterns
- The implications of Welsh Housing Quality Standard on Council stock
- Ensuring a range of house types are built to meet aspirations and retain residents

- Tackling problem vacant buildings and making the most of voids in the town centres
- Improving the unfitness levels in private sector housing
- Delivering affordable housing solutions

The aim of the Issues Paper is to stem population decline and encourage the growth of the population. The Paper identifies a number of growth scenarios with annual completions rising from below 100 per year to 200 in the South East Wales growth scenario and 250 in the high growth scenario based on the Housing Market Assessment. The aim is to concentrate the housing growth at key locations within Blaenau Gwent including Brynmawr.

1.2.5 Emerging Blaenau Gwent Regeneration Strategy

In 2007 the Welsh Assembly Government with its partners Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council, commissioned a review of the Regeneration Strategy for Blaenau Gwent.

The key strands of the ambitious 2002 Regeneration Strategy have been implemented and is continuing to bring real benefits to Blaenau Gwent. However, it is vital that the strategic partners continue with an exciting and challenging vision for the future of the Borough; and an updated strategy which will deliver this vision throughout Blaenau Gwent.

The new Regeneration Strategy has taken account of a wide range of initiatives and policies being developed at the national, valleys and local level. The One Wales agenda for the government of Wales has identified a vision of a fair, prosperous, confident and outgoing Wales, which creates prosperity and jobs in living communities. The emerging Wales Spatial Plan has identified a network of 'hub settlements' throughout South East Wales – employment and service centres with a critical role to play in delivering that vision.

Blaenau Gwent is well placed in this network with four hub settlements identified – Ebbw Vale, Tredegar, Abertillery and Brynmawr. The strategic partners fully support this vision for Blaenau Gwent and have placed the idea of accessible, sustainable and inclusive and prosperous Community Hubs at the centre of the Blaenau Gwent Regeneration Strategy for 2018. These Hubs – in the areas of Ebbw Vale, Tredegar, Upper Ebbw Fach and Lower Ebbw Fach – will be the focus of the key investment programmes and will create real opportunities throughout their local areas, offering a wide range of facilities and services.

1.2.6 Summary

The above demonstrates that there is clearly a need to successfully regenerate the town centre of Brynmawr to ensure that it provides a range of services for the local community to halt the decline of the population in Blaenau Gwent and actively encourage people to stay or relocate to the area to help the Council achieve its growth ambitions.



2.0 Brynmawr Town Centre – The changes 2001 and 2008

This section of the report reviews the current town centre offer, examining the changes which have occurred since 2001, identifying what still needs to be addressed in the town and whether the redevelopment of the Link Site will help to achieve the successful regeneration of the town.

2.1 Town Centre Environment

Improvements made since 2001 have upgraded the general ambience of the town centre and considerably reduced the dominance of the car. Improvements include: the narrowing of the carriageway; the introduction of raised pedestrian crossings and new paving, and; the improvement of a number of shop fronts throughout the town centre. The completion of King Street Car Park providing an additional 31 car parking spaces which has enabled a convenient source of car parking. Whilst the town centre initially benefited from these improvements, since the opening of the Asda store in 2006 and the subsequent occupation of retail units at Lakeside Retail Park, concerns have been expressed about the negative impact on the town centre of the store and adjacent units opening and the need to maximise the benefits of the new developments for the town centre.

2.2 Retail and Leisure Offer

Figure 1 shows the breakdown of Brynmawr town centre by use class in 2001, 2004, 2006 and 2008.



Figure 1: Brynmawr Town Centre by Use Class

Use Class	2001		2004		2006		2008		Change 2004-2006		Change 2006-2008	
	No. of Units	% of Units	No. of Units	% of Units	No. of Units	% of Units	No. of Units	% of Units	No. of Units	% of Units	No. of Units	% of Units
A1 (Shops)	77	45%	78	45%	76	44%	70	42%	-2	-1%	-6	-2%
A2 (Financial & Professional Services)	10	6%	16	9%	18	10%	19	11%	2	1%	1	1%
A3 (Food & Drink)	19	11%	17	10%	20	11%	21	13%	3	1%	1	2%
B1 (Business)	2	1%	3	2%	3	1%	3	2%	0	-1%	0	1%
C3 (Dwelling Houses)	43	25%	40	23%	34	20%	34	20%	-6	-3%	0	0%
D1 (Non-Residential Institutions)	3	2%	4	2%	4	2%	4	2%	0	0%	0	0%
Sui Generis	1	1%	3	2%	3	1%	3	2%	0	-1%	0	1%
Vacant	18	10%	13	7%	11	6%	14	8%	-2	-1%	3	2%

The Asda store at Lakeside has been operating for over 18 months and provides a wide-ranging retail offer including both convenience goods and comparison goods. In addition, the retail units are all occupied except for one unit. Whilst at a previous review completed in 2006, it was considered too early to decide whether the foodstore would threaten or complement the existing town centre offer, the changes in the health of the town centre since 2006 provide a good indication of the impact that Asda is having on the town. The main changes since 2006 when the Asda store opened include:

- A 2% decrease in the number of units occupied by A1.
- An increase of 1% in the number of A2 Professional and Financial Services including the Working Links Job Centre and a new accountancy firm.
- A 2% increase in the number of vacant units. This is the most significant change.
- A number of new units have opened since 2006 including a beauty salon, a cosmetics shop and a Chinese takeaway.
- A few occupiers have relocated within the town centre such as Smart Deli and Altered Images.

Whilst the increase in the number of A2 occupiers in the town centre is positive, the reduction of units occupied by A1 occupiers is of concern, especially considering that Somerfield has closed on the High Street. Whilst, accepting that the closure is a result of the parent company going bust, the closure of the unit is only likely to compound the negative impact of Asda store on the town centre reducing the overall convenience provision in the town centre. This increases the importance of improving linkages



between the town centre and the Asda store and adjacent units. There is clear scope for the two resources to complement each other. However, the complimentary is not working that effectively at the current time and there is clearly a need to improve linkages between the town centre, Asda store and Lakeside Retail Park.

2.2.1 Summary

From the above it is clear that Brynmawr town centre has altered since 2001 in a positive manner. The review demonstrates that Brynmawr has been subject to a range of public realm and shop front improvements since 2001, which have helped to enhance the general quality of the town centre environment. A number of the key weaknesses identified in 2001, such as the poor quality of the physical environment and conflict between vehicular and pedestrian movement in the town, have been addressed. Despite this, it is clear that the opening of the Asda store and Lakeside Retail Park is starting to have a negative impact on the town centre with the Urban Design Strategy and Master Plan (2001) identifying the provision of retail development at Lakeside as a potential threat to the vitality and viability of the town centre. Therefore, following the opening of the Asda Store and Lakeside Retail Park it is very important that effective linkages are put in place between the Lakeside development, Asda Store and the town centre. This is to ensure that the supermarket becomes a part of the town centre offer as opposed to an alternative to the town centre, indeed, there is huge potential to encourage sustainable linked trips whereby people drawn to the supermarket and the Lakeside Retail Park can easily access other services in the town centre (and vice versa). However, the current available evidence suggests that the Asda store and Lakeside Retail Park is actually impacting negatively on the town centre which increases the importance of achieving effective linkages between the store, adjacent units and town centre.

The strengths of the town must be built upon in order to make it a draw not only for local people but also the wider area. The Link Site offers the opportunity to build on these strengths. Brynmawr itself has a number of strengths, it could act as an important 'gateway' to the Brecon Beacons National Park and has traditional links to the local agricultural sector. As such there is an opportunity to explore the potential for a wider retail offer linked to these areas. Whilst no definitive research has been done on the potential market, there may be scope to capitalise on these factors to encourage for example: locally sustainable farmers markets, outdoor pursuit facilities and provisions for small scale local businesses. Based on the review of the health of the town centre, there is evidence to suggest that the opening of the Asda store and Lakeside Retail Park is starting to act negatively on the town centre. This provides the need to improve linkages between the Lakeside development and the town centre. The acquisition and redevelopment of the Link Site will provide the opportunity to ensure that the new development at Lakeside benefits the town centre. It is therefore concluded that the acquisition of the Link Site is justified as a positive step in addressing the decline of the town centre and meeting the objectives of the masterplan for the town. The next section of the report reviews the likely redevelopment potential of the Link Site.



3.0 Future Prospects

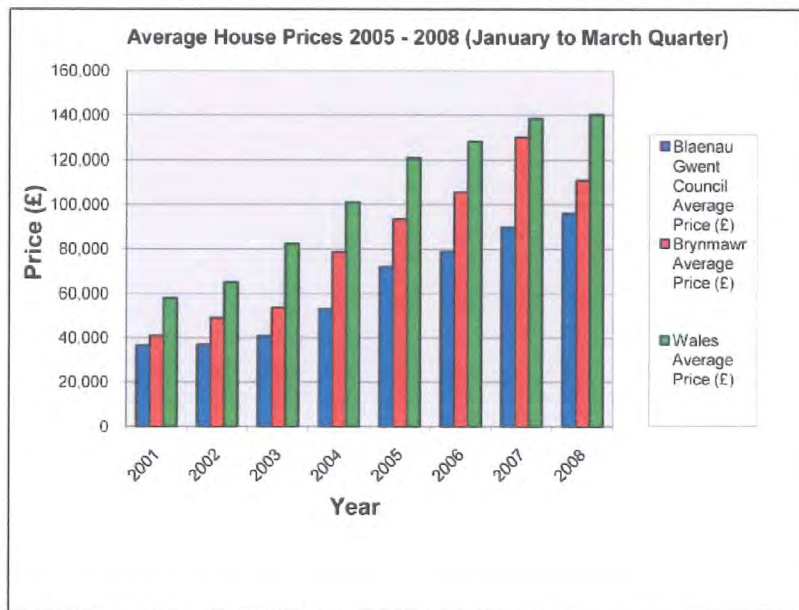
This section reviews the operation of the commercial market review, identifying implications and opportunities for the future development of Brynmawr, in particular the Link Site.

3.1 Residential

The residential market has performed extremely well during recent years, especially in the Heads of the Valleys Region yet the housing market in Wales is now settling after a period of strong house price growth in the years up to 2006. House prices across the UK fell by 0.3% in February, though prices in the three months to February were 0.2% higher than in the previous quarter. On an annual basis Welsh house prices have increased by 1.3%. It is evident that buyer confidence has been hit by the increase in interest rates, yet the more recent interest rate cuts are predicted to have a potential positive influence on the market through the second quarter of 2008, though these will be restricted to marginal. Mortgage approvals fell by 39% between January 2007 and January 2008. This is underlined through National Statistics that show an unprecedented increase in rental sectors, coupled with the first ever reduction in the number of owner-occupiers.

Since the 2006 review, the average house price in Wales has increased by around 9.5% and currently stands at £140,289². Over the previous period, 2004 to 2006 house prices increased approximately 100%. This severe reduction in rate of increase represents an overall slowing of the housing market across Wales that is reflected on regional and local levels. During the same period, house prices in Blaenau Gwent have increased by 21.5% currently standing at £95,979 which is still significantly lower than the Welsh average, whilst the rate of increase has also fallen significantly from the 2004 to 2006 period at 115%. Comparatively the average house price in Brynmawr is £110,916, which has fallen slightly over the 2006-2008 period; this is likely to be attributed to the increased interest rates during the final quarter of 2007, alongside a restabilising of the local market as prices were significantly inflated up to 2005 due to a period of unprecedented growth in the market.

Figure 2 : House Prices 2005-2008 (January to March Quarter)



² Source: HM Land Registry (April-June 2006)



Despite the more subdued housing market conditions across Wales, there are pockets of strength. Caerphilly, the best performer, saw a 16% rise in the past year in its average house price with buyers attracted to its relatively affordable housings. Ebbw Vale and Pontypool both recorded an 11% increase over the past year.

Current House Builder Activity

Despite a slight fall in the average house price in Brynmawr, large national house builders are still showing an interest in the area. Taylor Wimpey has significant presence in Brynmawr at Glas Y Dorlan, Blaina Road. This development consists of a mix of apartments, semi-detached houses and town houses, ranging between prices of £113,995 to £165,995. There are 62 dwellings in total at the site.

Redrow Homes currently has a development at Ebbw Vale of 72 dwellings at CaeFfwrnais, which includes a range of 1 and 2 bedroom apartments and 2, 3 and 4 bedroom houses. Prices begin at £132,995 for a 2-bedroom apartment, £173,995 for a 3-bedroom terrace, and up to £179,995 for a 4-bedroom terrace.

Other smaller local house builders are also present in Brynmawr, building detached family homes either as individual projects or as part of smaller development sites of less than 10 dwellings. Such properties are on the market for between £180,000 and £249,000.

Future Prospects Looking forward Blaenau Gwent CBC is aiming to sustain and increase the population of Blaenau Gwent through the Local Development Plan period to 2021. The increase in population will lead to an increase in demand for housing in the area. The Link Site provides a sustainable brownfield location to provide housing to help Blaenau Gwent achieve its growth ambitions. If a readily available site at the Link Site could be brought to the market whilst the market is currently experiencing a down turn, it is likely to generate residential developer interest. In terms of unit types, there is likely to be demand for 1 and 2 bed apartments and 2 and 3 bed semi-detached units. This type of product will help to diversify the local housing stock which is currently dominated by terraced properties. The actual split between the different types of housing will be determined by the actual purchaser and their particular product types.

3.2 Offices

The office market in Wales is focused on Cardiff and along the M4 corridor. These areas have experienced considerable growth in office stock over the last ten years. In contrast, other parts of South Wales have seen limited growth, with demand coming from local professional firms and existing business expansion. In the sub-region, only Newport can be viewed as having a commercial market of any strength. Considerable effort is being put into promoting the office market in Newport Central Area with the central area masterplan identifying capacity for an additional 56,000 sq m (0.6 million sq ft). In addition, the strategic masterplan for West Newport identifies capacity for circa 140,000 sq m (1.5 m sq ft) of business space. During the last 6 – 9 months, due to the credit crunch market activity has slowed with developers and occupiers becoming much more cautious about developing on a speculative basis, especially in areas which are considered to have limited demand. It is also widely thought that with the introduction of the removal of empty rates relief on office blocks from 1st April 2009, this will also slow the pace of speculative development.

³ Source: HBOS Halifax House Price Index (March 6th 2008)



The office sector within Blaenau Gwent is dominated by the public sector. It is highly unlikely that the local authority area would be able to attract a speculative office development, without at least a part pre-let. This is often the case even within Cardiff. The private sector is very unlikely to develop speculatively in Brynmawr due to the perceived lack of demand. Any development would need to be supported by public sector funding.

As with the majority of the valleys towns, the office market continues to be dominated by provision for public administration and local government services. In addition to this, the commercial market is still focused on small-scale premises for local professional services and limited provision of ancillary office accommodation for manufacturing occupiers. Since the development of the Urban Design Strategy and Master Plan for Brynmawr in 2001, Brynmawr has not attracted any significant office development. However, the provision of professional services in the town centre has increased significantly; the number of A2 Professional & Financial services has doubled.

Future Prospects Brynmawr continues not to have a commercial office market and is very unlikely to develop a significant office market. However, within the context of the aim to sustain and grow the population of the County demand may be generated for small-scale pavilion style offices with units ranging from 50 sq m (493 sq ft) to 500 sq m (4,930 sq ft). Even within this context any development in the short term would need to be subsidised by the public sector.

3.3 Leisure

Provision and retention of leisure facilities in town centres actively promotes vitality and viability – increasing consumer dwell times and extending operating hours; especially in terms of the evening economy. Achieving a balance of quality facilities to compliment the retail and employment offer is an important planning objective. However, in recent years the leisure market has experienced difficult trading conditions influenced by the slowing of the UK economy. Many areas of the UK are considered to be reaching saturation and there is a general consensus that the leisure market in South Wales has reached saturation point. Operators are experiencing much more competitive trading conditions with all sectors of the market affected.

The health and fitness sector has experienced dramatic growth since the mid 1990's but many locations are considered to have reached saturation, including South Wales.

There may be potential for capitalising on Brynmawr's location as a gateway to the countryside to the north. There are a number of potential outdoor pursuits that could be explored, the Brecon Beacons National Park to the north offers numerous activities including mountain biking, hiking, horse riding and caving.

The hotel market has become more competitive and branding / product differentiation has become increasingly important during the last decade. The hotel sector continues to experience difficult trading conditions, with many operators cutting back expansion programmes. However, demand still remains for good roadside locations within easy reach of the main road corridors.

The Market Hall Cinema remains the principal leisure amenity in Brynmawr. The cinema serves the populations of Brynmawr, Ebbw Vale, Abertillery, Blaenavon, Tredegar and Rhumney and opens every evening showing a different film each week. In terms of national operators, Whitbread and Brains operate single restaurant / pub style operations and although there are a number of other pubs in the town they are



either owned by private landlords or small pub companies and the quality and condition of the units varies widely. In 2007, Marstons opened up a public house adjacent to the Asda store, which whilst increasing the leisure offer of Brynmawr its proximity to the town centre is considered to be poor and the positive benefit on the town centre is considered to be questionable.

Future Prospects

Whilst, we are not currently aware of any leisure requirements for Brynmawr, with the increase in housing provision and Blaenau Gwent's agenda to grow the population in the future, the resultant increase in population will help to improve the attractiveness of Brynmawr to leisure operators in the future. There are a number of key messages in terms of providing sites which will prove attractive to potential leisure operators. Sites need to be easily accessible and visible from the main road network. In addition, due to many of them relying on night time trade, they require adequate levels of car parking. Potentially the vertical mix of uses, with retail and leisure units on the ground floor and apartments above may provide an opportunity to provide space in the town which will help to increase operator interest in the town. The most suitable location for such uses at the Link Site is either adjacent to Lake Road, or on land at the North of the site (the former NMC Factory and bus depot) which will help to increase linkages to the town centre.

3.4 Retail

Britain's retail landscape has changed dramatically over the last three decades. The traditional high street, which was once so dominant, now competes with a variety of new trading locations and attractions, ranging from shopping malls to leisure parks. Today, the high street accounts for less than 45% of Britain's total retail floorspace compared with 75% at the beginning of the 1980's.

The changing retail landscape of Britain has had a significant impact on the role and function of town centres around the UK, which traditionally provided services for the local population. These functions have been eroded due to increased shopper and visitor mobility, growth in out-of-town stores and changing shopper and visitor expectations.

In terms of future prospects for the retail sector, although the UK economy potentially faces the prospect of a downturn over the short term, it is still in a better position compared with the recession of the late 1980's and early 1990's. With the so-called credit crunch the retail market is increasingly challenging but there is continued retailer and consumer demand for the right product in the right location.

Retailers will favour locations which has active frontage with high pedestrian footfall. In addition, when making investment decisions, retailers will review the demographics of a local area to determine the spending power of the potential catchment. The better the demographic profile of an area, the more likely retailers are to invest in an area. Therefore, the diversification of the population at Brynmawr through the introduction of new people to the town and its immediate catchment will help to attract further retailer investment to the town.

Brynmawr combines a mix of convenience and comparison goods retail units. The town centre is dominated by local independent retailers, which are supplemented by a range of local services including banks, a post office, travel agents, estate agents, and takeaways. There is only a limited presence of national retailers. The new Asda supermarket lies on the edge of the Town Centre and offers a range of convenience and comparison retail goods.



4.0 Potential Opportunity to Redevelopment the Link Site

Set within the context of the above information, it is considered that the redevelopment of the Link Site is fundamental to the successful regeneration of Brynmawr town centre. It is of utmost importance to ensure that the 'new' expenditure is capitalised upon, and that the superstore and Lakeside Retail Park is integrated with the town centre. This will enable the town centre to benefit from the 'anchor' effect that Asda store had on letting all but one of the adjacent units. Based on the above, there are a number of key issues which underlie the consideration of future potential development of the Link Site, including:

- The need to establish and encourage sustainable linked trips between the town centre and Asda superstore and Lakeside Retail Park;
- The need to create physical linkages between the town centre and the Asda superstore and adjacent units to attract further expenditure to the town centre;
- The need to broaden the retail and leisure offer of the town centre;
- The need to provide an environment to encourage private sector activity going forward, especially retail and leisure occupiers;
- The need to encourage residential development within the town to create a more vibrant centre and increase the catchment population;
- The enabling role that residential development could perform in terms of enhancing private sector activity.

The redevelopment of the site will help to achieve the vision established for Brynmawr in 2001 and help to ensure that the town centre benefits from presence of the Asda superstore and Lakeside Retail Park development. Having completed a review of the current offer of Brynmawr and future prospects of Brynmawr, it is considered that the residential-led redevelopment of the site offers the greatest benefits to the regeneration of Brynmawr. The residential-led redevelopment of the site will help Blaenau Gwent CBC's objective of sustaining and increasing the residential population which in turn will help to regenerate the town centre by increasing footfall which should also make the town centre more attractive to potential occupiers. The leisure offer of Brynmawr is currently considered to be limited and the potential exists to set-a-side space to attract commercial leisure facilities in the future, which would help to increase facilities for the local community and attract more visitors to the town, helping Brynmawr to capitalise on its proximity to the Brecon Beacons National Park.

In terms of enabling the retail and leisure space to come forward at the Link Site it is increasingly common for the vertical mixing of space, with retail or leisure units being provided on the ground floor and residential above. This type of development is considered to be sustainable reducing the need to travel with facilities provided close to residential accommodation. Whilst the physical linkage will certainly facilitate movements between the town centre and the superstore, it is necessary for the town centre to improve its offer in order to attract that trade. Indeed, the current offer is limited and it is necessary to explore potential opportunities which could contribute to an enhanced retail offer. We have noted some potential options including links to sustainable local farmers markets and to outdoor pursuits associated with the nearby National Park.



5.0 Site Context

5.1 NMC/Bus Depot (2.275Ha)

Figure 1 shows the site location and boundaries. The site has a fall of 9m from north east to south west, and occupies a large site mid way between Asda and the town centre. The boundaries vary in character; the northern side being opposite residential frontage on Warwick Road and the entrance to Welfare Park; Blauna Road on the east forms a major entrance into the town centre; the Asda development to the south has included boundary landscape and fencing up to the boundary; the western edge is defined by a row of conifer trees, but a plot of rough ground in Chelverton ownership forms the interface with Lakeside Housing.

The current large scale buildings and the conifer tree screens block views across and over the site, but there is potential when cleared to frame key views and change the perception of visual and physical linkage with the town centre.

Surrounding road and pedestrian links are numerous, and a new pedestrian link must be as accessible and visible as possible to encourage use. However, level changes are a major constraint and would need careful consideration.

5.2 Deri Holdings Land (3.3 Ha)

Part of this land ownership is the former scrap-yard site. It is rural in aspect, with views to the Parc Nant-y-Waun and lake to the north west. However, residential use could be regarded as a natural extension to the Brynmawr development envelope, linking the residential areas of Warwick Road and Waunheulog. This conforms with the UDP, and would also build on the Lakeside Housing area. Former mining is evident with 5 capped mine shafts being a major constraint.

5.3 Waunheulog Estate (2.9 Ha)

Although various community based initiatives have been carried out here, with significant benefits, there is an option to relocate this community on the Deri Holdings land to the north. This would have a number of benefits but primarily it would provide better, more sustainable housing. This has been mooted as an option but at present there are no firm proposals. The Waunheulog areas could then be demolished and further housing developed. Although the council ownership of this land is a total of 5.1 Ha, only the estate area would be redeveloped, as the remainder is rising up the hillside, and may become open space and play area for future housing.

The plot of land north of Pond Road has been identified in the Urban Design Masterplan as a pocket park. If the option of the housing swap is achieved, this will be reviewed in the light of those negotiations.



6.0 Development Opportunities and Constraints

6.1 NMC/Bus Depot

Figure 3 illustrates the prime urban design opportunities afforded by this site. The strong visual link along Bailey Street directly into the town centre should be utilised, promoting a new pedestrian route crossing the site. As these will be a series of relatively small scale building masses, it is appropriate to address road frontages to continue the urban grain of Brynmawr, in a variety of characters to respond to the setting.

6.2 Southern Edge

This elevated edge defines a southern gateway to the town centre, juxtaposing with the landmark building of the Boiler House. A degree of visual permeability and articulation of this edge would allow views into the site, and greatly enhance this southern approach to the town. Views across the lake and to the hills beyond should be maximised.

6.3 Eastern Edge – Blaina Road

This currently presents a very poor approach to the town centre, with the advertising hoardings dominating. The main opportunity is to provide a coherent and consistent built edge, bringing buildings closer to the road than the existing NMC factory. The Boiler House has potential to provide a landmark feature and the south east corner of the site could similarly provide a landmark to contribute to this gateway. Further articulation could be provided opposite the Blaina Road Junction, as a highlight feature.

A reserve for a tree planting avenue should be included, as recommended by the original masterplan report, and as started within the Asda development. Opportunities should be taken to include tree planting belts at right angles to the slope of the site, creating visual enhancement, shelter from prevailing winds, and possibly related to level changes and terracing.

6.4 Northern edge – Warwick Road

This is residential in character and use, but the steep level changes would not allow new residential frontage onto the road for all of this edge. However, the grain of development should be retained, and respect the views from existing housing. The Leyland Cupress screen is not worth retention, and removal would allow the adjacent trees to develop more fully. In addition, the opening up of views can be used to advantage. A major viewpoint opposite the Welfare Park entrance should also be maximised. A road access to the Bus Depot provides the northern access to the site.

6.5 Western Edge – Chelverton Land

A small plot of rough land in the Chelverton ownership forms this boundary, which extends to Warwick Road. The NMC edge is well defined with conifer tree planting at present. However, it would be advantageous to co-ordinate developments on these two sites. The Chelverton site is very prominent at the head of a stream landscape that forms the boundary between Lakeside Housing and the Retail Units. Open Space and footpath connections with Warwick Road should be included here, to complete the streamside character and strategy.



7.0 Development Appraisal for Link Sites, Brynmawr

- 7.1** Figure 4 illustrates an indicative layout for housing and small business units for the NMC and Bus Depot sites. This addresses several issues on the south side of Brynmawr, as follows:
- Creates a new iconic building with a commercial/leisure opportunity
 - Realigns the difficult bend in Lake Road
 - Creates a new built edge
 - Provides car parking for the town centre
 - Includes several small business unit opportunities, with possible residential above
 - Enlarges the existing roundabout on Blaina Road, providing traffic calming and a better green setting.
- 7.2** A direct pedestrian link is provided between the town centre and Lakeside. This is designed to link existing and potential active retail frontages, and be as visible as possible from the road. As the acquisition of the NMC site and the Bus Station site may not happen together, the layout shows how these may be developed independently.
- 7.3** The bulk of the sites are shown as mixed residential, including 10-20% affordable housing. This would help establish a critical mass of population to generate demand for the commercial/leisure opportunity.
- 7.4** Establishing a car park on the south eastern edge of the site would help the concept of linked trips, being between Asda and the town centre. However, careful design and a good tree framework would be essential to avoid creating a car dominated area.
- 7.5** A neighbourhood play area has been suggested on the land to the west of NMC site. However, this is subject to separate negotiation as it is Chelverton land. This would strengthen the green corridor provided by the north/south stream adjacent to the Lakeside Housing, and be a green link to Welfare Park.
- 7.6** The pedestrian linkages opened up by this development will connect Lakeside Housing to the town centre, and to Welfare Park and beyond, filling a gap in the network and stitching all parts of the community together. Figure 4A shows an alternative option with strengths and weaknesses listed.
- 7.7** Figure 5 shows how the Deri Holdings land could be redeveloped for housing. A link road between Warwick road and Waunleulog Road has been suggested to access this long thin site. A mixture of 3 to 4 bed houses would produce about 100 units, with a further additional of 0.5ha may potentially be available, but this would encroach on the Parc Nant-y-Waun.
- 7.8** The interface with the Parc would need careful design, but there is the opportunity to create an interesting, fragmented edge to development here, with the existing pond as a focal point.
- 7.9** The constraint of 5 disused mine shafts would require detailed site investigation, and further capping work may be required.



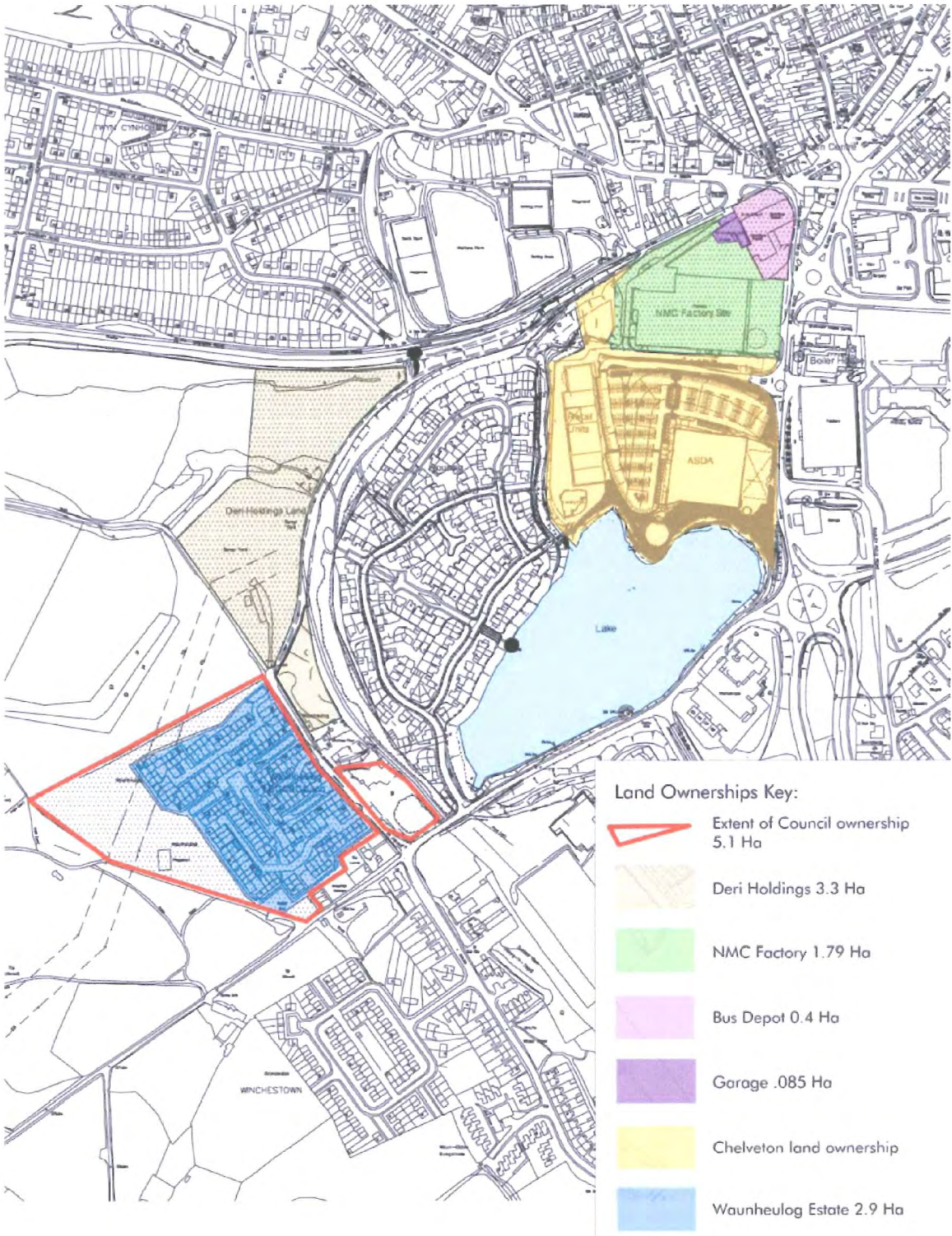


Figure 1 : Land Ownerships



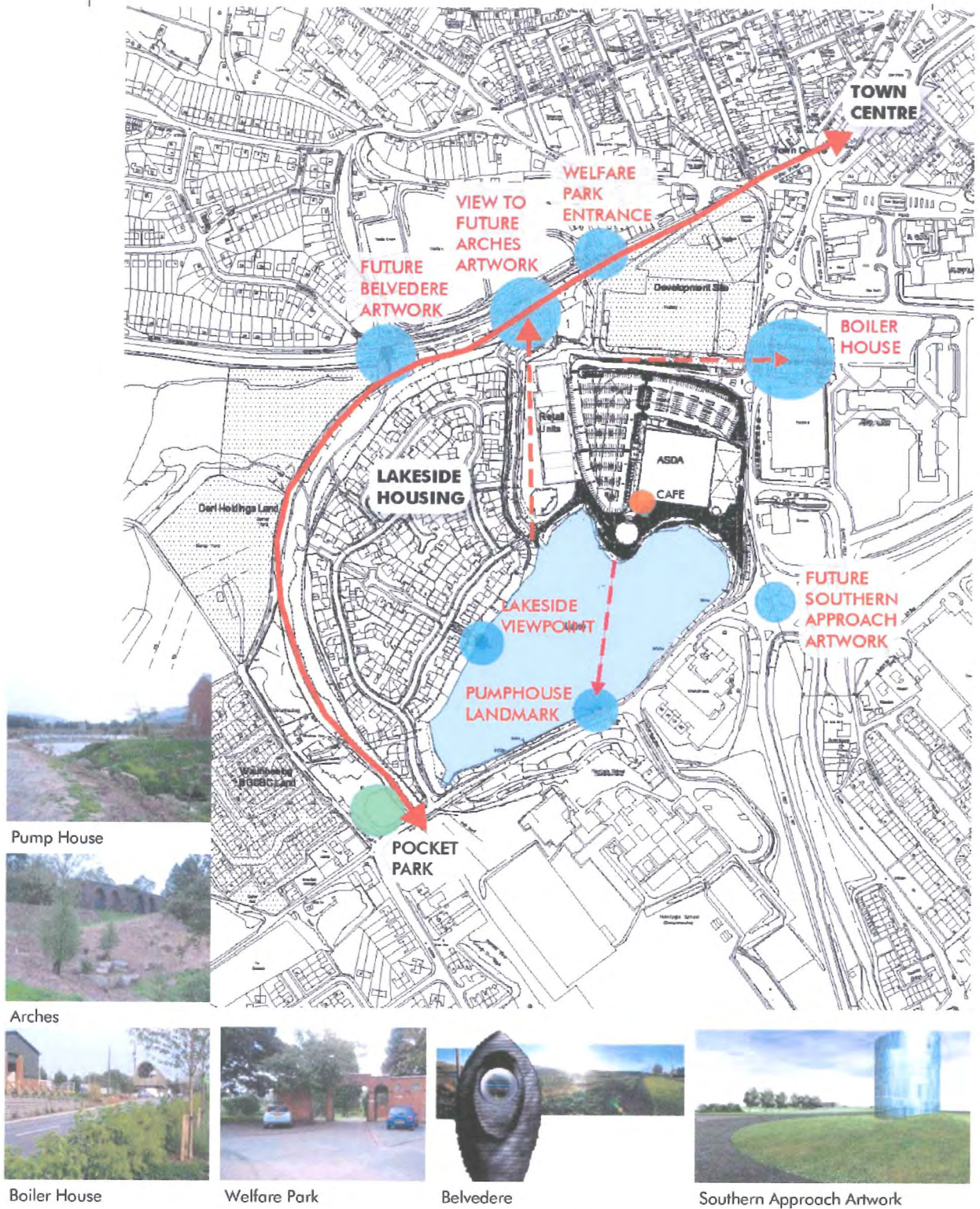
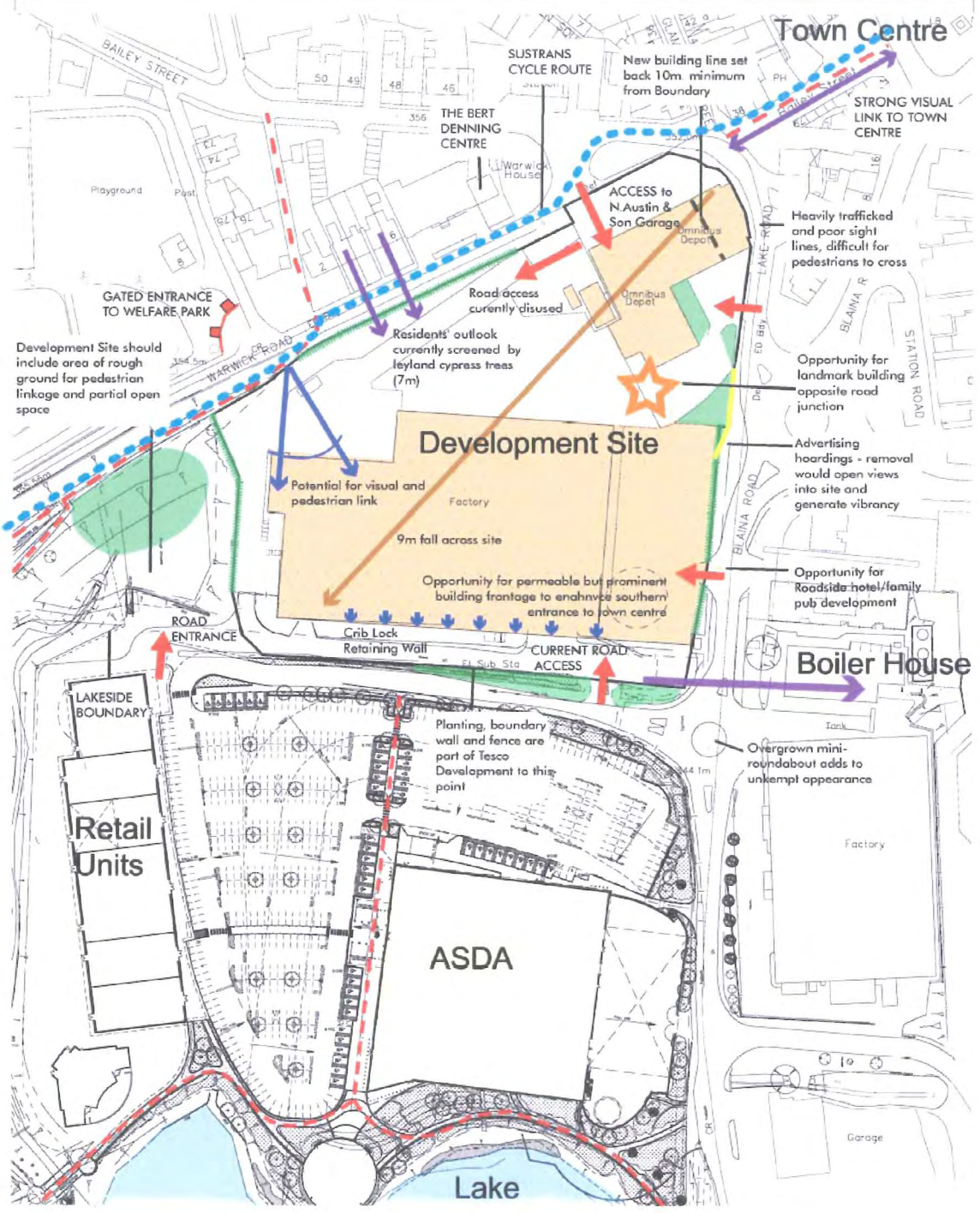


Figure 2 : Views, Landmarks and Linkages





--- Pedestrian Circulation
--- Conifer screen (7m) on boundary
 Opportunity to redevelop site as a Retail/Business/Leisure building creating a positive link between the Town Centre and Lakeside Development

Figure 3 : Opportunities and Constraints



Figure 4

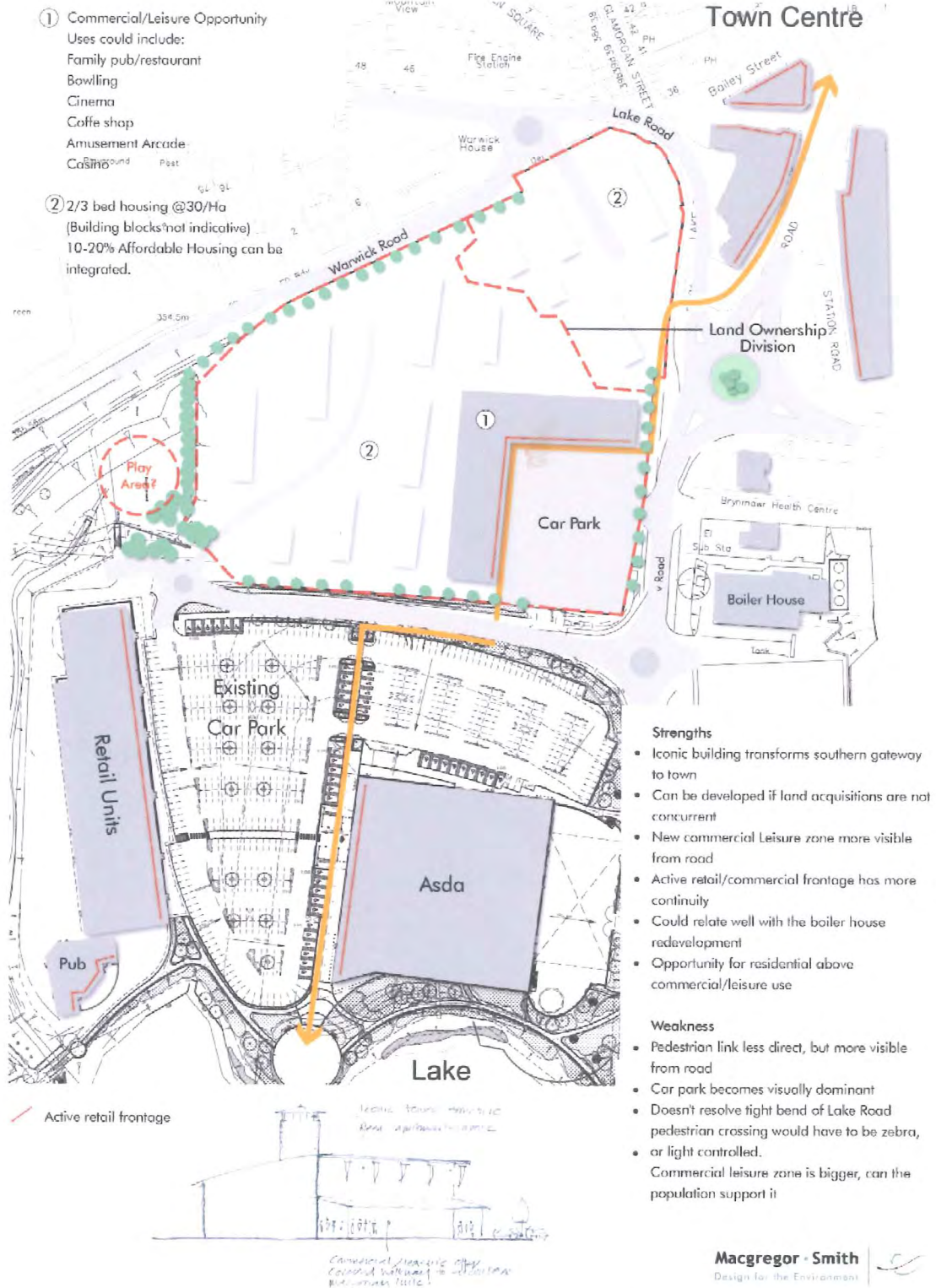


Figure 4 : Indicative Layout



Figure 4A
Alternative Option

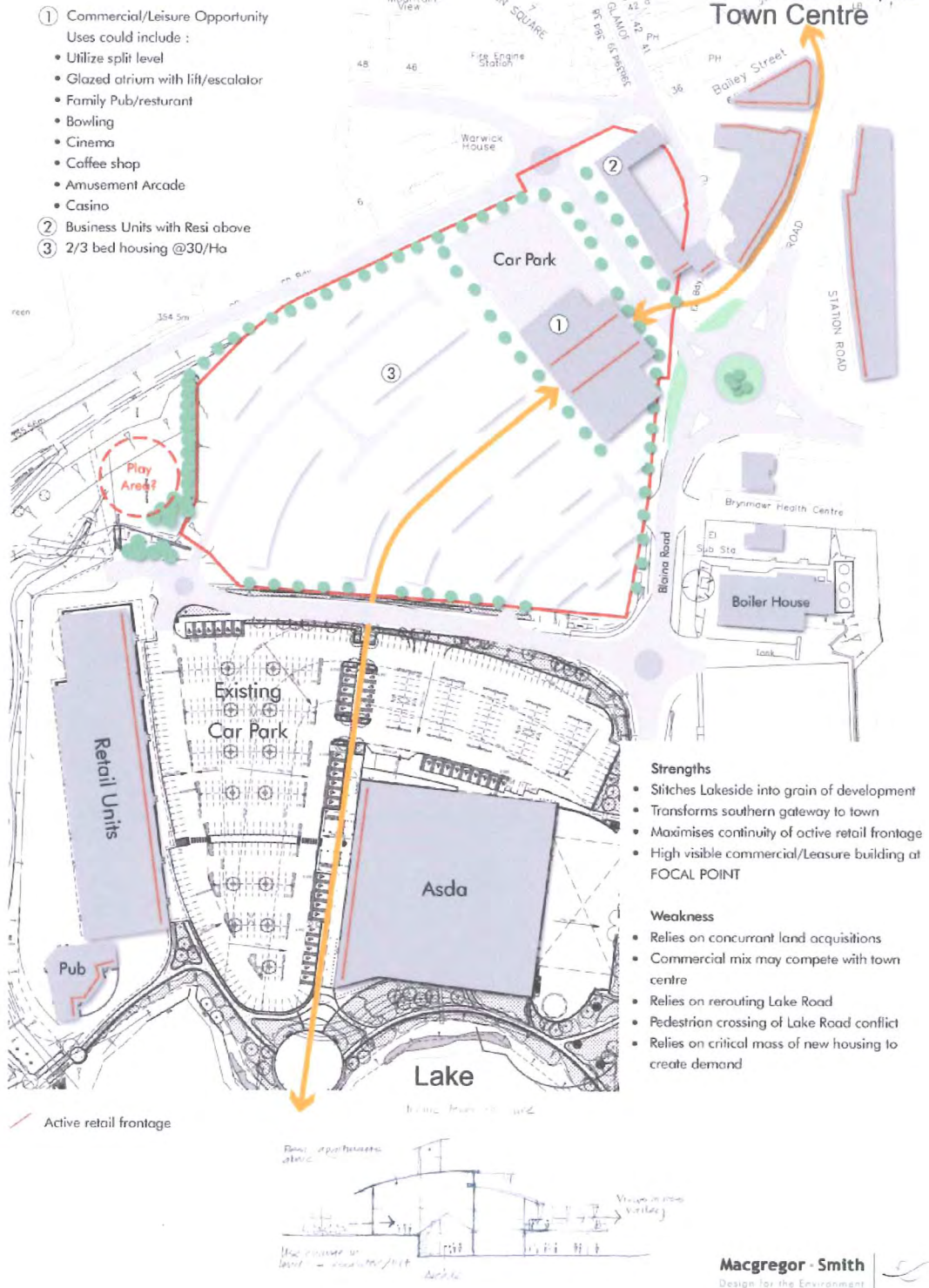
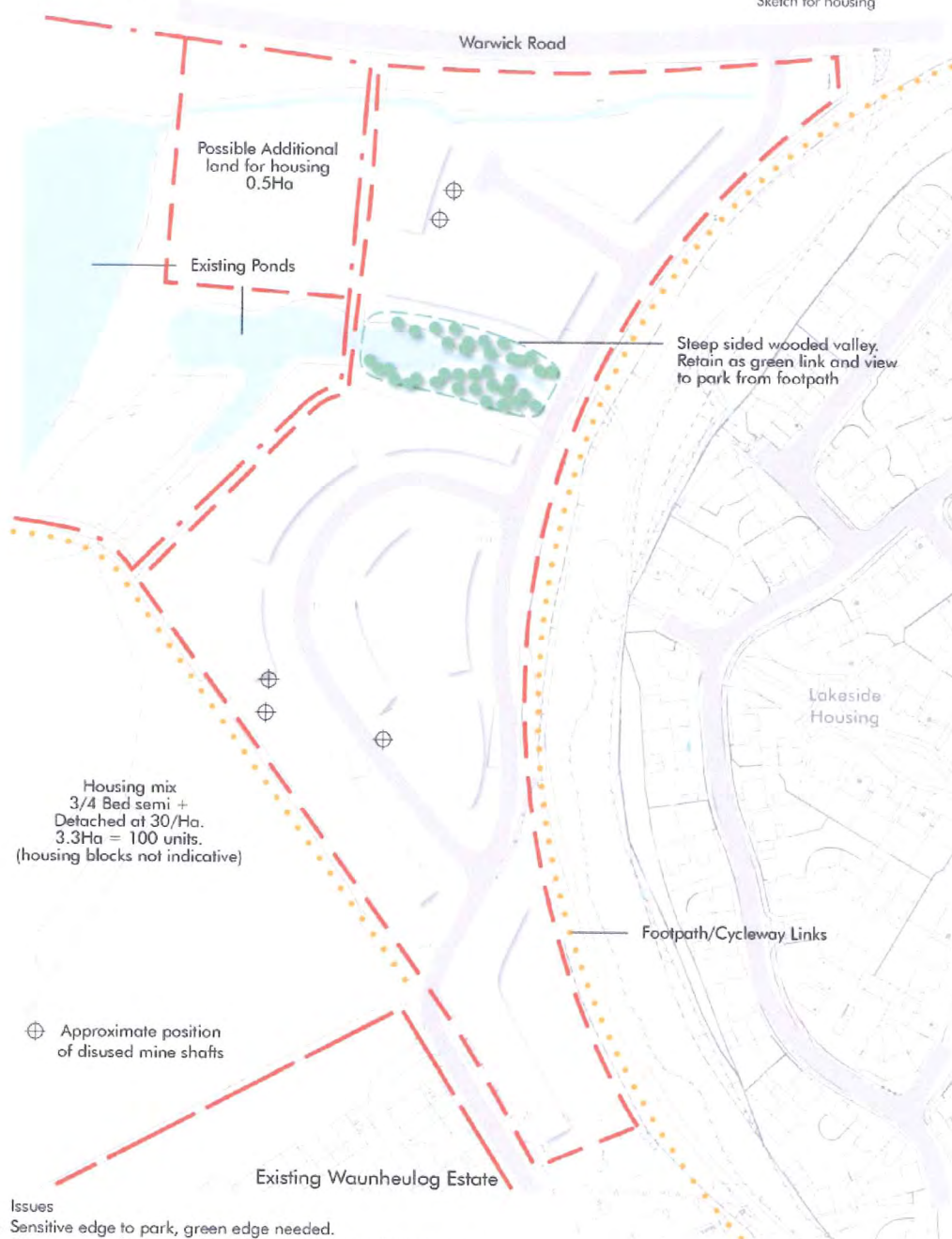


Figure 4a : Indicative Layout



DERI Holdings Land

Figure 5
Sketch for housing



Issues

- Sensitive edge to park, green edge needed.
- Opportunities for some off site contribution to park improvements and Waunheulog Road.
- Constraint of old mine shafts
- Opportunity for housing swap with Waunheulog Estate
- Additional land subject to agreements- extends built envelope of Brynmawr
- Constraint of 5 disused mine shafts

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Figure 5 : Waunheulog Housing Allocation



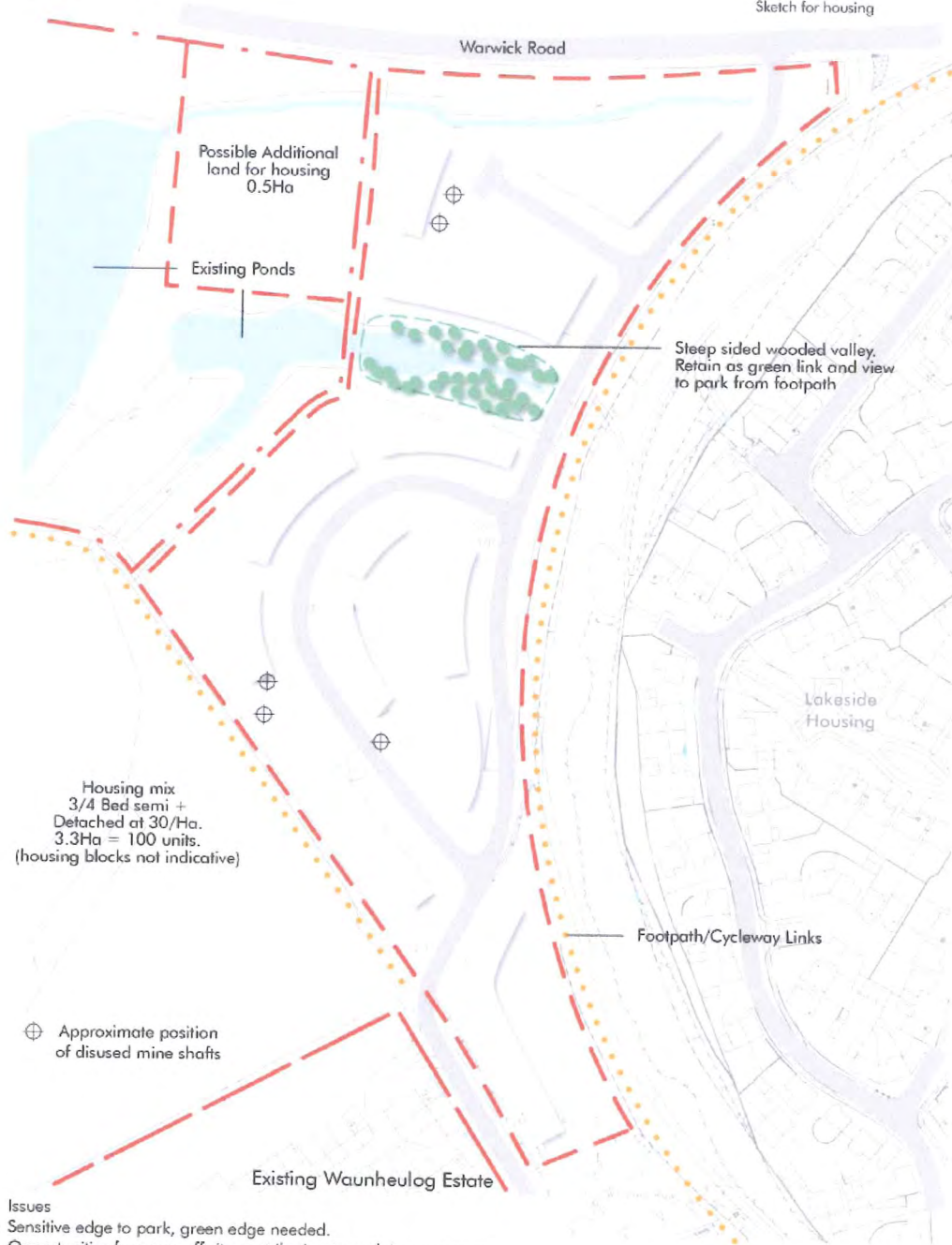


Figure 6 : Eco Homes Image Sheet



DERI Holdings Land

Figure 5
Sketch for housing



Issues

- Sensitive edge to park, green edge needed.
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Figure 5 : Waunheulog Housing Allocation





Figure 6 : Eco Homes Image Sheet

