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AS(N)21 Ty-Pwdr

Ty Pwdr Session 19 10.00 hours Tuesday 10th July 2012

rescheduled

to 9.00 hours Friday 6th July 2012

Ty-Pwdr has been continuously included in the settlement boundary for more than 25 years and it is considered this recognition should carry weight thereby retaining Ty Pwdr site in the Local Development Plan allocation and within the settlement's boundary (See Documents 1 Schedule A: Title Gwent Structure Plan 17/08/1984 Page 17 and the Abertillery Local Plan September 1985 page 37 (attached) adapted 14th April 1987).

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Question 1: Is there a need to identify any additional or alternative sites for housing/or live to work activity?

Response by Mr I. Watkins/Ian Roberts Consultancy

To preface any consideration of the need for an additional allocation of housing sites we need to examine the likelihood of the delivery of existing allocations. Having been born and bred in Abertillery and spent all but ten years living in that area, I would like to outline a forensic analysis of the Councils success in delivering and implementing their vision for housing in the lower Ebbw Fach Area.

In the July 2006 adopted Unitary Development Plan, the strategic housing policy outlined the following: -

- i) The number of Housing Commitment Units i.e. land with planning permission amounted to 150 on five sites, made up of 93 private units and 57 public sector units i.e. Housing Association affordable units. However in practice has seen actual delivery – 0 private, 45 public sector.

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- ii) The number of Housing Allocated Units defined on the proposal map amounted to a further 290 on five sites all of which were private. Not one of these units was delivered. It is difficult to believe that out of an aggregate total of 440 committed and allocated units provided for in the plan; only 45 public sector units were delivered. This amounts to a success rate of 10.2%.

A more damning indictment was that 93 private committed units and the 290 private allocated units had been brought forward from the 2001 adopted Development Plan as undelivered units. In other words there was a massive failure to deliver housing over a period which spanned two local development plans particularly at a time of buoyancy in the housing market.

This didn't start in 2001. I have a copy of a development plan for 1985 which suggests similar problems. Why has there been no monitoring or admission of these failures in delivery in the LDP. Failure to deliver could be used as a positive tool if it leads to change.

If we turn our attention to the current **March 2011 Deposit Local Development Plan (DLDP)**, I do not think a study of recent history should make us too confident in the following projections.

Housing commitment at Lower Ebbw Fach (see page 87 DLDP) amounts to 61 units made up of 43 private units under policy number HC1.29 and HC1.31 (again carried over from 2006) and 18 public sector units under policy number HC1.30

Housing Allocations for Lower Ebbw Fach (see pages 87/88 DLDP) amount to 297 units of which 257 are private with the remainder of 40 public sector units. Out of the 257 allocated private units, 235 units have been carried over from the 2006 Unitary Development Plan i.e. undelivered and, in many cases extended from the 2001 plan.

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Being optimistic and assuming all of the public housing (58 units) made up of committed (18) and allocated (40) units will be constructed within the term of this plan, which is likely to be a period of austerity; there remains a shortfall of 300 private units in the Lower Ebbw Valley. It is reasonable to assume that as none of the private housing has been delivered over the last 10 years, the status quo will prevail especially in times of a depressed economy. It is submitted that of the total of 358 dwellings identified under Lower Ebbw Fach H1 Housing allocations (297) coupled with HC1 Housing Commitments (61), only 16% delivery (58/358 x100%) will occur which suggests a shortfall of 300 units in the Lower Ebbw Valley.

Therefore there is definitely a need to identify alternative sites.

As important as the need for alternative sites is the need to monitor the continuing inability to deliver private housing in the south of the borough so that change can be brought about. There is a huge disparity in favour of development in the north of the borough which the Local Development Plan must address.

In Section 5 of the Deposit Local Development Plan Spatial Strategy, Page 23 Southern Strategy Area Regeneration Item 5.13 it states “there is little opportunity to provide housing due to lack of suitable sites thus only 11% of new houses are allocated in this area”.

However with a delivery success rate of 16% the actual figure could be 1.8% namely 66 houses of which 58 are public which the council supposes will satisfy 25% of the Boroughs population. This is an indictment of the neglect of housing in the southern part of the borough, especially when you consider it is over 20 years since a national house builder was engaged in a development in Abertillery i.e. Lovells of Tyleri Court.

To solve a problem you first have to identify and acknowledge there is one as I have attempted to do. If it cannot be solved within the local authority it

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may be that outside intervention will be necessary i.e. the Wales National Assembly academics or the appointment of consultants to address the issues.

Is there another borough in Wales where the Spatial Strategy excludes 25% of its population from housing choice?

I believe in its present form, the Deposit Local Development Plan is not transparent, accurate or sound and consequently raises false expectations. Its shortcomings, in respect of housing in the south of the borough, must be challenged.

On a positive note this could represent an opportunity to draw a line and openly declare the inability of previous plans to deliver and produce a more realistic appraisal.

The need for additional sites is highlighted in other relevant objectives outlined in the Deposit Local Development Plan including.

Section 3 – Blaenau Gwent Context & Challenges.

- Page 13 Item 3.4 suggests the population is projected to rise.
- Page 14 Item 3.12 stabilising the population

Page 14 Item 3.13 meeting housing needs and improving housing. There is a shortage of flats and detached properties. I would like to add that changes in cohabitation, divorce patterns, lifestyle choices and an aging population all create different demands on housing.

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In addition the development plan does not cater for high social groups wanting to reside in the southern part of the borough with the result that these groups will move outside the area, i.e. no aspirational housing provision.

- Page 17 Section 4.0 Vision & Objectives

This vision is to create by 2021, Abertillery as a sustainable District Hub. In doing so, it is anticipated to construct 3666 new houses throughout the Borough with 800 being affordable units and 2866 as private dwellings.

- Page 19 Item 4.3 the vision needs the private sector.

Section 5. Spatial Strategy Southern Strategy Area

- Page 23 Item 5.13 Housing Lack of Suitable Sites.

At risk of overemphasizing the position, it states only 11% of new houses have been allocated for in the southern part of the borough. This represents 88 public and 315 private dwellings.

However with a projected 16% delivery success a more accurate **overall** projection would be 1.8% new houses being delivered in the south of the borough

It is quite possible that the public sector element might increase but that will make the situation with the private sector even worse if past history on delivery is repeated.

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Section 6.0 Strategic Policies

- Page 28 Item 6.15. The main difference between the south and north is that the south has fewer opportunities for development due to topographical constraints.
- Page 31 Item 6.29. The LDP provides a framework for the development of 3,666 new dwellings.

But does it!!

If the 16% delivery in the southern part of the borough is replicated throughout the borough, a problem will exist. I suggest a similar forensic exercise be undertaken throughout the borough to confirm more realistic statistics.

- Page 33 SP5 Spatial Distribution of Housing Sites, Lower Ebbw Fach 350 dwellings out of total of 3666 for the whole of the borough.
- Item 5.36. Is the Lower Ebbw Fach hub sustainable if a significantly lower number of houses are realised?

Section 8.0 Allocations & Designations

- Page 89 Item 8.28 In order to stimulate growth etc settlement in the south of the County Borough will rely heavily on small sites and windfall development.

Does this mean that all the brown field sites have been used up and therefore should we be looking for other sites?

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Section 9.00 Delivery & Implementation

Funding Sources & Responsibility for Delivery

- Page 111 Item 9.5. In general the housing allocations are expected to be delivered by the private sector. As in the past!!

The Councils vision should extend to include an allowance for Page 28 6.15 where they identified topographical constraints in the south.

The Council should encourage the private sector with far more help and assistance and if need be, make concessions to allow for the higher cost of infrastructure to make developments more economically viable. This would provide general benefit rather than the selective benefit that the public sector provides for.

Question 2: Are the alternative proposals put forward AS(N) 21 appropriate and deliverable?

- i) Candidate Site D27 is not Ty-Pwdr
- ii) The SINC boundary and its effect upon the Ty-Pwdr Candidate Site is being challenged see Schedule H
- iii) Mitigation to limit the visual obtrusiveness is addressed in Schedule G the new scheme items B) and C)
- iv) As is the question of Landmap as previously addressed

The site is located in the southern strategy area and the local development plan will not deliver sufficient land to deliver housing/land for sustainable regeneration.

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Question 3: Has this site been subject to sustainability appraisal compatible with that for other allocated sites in the Plan

During the discussion under ES4.9 (Housing Session 4: Housing Sites) held on Wednesday 27 June 2012, there emerged an inconsistency as to the approach adapted to sustainability appraisal. There was a difference of opinion between Planning Officers and the Authority's ecologist. The Planners recognised that with SINC's there was the opportunity to consider development upon such land although the Authority's ecologist was not of the same view. As such incompatible appraisals have occurred.

Appendix 2

Councils Rebuttal of Alternative Site AS(N)21

SINC No. 132 Page 105 of Deposit Local Development Plan - Greenmeadow Farm

Contrary to the Councils assertion, the development of Ty-Pwdr will not result in the loss of majority of acid grassland within Ty-Pwdr.

Chronology of Surveys by Borough Council

1. Winder September 1998 SINC notification describes Greenmeadow Farm only.
2. Unknown surveyor 15th January 2008

Site selected as a Wildlife Site/SINC? No change in description and no mention of habitation of Ty-Pwdr. What does the ? mean

3. Biodiversity Assessment proforma dated March 2008 previously attached as Schedule H Article H3) although confusingly, the site survey is dated 11th August 2008 (5 months later). Site Name – Ty-Pwdr Greenmeadow Farm

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Site Reference D27. This can hardly be regarded a contemporaneous assessment.

Answer to question 11 record of unspecified bat on site. What record?

David Clements Ecology Ltd surveyed every tree on the site for Bat roost potential. Only 2 trees - No. 58 and 93 on Plan 3 of their assessment met criteria 2A but there was no evidence of use. In addition both trees lie outside the development area.

Answer to question 12 records of protected species, badger and bluebells. Bluebells are protected with respect to collection for trade under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 but remains common and widespread in ancient woodlands in the county.

Answer to question 24 Full ecological survey assessment required.

It is submitted that the biodiversity assessment proforma puts forward a preconceived outcome in addressing the potential impact of proposed development. It is emotive and lacks rigour.

4. South East Wales Biodiversity Records Centre (the main depository for bat records and ecological data in south east Wales) produced a plot dated 14th July 2008 on behalf of Blaenau Gwent County Borough as part of the candidate site assessment showing the SINC boundary east of site number D27. The plot did **not** enclose the Ty Pwdr development site.
5. A management plan was also produced for the full extent of Greenmeadow Farm Site in 2001 by Wye Valley Surveys. Since that time what sort of financial commitment has been made by the Borough Council in the last 11 years?

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Appendix 2 Pages 1 and 2. As exemplified above, the Authority's approach to SINC designation is flawed. Moreover, at page 2 their rebuttal revolves around description, analysis of the SINC notification form. Greenmeadow Farm is 42.46 hectares whilst Ty-Pwdr is 8 hectares (20% of the site) and no mention is made of Ty-Pwdr. The Authority's ecologist review seems to suggest there has been no effort to protect Acid Grassland which species justifies SINC designation. A study of the criteria for the selection of SINC in the Mid Valley Area (CS SINC MVA) H6 Acid Grassland makes a more specific requirement in paragraph 2 and 3, page 26 (as attached) for SINC inclusion.

Unimproved acid grassland refers to SWARDS which contain a high proportion of the species listed as community constants as described by Rodwell (1992)

To be considered for selection the site must contain 7 or more indicator species from Table 4 Page 27 and 28 of the document SD113 (CS SINC MVA) attached

David Clements Ecology Ltd assessment for Greenmeadow and Ty-Pwdr did not separate the various area of grassland. However In the commissioned Gwent Wildlife's Trusts Habitat Survey, a much more vigorous exercise has occurred. This describes the extent of different plants and grasses in specific areas. The Areas 5, 6, 6a, 7 and 8 shown on the previously supplied Figure 2 are those relevant to the proposed development.

In **Area 5** four species of grasses exist on this unimproved meadow with 28 flowering plants of which only 3 indicator species exist

Conopodium Majus – Pignut

Galium Saxatile – Heather bedstraw

Vaccinium Myrtillus – Germander speedwell

Area 6 is similar to 5 but with the addition of heather caluna vulgaris and 'creeping forget me not' which are not indicator species.

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Therefore only three indicator species exist in Area 6 and those same species are identical to Area 5.

Area 6A steeper slopes form the westerly margin of meadow area 6 very wet, dominated by rushes four species of grasses exist in this area together with two species of rushes. One of which is Juncus Squarrosus and is an indicator species. Although 18 flowering plants exist, none of which are indicator species

Area 7 Ty-Pwdr Farmhouse and the surrounding area to the west is heavily disturbed with no conservation value.

Area 8 wet marshy grassland is dominated by rushes and tufted hare grass. Three species of grasses exist, with three types of rushes and a further six types of flowering plant. None of the above are classified as indicator species. This area has low species diversity due to dense rushes and impoverished waterlogged sub strata.

As a conclusion to the biodiversity issues above, only four indicator species exist within the development and as such does not justify SINC designation. Acid grasslands occur primarily on upland common land and colliery reclamations, being restricted to areas of nutrient poor acidic soils.

However not withstanding the above comments, as responsible developers we are committed to provide a scheme which will enhance and improve the opportunities for wildlife. The proposed layout and design allows for the introduction of south to north stepping stones in the form on new hedgerows where currently none exist and will protect a high proportion of acid grassland. We believe our land compensation and landscape mitigation arrangements can satisfy the most ardent environmentalist

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Summary of Issues of Concern

If the Deposit Local Development Plan is to show vision, private developers in the south of the Borough must be given incentive to bring forward schemes using some blue sky thinking.

1. It could be that there should be a presumption in favour of private development in the south of the Borough.
2. Planners should be encouraged to engage with developers and seek the potential of actively seeking development on appropriate sites. Ty Pwdr is such a site.
3. Heritage – It is noted that the Authority no longer regards archaeological features to be of any significance with regard to the Ty Pwdr land.

I am also sure there are other issues that can be addressed by the professionals that would help to bring development to the area.