

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN (2006-2021)

Design Topic Paper

April 2008

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BACKGROUND

In January 2007 the Council issued for public consultation the Local Development Plan: Preferred Strategy. The Strategy was the first stage of the new statutory local development plan (LDP).

The next stage in the plan making process is the production of a deposit draft LDP. In order to ensure the soundness of the emerging LDP and transparency in the plan making process, the Council has produced a series of topic papers.

The topic papers address the main area of policy to be considered in the LDP. **It should be stressed that these papers are a starting point for policy development, through the sustainability appraisal process and as the Council's evidence base develops, emerging LDP policy will evolve and be refined.**

1. INTRODUCTION

The quality of the built environment impacts on everyone's lives, streets are after all the stages on which we live out our lives they are key to our cultural identity and raising the quality of design of new developments across the County Borough and regenerating existing areas are key objectives for the Council.

In order to do this the topic paper will outline:

The policy context for Design, including an explanation of national, regional and local policy;

- Key Issues in Rhondda Cynon Taf, which relate specifically to Design
- Preferred Strategy, policy in respect of Design, representations to the Strategy and proposed policy response, and
- Draft LDP Policy, which provides a policy context for design

2. NATIONAL POLICY CONTEXT

People, Places, Futures – The Wales Spatial Plan (adopted 2004)

The Wales Spatial Plan, provides a framework for the future spatial development of Wales. Rhondda Cynon Taf along with the neighbouring authorities of Cardiff, Bridgend, Merthyr Tydfil, Caerphilly and the Vale of Glamorgan 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 by 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”.

Whilst the Spatial Plan may not provide a detailed framework for the development of design in South East Wales it does nevertheless provide a number of clear propositions. These include the following:

The Valleys need to be strengthened as desirable places to live, work and visit; combining a wider mix of types of housing and good access to jobs and services, in distinctive communities set in an attractive environment.

Development must not compromise the attractiveness of the area's towns and wider environment, which are key factors in the area's success.

Turning Heads – A Strategy for the Heads of the Valleys 2020 (June 2006)

Turning Heads – A Strategy for the Heads of the Valleys 2020 as the name suggests, outlines a strategy for regenerating the northern Valley areas of South East Wales. In Rhondda Cynon Taf the strategy area includes Treorchy, Treherbert, Ferndale, Mountain Ash and Aberdare. The objectives of the programme reflect those of the Wales Spatial Plan in seeking to ensure:

- 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

With regards to design, Strategy Programme 1: A Sub-Regional Approach to the Regeneration of Settlements comments as follows:

We will actively promote environmental standards such as BREEAM and Eco-Homes, incorporating the principles contained within the Welsh Assembly Government's 'Creating Sustainable Places' guidance.

With regards to design, Strategy Programme 2: A Perception Changing Landscape comments as follows:

With stakeholders, we will develop and implement a number of key strategic landscape-scale the environmental enhancements, concentrating on key corridors and gateways such as the A465 (T) Heads of the Valleys Road, and approaches to the former Ebbw Vale Steelworks and Hirwaun. We will focus on areas that are visually unattractive or derelict, acquiring sites if necessary to ensure the early removal of eyesores. We will seek to protect, enhance and manage the natural and semi-natural environment, its resources and its biodiversity. We will develop a comprehensive design code to encourage consistent standards of urban and landscape design.

Ministerial Interim Planning Policy Statement 01/2008 (January 2008)

Assembly Government design policy is embodied in Ministerial Interim Planning Policy Statement (MIPPS)

01/2008. The MIPPS revises section 2.9 of Chapter 2 Planning for Sustainability. Supplementary guidance in relation to design is contained in Technical Advice Note 12. The Planning Policy Wales Companion Guide (2006) relates the guidance to the LDP system, identifying clear statements of national policy that should only be repeated in where local circumstance require.

The Assembly Government's objectives for design are to:

- Creating sustainability by going beyond the aesthetics
- Access statements reflecting the impact that good design can achieve such as climate change and that access statements should be incorporated into planning applications.
- Inclusive design- placing people at the heart of design
- Efficient use of resources
- Ensuring that the design process gains developer contributions for tackling the causes or climate change.
- Ensuring that schemes are mixed use and flexible.
- The emphasis on Local Authorities to reject schemes, which are poorly designed.
- Fostering traditional design and local distinctiveness in appropriate locations.
- The legal obligations that Local Authorities have to reduce crime and disorder and that design should be seeking to do this.
- Local authorities should encourage community involvement in design to ensure an ownership or the area is established.

- Local authorities should set out clear policies, which encourage good quality design.
- The use of planning and development briefs.

Technical Advice Note 12: Design (2002)

Technical Advice Note (TAN) 12 provides advice on Delivering design quality in all developments at every scale throughout Wales. Emphasis is placed on the planning system to be pro-active in raising the standard of design and raising awareness of design issues with the public and developers. Achieving good design is the responsibility of all those involved in the design process. Adherence with this document is critical in the delivery of design quality and sustainable development.

Planning and Inclusive Design (Consultation Document, March 2007)

This document accompanies recent legislation requiring Access Statements for all development proposals except for householder development or changes of use. The message that in conveys is that Inclusive design should address the needs of all, be considered from the outset and is indivisible from good design.

Also set out was in the consultation document was a definition of inclusive design for inclusion in PPW:

- Places people at the heart of the design process
- Acknowledges diversity and difference
- Offers choice where a single design solution cannot accommodate all users

- Provides for flexibility in use
- Provides buildings and environments that are convenient and enjoyable to use for everyone.

A model design guide for Wales: residential development

This design guide was prepared for the Planning Officers for Wales with the support of the Welsh Assembly Government. It is a companion guide to TAN 12, which seeks to establish the principle of good design for residential development in Wales, clarifying the fundamental design issues and how they might be addressed. The guide sets objectives for good design with regard to residential development:

Objective 1: Natural heritage (landscape and biodiversity)

Objective 2: Compactness

Objective 3: Accessibility and ease of movement

Objective 4: Legibility

Objective 5: Character and context

Objective 6: Continuity and enclosure

Objective 7: Public realm

Objective 8: Variety and diversity

Objective 9: Adaptability

Objective 10: Resource efficiency

The importance of the design process is emphasised. This should include consultation, context and site appraisal, visioning.

PPW and TAN12 require applications for planning permission to be accompanied by an illustrated Design Statement. The required content for a Design Statement is:

- Relationship to policy context
- Relationship to site and wider context
- Design principles and concept
- Translation of concept to detailed scheme

Manual for Streets

This document recognises the important role that streets play in creating successful places. The aim is to help create streets that promote greater social interaction and enjoyment while still performing successfully as conduits for movement. It is to be used predominantly for the design, construction, adoption and maintenance of new residential streets, but it is also applicable to existing residential streets that are subject to re-design.

It will assist in the creation of streets that:

- Help to build and strengthen the communities they serve;
- Meet the needs of all users, by embodying the principles of inclusive design;
- Form part of a well-connected network;
- Are attractive and have their own distinctive identity;
- Are cost-effective to construct and maintain;
- Are safe.

It gives clear guidance on how to achieve well-designed streets and spaces that serve the community. It demonstrates the benefits that flow from good design and places a higher priority on pedestrians and cyclists. It

challenges some established working practices. In order to bring about these changes it promotes multi-disciplinary working where the aim is to create 'places.'

3. LOCAL POLICY CONTEXT

A Better Life – Our Community Plan 2001 – 20014

A Better Life - Our Community Plan sets out a framework for creating a brighter future for everyone who lives and works in Rhondda Cynon Taff. The plan was developed through the Better Life Consortium, during 2003/2004. The Community Plan identifies 5 key themes under which are a series of local level aims. The key themes are:

- Safer Communities
- Our Living Space
- Our Health and Well Being
- Boosting Our Local Economy
- Learning for Growth

The key themes identified in the Community Plan has been developed into strategies for improving the quality of life in Rhondda Cynon Taf. Design is considered as part of the Our Living Space Strategy. The Strategy sets the following themes:

- Biodiversity and Rivers
- Waste
- A Cleaner, Safer Environment
- Local Environments

- The Built Environment
- Transport
- Energy, Resource use and Climate Change
- Education and Awareness Raising

Of particular relevance to this topic area are four priorities set out under the Built Environment theme. The priorities seek to promote:

- An increase in the number of people very satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live and who think that their neighbourhood is getting better.
- An urban environment especially town centres that is accessible to all and that meets the needs of all users
- A reduction in dilapidated property and increase in development that promotes our built heritage and conserves areas and buildings of local importance.
- The promotion of new development which is sensitive to local character and the environment with high quality design in terms of buildings, street furniture, signage and lighting

4. KEY ISSUES IN RHONDDA CYNON TAF

The key issues to be addressed by the Rhondda Cynon Taf LDP have been identified by making an assessment of the following:

- The results of pre deposit consultation with key stakeholder;

- The results of the Sustainability Appraisal /Strategic Environmental Assessment Scoping Exercise; and
- A review of baseline social, economic and environmental information and

The issues identified through this process will inform directly the development of the spatial strategy for the LDP.

Pre deposit consultation

Design issues are identified as follows:

- Should be more adventurous with construction techniques
- External perception of the borough needs to be improved
- Need to encourage people to stay and build homes
- Wind farms – dictated by the Welsh Assembly Government need careful location if not to make the area undesirable for tourism, homebuyers and business.
- Creating sustainable communities
- Self esteem, lack of confidence, lack of optimism
- Perception of personal safety needs to change
- Identity and attractiveness of RCT to residents and investors.
- The needs of children and young people must be considered in both new development and refurbishment

Sustainability Appraisal/ Strategic Environmental Assessment

The sustainability Appraisal /Strategic environmental Assessment identified the following issues in design:

- 53% of the housing stock is terraced
- 17 out Rhondda Cynon Taf's 53 electoral wards are amongst the 100 most deprived in Wales.
- Depopulation affecting the valleys
- Decreasing population overall but an increase in the South

Baseline information

Design issues are identified as follows:

- The population of Rhondda Cynon Taf has remained largely unchanged between 1991 and 2001. However this masks significant local variation, between 1991 – 2001 the population of the central and northern valleys declined by 5% whilst the population the population of the south increases by 10% (Office for National Statistics)
- The population projections for South East Wales forecast an overall increase in population of 7.8 % between 2003 and 2023 (Welsh Assembly Government – Household Projections 2006)
- The number of households in South East Wales will increase by 18.6% from 583,700 in 2003 to 692,600 in 2023 (Welsh Assembly Government- Household Projections 2006)

- The highest levels of 'physical environment' deprivation in Rhondda Cynon Taf are located in the central and northern valleys (welsh index of multiple deprivation 2005)
- Car ownership in Rhondda Cynon Taf has grown since 1991 from 60% to 68% in 2001 (office for national statistics)
- Rhondda Cynon Taf has 4 sites of special areas of nature conservation and 11 designated sites of special scientific interest
- Rhondda Cynon Taf has 17 conservation areas and 360 listed buildings.

5. PREFERRED STRATEGY

The preferred strategy provides the following policy framework for the development of design in Rhondda Cynon Taf.

Objectives of the Local Development Plan

Paragraph 4.2 of the Preferred Strategy (January 2007) lists 16 objectives for the LDP. The following objectives are the most relevant to the topic area;

- Promote and protect the culture and heritage including landscape, archaeology and language.
- Improve and protect the landscape and countryside
- Promote efficient use of land and soils
- Provide a high quality built environment

Development Strategy

Paragraphs 6.1 – 6.11 of the Preferred Strategy sets out a development strategy for Rhondda Cynon Taf. The strategy area is divided into two distinct parts: -

- Northern Strategy Area, and
- Southern Strategy Area

The Northern Strategy area comprises the key settlements of Tonypany, Porth, Treorchy, Treherbert, Ferndale, Tylorstown, Mountain Ash and Hirwaun and the principal town of Aberdare. In this area the emphasis is on building sustainable communities and halting the process of depopulation and decline.

The Southern Strategy area includes the principal towns of Pontypridd and Llantrisant and key settlements of Tonyrefail and Llanharan. In the south of the County Borough the emphasis is on sustainable growth that benefits Rhondda Cynon Taf as a whole.

The strategy recognises the important role that principal towns and key settlements play in providing services of both local and county importance. Where possible, development will be focused on the principal towns and key settlements of the County Borough in order to support and reinforce the important role of these centres play as places for social and economic activity.

Design

Paragraph 6.35- 6.36 of the Preferred Strategy provides a strategy for the development of design. The paragraphs are as follows;

“To compliment this approach the strategy will also provide a positive approach to energy efficiency and conservation measures in both the siting and design of new developments.

Community Regeneration aims are of particular significance in the northern strategy areas, which suffers from the greatest deprivation. But the need to ensure development takes place in a way, which is both sustainable and benefits the communities of Rhondda Cynon Taf is a matter for the County Borough as a whole. An emphasis will be placed on maintaining and creating sustainable communities throughout the County Borough. In order to achieve this the Plan will provide a framework for the creation and enhancement of sustainable communities by:

- Ensuring that efficient use is made of land to meet anticipated needs and aspirations of existing and future communities;
- Achieving an improved sense of place and integrating into an existing community by basing the design philosophy on the best aspects of the local area to reflect future needs;
- Achieving provision of an appropriate mix of housing, employment and leisure development in accessible

locations which will benefit wide sectors of the local community”

Strategic Policy

The strategic design policy is as follows:

SP4- Placemaking

All development proposals shall contribute to creating sustainable places where the quality of life for residents, workers, visitors and other users is of key importance. Sustainable places shall include the following: -

- i) **Integrated mixture of uses;**
- ii) **Efficient use of land, especially higher densities in proximity to local amenities and public transport;**
- iii) **High level of connectivity to existing centres by a wide range of travel modes;**
- iv) **Flexibility – consideration of changes in future requirements and circumstances**
- v) **High standard of design, which reinforces attractive qualities of local distinctiveness**
- vi) **High quality public realm**
- vii) **Environmental enhancement**
- viii) **Enhancement of areas of poor design**
- Involvement of the local community**
- x) **Small sites will be required to integrate positively with established settlements and communities. Strategic sites must be high quality sustainable places in their own right.**

Representations to the Preferred Strategy

Preferred Strategy fall broadly into 1 area – representations in respect of Strategic Policy 4 – Place Making

Outlined below is a summary of the main representation submitted in respect of Strategic Policy 4.

Representations to policy SP4- Place Making

Issue: In particular support is expressed for the intention to focus new development in principle towns and key settlements throughout Rhondda Cynon Taf, and the strategic objectives of policies SP3 (Sustainable Development), SP4 (Place Making), SP8 (Town Centres and Retailing), SP9 (Transportation), SP11 (Protection of Natural Environment), SP12 (Community Infrastructure) and SP13 (Waste).

Response: Support is welcomed

Issue: Support for this policy.

Response: Support is welcomed

Issue: The policy should be amended to include ‘enhancement of landscape for biodiversity’.

Proposed Response: Noted the policy will be amended to include ‘enhancement of landscape for biodiversity’.

6. DRAFT LDP POLICY

Revised Strategic Policy 4

SP4- Place Making

All development proposals shall contribute to creating sustainable places where the quality of life for residents, workers, visitors and other users is of key importance. Sustainable places shall include the following: -

Integrated mixture of uses;

- i) Efficient use of land, especially higher densities in proximity to local amenities and public transport;**
- ii) High level of connectivity to existing centres by a wide range of travel modes;**
- iii) Flexibility – consideration of changes in future requirements and circumstances**
- iv) High standard of design, which reinforces attractive qualities of local distinctiveness**
- v) High quality public realm**
- vi) Environmental enhancement**
- vii) Enhancement of areas of poor design**
- viii) Involvement of the local community**
- ix) Small sites will be required to integrate positively with established settlements and communities. Strategic sites must be high quality sustainable places in their own right.**

x) Enhancement of landscape biodiversity

To compliment this approach the strategy will also provide a positive approach to energy efficiency and conservation measures in both the siting and design of new developments.

Community Regeneration aims are of particular significance in the northern strategy areas, which suffers from the greatest deprivation. But the need to ensure development takes place in a way, which is both sustainable and benefits the communities of Rhondda Cynon Taf is a matter for the County Borough as a whole. An emphasis will be placed on maintaining and creating sustainable communities throughout the County Borough. In order to achieve this the Plan will provide a framework for the creation and enhancement of sustainable communities by:

- Ensuring that efficient use is made of land to meet anticipated needs and aspirations of existing and future communities;
- Achieving an improved sense of place and integrating into an existing community by basing the design philosophy on the best aspects of the local area to reflect future needs;
- Achieving provision of an appropriate mix of housing, employment and leisure development in accessible locations, which will benefit wide sectors of the local community;

Area Wide Policy

Securing high quality, sustainable developments, irrespective of size, location or proposed use, plays an important role in improving quality of life within the County Borough, contributing towards an attractive environment, successful economy and regeneration of existing communities.

A design-led approach will ensure that every development proposal what ever its scale, responds positively to its context, reinforces local distinctiveness, is sustainable and is a quality place in its own right. The Council encourages pre-application discussions to explore issues prior to the submission of planning applications.

‘Planning Policy Wales’ indicates that applicants for planning permission should as a minimum provide a short written statement setting out the design principles adopted, as well as illustrative material in plan and elevation.

‘Technical Advice Note 12: Design’ requires Design Statements to be submitted with all planning applications which have design implications including applications for new or extended buildings and infrastructure and changes to landscape appearance.

It is imperative that the Council has sufficient information to fully understand a development proposal, the reasoning behind it and the likely impact, in order to make well-informed and balanced decisions. Design Statements are an opportunity for the applicant to explain and justify their proposals and demonstrate how they have taken into

account the need for good design. Design Statements also allow local communities, amenity groups and other stakeholders to involve themselves more directly in the planning process without needing to interpret plans, which can be technical and confusing.

The following policies provide a broad foundation for delivering high quality sustainable development and should be read in conjunction with best practice guidance such as Manual for Streets, plus SPG prepared by the Council on a variety of design related topics.

Policy D1 - Site planning and public realm

Achieving good design is about more than how a place looks. The layout of a scheme, how it connects to the wider area and the overall quality of the spaces between the buildings and the elevations which define them (known as the public realm) are all critical issues in delivering successful sustainable development. Therefore development will be permitted where:

- i) Schemes are well connected to their surroundings, and where appropriate safe and convenient routes are created through the site;**
- ii) Schemes are based on a connected network of streets and spaces where possible;**
- iii) Efficient use is made of land with higher densities in locations which are accessible by public transport and/or adjacent to a range of facilities;**

- iv) The character and quality of the public realm is of high quality;**
- v) Buildings relate positively to the public realm and a clear distinction is made between the public realm and private space;**
- vi) Car parking and highway requirements do not dictate the design of the development; dominate the quality of the public realm;**
- vii) Open space is provided in accordance with Policy?? and where required on site forms a focal area;**
- viii) Existing site features of landscape, nature conservation, heritage or amenity value are retained where possible and positively integrated into the proposed development;**
- ix) Safe and secure environments are created for all users of the public realm, where natural surveillance is maximised;**
- x) The proposed development protects the amenities of existing or proposed occupiers through consideration of issues such as overbearing impact, visual impact, loss of light, increased overlooking, noise, smell or traffic;**
- xi) The proposals do not impact on making the best use of adjacent development sites;**
- xii) Access for all is provided;**
- xiii) Well integrated mixed uses are provided where appropriate, utilising upper floors where possible; and**
- xiv) Non-residential uses and community facilities required by the Council and other agencies are**

provided in accessible locations and accommodated in focal buildings.

Justification

Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council is committed to raising the standard of all development across the County Borough.

'Place making' is a key element of achieving sustainable development through the creation of well-designed places, which are able to stand the test of time. These areas will have reduced dependence on cars, quality streets and spaces and the right mix of uses to help build a strong community. Rhondda Cynon Taf has an opportunity to ensure that new development achieves social, economic and environmental sustainability and to create places that are socially inclusive.

Site planning is at the heart of good design and making successful places. It involves arranging access points, routes, building blocks and spaces within the site boundaries to accommodate existing features and ensure the new development works well. A primary consideration of site planning is the creation of walkable neighbourhoods and the nature of the spaces between buildings. However small, they should be useful, connected, safe and properly landscape designed. Public space and private areas should be clearly differentiated. Spaces that are safe and welcoming in the long term depend on eliminating the opportunity for anti-social activity through the placing of building fronts and treatment of spaces. This applies equally to public highway

space. Well thought out site planning forms the foundation for good architecture.

A connected environment is an essential element of a walkable neighbourhood, which helps reduce the need to travel by providing a choice of safe, attractive and convenient routes, which ensure that new and existing local facilities are easily available to a greater number of people. Additionally such a layout, which encourages walking and cycling, leads to greater natural surveillance.

On all but the smallest sites, an element of open space provision on site should meet local needs and at the same time create a focal area within the development providing a distinct sense of place. Open spaces, which serve no practical function, are in 'left over' areas and/or are poorly supervised are not acceptable. The provision of public open space will be sought in accordance with Policy TBA (leisure and recreation)

The Local Development Plan aims to make the best possible use of available land, whilst achieving high standards of design and layout sensitive to the individual site, and its surroundings. A range of housing types and sizes and a mix of uses should be provided to help achieve balanced communities and avoid social exclusion, which is a key issue in the Borough. It is essential in Rhondda Cynon Taf to integrate the strong existing communities with the new.

The appropriate density will depend on the character of the site, its location and the nature of the development proposed. On the whole low-density development is to be avoided and

higher densities will be sought particularly in and around existing town and local centres where there is a concentration of employment opportunities, community facilities and good access to public transport services. Guidance on density levels is contained in Policy HOUS (TBA).

The quality of the spaces between buildings and the elevations which define them (known collectively as the public realm) is essential to the character and success of a development. The Council expects emphasis to be placed on key areas within schemes, through use of built form to positively define public realm in locations such as entrances to sites, frontages onto main roads, junction areas, main routes and frontages onto open spaces. Where development is proposed on a large site, the use of character areas are required to create sense of place and ensure that the site is easy to find your way around.

A key element of public realm quality is the direction that buildings face and how they relate to street level and the resulting pedestrian experience. Rear boundaries onto streets are not acceptable as this creates a poor quality public realm and lacks natural surveillance required to encourage walking and cycling. All developments should have building frontages facing onto the public realm with the main habitable rooms orientated towards and visible from public areas.

The interaction of parking provision and highway requirements on the quality of the public realm is an issue explored in Manual for Streets. This document stresses the

'place' function of streets and that movement and parking are only some of the many activities, which occur. Therefore all developments must demonstrate how the character of streets has been addressed to support a wide range of activities such as walking, talking, sitting and playing whilst creating a safe and accessible environment. Parking provision must be positively designed into a scheme with a variety of strategies including on street, on plot and rear courtyard.

Whilst development will inevitably lead to change, the avoidance of harm to the amenities of existing occupants is a key issue in order to positively integrate new and existing development.

Site features such as field boundaries, watercourses, existing buildings and trees can contribute to the character and sense of place of a scheme, as well as being of nature conservation value and a link to the historic environment. Therefore features of value should be retained where possible and utilised to give the public realm of a site a unique sense of place. Where features cannot be retained, or where a site has already lost features it may be appropriate to recreate these in the design – for example historic field boundaries could be used to locate new structure planting.

Making best use of land includes ensuring that sites can be developed without fettering the ability to develop an adjoining area in an appropriate manner. This may mean that groups of adjoining sites which are allocated or suitable for development must be comprehensively planned to ensure that optimum use can be achieved in a manner which creates a high quality connected place.

Ensuring access for all is a key element of sustainable development and is now a statutory requirement of all development except listed buildings. Therefore all developments must be accompanied by an access statement, which demonstrates how access is provided from the adopted highway to front doors. For further information please see guidance note prepared by the Design Commission For Wales.

Mixed uses are central to creating sustainable communities. These ensure that new developments incorporate shops, community facilities, employment opportunities, etc which give people the choice of living and working locally and therefore not being dependent on car travel. Mixed uses in town centres are also key to creating character and vitality, plus making the best use of urban areas.

Large scale new residential developments must not simply be a housing estate, consideration must be given to the needs of the existing and potential community. Where community facilities such as halls, medical centres, and local shops are required they must be located in accessible locations, which are easily accessed by foot or cycle and should form focal areas within a development.

Policy D2. Context and character

There is a widespread concern about the erosion of local distinctiveness and as a result, the way in which places are all starting to look the same, plus the overall visual quality of a new development in its own right is important.

Development will be permitted where:

- i) It responds to the local context in terms of siting, appearance, scale, height, massing, elevational treatment, materials and detailing; reinforcing or complementing attractive qualities of local distinctiveness or improving areas of poor design and layout;**
- ii) The character and quality of the built form is maximised in key townscape locations such as town centres, major routes, junctions and spaces;**
- iii) It does not have an adverse impact on prominent buildings, landscapes, open spaces and the general locality;**
- iv) Planting enhances the development and complements the context;**
- v) The appearance of extensions respect and complement the main building and surrounding context.**

Justification

The erosion of local distinctiveness is a wide spread issue across the whole of the UK. In Rhondda Cynon Taf the north and south areas of the County Borough have very different traditional characteristics and yet recent development in these areas is identical and uniformly lacks quality. Rhondda Cynon Taf has a strong culture and heritage, this is reflected in its design and it is important that the traditional character of the Borough is respected and enhanced through design.

The design of buildings is central to the quality of the built environment. Proposals for new developments should assess how a building will be viewed in its context both in terms of the immediate street scene, general neighbourhood and wider views. Supporting information such as street scenes and visualisations are important to show proposals in context.

Choice of materials and the use of architectural details play a large part in establishing local character and identity. It is essential when formulating proposals for new development, to acquire insight into the predominant colours, materials and details in the vicinity of the site.

The purpose is not to dictate vernacular styles, but to reinforce attractive qualities of local distinctiveness. At times this will involve promoting contemporary design. Where an area lacks design quality, then development will be expected to take the opportunity to improve the area.

Where a site is highly prominent, in an important location or a sensitive location such as a town centre, overlooking a well used route/ space or within a Conservation Area it will even more important to achieve a quality of design which ties into the local area and/or which makes a positive statement of quality.

A Design Statement must accompany the majority of all planning applications. As well as explaining and justifying the proposals, this will also need to show that the character of an area has been appraised and how the proposals relate to

this. See Design Statement Guidance Note for further information.

Where existing buildings and open spaces contribute to the character of an area, they should be retained. This could include conversion of former chapels and public houses to new uses. If it can be demonstrated that an existing building cannot be reused to the Council's satisfaction, then a materials recycling condition will be imposed and the quality of proposed development will be judged against what is being lost.

Landscape and planting must be treated as an integral part of any development not an afterthought to green left over areas. The design of open spaces, structure planting and street planting is critical to the overall quality and character of a development.

Where non-residential buildings are being extended, the character of the existing building is a key consideration. The quality and character of industrial areas are important to attract inward investment and provide a place of work for many people therefore they are not 'design free zones'. Guidance on domestic extensions can be found in policy D5.

Policy D3 Masterplan-led Development

Developers will be required prepare a comprehensive masterplan for development on any of the Strategic Sites or any site proposed for development of 50 and over. Where Concept Statements and design principles have been prepared, the masterplan must be evolved in

keeping with these. The masterplan must be agreed by the Council prior to any permission being granted.

The masterplan shall set out:

- i) The exact site boundaries for the whole development and individual phases, including potential growth beyond the plan period;
- ii) Defined walkable neighbourhoods and/or development parcels for which separate development briefs and design codes will be prepared, including plans to show in detail how the design principles will be implemented;
- iii) Movement framework which includes details of street character types, pedestrian and cycle routes, main vehicle routes and links to the existing highway network;
- iv) Location and design principles for proposed town, neighbourhood and local centres;
- v) The range and mix of housing types and the level of affordable housing provision;
- vi) Density of housing/ mix of uses for each neighbourhood;
- vii) Location and design principles of employment sites;
- viii) Location and design principles of social infrastructure sites;
- ix) Public transport links, and proposals to limit dependence on the private car;
- x) Major landscaping and open space proposals to assimilate new development into the

- landscape and create a new habitat landscape setting;
- xi) Bio-diversity plan, including species and habitat protection, mitigation, compensation and new habitat creation measures for sustainability;
- xii) Measures to promote sustainable living, including energy saving designs, innovations in heating and lighting technologies and waste reduction measures;
- xiii) Design and public art strategy; and
- xiv) The expected phasing and funding release for social and physical infrastructure and implementation timetable, including beyond the plan period.

Justification

The identified strategic sites are key to the future of Rhondda Cynon Taf and they also have potential to deliver significant benefits to the existing communities. To ensure that best use is made of these sites and high quality sustainable development is delivered, the Council has prepared a Concept Statement for each, setting out the key elements of spatial form, required mix of uses and design principles. These Concept Statements will form the starting point for developers in the preparation of the required Masterplans.

Sites of 50 and over have considerable potential at both the local level and county level. The Council is keen to ensure that best use is made of these sites and a high quality development is achieved. Therefore in addition to complying

with all the policies of this LDP, development which accords with the criteria set out must take a masterplan led approach.

The quality and content of master plans received by the Council varies widely. The majority lack key information or are not capable of being implemented. Therefore it is considered appropriate to set out the above criteria to ensure a rigorous and robust master planning process. For further guidance see the CABI publication 'Creating Successful Master plans'.

Policy D4. Low Carbon Development

Buildings can play a key role in delivering sustainable development, particularly as they account for up to half of our carbon emissions. Transport is also a key issue given that nearly a quarter of all car trips are under 2 miles. The Assembly has set out the aspiration for all new buildings to be zero carbon by 2011 and Rhondda Cynon Taff will strive to help achieve this. Development will be permitted where:

- i) The site layout and mix of uses maximises opportunities to reduce dependence on cars;**
- ii) Building design minimised energy loss and use and maximises opportunities to capture and store free energy through measures such as solar orientation;**
- iii) Schemes with a floor-space of 1000m² and over or ten or more residential units achieve as a minimum the Good BREEAM (or equivalent)**

target and the Good EcoHomes (or equivalent) target;

- iv) Schemes with a floor-space of 1000m² and over or ten or more residential units provide at least 10% of predicted energy requirements from on site renewable sources; and**
- v) Flexibility in building design allows for future change of use.**

Justification

Good design can play a key role to contributing to reducing the impact of climate change and promote a more efficient use of resources. Buildings currently account of up to half of our CO₂ emissions, therefore there is considerable scope for this further to be reduced through more sympathetic and efficient design.

The recent Stern Report has highlighted a significant body of scientific evidence showing that climate change is a serious and urgent issue.

A reduction in the environmental impact of new developments will be promoted across Rhondda Cynon Taf. This could involve the use of 'greener' construction techniques to reduce CO₂ emissions during construction and use. This will also involve the consideration of building design, layout and orientation, the use of sustainable and recycled materials and the promotion of on-site micro generation.

The Welsh Assembly Government is encouraging all Local Authorities to require that 10% of a schemes energy requirement should be provided on site through renewable energy sources. This target will be monitored and may be increased as technologies improve. If it can be demonstrated to the Council's satisfaction that the incorporation of renewable energy resources are not practical on site, then off site provision will be sought through committed payments to reduce carbon emissions in the locality by cutting energy usage, producing renewable energy in other locations or tree planting.

The Building Research Establishment has developed the Building Research Established Environmental Assessment (BREEAM) standard for all non-residential buildings and the EcoHomes standard for all domestic buildings. Both approaches incorporate sustainability credentials and encourage good environmental design, site planning and construction in addition to reducing running costs through greater energy efficiency. The requirement to achieve a minimum of a Good standard in both BREEAM and EcoHomes will be monitored and may be increased as technologies improve. The Council will adopt appropriate recognised standards if the existing are superseded.

All developments where EcoHomes or BREEAM standards apply (i.e. developments of a floor-space of 1000m² and over or ten or more residential units) will have to submit an Energy Statement prepared by an accredited assessor with the proposal.

Policy D5. Extensions, Alterations and Out Buildings
Extensions, alterations and out buildings in domestic situations will be permitted provided they:

- i) Reflect or complement the form, siting, materials, details and character of the original building and its curtilage;**
- ii) Reflect or complement the character of the wider area, particularly where the property forms part of a semi-detached pair, a terrace or a formal street pattern;**
- iii) Would not cause unacceptable harm to the amenities of neighbouring occupiers;**
- iv) Retain satisfactory car parking on site; and**
- v) Provide satisfactory amenity space within the site.**

Justification

The Council recognises the desire of occupants to stay within communities by adapting and upgrading their dwellings as their life style and personal needs change. However the changes must be balanced against the manner in which works to existing properties both individually and collectively, have an effect on the character of an area. It is important in the interests of good design and to safeguard the character of an area, that such extensions are well designed in themselves, in relation to the main building and the general street scene.

Extensions should be subservient to the original building and where possible significant alterations and extensions should be confined to the rear and side elevations.

Policy D6. Alterations to Buildings in the Countryside

The alteration, renovation or conversion of existing buildings in the countryside outside the defined settlement boundary will only be permitted where:

- i) The existing building is structurally sound or is capable of being made so without substantial major external alteration or reconstruction;**
- ii) The proposed use is compatible with surrounding land uses and does not require substantial extension;**
- iii) The character, form, material and design responds to the rural character, and the proposed conversion is in scale and sympathy with the surrounding landscape;**
- iv) The proposal satisfies transportation considerations including access, traffic generation and parking; and**
- v) There are no adverse effects on nature conservation interests.**

Justification

Buildings in the countryside are important to the overall landscape character and quality of the County Borough. The Council will support the re-use of buildings where they are structurally sound and the works required to accommodate

the new uses are in scale with the building and wider landscape.

Where significant increase in size or alteration in character is proposed, or where the buildings are so derelict that substantial or complete rebuilding is required, this will be treated as a new development in the countryside.

The character of new works could be traditional or contemporary provided they are rural in character and compatible with the existing character of the building.

When converting rural buildings the presence of bats and owls is an issue, which must be thoroughly investigated and may require design revisions.

Policy D7. Shopfronts and commercial frontages

Shopfronts that harm the appearance of an area through inappropriate design or through unsympathetic security measures will not be permitted. Shopfronts will only be permitted where:

- i) The scale, proportion and overall design of shopfront with is compatible with the upper floors of the main building;**
- ii) Shopfronts which stretch across more than one building are designed to reflect the change in properties;**
- iii) The scale, proportion and overall design reflects or complements the wider street scene;**

- iv) Existing features and details of architectural interest, or which contribute to the overall character of an area are retained;
- v) Safe and convenient access for all is provided;
- vi) Security measures are only provided where necessary, and if required are discretely incorporated and designed; and
- vii) Independent ground floor access to the upper floors is provided, except where a safe and convenient rear or side access is provide

Justification

Shopfronts and commercial frontages are an essential element of the commercial activity of town and local centres and there is constant pressure to update and modify them. If the visual quality of the borough's shopping streets are to be enhanced, then well-designed shopfronts using good quality materials are essential. It is important that the. It is also important to recognise that the successful use of upper floors to accommodate mixed uses within retail areas usually requires separate access from the street. Where security measures are required they should be sensitively incorporated into shopfronts. The preference is for internal shutters behind the glass, but if external shutters are proposed then they must be of the slatted kind to allow glimpses through to the shopfront behind not solid and be in a painted finish. Design, proportion and scale of the shopfront relates to both the building of which it is part, and to adjoining buildings. In sensitive locations such as Conservation Areas corporate styles may be unacceptable.

Policy D8 – PUBLIC ART

The Council will promote the benefits of public art in the Borough and will seek the provision of new works of art as part of new development schemes. Developers will be encouraged to set aside a proportion of their costs for works of art to be provided within the development, or where this is not appropriate, at a suitable location within the Borough.

The Council recognises that public art can make a positive contribution to the quality of the environment and encouragement will be given to the integration of good quality art or craft works in the design of the public realm, new development or refurbishment proposals. The artwork should be located in publicly visible or accessible areas. Developers are encouraged to integrate art and craft works into development schemes at the design stage.

Developers should consider the opportunities for art at the outset of the design process and are encouraged to engage artists to work with the design team. Consideration should be given to: Location, Materials , Safety, Vandalism.

The recognised benefits of public art include attracting investment into an area. Public art in Rhondda Cynon Taf will play a key role in creating areas and public realm that are more appealing places for businesses to locate.

The community can be regenerated through community art projects but also by being involved in the creation of a public art work this can lead to employment opportunities and training.

Tourism can be generated through public art, as it often becomes a catalyst in itself, encouraging visitors to an area and giving an area a competitive edge in relation to competing visitor destinations. This is important in Rhondda Cynon Taf, as tourism is a key sector in the creation of a sustainable economy. Changing the wider perception of the Borough is particularly important to encourage investment and also changing the local residents perception of their area, instilling pride. This in turn can lead to a greater use of open spaces and public realm and create a greater sense of ownership within the local community.

Public art can contribute to the local distinctiveness of Rhondda Cynon Taf through not only depicting the past history and culture of the area but also in portraying that the borough is changing and moving on to a brighter future. This element is key in public art which often reinforces the past rather than highlighting the future.

Public art in Rhondda Cynon Taf can be more than sculptures, it can be used to create places for people to use and within the Borough will have a key role to play in creating vibrant town centres and public spaces.

7. Further Advice

If you require any further advice or assistance in respect this or other LDP documents or wish to be placed on the Council's consultation database please contact a member of the Local Development Plan Team at:

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Pontypridd
CF37 2TB

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