

Parklands

A proposal for a

NEW TOWN

Between Cardiff and Llantrisant in South Wales

Proposed by Cardiff Civic Society

April 2014

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1. Executive Summary

The Cardiff Local Development Plan proposes extensive development on Greenfield sites north-west of the city in the form of massive suburban extensions. There is an indication that a rapid transport route may be provided in the future. In response to those proposals, Cardiff Civic Society has proposed that development be integrated with the rapid transport route to form a linear new town, to be delivered by a development agency, company or partnership specifically set up for that purpose. The new town would take the form of a series of distinct neighbourhoods arranged along the rapid transport route with high density development centred around the stations and large public open spaces strategically located between the new neighbourhoods and between them and existing communities, to form a 21st Century 'Garden City'.

2. Background

2a. Cardiff Civic Society

Cardiff Civic Society (CCS) was founded in 1964. It is a voluntary organisation affiliated to the Civic Trust for Wales. It has been closely involved in commenting constructively on Cardiff's Local Development Plan (LDP) at all of its stages.

Cardiff Civic Society is no 'NIMBY' organisation. Far from it, the Society wants to see Cardiff grow in a sustainable way into a modern European city but it is objecting to the deposit LDP, because we believe it should be phased so that development is integrated with investment in public transport infrastructure rather than preceding it.

As a body the CCS is concerned with the quality of life for the citizens of Cardiff – i.e. the quality of the built environment and its open spaces, and, the ability of its citizens to enjoy the City, to feel safe, and to have a reasonable prospect of finding suitable housing and employment. The new town we propose north-west of Cardiff could make a major contribution to achieving these goals.

CCS has recently held discussions with the North-West Group - an alliance of local community councils and residents organisations opposed to the strategic development sites proposed north west of Cardiff in the LDP. The group has expressed support for CCS's vision for the development of the area and this holds out the unusual prospect of a new town proposal being supported by local residents.

2b. The Cardiff Local Development Plan (LDP)

The proposed new town in Ebblefleet notwithstanding, Cardiff city has a once-in-a-century opportunity to pioneer new forms of sustainable development - not only in Wales but in the whole of Great Britain – by promoting the development of a new town on Garden City principles adapted to the 21st century.

The opportunity is presented by the combination of two powerful drivers. Firstly, the city's phenomenal (in Welsh terms) population growth and consequent demand for housing and secondly the prospect of a comprehensive rapid transport network in South East Wales – the 'Metro'.

Between 2001 and 2011 Cardiff's population grew by over 46,000 - a quarter of the population growth in Wales (Cardiff currently has approximately 11% of the total Welsh population). Since 2011

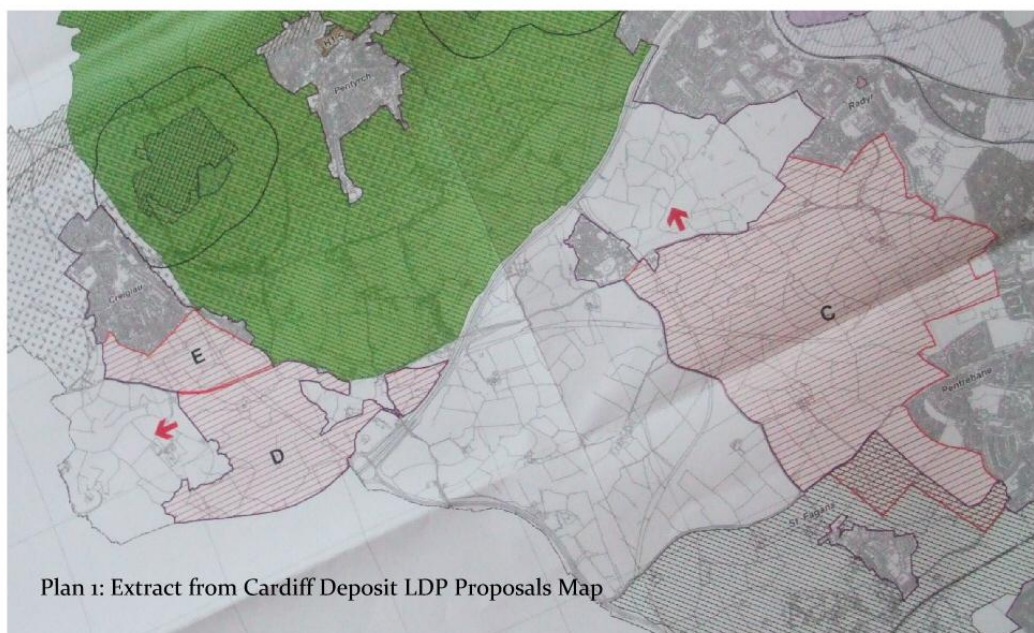
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Cardiff has continued to grow, with an additional 3,100 people added in 2011/12 – 30% of the national increase.

Cardiff has also seen rapid growth in the number of jobs provided in the city in the first decade of the 21st Century and the city now attracts a daily inflow of 78,000 commuters from the surrounding region. Despite being rather small compared to other British cities, Cardiff contains the 10th largest retail centre in the UK. It contains the seat of the devolved Welsh Government and many Welsh National institutions including the national rugby stadium and the national museum. Three universities and several other higher education facilities attract tens of thousands of students to the city. Cardiff's city centre is therefore the primary travel destination in South East Wales and this has inevitably given rise to problems of traffic congestion on the roads leading into the city centre.

In recent years the rapid growth in population has not been reflected in an increase in the number of households, as the recent recession and financial crisis has prevented new households from forming and increasing numbers of twenty and thirty-somethings have been forced to live with Mum and Dad. This is only a temporary phenomenon, however and when wages begin to catch up and overtake inflation, demand for new dwellings in the Cardiff travel to work area will be enormous.

Cardiff City's deposit LDP recognises this and proposes to meet the anticipated demand through the allocation of eight large 'strategic sites' for development, mainly in the remaining green space around the north of the city. Three of these sites, with a capacity for 7,000 to 13,000 dwellings, are allocated North West of Cardiff. **Plan 1** shows an extract from the Cardiff City LDP Deposit Plan Proposals Map showing its proposals in this North-West area of the city.



The LDP key diagram indicates that a major rapid transport corridor is proposed in this part of the Plan area, extending right to the boundary with Rhondda Cynon Taff, and CCS applauds this intention. However, the Society notes that the transport corridors on the key diagram are qualified by the phrase "precise alignments subject to further detailed work". Moreover, although LDP

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transport policy T2(i) seeks to 'introduce' a rapid transport system here and policy T7 (iii) 'supports' that idea, there is no rapid transport corridor proposal on the LDP Proposals Map.

Instead a variety of routes are shown criss-crossing the area on the LDP *constraints* map. This implies, in the context of current LDP guidance, that the rapid transport corridor will not be in place during the Plan Period but is safeguarded for later implementation.

The Plan's proposals are therefore very firm in their intention to allow the construction of 7,650 or more dwellings in this area but are very vague as to how, where and when the transport infrastructure necessary to support these huge allocations will be put in place.

The inevitable consequence of this, in the Society's view, is that developers will commence large scale housing development of site C in the form of extensions to the existing suburbs of Radyr and Pentreban, until they eventually meet somewhere in the middle. Sites D and E will similarly become extensions of Creigiau. In the absence of any firm intention regarding the type of rapid transport envisaged, the rapid transport corridor's actual route and how it is to be funded, vast quantities of additional traffic will be decanted onto suburban road networks and commuter routes such as the A4119, which are already near capacity at rush hour.

We fail to see how private sector developers will be able to produce credible Masterplans for their respective strategic sites in the absence of information about the rapid transport route but as they are required to do so, it is entirely possible that they will each produce masterplans that, while being internally coherent, do not complement each other, particularly in respect of the type of rapid transport they envisage, the rapid transport route they choose in relation to the route chosen in the other masterplans and the extent to which they will each contribute funding towards it.

In summary the Civic Society proposes;

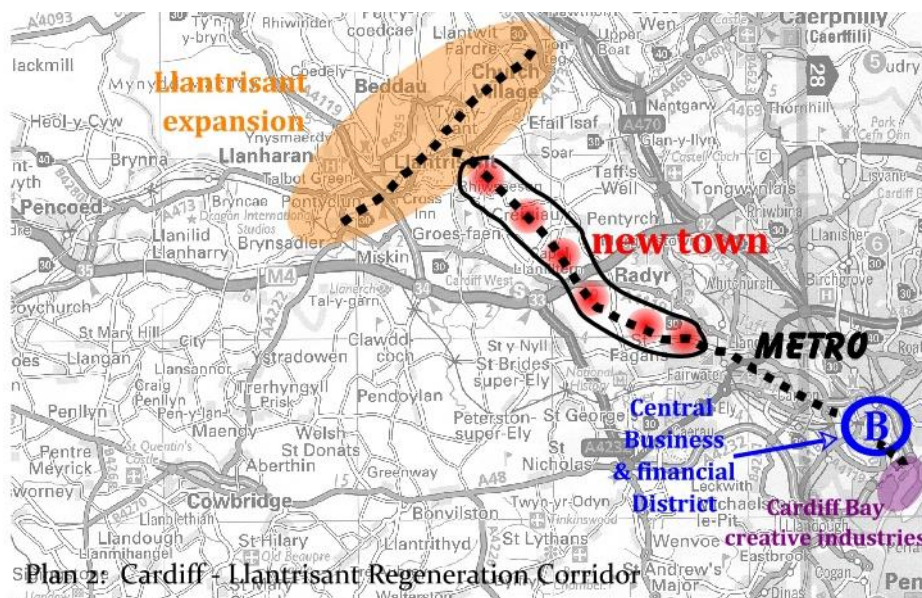
1. **Phasing** the Deposit Plan as a whole so that the Strategic Sites in North-West Cardiff are not developed until the latter part of the Plan Period (2018-2026) in order to give time for the Rapid Transport Route, the Mode of rapid transport and its implementation mechanism to be firmed up and developed concurrently with the housing and employment developments.
2. Support for the Plan's concept of **Masterplanning**, but not of the individual Strategic sites in isolation but for **the whole of the corridor**, including adjacent areas of Rhondda Cynon Taff, in a genuine regional collaboration initiative.
3. We believe that that the most effective and sound way of achieving sustainable development in this area would be to regard the whole of the North-West corridor as a **New Town** and plan it as such. The New Town would be able to accommodate Cardiff's growth not just in the Plan Period but also beyond it with an eventual target population of around 40,000 people.
4. In order to prevent the ad hoc extension of existing suburbs and to establish the New Town's identity, CCS propose that the Masterplan should make provision for Country Parks to be established as buffer zones between the new developments and the existing suburbs of Radyr, Pentreban and Creigiau, thus giving the inhabitants of those areas a stake in the success of the new venture.
5. Furthermore, CCS believes that the establishment of a **New Town Development Corporation** or Urban Development Company, would be the most effective delivery mechanism for the ambitious proposals in North-West Cardiff and adjacent areas of Rhondda Cynon Taff.

2c. The Metro and the regional context

Cardiff is part of a South-East Wales region that encompasses ten unitary authority areas. While in England the UK government has dismantled regional planning frameworks, In Wales there is a gathering consensus in favour of regional planning at least in the 'city-regions' around Cardiff and Swansea. Recently the Welsh Government published a consultative document on a proposed Welsh Planning Act¹, that included provision for introducing regional 'strategic plans' in parts of Wales. The Welsh government has already established city-region boards for the Cardiff and Swansea sub-regions to advise ministers on the development of those areas.

The concept of a 'Metro' or comprehensive network of rapid transport routes in South-East Wales was first put forward by visionary consultant Mark Barry in 2011. The concept has now gained widespread acceptance in South-East Wales, including backing from Cardiff City Council and the Welsh Government, which has committed £62million to developing the first phase of the Metro. Its latest ideas on the concept are contained in a 'Metro Impact Report'² which includes a proposal for a new rapid transport link between North-West Cardiff and the growth area around Llantrisant in the adjacent Rhondda Cynon Taff local authority area.

North West of Cardiff is the track bed of a disused railway line that used to link the west of the city to Llantrisant. This route is recognised in the Metro plan as an ideal opportunity to develop a modern rapid transport route to accommodate commuting into the city from Rhondda Cynon Taff (currently running at 18,800 trips a day³). The most desirable form of rapid transport here is a tram-train facility similar to those to be found in many continental cities. This would enable the new public transport facility to plug into the existing railway line from the Taff Valley into Cardiff Central railway station and thence to the concentration of job opportunities in the city centre, where an Enterprise Zone has been declared in Cardiff's proposed 'Central Business District'.



¹ 'Positive Planning'; Welsh Government 2013

² 'Metro Impact Report' Welsh Government 2013

³ SB 124/2012: statistics on Commuting in Wales 2011

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There is a real opportunity here for co-ordinated and integrated planning to produce a major boost to the struggling Welsh Economy by linking the growth area around Llantrisant in the Welsh Valleys to the job opportunities in Cardiff's Central Business District and in Cardiff Bay (which is developing as a centre for creative industries) through a combination of new and existing rapid transport links (see **Plan 2**). The missing piece of this Growth corridor is the area between Cardiff and Llantrisant. Here development is proposed but not in any co-ordinated way that is specifically linked to the transportation opportunities or other developments in the region. The best way to develop this opportunity area, we believe, is through the creation of a new Town – one that could serve as an exemplar of how to apply the Garden City concept to 21st century realities.

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3a. A 21st century Garden City

Twentieth century 'garden cities' featuring low density semi-detached houses with generous private gardens, were a positive response to the densely packed unhygienic slums of the Nineteenth Century. The 'New Town' proposed here is unlikely to follow that model's physical form but could pioneer a 21st Century version of the Garden City with high density communities clustered around public transport stations but physically separated from each other by extensive public 'gardens' in the form of parks or recreational facilities.

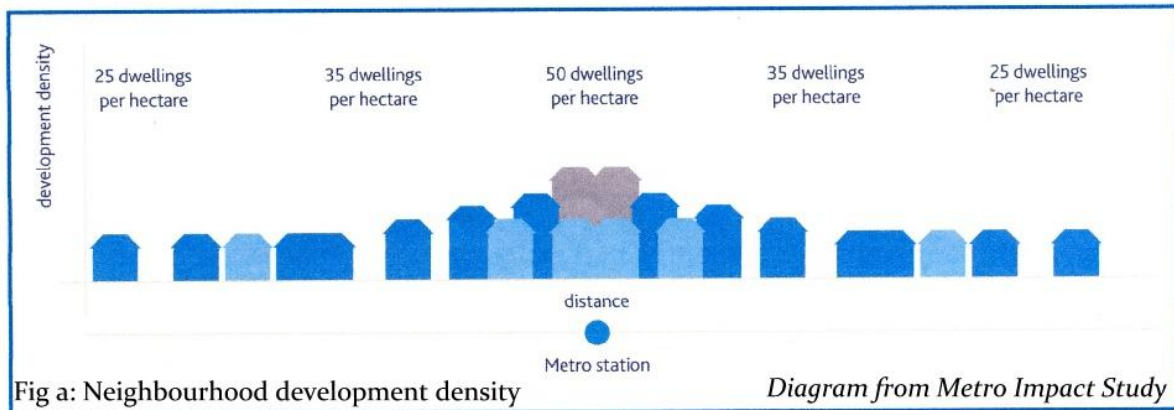
The starting point for the plan for the new town is the proposed rapid transport route, which will define the extent and location of the settlement.

Cardiff Civic Society believes it is of fundamental importance to identify a firm route for the rapid transport facility north-west of Cardiff *before* approving development site boundaries. This is because in order to make development sustainable and the Metro link viable, it is essential that development is arranged in the optimum configuration to take advantage of, and provide support to, the rapid transport facility.

This means arranging development around proposed tram-train stations as hubs for the neighbourhoods that will be created in the new town. Current advice is that a distance of 800 metres is considered a reasonable walking distance to a public transport node, beyond which the propensity to use the facility rapidly declines. The Civic Society therefore proposes a linear urban form comprising a series of neighbourhoods each centred on a station and contained within a circle radiating 800 metres from the centre. The gross area of each neighbourhood would be around 200 hectares (approximately 500 acres) accommodating up to 6,000 dwellings, depending on the proportion of non-residential development and the density of development.

To optimise the sustainability and viability gains of this format, high density development, whether residential, employment, or services, should be located closest to the station 'hub' of each neighbourhood with lower density development on the fringe (see figure 'a').

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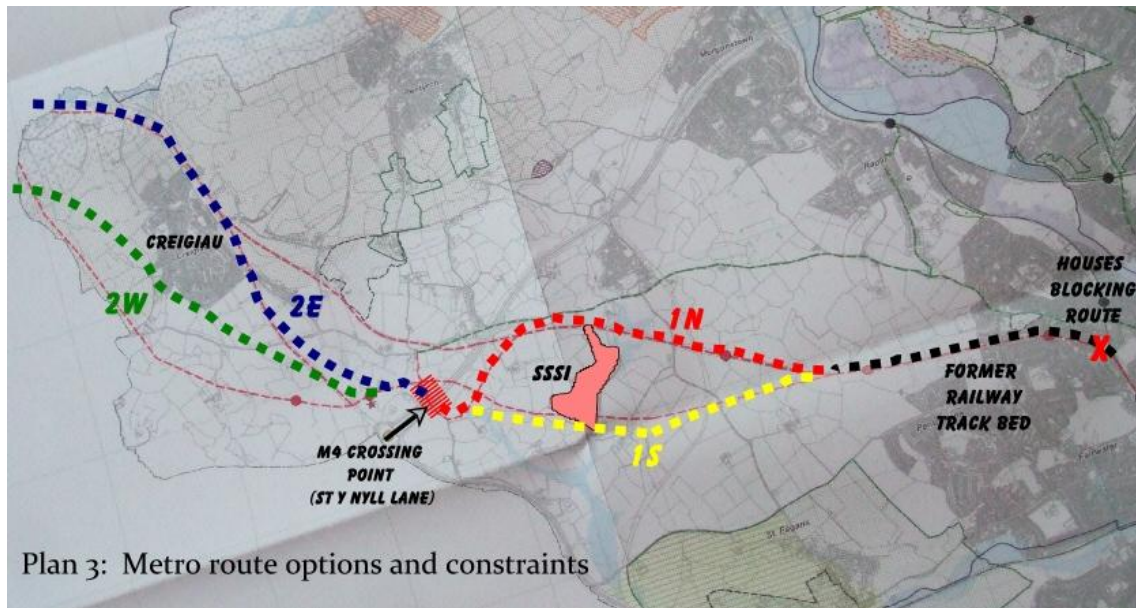
3b. The Rapid Transport Route

There are relatively few constraints affecting the area between Cardiff and Llantrisant but they do exist and will influence the route of the proposed rapid transport facility. They are;

1. A small estate of some 20 dwellings that was built on the former railway line just where it used to join the existing railway line to the city centre. Unfortunately, there really is no alternative to the compulsory purchase and removal of these houses if the rapid transport proposal is to be realised. It nevertheless provides a significant political hurdle that Cardiff's decision makers will have to face up to.
2. There is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) centred on the Nant Dowlais (stream) about half way between Cardiff and the village of Creigiau, that also presents a flood risk. The Metro route should go either north or south of the SSSI and development should avoid it altogether. (We suggest it could contribute to one of the open spaces between New Town neighbourhoods).
3. The most formidable obstacle is the M4, which runs east-west right across the area. Bridging over or tunnelling under the motorway would be prohibitively expensive for a transport facility that will in any event be an expensive undertaking. Fortunately there is a handy route that was provided under the M4 when it was built. This takes the form of a tunnel accommodating a minor road – the strangely named Saint Y Nyll lane – that could accommodate a twin track tram train facility. Thus all the route options for the rapid transport must converge on this point.
4. The village of Creigiau. This is a small village north of the M4 that is bounded on the eastern side by the edge of the Green Belt proposed around Northern Cardiff in the Deposit LDP. The rapid transport route must pass to the west or to the east of the village and it makes sense to locate a station there to serve the settlement itself.
5. The former railway track bed continues beyond Creigiau into Rhondda Cynon Taff to the vicinity of another former railway track that is also proposed for a rapid transport route in the adopted Rhondda Cynon Taff LDP. Unfortunately adjacent to that route is a sewage works, an iron age hill fort and former mine workings, which limit the development potential of that area. It may be preferable for the rapid transport link to follow a route further south while still converging on a point between Llantrisant and Beddau.

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These constraints mean that effectively the alternative routes for the rapid transport route are limited to the four options that are illustrated on **Plan 4**. These comprise combinations of the routes north and south of the SSSI (labelled 1N and 1S on the Plan) with the routes East and West of Creigiau (2E and 2W on the Plan).



It can immediately be appreciated that whichever combination of routes is eventually chosen (ie 1S-2E, 1S-2W, 1N-2E or 1N-2W) the current proposals for development sites in the Cardiff LDP are not ideally placed to take full advantage of the rapid transport facility. Far better for the parts of strategic sites C, D and E that are more than 800 metres away from stations to be excluded from development in favour of areas currently unallocated in the LDP that would be within that radius of a Metro Station.

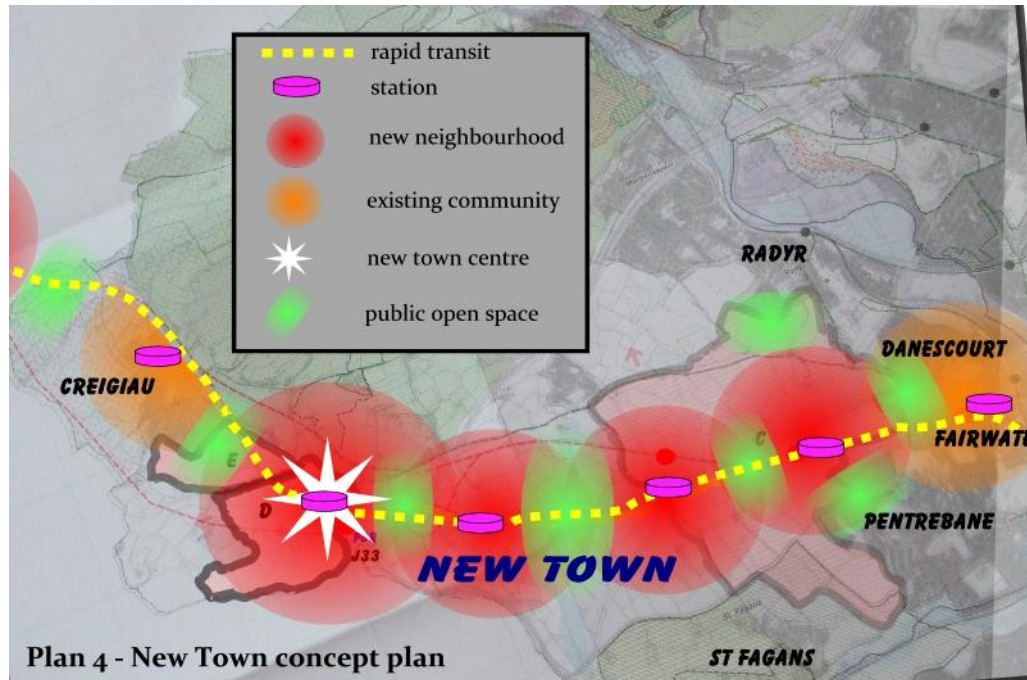
This is not just a 'wouldn't it be nice if . . .' assertion; *the very viability and thus fundability of the Metro route relies on maximising its potential customer base and hence the revenue stream that will underpin the capital required to finance the construction and running costs of the facility.* Moreover, if the strategic sites are built out first, and a rapid transport facility comes along later, many residents will have by that time become used to using a car or other alternative form of transport thus reducing their propensity to patronise the Metro still further.

Although some in Welsh Government appear to believe that population and household projections are a form of infallible predictive science, the fact is that the projections for housing demand on which the Cardiff LDP is based are subject to a range of variable social and economic factors that may result in a future demand that is lower or higher than predicted. An added advantage of the modular format of the proposed New Town is that it allows a logical progression of new neighbourhoods to be built in response to whatever demand actually occurs for new housing in the Cardiff travel to work area. For example if demand turns out to be very low (as it has been during the recent recession) then only one neighbourhood is built initially and the Metro only goes that far but if demand turns out to be higher then more neighbourhoods could be built.

The CCS suggests that country parks be established between the proposed New Town and the adjoining western suburbs of Cardiff and between the new town and the village of Creigiau. These would help define the New Town as a distinct entity but would also, through the provision within the parks of extensive pedestrian and cycle routes, provide recreational facilities that could be enjoyed by residents of adjacent suburbs of Cardiff as well as New Town residents. Thus both existing and new residents would have a common interest in the success of the New Town project. We further

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suggest a development model in which the distinct station-focussed neighbourhoods of the new town are themselves separated from each other by open spaces, be they public parks, recreation grounds, allotments, nature reserves or a combination of those green spaces. This widespread provision of green infrastructure will help define the new settlement and its character – hence the suggested name of ‘Parklands’ for the new town.



3c. The new town centre

A new town that may eventually contain a population of some 40,000 people could support a substantial and vibrant town centre, even in this era of internet shopping and service provision. This presents an opportunity for an imaginative, people centred design for a multi functional centre that will itself help define the character of the new town. It must of course be focussed on a metro station and be easily accessible by public transport and the town's cycling and footpath network.

Alas, what is most likely to happen under the current proposals is the development of a characterless sprawl of retail sheds around Junction 33 of the M4, sucking trade from the city centre and other traditional shopping centres in the region rather than serving the needs of residents of the new developments. A further intensification of the traffic congestion around this junction will inevitably follow, detracting from the M4's original purpose of providing good vehicular access to the region as a whole.

It is probably inevitable, even if the Civic Society's plan were adopted, that the main retail and service focus of the new town would be in the vicinity of J33. The centre could still be carefully planned, however, so that it would be easily accessible by public transport and accessible, but not directly, from M4 J33. In any event there should be at least half a mile of road between the centre's car parks and J33 in order to avoid queuing traffic backing up and grid locking the Motorway junction.

Some may say that a town centre in this location is not 'central' enough to properly serve all the new communities being created to the east. Even the most easterly neighbourhood would only be a few minutes away from the centre by Metro however and an important consideration for Metro viability is the need to have passengers travelling in the opposite direction to the main flow into and out of the city centre. The curse of any city transport service is that during the rush hour half of its infrastructure is largely unused. It is therefore important to have trip generating destinations west

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and north of Cardiff on the Metro line to enhance its viability (and boost regeneration in the region generally).

3d. Links to the expansion of Llantrisant

An essential feature of the CCS new town proposal is that the rapid transport route should link Cardiff and the Llantrisant area in Rhondda Cynon Taff, boosting the regeneration potential of that area of the valleys and providing a sustainable alternative to the car for the 18,800 commuters that travel into Cardiff from RCT every day. Llantrisant was itself proposed as the location for a new town in the 1960s but this was never implemented after strong opposition from local authorities north of the town. Despite this, the area has experienced steady growth in residential, employment and retailing development but in an unplanned manner. Rhondda Cynon Taff's LDP, adopted in 2012, seeks to remedy this and itself proposes a rapid transport route along a disused railway route running south-west to north-east through Pontyclun, Talbot Green, Llantrisant, Beddau and Church Village with links to a number of strategic development sites in that corridor. Alas, this proposed route does not link up to the rapid transport corridor north west of Cardiff.

Fortunately, the former rail track from Cardiff does link up physically with the one in Rhondda Cynon Taff, just north of Llantrisant. Unfortunately the land adjacent to this section of the former railway suffers from a number of constraints limiting its development potential, including a sewage works, former mine workings and shafts and an historic iron age hill fort.

As discussed above it is vital to the success of the proposed tram-train facility that it is complemented by adjacent development to maximise its potential use and therefore financial viability. The project cannot afford to have long stretches of expensive infrastructure that does not access revenue generating customers. It may make sense therefore to route the rapid transport west of Creigiau on a new route south of the former railway route so that further new town neighbourhoods could be developed in the Rhondda Cynon Taff section of the link.

4. Delivering the new town

We believe there is a compelling argument for developing this New Town through a purpose built delivery body – a New Town Development Corporation. Although no new towns have been built in Britain for several decades, the legislation for declaring one is still on the statute books.

CCS recognises that Cardiff City Council has not the powers to establish a New Town Development Corporation (NTDC) itself but it could support and indeed recommend the establishment of such a body to Welsh Government. We also recognise that some in the City Council may be concerned that such a body would remove control over the future development of the area from the city council.

We understand but disagree with that perception. The proposal should rather be seen as enhancing the city council's powers to secure the implementation of its ambitious plans for this area. The reality is that Cardiff City Council has no hope of implementing any of the developments and infrastructure proposed north-west of the city without the agreement and active support of landowners, private sector developers, infrastructure providers, adjacent local authorities and not least, Welsh Government. The Board of a NTDC should have representatives of all these interested parties on it, including members of the city council (and Rhondda Cynon Taff council) and so would be merely formalising a partnership that would have to exist in any event. To further reduce concerns in this respect CCS recommends that the City Council retain the power to determine planning applications in the New Town area, as it did with regard to the Cardiff Bay Urban Development Company.

The gains that could be obtained by the establishment of a NTDC by contrast would be extensive and would include the following;

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1. A dedicated delivery vehicle such as a New Town Development Authority (NTDC) would be responsible for both producing a comprehensive plan for the whole area and for ensuring its implementation.
2. With council budgets across the UK being cut back for the foreseeable future, it is unlikely that Cardiff CC would be able to fund the necessary infrastructure. By contrast a NTDC would be free to borrow against the anticipated value of the developments and assets it would create in order to fund infrastructure up front.
3. A NTDC would have compulsory purchase powers enabling it to acquire land for both infrastructure (including green infrastructure) and development.
4. A NTDC would be able to acquire land in a 'no scheme' valuation scenario – ie at the proposed use value but less the cost of the gas, electricity, sewerage etc that would be required to service the site if it remained in open countryside. It would thus realise a large proportion of the betterment of the land value *as well as* any receipts from S106 agreements. This could fund a larger percentage of the required infrastructure than any other delivery mechanism.
5. This could also be seen as a socially progressive way of sharing the betterment on land value brought about by planning, particularly as the majority of the land in NW Cardiff is in the ownership of a single individual (the Earl of Plymouth). The Plymouth Estate would no doubt be represented on the Board of the NTDC and still realise substantial profits from the sale of its land, but not so much as would be the case if the public sector relied on existing arrangements such as S106 agreements or the Community Infrastructure Levy (which is cumbersome, inadequate, open to challenge and may not survive the next UK General Election).
6. A NTDC would be a Registered Social Landlord, able to borrow finance to build dwellings for rent and thus make a major contribution to the LDP's ambitious housing targets. Indeed without a NTDC the affordable housing targets of the LDP are most unlikely to be realised.
7. Cardiff's Deposit LDP contains an admirable list of requirements for 'Sustainable (new) Neighbourhoods'⁴ including minimising energy demand, water use, air pollution and car travel and maximising renewable solutions, recycling, sustainable drainage, sustainable transport use and the early provision of social facilities and community infrastructure. Good design, a strategic cycle network, benefits to existing communities and a diversity of land uses are also on Cardiff's sustainable neighbourhoods wish list. A NTDC is much more likely to realise these aspirations than relying on the private sector to deliver environmental benefits given that the sector has been highly critical of Welsh Government's sustainability policies for new housing and thus will be reluctant to implement them.
8. The governing Board of a NTDC would consist of both public and private sector representatives (including of course, local Councillors) thus combining the abilities and expertise of both sectors in an effective partnership.

To summarise, this New Town Development Corporation (or Agency or Partnership) should be charged with planning and implementing housing, employment, transportation and other

⁴ Cardiff Deposit Local Development Plan p31 – objective 4 'To create sustainable neighbourhoods that form part of a sustainable city'

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infrastructure not just in North-West Cardiff but also across the border in adjacent areas of Rhondda Cynon Taff. It should have compulsory purchase and borrowing powers but planning development control powers should be retained by the respective local authorities to ensure democratic control over development. The NTDC would however be charged with producing a comprehensive master plan for the area, to be reviewed every five years. An independent body like this would be able to provide infrastructure up front by acquiring land and borrowing (or securing grant aid) against the prospect of increasing value of its land holdings as future development sites and secure the maximum public benefit from the uplift in land values from development.

It is clear that Welsh Government, Cardiff City Council and the landowners and prospective developers of the strategic sites in the LDP are all baulking at the prospect of having to fund on their own the £100 million plus rapid transport route, though they all support the concept. These three major players need to combine resources in order to bring it about and they could also support the Development Corporation or Agency with grants, loans, the gift of land and the provision of human and other resources.

Conclusion

It is not too late for Cardiff City Council to amend its Local Development Plan in a way that would avoid the prospect of an uncoordinated developer rampage through the countryside west of the city and replace it with a vision of a new town that would be an inspiration to its citizens and an exemplar of sound planning for the rest of the UK to follow. It is a vision that would need to be supported by Welsh Government and the private sector and not least, the citizens of Cardiff. The case for such an approach is set out here. Now it's up to you.

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For Cardiff Civic Society

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