

# DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

DECEMBER 2023

GRAIG Y RHACCA COMMUNITY RESOURCES CENTRE, 59 - 71 GRAYS GARDENS, MACHEN, CAERPHILLY CF83 8TQ  
CONVERSION WORKS — PROPOSED ADAPTATION TO EXISTING BUILDING TO CREATE SIX APARTMENTS AND  
ONE TWO BEDROOM DETACHED DWELLING.



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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

This Design and Access Statement has been produced in support of a full planning application for conversion of the vacant Graig Y Rhacca Community Resources Centre, into six apartments and one two bedroom dwelling.

Constructed in the mid 1960's as six apartments and one two bedroom dwelling, forming part of Caerphilly County Borough Councils social housing stock and converted into the current Graig Y Rhacca Community Resources Centre in 2002.

Opened in January 2002, aiming to provide a local facility to continually develop and improve the quality of life for the residents of Graig Y Rhacca and the wider community. Run as a social enterprise, the centre has previously provided services including a crèche, credit union, doctors surgery, homework club and other services.

Closed in December 2017 following the dissolution of the Communities First Scheme.

Re-opened in 2018 to provide services to the local community, this was stopped during the COVID-19 pandemic. The building reopened following COVID-19 as "Caerphilly Cares", however, the facility was under used and closed in March 2023 and has remained vacant.

## **1.1 DOCUMENT SCOPE**

The purpose of this Design and Access Statement is to explain the process that has led to the concept of the design and how the development satisfies the criteria within the Local Development Plan.

Technical Advice Note 12 sets out the requirements for a Design and Access Statement in Wales. This includes understanding the site and its context and achieving the following objectives of good design:

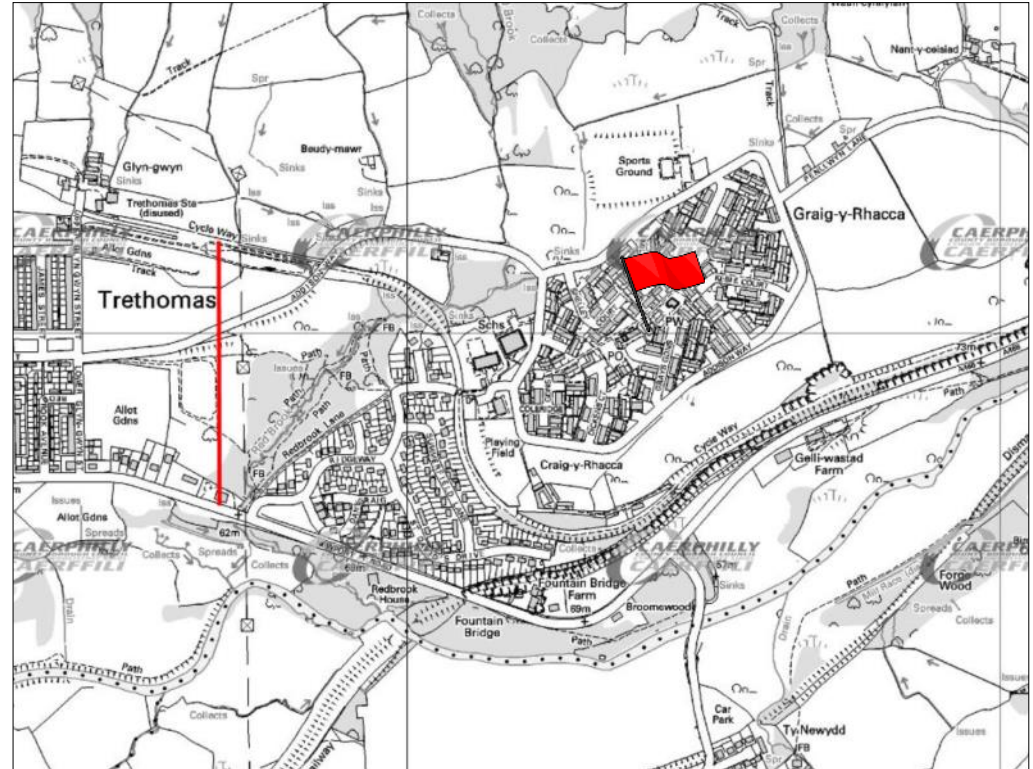
- Environmental sustainability
- Movement
- Access
- Appearance and character
- Community safety

## 1.2 SITE LOCATION AND CONTEXT

The site which forms the subject of this application is in Grays Gardens, Graig-y-Rhacca, a housing estate bordering Trethomas, Bedwas and Machen in the borough of Caerphilly. The town is about 8 miles to the west of Newport and 4 miles to the east of Caerphilly. The area mainly consists of local authority tenancies and privately owned estates.

Graig Y Rhacca Community Resources Centre is bounded on three sides with pedestrian footways and residential buildings. The South-West elevation of the building is bordered by the main access road into cul-de-sac (Grays Gardens) and by a block of retail units, and is adjacent to a disused fish and chip shop.

The surrounding vernacular is predominantly residential in character, with linked housing to the North, East and Western boundaries, built in the same style and time period as the Graig Y Rhacca Community Resources Centre (GYR CRC).



CCBC LDP 2010



Right : GYR CRC  
Viewed from  
Penllwyn Walk



Left : GYR CRC  
Viewed from end  
of cul-de-sac.

## PHOTOGRAPHS OF STRUCTURES TO BE DEMOLISHED AND SURROUNDING CONTEXT



GYR CRC viewed from cul-de-sac



Rear elevation GYR CRC (proposed two bed dwelling)



GYR CRC viewed in context with disused Chip Shop



GYR CRC in context with adjacent housing



Rear flat roof lift enclosure for demolition



Flat roof extension for demolition

### 1.3 FLOOD RISK

The site lies circa 500 meters away from the Rhymney River and is approximately 115.04m above ordinance datum. Natural Resources Wales online Flood Risk Assessment Wales Map shows that the proposed development site is not in a location considered to be at risk of flooding.



Natural Resources Wales online Flood Risk Assessment Wales Map

## 1.4 SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONTEXT

Constructed in the mid 1960's as six apartments and one two bedroom dwelling, forming part of Caerphilly County Borough Councils social housing stock. Due to economic circumstances at the time, the decision was taken to convert the building, to create a community facility.

Combined with the downturn in use and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Graig Y Rhacca Community Group could not economically meet the increasing costs of running the facility.

Options for the refurbishment of the community facility and the demolition and re-build of a new facility were considered by CCBC, however, both options were cost prohibitive.

The proposal will provide a long term solution assisting in meeting the current demand for single person and small local authority tenancies.

## 1.5 THE PROPOSAL

Briefly the proposal envisages the conversion of the Graig Y Rhacca Community Recourses Centre to create 5 No. one bedroom apartments, 1 No. two bedroom apartment and 1 No. two bedroom house.

Prior to its conversion into Graig Y Rhacca Community Recourses Centre, numbers 59-71 Grays Gardens were 6 No. one bedroom apartments and 1 No. two bedroom house, which formed part of Caerphilly County Borough Council's social housing stock.

Adaptation and extensions were undertaken at various stages of Graig Y Rhacca Community Recourses Centre's lifespan, all of which were of a nature that make conversion back to residential units relatively straight forward. The proposal envisages the demolition of the flat roof extension to the front of the building and the demolition of the lift (out of service), to the rear of the building. The former commercial kitchen space will be incorporated into one of the ground floor apartments to create a two bedroom unit.

Issues considered in the decision to retain and convert Graig Y Rhacca Community Recourses Centre are as follows:

- Financial viability of the community services.
- Viability of refurbishment for further community use v's the shortage of single person and small council tenancies.
- Financial viability of demolition of the building and the construction of a new facility.
- The nature and condition of the existing building and its adaptability to revert to residential use.

## 2.0 EXISTING SITE AND CONTEXT

2.1 The site that forms the subject of this application lies within the Graig Y Rhacca housing estate, constructed in the mid 1960's as six apartments and one two bedroom dwelling. The property was converted in 2002 to form the Graig Y Rhacca Community Resources Centre.

The site as a whole in terms of use class is Local and Community D2, with residential properties to the North East, South East and North West and a mixture of residential and vacant retail units to the South West boundary.

2.2 The surrounding vernacular is predominantly 1960's semi-detached link and terrace housing, with a materials palette consisting of red and cream facing brickwork, roughcast / spa-rendered walls and a mixture of interlocking concrete roof tiles and flat roofs.

2.3 The existing building, constructed in no-fines concrete, dominates the site. Converted to from GYR CRC in 2002 and upgraded with external wall insulation to incorporate red facing brick slip and spa-render bonded to an phenolic insulation material. Further adapted in 2013 adding flat roofed extensions to the front and rear of the property.

Latterly a further flat roof extension was added to allow the incorporation of a proprietary hydraulic platform lift and the building's link re-roofed.



Adjacent vacant retail units



Nearby apartments same building type as per GYR CRC prior to conversion and re-roofing



## 2.4 Opportunities & Constraints

### Opportunities

- The previous use of the building lends itself to straight forward conversion back to C3 housing.
- The site provides a secure and enclosed location.
- There are not considered to be any overlooking issues associated with the change of use.
- The creation of a modernised and fit for purpose facility.
- Provision of a long term solution assisting in meeting the current demand for single person and small local authority tenancies.
- Existing dilapidated building stock is upgraded and re-purposed.
- Existing parking facilities associated with the Graig Y Rhacca Community Recourses Centre are considered adequate to service the proposals.

### Constraints

- The site is enclosed on 75% of its perimeter by residential and retail properties, limiting access for construction materials. Planned management of materials deliveries will need to be implemented to limit disruption to the residents of Grays Gardens.
- Careful management of material storage and site circulation will be required to ensure safety and security during the construction process.



Existing vehicle and pedestrian access to GYR CRC from Grays Gardens



Pedestrian access to GYR CRC from Penllwyn Walk



Highway access from Grays Gardens

### 3.0 DESIGN

#### 3.1 Site Layout



Proposed site layout NTS

The entire site of the Graig Y Rhacca Community Resources Centre is circa 660m<sup>2</sup>, with an existing building footprint of 303m<sup>2</sup>.

The land rises gently from South West to North East circa 1m. The change of level is accommodated within the site curtilage with retaining walls to the rear boundaries of the site and immediately adjacent to the rear flat roof extension. As can be seen in the following elevational images, there is a significant change in finished floor level between the main apartment block and the semi detached dwelling.

As previously discussed the intent is to demolish the existing flat roof extension to the main entrance of the building and the proprietary lift enclosure to the rear. This leaves a residual building footprint of 256m<sup>2</sup>.

Wherever possible areas of soft landscape have been retained, generally in pockets created by the existing retaining features of the site.

Spaces for cycle storage and the drying of laundry have been provided within the site boundary, along with adequate enclosed refuse and recycling storage.

As identified in the accompanying detailed site plan, boundary treatments will be a mix of 1200mm high and 1800mm high hit and miss fencing and 1200mm high hoop top metal fencing.

The existing hoop top fencing to the North East boundary (Circa 1600mm high) will be retained and refinished.

There are currently eight car parking spaces associated with the Graig Y Rhacca Community Resources Centre, which will provide adequate parking for the proposed residential units.

### 3.2 Design Development



Proposed Ground Floor Plan

Initially, consideration was given to the adaptation of the flat roof extension at the front of the building, creating a spacious two bedroom apartment with enhanced kitchen and sanitary facilities.

However, given the scale of the enhanced apartment in comparison to the remaining units, this was considered unnecessary and when assessed not financially viable.

The decision was therefore taken to demolish the extension and reconfigure the two bedroom apartment to a more modest footprint. This provided an opportunity to provide additional outdoor space for the safe and hygienic storage of refuse and recycling.

Alternative materials were considered, with the use of a scribed rough cast render which would provide an easy to clean surface to the lower elements of the façade.

This option was discounted. The view was taken that the proposed red facing brick, creates a more vibrant and welcoming appearance, that is appropriate to the material palette of the local vernacular.

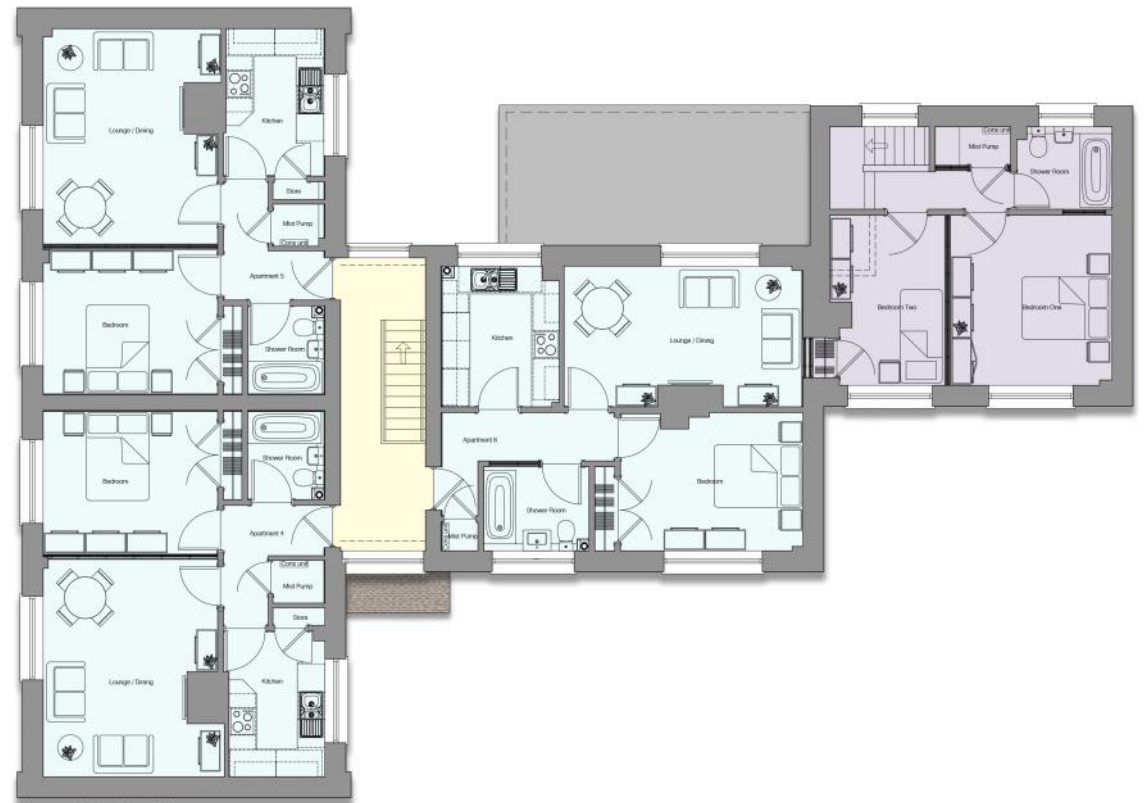


Proposed South West Elevation

### 3.3 Proposed Ground and First Floor Plans



Proposed Ground Floor Plan



Proposed First Floor Plan

### 3.4 Appearance



Proposed South West Elevation

Aesthetically the building utilises a combination of modern and traditional materials, the proportions of the fenestration and surface finishes taking cue's from the surrounding vernacular.

Materials are placed to provide maintainable surfaces and to create distinctive points of entry to the communal elements of the building.

Facing brickwork, soldier courses and contrasting through coloured render are placed to create articulation and contrast within the façade.



Proposed South East Elevation

- Brickwork - Weatherby 7421 Estepona clay slip brick bonded to external wall insulation system.
- Soldier courses - Weatherby 7402 Montado clay slip brick bonded to external wall insulation system.
- Render - Weatherby off white silicone through colour render with 2mm K finish.
- Windows - White UPVC, Secure by Design accredited.
- External Doors - White aluminium, Secure by Design accredited.
- Soffits and Facias - White UPVC.
- Rainwater Goods - Black aluminium.
- Roof - Existing interlocking concrete tile to be retained.

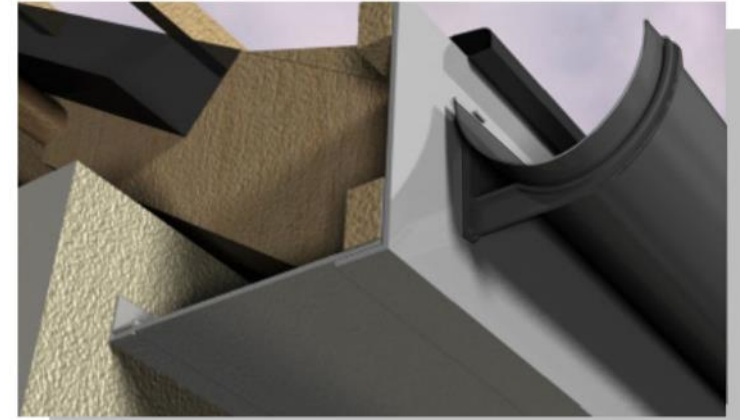
### 3.5 Materials



Brickwork - Weatherby 7421  
Estepona clay slip brick bonded to



Soldier courses - Weatherby 7402  
Montado clay slip brick



Soffits and Facias - White UPVC.  
Rainwater Goods - Black aluminium.



Render - Weatherby off white silicone  
through colour render with 2mm K  
finish.



Paving - Marshalls Saxon buff paving



Windows - White UPVC, Secure by Design accredited.

## **4.0 ECOLOGY AND LANDSCAPE**

### **4.1 Initial Approach**

A site visit was undertaken with Margaret Iles, CCBC Ecologist to discuss the required process in relation to the proposals. The following advice was received.

- Whilst little evidence of nesting birds was visible at the time of the visit, due to the configuration of the eaves of the building and potential access points into the roof space, a nesting bird survey will be required during the nesting season.
- As above the nature of the roof and the potential for bat roosts will require further investigation.

A further site visit was undertaken with Just Mammals Ltd. to discuss the advice received from CCBC's Ecologist.

### **4.2 Preliminary Roost Assessment**

Following the advice from Just Mammals and CCBC's Ecologist, Just Mammals have been commissioned to undertake a preliminary roost assessment for both bats and birds, and to provide a detailed report of findings, including recommendations for further survey works to be undertaken and recommendations for suitable bio-diversity enhancements to be incorporated into the scheme.

The preliminary roost assessment is scheduled for the 9th January 2024.

### **4.3 Initial Bio-diversity Enhancements**

As part of the commitment to bio-diversity, there are currently 6 No. Schwegler bird nesting boxes indicated as part of the proposals.

### **4.4 Landscape**

Within the curtilage of the site there are a number of small pockets of soft landscape punctuating the existing hard surfacing. The intention is to retain these features wherever possible and enhance the landscaping with appropriate species as to minimise the required maintenance of the residents.

There is a large area of overgrown bramble and scrub to the North East of the site which will be removed and laid to lawn, accommodating the laundry drying area.

Areas of existing hard landscape are tarmac, which are to be removed and reinstated with a more appropriate material to a domestic property. The existing block paved areas are in good condition and will be retained and cleaned as part of the proposals. New hard surface is identified on the accompanying site plan and facilitates safe pedestrian movement from the rear gardens to the drying areas.

## **5.0 COMMUNITY SAFETY**

The proposed development at Grays Gardens, is entirely contained within the existing community resources centre site and will enhance and utilise the existing vehicular and pedestrian accesses once the site is complete. The property will implement an electronic access control system to the communal circulation spaces, for access by residents and a control of access by visitors to the properties.

All construction and site traffic will be limited to the confines of the site, however, given the scale and nature of the existing building, there is little to no site traffic anticipated.

The new apartments will be appropriately signposted.

Fire detection and a misting system will be installed within the building with a main panel and interlinked sounders. Heat and smoke detection and light / sounder beacons will be installed in appropriate locations, with a repeater panel in the communal circulation space.

In consideration of the above we do not consider that the conversion of the Graig Y Rhacca Community Resources Centre back into apartments will have an adverse impact upon community safety.

## **6.0 ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY**

### **6.1 Building Standards**

Taking a fabric first approach, the intention is to enhance the thermal performance of the existing building fabric, improving on the current standards for conservation of fuel and power. The Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) will be implemented based on the upgrade proposals and will be included in the Building Regulations application in due course.

The use of renewable energy in the form of photovoltaic panels is proposed, with each of the apartment having access to the power created.

### **6.2 Ecological and Landscape Integration**

In order to fulfil statutory duties, to identify, protect, conserve and enhance protected species and other biodiversity on site, CCBC have commissioned a preliminary roost assessment for both bats and birds, and to provide a detailed report of findings. Once findings are reported, ecological surveys will be undertaken as recommended.

The results of these surveys will be integrated into the proposals for the project. As part of the commitment to bio-diversity, there are currently 6 No. Schwegler bird nesting boxes indicated as part of the proposals.

Hedgehog tunnels / highways (13 x 13cm) will be created at the site boundaries, providing secure passage allowing hedgehogs to travel between populations and habitats and avoiding contact with vehicles.



### **6.3 Noise**

The intention is to commission an acoustic consultant to survey and advise on the existing ambient and background noise levels, inform the façade solutions and sound insulation requirements for the building fabric, both internally and externally.

The scheme will be developed in accordance with the acoustic criteria set out by the acoustic survey and will be compliant with the requirements of Approved Document E of the Building Regulations.

### **6.4 Light Pollution**

With regards to light pollution, proposals will be submitted to the Local Planning Authority for consideration. The external lighting strategy will be designed in compliance with Table 1 (and its accompanying notes) of the ILE Guidance notes for the reduction of obtrusive light, 2005.

### **6.5 Construction Waste**

As part of the project the Contractor will be required to construct the building to ensure that a minimum of 15% of total material used in construction, by value, derives from reused and recycled content. The Contractor will use the WRAP Net Waste Tool ([www.wrap.org.uk/nwtool](http://www.wrap.org.uk/nwtool)) to quantify this, in accordance with Welsh Assembly Government funding requirements, and submit a final report verifying the final achieved recycled percentage.

## 7.0 Access

Due to the inherent nature of the project the scheme will benefit from the requirements of Part M of the building regulations, for minimum widths of doorways corridors etc.

The proposed building will be accessible in compliance with Approved Document M4 of the Building Regulations. The approach gradient to the will not exceed 1:20, and the surface will be hard paved with width exceeding 900mm.

Man entrance doors will have a minimum width of 1000mm. Doors in communal areas will be marked with visual signage for users to distinguish between the space designations.

Floors will be matt finish with soft, non slip surfaces. WC's / bathrooms will be compliant with the requirements of Approved Document M of the Building Regulations, providing a clear zone of 750mm x 750mm in front of the WC pan and a minimum of 500mm to the centre line of the pan from any adjacent wall.

Doors will have matching ironmongery which is easy to open and grip.

Doors will generally have a minimum clear opening width of at least 775mm.

All door opening pressures will not be greater than 30 Newtons. External doors will have thresholds less than 15mm high. Door handles will be lever arm type so that they are easy to grip and operate.

The staircases will include handrails on both sides of the stairs, 900mm above the flights and 1100mm from landing levels, they will project past the last flight by 300mm.

Switches will be positioned a maximum of 1200mm from finished floor level and sockets a minimum of 450mm from finished floor level, in accordance with Section 8:M1 of Approved Document M of the Building Regulations.

Tonal differences between floors, walls, doors and furniture will be provided in all communal areas which will ensure that there are clear visual differentiations that can identify

surfaces and doors. Surfaces will be matt finish rather than glossy to avoid glare or confusing reflections. Circulation Routes will be kept clear of obstacles and hazards.

Any necessary signs, particularly around the entrance area will be provided with initial capital letters followed by lower case letters. The use of capital and lower case text give words shape, which can be read more readily by people with vision or cognitive impairments.

## 8.0 CONCLUSIONS

This report, based on an appraisal of the site and its surrounding areas and has identified that the development would fit within its surroundings and can be supported by existing site access, both vehicular and pedestrian.

The materials for the refurbished facades have been chosen to reflect aspects of the existing building and other buildings in the area, whilst also providing a modern and welcoming feel to the buildings appearance.

The intended approach will vastly improve the thermal performance and functionality of the existing building, re-purposing vacant building stock and providing a long term solution in meeting the current demand for single person and small local authority tenancies.

The proposal will offer:

- Reduced use of new materials over a new build solution.
- Improved energy security.
- Reduced air pollution.
- Reduced greenhouse gas emissions and impact on climate change.
- Increased thermal comfort for building users.
- Enhanced indoor air quality and occupant health.
- Reduction of peak electrical demand via photovoltaic energy conversion.