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# RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT, CRISTIONYDD LANE, PEN Y CAE

## LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL APPRAISAL

This study is intended to accompany a pre-application planning enquiry made to Wrexham County Borough Council for a development of 36 no new dwelling. The study has been prepared and coordinated by Above Zero Landscape Architecture on behalf of Wales and West Housing Association.

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# Contents

## **1.0 Introduction**

## **2.0 Baseline Environment- Landscape**

- The Site and its Landscape Context
- Summary of Published Landscape Assessments
- Landscape Designations
- Landscape Character of the site and its surrounds
- Summary of Landscape Character

## **3.0 Baseline Environment- Visual**

- Nature of existing views
- Visual Receptors
- Summary of Views

## **4.0 The Proposed Development**

- Design Considerations and Mitigation
- Detailed Description of Proposed Built Form

## **5.0 Conclusion of Assessment of Effects on Landscape and Views**

- Proposed Development
- Appraisal of Effects on Landscape Character
- Appraisal of Effects on Views
- Overall Conclusion

## **Figures** (See Separate Document)

### **Site Context and Landscape Character**

Figure 1.1- Site Location Plan (1/7,500)

Figure 2.1- Topographical Survey (1/1000)

Figure 3.1- Landscape Character Areas (1/7,500)

Figure 4.1- Viewpoint Location and Visual Receptor Plan 1 of 2 (1/5,000)

Figure 5.1- Landscape and Visual Analysis Plan (1/5,000)

Figure 6.1- Landscape Strategy (1/1,000)

### **Representative Viewpoint Photographs**

Figure 7.1.- 7.5 – Representative Viewpoint Photographs 1-10

## 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1. This Landscape and Visual Impact Appraisal (LVIA) has been prepared to assess the landscape and visual effects of residential development occupying land to the west of Cristionydd Lane, Pen-y-Cae. The report is intended to support a pre-application enquiry made to Wrexham County Borough Council (WCBC) for the site.
- 1.2. Desk and field analysis and assessment has been coordinated and prepared by a Chartered Landscape Architect and is set out to include the following topics:
  - Establishment of the landscape character of the site and immediate surrounds;
  - Establishment of the nature of views to the site for the surrounding area;
  - A description of the proposed development;
  - Mitigation, design considerations and design evolution;
  - Summary and Conclusion.
- 1.3. The assessment commenced in September 2021 as part of an iterative design process alongside other professionals involved in the design and development of the site. Landscape Architects have inputted into the design process through analysis of the site and its surrounds, and identification of the site's constraints and opportunities. This Landscape and Visual Appraisal sets out the design considerations established through the development process to minimise landscape and visual effects and where possible provide beneficial effects.
- 1.4. The method adopted for undertaking the assessment is contained at Appendix 2 of this report and is in accordance with the '*Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Assessment, (Third Edition) (GLVIA3)*'. GLVIA3 is a joint publication by the Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environment Management and Assessment (IEMA).

## 2.0 Baseline Environment- Landscape

### The Site and its Landscape Context

- 2.1. The site lies on the southern edge of Pen-y-Cae; a village c.4.5 miles to the south of Wrexham. The site is immediately to the west of Cristionydd Lane. The site is on gently undulating ground rising from c.181m AOD along the north eastern boundary to a high point of 184.5m AOD in the southern part of the site, before falling again towards a hedgerow boundary.

### Summary of Published Landscape Assessments

#### Wrexham LANDMAP

- 2.2. Wrexham LANDMAP was produced in 2004 and provides a consolidated and simplified version of LANDMAP in all but the evaluation scores for each aspect. Wrexham LANDMAP supersedes the Natural Resources Wales (NRW) LANDMAP data (produced in 2002).
- 2.3. This report forms supplementary planning guidance and is part of a series of guidance notes which support the adopted Unitary Development Plan. It forms a material consideration in the determination of all planning applications which could affect the form, appearance and setting of the built and natural landscape and its features. Figure 3.1 illustrates the landscape character areas.
- 2.4. The site is within Landscape Character Area (LCA) Rural/Urban Villages. This is described as Wrexham's urban villages which are associated with past coal mining and located on the edge of the uplands. The villages are set among farmland, wooded valleys and regenerating or restored landscapes. This complex character area contains main roads, railways and canal as well as Offa's Dyke and prehistoric hill forts, reflecting Wrexham's history on the border between England and Wales.
- 2.5. The key landscape issues described for this area are:
  - The future of 'urban fringe' landscapes;
  - The potential for urban forestry;

- Impact of new housing on traditional community identity;
- Maintenance of local distinctiveness;
- The future of Bersham tip;
- The need for footpath and cycle links;
- The long-term impact of sand and clay quarries and landfill; and
- Preservation of local history and industrial archaeology.

2.6. The Landscape Character Area is sub-divided into a number of Detailed Character Areas (DCA). The site lies within DCA 7c: Rhosllannerchrugog-Rhostyllen- Ruabon - Penycae.

2.7. The key characteristics of this LCA are described as:

- Rural and urban areas affected by history of mining and quarrying;
- Villages (Rhos, Penycae, Rhostyllen, Ruabon) characterised by high density and use of Ruabon red brick;
- Prehistoric military border area – Gardden hill fort and Offa's Dyke;
- Much accessible natural greenspace forming ecological network, including woodland and grassland habitats of high value; and
- The A483 and railway follow the lower edge of the area.

2.8. Similar to NRW Landmap data the key characteristics of the landscape are spilt into topics covering Visual, Geological, Ecological and Historic character. Key characteristics relevant to site and the surrounding areas described by Wrexham Landmap are as follows :

#### *Visual Character*

- Lower slopes of Ruabon Mountain consisting of undulating farmland, with residential development and industrial development; and
- Bersham Colliery and tip, and the Hafod tip, now restored, are landmarks.

#### *Geological Character*

- Gentle Carboniferous Coal Measure slopes (sandstone) mostly overlain by glacial till; and
- A sandstone ridge, highest at Garnden Hill and followed to the north by Offa's Syke (part now under Johnstown) runs through the centre of the character area; and
- To the east of Johnstown, Etruria Marl has been quarried to make the characteristic red brick and tiles.

#### *Ecological Character*

- Most farmland is improved grassland of low biodiversity value;
- Some former industrial sites are now of high wildlife value, including Stryt Las (great crested newts), the former Hafod tip (young broadleaved woodland) and birch woodland north of Rhos; and
- Fragmented areas of semi-natural vegetation include broadleaved scrub, neutral grassland, upland oak woodland along the Afon Eitha valley, beech woodland on Gardden Hill, neutral grassland at Legacy substation, lowland pasture, and oak/ash/sycamore woodlands around the Crematorium and Llwyneinion.

#### *Historical Character*

- Settlements are mainly 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century origin but Penycae and Ruabon have older centres;
- Coal mining remains are frequent but Bersham Colliery, with its coal spoil tip and remaining headgear is of particularly high importance; and
- Border area- prehistoric military hillfort at Garnden and Offa's Dyke, marking a former political and military boundary.

2.9. The document also provides a list of management guidelines for the DCA. The management strategy is enhancement, conservation and sustainable development. Guidelines of relevance to landscape and visual mitigation for the site include:

- Promote urban forestry and enhance remaining areas of derelict land;



- Survey and assess use of sandstone and local red brick in walls and buildings;
- Retain and improve environment for pedestrians and cyclists within settlements through the development of accessible natural greenspace and green network;
- Develop wildlife corridors as part of a green network, linking fragmented habitats; and
- Maintain, enhance and expand scrub, broadleaved woodland, lowland pasture and hedges.

2.10. As noted above; the site lies in the south western part of DCA 7c. DCA 7b lies to the south and DCA 5b lies to the west. The key characteristics of these neighbouring DCAs have been referenced below.

2.11. The LCA to the south of the site is DCA 7b:. The key landscape characteristics are described as:

- Fragmented area of urban villages and open space with a legacy of industrial land uses;
- Densely built hillside village of Cefn Mawr set on a ridge with good views over the Dee Valley;
- Chemical industries;
- Restored farmland to north, and much green space within settlements; and
- Need for sympathetic regeneration without loss of heritage.

2.12. The overall management strategy is enhancement, restoration and conservation. Management guidelines of relevance include:

- Retain woodland and trees within the settlement and carry out woodland management to increase amenity value;
- Increase urban and rural tree planting, particularly on derelict and neglected sites of low ecological value;
- Protect and improve existing footpaths and rights of way in urban areas;

- Preserve local character including built development; industrial sites; field systems and small-scale road and building pattern; and
- Use local building materials including Cefn sandstone and Ruabon red brick where possible.

2.13. The LCA to the west of the site is DCA 5b:. The key landscape characteristics are described as:

- Scenic area between moorland and developed lowlands;
- Small irregular fields on east facing slopes, used for pasture;
- Sharp boundary between farmland and moorland;
- Linear woodlands and reservoirs in minor valleys;
- Remnants of historic mining, although area appears undisturbed; and
- Isolated farms and very small hamlets.

2.14. The overall management strategy is conservation. Management guidelines of relevance include:

- Resist unsympathetic development of conversion of farmstead;
- Ensure that any new development is integrated within the landscape in local and distant views, through appropriate siting, form of development, retention of vegetation and traditional hedgerow/stone wall boundaries to minimise visual impact;
- Restore and maintain stone buildings and walls;
- Maintain, enhance and expand lowland acid grassland, lowland pasture and upland mixed ash woods;
- Maintain ecological corridors (e.g. woodlands, hedgerows, road verges) and extend where possible;
- Replace coniferous trees with native species.

### **Landscape Designations**

2.15. The site lies to the south of a Special Landscape Area (SLA). A local-level landscape designation covering large proportions of the administrative area of WCBC.

Development within a SLA is covered by WCBC planning policy EC5 with the adopted (February 2005) Unitary Development Plan (UDP) 1.

- 2.16. WCBC is preparing the Local Development Plan (LDP) which will replace the current adopted Unitary Development Plan. The LDP will be a long-term land use and development strategy focused on achieving sustainable development. SLA's are covered within the Deposit Version of the Plan (December 2017) under policy NE5: Special Landscape Areas. The SLA close to the site is not proposed to be taken forward to the LDP.

### **Landscape Character of the site and its surrounds**

#### **The Site**

- 2.17. The application site forms part of a larger undulating field bound either by hedgerows or post and wire fencing. As stated at paragraph 2.1 above, the site is on gently undulating ground rising from 181m AOD along the north eastern boundary to a high point of 184.5m AOD in the southern part of the site, before falling again towards a hedgerow boundary.
- 2.18. The northern boundary of the site is formed by a post and wire fence with occasional young shrubs establishing beyond a small grass verge to a residential road (Groesfan).
- 2.19. The eastern boundary comprises a low hedgerow to the boundary of a private property and then woodland and shrubs which make up a small triangular part of the eastern boundary. The remainder of the eastern boundary comprises hedgerow and mature trees along Cristionydd Lane.
- 2.20. The southern boundary comprises a line of mature trees and hedgerow along the field boundary at a low point in the landscape. The land within the site immediately north of the boundary and farmland to the south rise notably from

this hedgerow. The western boundary is undefined as the application site is part of a larger field.

- 2.21. The site is characterised primarily by undulating pasture land with a public right of way extending from the north western corner of the field and crossing the site through the centre and exiting via a timber stile in the south eastern corner onto Cristionydd Lane. There is no direct access onto the PRow from Groesfan.

*The surrounding landscape*

- 2.22. The application site lies on the edge of Pen-y-Cae. On the northern side of Groesfan are a number of semi-detached and terraced red brick properties set behind small front gardens. Immediately adjacent to the site is a small square of public open space comprising short mown grass. A small residential road extends around the outer edge of this space and properties front onto it along its northern, eastern and western sides. A group of 4 properties (semi-detached) front directly onto Groesfan, then to the west is another small square of open space, again with roads around its perimeter and properties fronting onto the roads on the space's northern, western and eastern sides. This open space has a number of trees planted within it. This edge of Pen-y-Cae is relatively open to the countryside and forms a hard urban edge to the adjacent fields. This character continues to the west where properties either back onto the adjacent field or are orientated side on. There is a small churchyard characterised by stone wall boundaries off Chapel Street. St Thomas' church provides a feature on the skyline to this village fringe.
- 2.23. The farmland along the southern edge of the village is characterised by a strongly undulating landform that rises, dips then rises again to the south. Fields are generally irregular in shape and bound by mature trees and hedgerows. In places hedgerows have been replaced by timber post and wire fencing. The undulating nature of the land means that the farmland close to the village edge is enclosed and longer views to the south are not possible. There are a number of large farmsteads and associated buildings within this part of countryside but these are not visible from the village. A watercourse flows through the landscape to the

south of the application site, notable by its riparian woodland. Wooded river valleys are a noted feature of this landscape.

- 2.24. Cristionydd Lane is a narrow rural lane that extends south from Pen-y-Cae. It is bound on both sides by mature hedgerows and trees that provide enclosure. In places where the hedge is maintained at a lower height there are glimpses into adjacent fields but generally views are only of the field immediately adjacent. Landform or field boundaries providing enclosure and foreshortening views. Church Street to the west is similar in character until it enters Pen-y-Cae where it is characterised by built form to either side of the road. Copperas Hill (to the east) is more urban in character with properties bordering its northern side from the junction with the B5097. Hedgerow bounds the southern side limiting views. This section of road is on higher ground so where southerly views are possible they open out towards Rhuabon Mountain which is a prominent backdrop to views across undulating farmland.

### **Summary of Landscape Character**

- 2.25. The characteristics of the site and surrounding area can be summarised as:
- Prominent village edge with little boundary vegetation or screening;
  - St Thomas' Church locally prominent on the village skyline;
  - Strongly undulating landform of countryside to the south of Pen-y-Cae that provides enclosure;
  - Farmland generally enclosed by intact hedgerows and mature hedgerow trees; and
  - Watercourses notable through the riparian woodland associated with them.

## 3.0 Baseline Environment- Visual

### Nature of existing views

- 3.1. The site is on lower ground on the southern edge of Pen-y-Cae. The land gently rises to a high point of 184.5mAOD in the southern part of the site before dipping slightly on the southern boundary and then rising again south of the site. This landform limits views into the site from the surrounding area. There are few PRow to the south of the village and only a few rural roads. PRow Pen 4 crosses the site and there are open views from that section of footpath.

### *Views from the north*

- 3.2. People in properties and using Groesfan have open views towards the site. These properties screen views to the site from properties further north.

### *Views from the east*

- 3.3. Easterly views towards the site are only possible for people using Cristionydd Lane. This lane is bordered by a mix of woodland and then hedgerows to the boundary with the site which limits and screens views. Glimpsed views are possible from the field access gate and stile at the south eastern corner of the site.

### *Views from the south*

- 3.4. The undulating nature of the landform south of the site provides screening. Only two farmsteads are to the south of the site. Intervening landform screens the site from these properties.

### *Views from the west*

- 3.5. Views to the site from the west are possible from PRow Pen 4 and Pen 35. The mature field boundary screens views for residents on this southern edge of the village.

## Visual Receptors

- 3.6. The following groups of people have been identified as potential visual receptors as part of the baseline visual assessment. In some cases, these have been included to demonstrate that there is not a view or where there are views these are very localised and that many receptors only have partial or filtered views to the development site. Visual Receptors are illustrated on Figure 5.1.

- A People using the public right of way across the site (Pen 4);
- B Residents of properties and people using recreation space to the north and immediate north west of the site;
- C People using PRoW to the west of the site (Pen 4 and Pen 35); and
- D People using Cristionydd Lane and PRoW to the south east of the site (Pen 5).

### Description of Visual Receptor Views

- 3.7. **Receptor A** represents people walking along public right of way (Pen 4) through the site, where there are open views of the grass within the field and mature field boundaries. The edge of Pen-y-Cae is prominent in these views with properties along Groesfan forming a continuous line of development. The nature of views are illustrated on photographs 1, 2 and 3, which show a continuous line of properties visible. Even at the southern most end of the PRoW where it joins Cristionydd Lane, the roofline of properties are visible beyond locally rising ground within the site.
- 3.8. **Receptor B** represents people living in the properties off Groesfan as well as people using the public open space and surrounding residential roads. There are open views towards the post and wire fence and of the grassland on site. The southern end of the site is screened by landform on site but the tops of the mature trees along the southern boundary are visible. The rising farmland beyond the site is also visible between mature trees as is a very small glimpse towards Ruabon Mountain (Photograph 5). Views are similar from the public open space further to the west. Views from properties west and north of this space will be partially filtered by intervening properties and mature trees (Photograph 4).

- 3.9. **Receptor C** represents views for people using PRoW to the west of the site. People using the PRoW Pen 4 (which also continues through the site) have open views of the site where the footpath crosses the western part of the field where the application site is. Further to the west the PRoW continues on low ground close to the village edge and a line of mature trees and hedgerow along the intervening field boundary provides screening to the site. Properties on this edge of the village are a prominent feature, as is the churchyard and spire of St Thomas's church.
- 3.10. Views from public right of way (Pen 35) are initially of the surrounding field and the prominent urban edge of Pen-y-Cae. Views of the site are screened by intervening hedgerows and trees. As the land rises, there is a low hedgerow and field access gate that allows more open and panoramic views across the adjacent farmland. There are open views towards the application site; although mature trees on the southern edge of the site provide some screening to the south eastern part of the site. The view is dominated by the residential edge of Pen-y-Cae and a rising roofline of properties with mature trees just visible above on the skyline.
- 3.11. **Receptor D** represents views for people using Cristionydd Lane and PRoW Pen 5. This lane is bordered by a mix of woodland and then hedgerows to the boundary with the site which limits and screens views. Glimpsed views are possible from the field access gate and stile at the south eastern corner of the site. Views are similar to those described for views from public right of way (Pen 4). With rising grassland to the foreground and the roofline of properties visible beyond. This view is only possible from the field access gate and for most people using this lane only experienced fleetingly.
- 3.12. Intervening trees and hedgerows as well as landform screen the site for people using PRoW Pen 5.

### **Summary of Views**

- 3.13. The site is on undulating ground on the southern edge of Pen-y-Cae. Landform and hedgerow boundaries screen many views from the south and east. There are



limited views from the west; the most open views are possible for people using the PRow crossing the site and residents and people using residential roads to the north.

3.14. Receptors that have the potential to experience the greatest change in their views include:

- Receptor A: People using the public right of way across the site (Pen 4); and
- Receptor B: Residents of properties and people using recreation space to the north and immediate north west of the site.

## 4.0 The Proposed Development

### Description of the Scheme

- 4.1. The development comprises a 36no affordable single and two storey and homes, made up of:
- 19no two bed dwellings;
  - 4no. three bed dwelling;
  - 1no. four bed dwelling;
  - 7no apartments contained in a single apartment block.
- 4.2. The appearance of the two storey dwellings will be mainly of facing brick outer leaf under a profiled tile roof and will include feature brickwork detailing. The bungalows will have a through coloured render finish to the walls which will continue to the upper storey of the apartments block. The low density layout of the site allows for orientation of the dwellings to accommodate photovoltaic panels on south and west facing roof slopes.
- 4.3. All properties are accessed off Groesfan via a main access route and a smaller spur road. Properties all have driveways and small rear gardens. There is a small parking court to the north of the proposed flats.
- 4.4. The Landscape Strategy Plan (Figure 6.1) sets out the landscape proposals for the site. The landscape proposals are summarised as follows:
- Retention of the existing trees along the southern site boundary;
  - Retention of the existing woodland area on the eastern boundary;
  - New boundary hedgerows to the eastern and western boundaries. The western boundary also includes tree planting;
  - Small area of open space linking to the existing retained woodland and bordering Groesfan. This includes new tree planting and potential SUDs retention pond;

- Small area of green space with trees along the alignment of the PRow as it enters the site; and
- New tree planting within gardens and within grass verges along the access road through the site.

## 5.0 Conclusion of Assessment of effects on Landscape and Views

- 5.1 The site is on the southern edge of Pen-y-cae immediately to the south of residential road, Groesfan. The site is on gently rising ground gently increasing in height from 180m AOD along the northern boundary to 184.5m AOD at a high point towards the southern part of the site before falling sharply towards a hedgerow lining the southern boundary.
- 5.2 Pen-y-cae is a small village with a residential 'suburban' character, the edge closest to the site comprises semi-detached and terraced properties set around 3 sides of square open spaces. These open spaces comprise grass with one containing a few trees. St Thomas's Church provides a localised feature on the skyline from the south western edge of the village (west of the application site).
- 5.3 The wider landscape comprises undulating farmland bound by hedgerows, frequent hedgerow trees and small areas of woodland as well as linear riparian woodland along watercourses. The landscape provides a strong degree of enclosure, however where the land becomes more open views extend towards Ruabon Mountain.

### Proposed Development

- 5.4 The proposed development comprises a mix of 36no. affordable residential properties set along residential roads with access off Groesfan. The development proposes to create small areas of open space; one at the northern edge of the application site bordering Groesfan as well as a small area on the western boundary that forms an entrance into the development for the existing PRoW that crosses the site.

## Appraisal of Effects on Landscape Character

- 5.5 The site forms an undulating piece of farmland on the southern edge of Pen-y-Cae. This forms an attractive edge to the village and the character is reasonably consistent as farmland extends south. The built form/ residential edge of Pen-y-Cae along Groesfan is a prominent feature when viewed from within the site and fields adjacent to the village and means there is a rural fringe character to this farmland. Development on the site of 36no. new residential properties would alter the character of the site by introducing built form and associated access road, driveways and gardens onto a field. However, this development would be introduced into a village edge where the new properties could integrate with the village edge context. Properties would be set along Groesfan on the southern side of green space integrating with the character of properties bordering the roads that surround green space. A small area of greenspace is also included in the northern edge of the development to retain a buffer and green outlook to Groesfan and a green link to the woodland adjacent.
- 5.6 The proposals will bring development beyond the road which presently forms a natural edge to the village. The undulating nature of the landform means the site is reasonably enclosed. Therefore development on site would have a low adverse effect on the wider character of fields bound by hedgerows to the south.
- 5.7 The character of the PRoW would be altered as the route will go from within a field with properties visible in the distance to along a residential road or through a small narrow green space. This will alter the character of the section of the PRoW through the site from rural fringe to suburban. However, this is a short section of a longer route and the rest of the route would remain similar in character to now as a PRoW on the edge of a village. There is currently no direct access to the PRoW from Groesfan and properties along it and the development offers the opportunity to provide pedestrian links to the PRoW for nearby residents.

- 5.8 Development on site would introduce a large scale of change to the site altering it from an fringe field to suburban development. However, the effects would only be experienced on a very local scale within the single field of the application site. The nature of the undulating landform does provide enclosure to the site and limits its visual influence in the wider rural landscape to the south which would remain rural fringe in character.

### **Appraisal of Effects on Views**

- 5.9 Views of the site are mostly experienced by people within properties bordering the site; using the local road network and local PRow.

#### *Receptor A*

- 5.10 People using this footpath currently have views across the field towards the residential edge of Pen-y-cae. The views along the western section of footpath (within the same field as the application site) would alter to be towards the edge of the new properties. Initially this would be very prominent with little greening, as trees and the hedgerow mature views would be more filtered. The biggest change would be where the PRow is through the development where the character would become suburban, along roads with properties to either side of the road, front gardens and driveways. This would form an adverse change to the view but along a short section of a PRow where urban development is presently visible a short distance away.

#### *Receptor B*

- 5.11 Views for residents and from the open space are currently towards undulating farmland. Development on site would foreshorten and enclose views. The views would be of new residential development, softened by a small area of greenspace along Groesfan. This will alter the rural edge character to views for properties to the eastern end of Groesfan. Those set around the other open space slightly further west would retain views across a field to the hedge line and farmland beyond, although the edge of the new development would be visible in oblique views. As vegetation establishes this edge would be partially softened by

hedgerows and trees. The development would result in an adverse change to views from these properties.

#### *Receptor C*

- 5.12 People using PROW Pen 4 to the west of the site would have similar views to existing as the boundary hedgerow bordering the two fields the PROW passes though is mature and would help to screen the new development. The roofline of properties would be visible above trees but would be a small change to a view containing the existing properties along Groesfan.
- 5.13 People using PROW Pen 35 would experience limited change to their views where the route is on lower ground. As it heads south onto higher ground, views towards the site are possible. The view would change to include the new development which is visible beyond boundary vegetation. Retained trees along the southern boundary of the site would provide some screening, particularly during the summer months. Views presently contain the prominent edge of Pen-y-cae and the new development would integrate with this development. There would be a small adverse change to views along a short section of this PROW.

#### *Receptor D*

- 5.14 For people using Cristionydd Lane, the new development would form a small change to the view. An existing mature hedgerow provides some screening to the site and this would remain and be reinforced with new hedgerow planting. New properties would be seen above the hedgerow and increase the urban fringe and built form character to this rural road, but only for the short section of road as it passes the site. The remainder of the route would remain similar to the existing character.
- 5.15 For people using PROW Pen 5 views would be similar to existing as intervening trees and hedgerows would screen the site.

## Overall Conclusion

- 5.16 As described above, the development would form an adverse change and extend residential development beyond the existing village edge. However, the nature of the landform in the countryside along with boundary vegetation would limit the effects to landscape character of the wider farmland to the south. Development would form a small change to landscape character. The new development, whilst locally visible on the edge of the village would form a small element of views from the majority of receptors with the exception of the PRow Pen 4 through the site (Receptor A) and properties to the immediate north on Groesfan (Receptor B).