

Penarth Heights Planning Design Statement

ON BEHALF OF CREST NICHOLSON (SW) LTD



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Penarth Heights Planning Design Statement

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2				
3				

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Planning Consultant: RPS
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report explains the design of our proposals for Penarth Heights, won in competition in 2004 and now submitted as a detailed planning application. It forms part of a comprehensive series of reports supporting the application.

1.1 VISION

Throughout we have held onto our original vision: that Penarth Heights will be an exemplar of sustainable community development. In the European tradition of urban planning, we take this opportunity to design a new quarter in the town by creating a distinct, predominant character, within which individual streets and buildings are designed with subtle variations to give a real local sense of place.

This will be a new residential quarter in Penarth, based on a hierarchy of streets defined and enclosed by terraces and the aligned facades of houses. Our proposal responds to and takes advantage of the special topography of the site, working with the contours to make characterful streets with great views.

A strong landscape structure is integral to the scheme, both to calm the predominance of the car, and to link with the site's green surroundings.

Our scheme is a highly site specific response to the site in the following ways:

- It works closely with the existing contours
- The framework of streets follows the grain of the existing town to provide fine views out of the site
- Good articulation of the buildings create a varied skyline seen from the bay
- The palette of materials is based on local precedents.

1.2 DESIGN DEVELOPMENT SINCE THE COMPETITION

Since the competition, Crest Nicholson's design team have developed the scheme on a number of fronts.

Technical studies have been carried out that cover:

- Asbestos in the existing buildings
- Ecology and biodiversity
- Geotechnical site investigation
- Japanese Knotweed
- Infrastructure services
- Infrastructure drainage including SUDS
- Transport Assessment

The results of all of these studies have been taken into account in how the design has developed.

Pre-application meetings and workshops have been held with the Vale of Glamorgan Council's officers in Planning, Highways, Landscape, and Refuse Management.

The brief for the Affordable Housing requires Secured by Design accreditation. We have met with Sergeant Crates the Police ALO and issued drawings as the scheme has progressed.

The scheme was presented to the Design Commission for Wales in July 2005. The panel was broadly supportive but raised a number of issues to consider further. We would anticipate that they will be invited to consult on the application.

At the same time, as set out in the competition entry, Crest has implemented a programme of public consultation. This is described fully in the accompanying Statement of Community Involvement. The views of the stakeholders and consultees have been heeded and the scheme adapted, particularly to address the concerns about overlooking.

Nevertheless, the core urban design principles embodied in the competition winning scheme have been retained.

This section sets out the appraisal of the site from the point of view of urban design. Landscape and ecology are covered separately by Nicholas Pearson Associates in the accompanying Landscape Appraisal.



The site occupies the western end of the ridge that forms the geological backbone to Penarth, ending in Penarth Head to the east. This is shown graphically on figure 1.



An aerial photograph of Hiroshima, Japan, taken after the atomic bombing. The image shows a vast area of destruction, with many buildings reduced to rubble. In the foreground, the atomic bombing memorial is visible, a large circular structure surrounded by a moat. The city's layout, with its grid-like streets and dense urban areas, is still discernible despite the damage. The surrounding landscape includes some greenery and a body of water in the upper left corner.

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In the same period, Penarth prospered as a genteel seaside town - 'the garden by the sea' - with development of the esplanade, pier and gardens on the east side of the town. Today, enjoying the peace of the open space as one looks out over the sparkling waters of the bay (figure 4), it is hard to imagine the former visual, aural and olfactory contrast between the north and east sides of the town.



Figure 4 Stunning views

The closure of the docks in 1963 and their subsequent regeneration as the Portway Marina Village and the 1990's construction of the Cardiff Bay barrage have clearly changed the whole orientation of the town and the potential of the site as a desirable place to live.

This vision of change was clearly underway in 1969 when the current housing was built, now sadly standing as an indictment of the shortcomings of that generation's approach to housing provision.

Figure 5 summarises the key strengths of the site. It is within easy walking distance of the town centre, and has good transport connections nearby: Dingle Road and Cogan railway stations to the south, the bay ferry to the north east, and bus routes on Plassey Street and Terra Nova Way. The ridge location makes the site visually prominent from all parts of the bay and the centre of Cardiff, as shown on the drawing on the cover of this report. Although the wooded escarpment to the north forms a natural barrier, the zig-zag path through the bowl provides an important connection to Terra Nova Way leading to Tesco, the marina and the barrage below.

The opportunities of the site can be summarised as:

- Stunning views to the north over the bay
- Fine views up the valley of the River Ely from the bowl
- Within easy walking distance of the town centre, the sea-side promenades and local transport connections
- A happy balance of stunning views to the north with glorious south and southwest facing aspects.

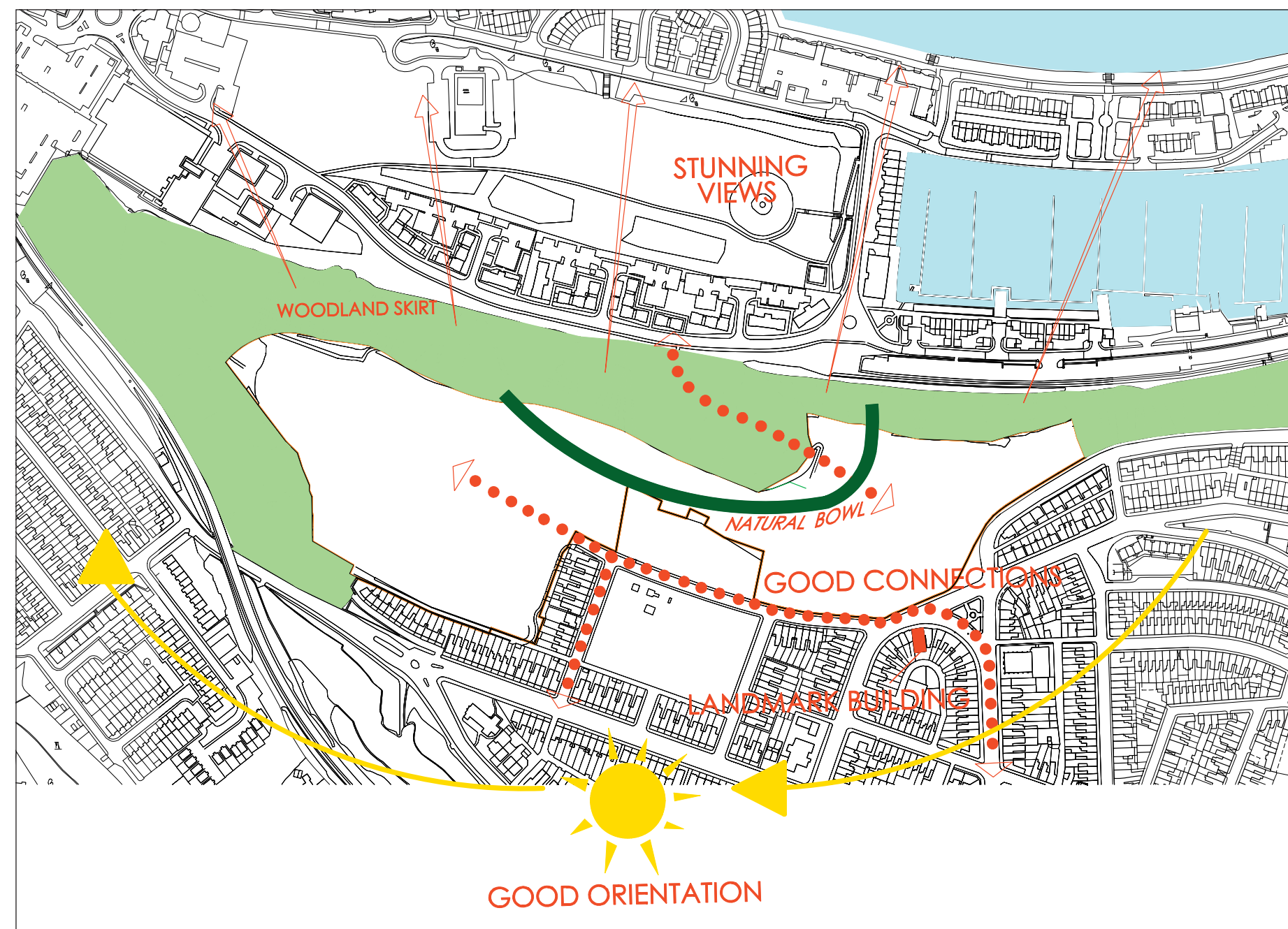


Figure 5 Site analysis

The site has three distinct areas, shown on figure 6 .

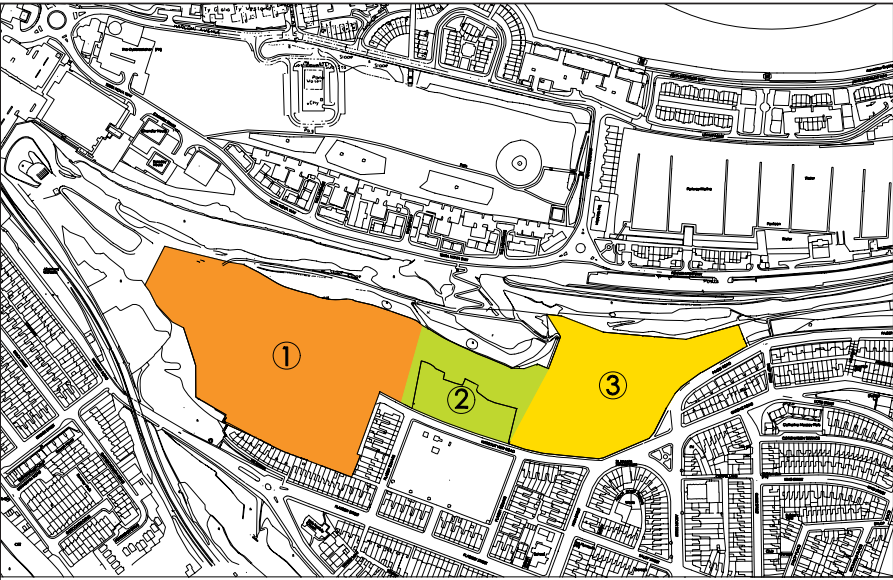


Figure 6 Three areas of the site

1: The western section, lying on both sides of the ridge (figure 7)

The site here is bounded to the south by the backs of existing houses, and to the west and north by the steeply wooded slopes. As a result, it has the strong sense of being at the edge of the town. The corollary of this is that there should be no cause for rat-running by motorists through the site, a fact which is important in terms of the approach to the treatment of the public realm described in section 3.4 below.

2: The narrow central section lying at the foot of the steeply sloping allotment gardens (figures 8 and 9)

On the map there is continuous open space from the southern edge of the great Plassey Square, through the allotments, to Terra Nova Way at the foot of the bowl. Because of the topography, this continuity in reality is experienced sequentially. When approaching from the south, the panorama is revealed suddenly and dramatically when Harbour View Road at the crest of the ridge is reached. Similarly, climbing the hill from the Terra Nova Way, the generous size of Plassey Square opening to the southern sky comes as a surprise.

3: The eastern section where the land drops away from Paget Road as it climbs sinuously past the Arcot Street triangle towards Plassey Square (figure 10)

Here there are fine views, both of Cardiff Bay and up the valley of the River Ely. The residents of the existing terraces of houses currently enjoy these views, and it is important that this existing amenity for local people be respected and maintained.



Figure 7 The western section



Figure 8 The central section



Figure 9 Approach to the ridge



Figure 10 The eastern section

2.2 SITE CONSTRAINTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The series of site investigations have established that in fact the site is constrained in terms of physical features. These are summarised on figures 11.

Ground stability

The site has a history of quarries, fill and landslips. The conclusion of analysing these areas is that to the north of the site, no building development should encroach beyond a certain line, shown in blue, and no garden beyond the line shown green.

Existing services

A 300mm foul/combined sewer cut across the land to the north of the Arcot Triangle, which has a 6.5m easement to both sides. On this area we had shown apartment buildings in the competition scheme.

The outfall to the south of the site leading into Hill Terrace also requires an easement, of 3m to both sides. The easements are shown in purple.

Adjacent landowners and historic buildings

The competition scheme assumed that the ragged boundary to the allotments could be straightened for mutual benefit. However, the legal difficulties in doing this have led us to work with the existing boundary alignment.

The historic St Joseph's Catholic Church continues to be a generator of the alignment of the proposed path leading through the site to the bay.

Other constraints such as the extent of the Japanese Knotweed have had a bearing on the proposed phasing of the development, but not on its masterplanning principles.

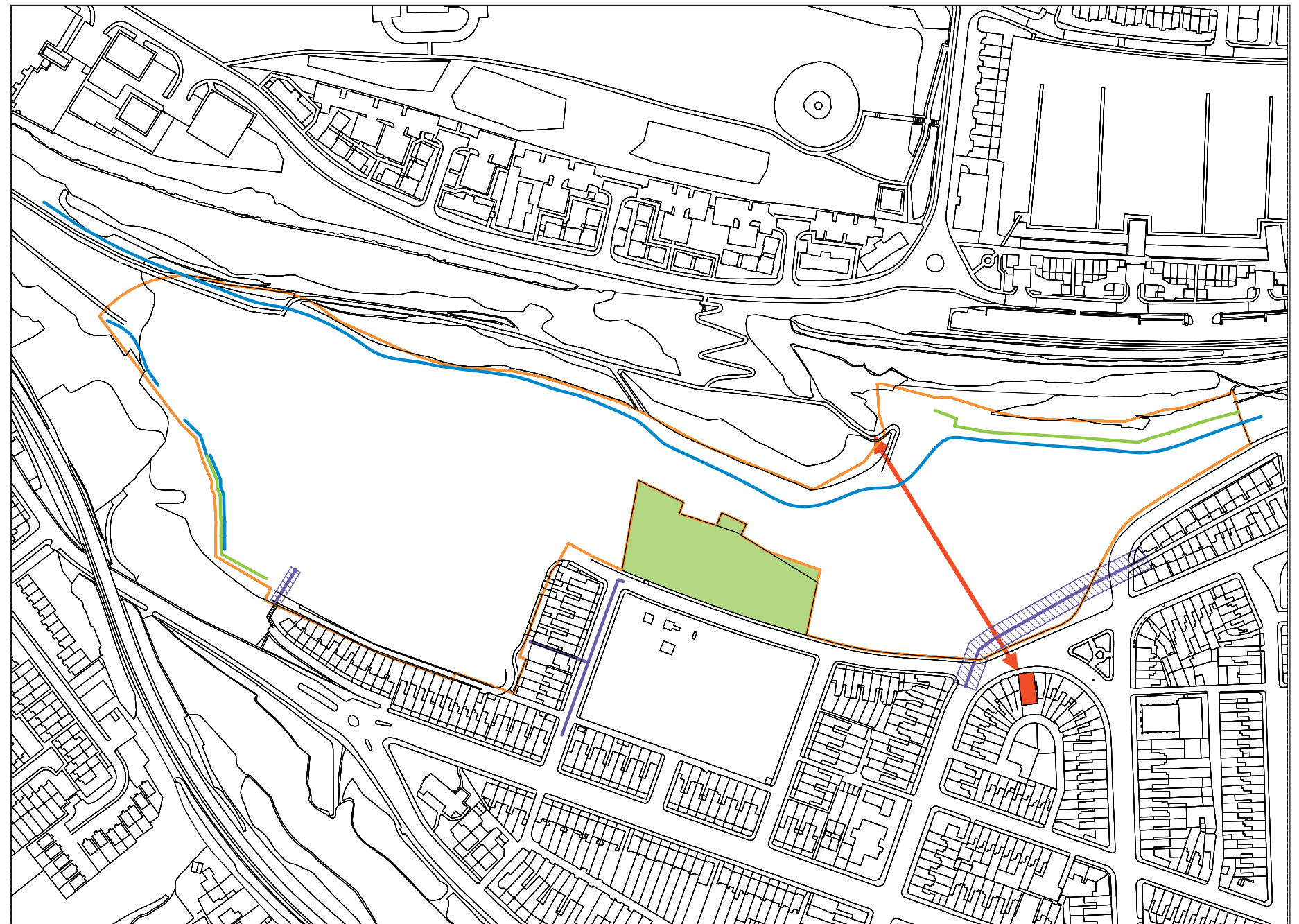


Figure 11 Site constraints

2.3 LOCAL URBAN DESIGN CHARACTER APPRAISAL

The plan below, figure 12, uses the Conservation area map to highlight the grain of the streets.

In the centre of the town are two distinguishing features: first, sinuous roads, running largely with the contours, with large semi-detached houses set in mature gardens. There are many fine examples of late Victorian domestic architecture here, in a clearly defined townscape in which boundary walls are designed as part of the whole, as shown in figures 13-16.

Second, to the west of the town centre these sinuous lines give way to a regular orthogonal grid that comes up to the site. Here the two/three-storey terraces are smaller in scale. In those nearest the site the houses typically rise from the back edge of the pavement, or have small front gardens. (figures 17-21).

There is no common palette of materials or architectural details: coursed rubble stonework of warm grey hue, red brick, and render in various colours predominate in different streets. Dormers, barge-boarded gables, half timbering, bay windows and decorative brickwork were evidently used by different developer builders following changing fashions at different times.

Set amongst these two predominant grains are individual special buildings: Butterfield's St Augustine Church (figure 22), the gutsy 1929 pavilion to the pier (figure 23), the moderne Post Office (figure 24), and school building in a crisp Arts and Craft style (figure 25).

Between the buildings, local adaptation to contours plays a key part in defining the urban character: the dingles (figure 26); the triangular greens that deal with awkward road junctions on the slopes (figure 27), and the back lanes (figures 28 and 29).

Boundary treatments vary according to the grandeur of the streets.

Around Plassey Square the houses have low walls, using the same red brick as the houses. In the streets between the site and the town centre – such as Salop Street, Arcot Street, Glebe Street – the terraced houses rise directly from the back edge of the pavement, and only their varying width denotes their original social hierarchy.

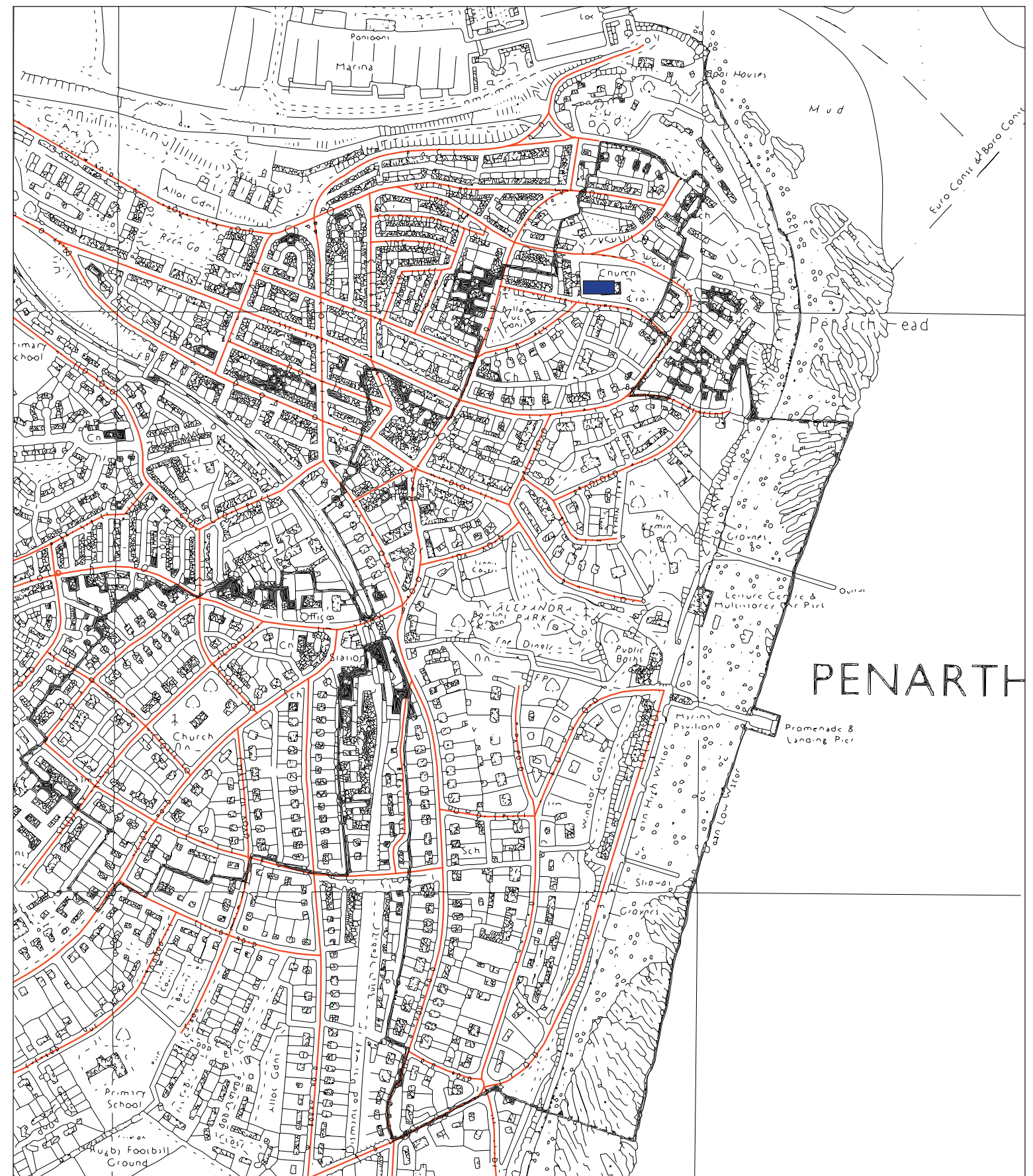


Figure 12 Penarth street structure

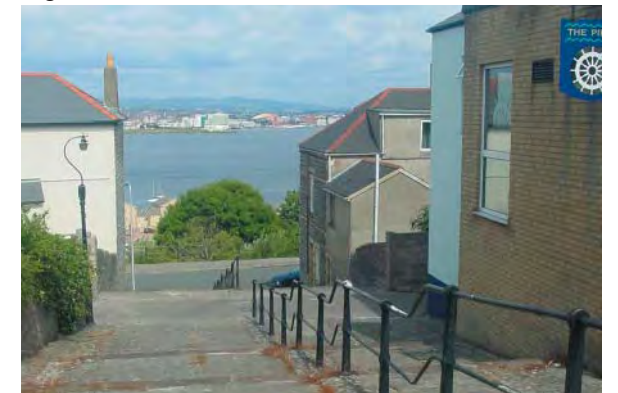


Figure 13-16 Sinuous streets with detached and semi-detached houses

Figure 17-21 Generally straight streets with terraced houses

Figure 22 St Augustine's Church

Figures 28, 29 Local back lanes

Figure 24 Former post office

Figure 25 School

Figure 26 Local dingle

Figure 27 Infill green on slope