

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE 14.4.2008

NOTE TO EDITORS: Sonia Bird, a director of the Bird Group, will be available for interview on site in Risca between 11am and noon today, Monday April 14. Please follow the A467 until you reach the roundabout for the entrance to the town and turn off as if entering Risca. Take the first left into the industrial estate and drive on until you come to Gwent Machine Handling. Turn right immediately opposite and go down to the old foundry site where you will meet Sonia and my colleague Nigel Heath of Media-Consult. His mobile phone number, should you have problems, is 07721 001990.

MAJOR REGENERATION SCHEME TO REVITALISE RISCA

A £60 million pound scheme to transform Risca has been unveiled by South Wales-based developers the Bird Group.

The proposal, if approved by Caerphilly County Borough Council, will include major retail, residential and commercial development.

National retailer Tesco is looking to build one of its larger "Extra" stores on the 14-acre site of a former foundry between the A467 and the western bank of the Ebbw River which will alone provide at least 500 local jobs.

The scheme also proposes to develop five acres of land on the eastern side of the river to create a landmark entrance to the town.

This will include a luxury 50 unit care home and more than 200 homes and 10,000 sq ft of office accommodation.

The homes will comprise 81 high quality apartments on Mill Street and 132 apartments in Commercial Street, many of them for first time buyers.

It is intended that this part of the development will become an attractive gateway to Risca.

The scheme differs from the Bird Group's original proposal which was granted outline planning permission by the borough council last year.

This envisaged 236 homes on the western bank of the Ebbw and retirement flats, 93 affordable homes and some commercial development on the Commercial Street site.

Bird Group director, Brian Bird, said: "We feel the revised scheme offers an even more exciting opportunity for Risca and will act as a catalyst for the further development of the town.

"The scheme, as well as providing the opportunity for quality employment, will improve the amenities of the town with large open areas of grassland and a river walkway which will provide public access to the Ebbw and the views beyond for the first time."

The Bird Group, which has held business interests in Risca since 1962, has commissioned the renowned Monmouthshire artist and sculptor Richard Wills, to create a bronze statue of a steelworker, acknowledging the heritage and history of Risca, to be a centrepiece of the development.

Glyn Parker, of Cardiff architects Powell Dobson, who have designed the project, said: "We are delighted to be involved with what is probably the most significant scheme in Risca for decades."

Local estate agent Richard Tuck, who has been appointed to market the new homes, said: "It's a new vision for Risca."

"The town has had no major development apart from little pockets on the outskirts for many years. This is going to attract new people into the town as well as creating jobs and will generally improve house prices in the area."

"With the new rail link, Cardiff is now only 15 minutes away from Risca and Newport just 10 minutes away. And with the M4 just five minutes away by car, this will make the Risca development extremely attractive."

Borough councillor Keith Griffiths (Lab, Risca West), said the scheme was the result of four years of hard work and would provide employment as well as significant funds that would come from the sale of council land included in the project.

He said: "We are over the moon with the proposal. They will certainly regenerate the whole of this area. It's something that is long overdue, and now the work really begins."

The council's chief executive, Stuart Rosser, said: "This is excellent news for Risca and the surrounding communities."

"The potential benefits of a large food retailer located within walking distance of the centre of Risca are enormous."

"Any inward investment of this scale will greatly improve Risca's commercial stature and significantly reduce the amount of retail spend seeping out of the county borough."

"We are delighted to see Risca is benefiting from exciting proposals which will help breathe new life into the town centre and create many new jobs in our communities."

In addition to the Risca project, the Bird Group, through its associate company Carn Ltd, is currently developing 33 apartments in Abercarn, about five miles north of Risca, for Fairlake Homes.

The first residents are due to move in by the end of the year and it is also planned to build a new library on the site

Ends.

Issued on behalf of the Bird Group of Companies by Media-Consult. For more information, e-mail Andrew White on andrew@media-consult.co.uk or telephone 01934 624289 or 07749 000028.

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