

Comisiwn Dylunio Cymru Design	Commission for Wales
Design Review Report:	14 July 2004
Meeting Date / Material Submitted:	8 July 2004
Location:	Lakeside, Brynmawr Former Rubber Factory site
Scheme Description:	Mixed Retail and Leisure Development
Architects / Design Team:	Mountford Piggott Architects (Alan Gaskell) Powell Dobson Partnership (Howard Wainwright, Bernadette Kinsella)
Consultants:	Robert Chapman & Co
Developers:	Chelverton (Paddy Fox)
Public/Other Body:	WDA (Hamish Munro) Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council (Rob Murray)
Planning Status:	Outline approval with siting and access not reserved. Reserved matters application submitted
Design Review Panel Members Present:	
John Punter (chair)	Mike Biddulph
Cindy Harris (officer)	Ed Colgan
Lyn Owen	Nigel Hanson
Carole-Anne Davies (observing)	Jonathan Adams

Presentation

Since the last time this scheme was presented for design review, a number of workshops have been held to further refine the site layout, usage and relation to the masterplan. Five areas in particular were examined: built form; appearance and materials; access; boundaries; and landscape. The workshops focused on appropriate solutions given the specific requirements of the major end user.

The current resolution of these major issues respects the lake, the views from the pump house across the lake, the boilerhouse building, and the main road. It is acknowledged that this is a four sided development which has to work from all sides and has to forge strong links with the town centre.

The lakeside strip has been improved with better landscaping, decorative paving and fencing, and a hierarchy of footpaths. The original rectilinear layout of the car park has been changed to deliver a better relationship between the supermarket and the retail units. The overall number of car parking spaces has been reduced,

but provision for disabled and parent/child parking is higher than the norm. Servicing remains on the outside of the development with service yards to east and west.

The elevations and roofscape of the main retail buildings have been curved to respond to the gently rolling nature of the surrounding landscape and to give the development more architectural sophistication. Roof overhangs and supports provide some shelter to shoppers and more visual interest than is the norm. Sinusoidal metal sheet cladding connects the south elevation with the service yard enclosure. Below that, a quality flat panel system sits on a plinth of stone or buff coloured brick. The coffee shop has been retained, remains highly glazed and faces the lake. It too breaks the rectilinearity of the retail box and is angled slightly towards the water with a strongly curved roof. The family pub now utilises the same contemporary architectural language as the rest of the development, though the design will depend upon the chosen operator.

With the above modifications, the designers feel that the scheme fits better within the masterplan. A lot of time and effort has gone into the revised proposals and, in the face of commercial reservations, many of the improvements were hard won.

On behalf of the WDA, Hamish Munro regretted that the main end user was not present for this discussion. He acknowledged that improvements had been made, but expressed disappointment that design innovation was not regarded as appropriate for this site, and had in many ways been overridden by commercial priorities.

Panel's Response

Obviously the Panel were disappointed that the design team has not felt able to take on the fundamental recommendations arising from the last design review, particularly the idea of a more overlooked lake-side with a skin of residential units facing the water. Within tight commercial constraints, considerable improvements have been made in terms of accessibility and pedestrian linkage within the site, and these could perhaps be further strengthened.

The disposition of buildings on the site has deliberately avoided the northern edge, thereby inviting linkages with any future development on the NMC site, and providing them with views of the lake. The Panel thought this maintenance of the main north/south axis and the view corridor was an important element, emphasised in the original masterplan.

Some further landscape improvements are possible. In particular it was felt that more tree planting in and around the carpark, and especially alongside the main pedestrian routes could add value and reinforce the geometry of the buildings.

There was disappointment that the main food store remains a largely 'blind box' which fails to make the best use of the lakeside setting. The retailers were unwilling to accept a greater glazed area for reasons of security and internal layout, but an element of roof glazing was suggested as a way to reduce artificial lighting.

Although some possibilities for improvement have been lost, many other issues have been treated sensitively, such as the enhanced landscaping on the lakeside incorporating the belvedere, the curved roof forms of the main buildings, improved

east/west pedestrian links across the site, and better screening of the service yards.

It is important that this development proceed in line with the public arts strategy commissioned and adopted by Blaenau Gwent. The Local Authority should seek to raise additional funds to ensure the integration of artworks into this scheme at the earliest opportunity.

Summary

We welcome the improvements made at the request of DCFW, and the continuing support of the Council for a quality development.

While the Panel did suggest a more fundamental redesign at the last review they nevertheless understand the constraints imposed by retailers which have prevented a more genuinely mixed use and urbane development on this site. The current proposals show a carefully detailed set of buildings with a well chosen palette of materials. The box forms are well disguised where they interact most closely with the shoppers and the lakeside has been significantly improved as an amenity. Pedestrian movement within and across the car park has been enhanced and the pub is better integrated with the retail units. The coffee shop has been retained overlooking the lake and given more emphasis in plan and elevation, demonstrating the benefit of the design team's insistence on its importance. However, edge-of-town issues remain and pedestrian links outside the site remain problematic.

Four further improvements could be made. The landscaping of the car park could be improved with tree planting along the north-south pedestrian axes helping to green the car park, soften the aspect and make walking more pleasant. Secondly, a green (turf or planted) roof would echo the green rolling hills much more effectively. Thirdly natural lighting of the retail space should be considered by glazing parts of the roofs. Fourthly, the wood fencing around the belvedere does not fit well into the palette of materials and modern furniture adopted elsewhere in the project.

Finally pedestrian crossing of the access road to the north remains problematic and downright dangerous and this must be resolved more satisfactorily.

End