

Comisiwn Dylunio Cymru	Design Commission for Wales
Design Review Report:	14 October 2004
Meeting Date / Material Submitted:	7 October 2004
Location:	Parc Bryn Cegin, Bangor
Scheme Description:	Headquarters office building
Client:	Countryside Council for Wales [Mark Hughes]
Developer:	UK Land & Property [Paul Johnson]
Architect:	Austin Smith Lord [Ian Brebner]
Project Manager:	EC Harris [John Whitehead]
Consultants: [M&E + BREEAM Assessor]	WS Atkins [Andy Mutter]
Public/Other Body:	Gwynedd County Council WDA [Fiona Evans, Jeff St Paul]
Planning Status:	Outline permission exists
Panel Members: Alan Francis (Chair) Cindy Harris (Officer) Lyn Owen	Nick Davies Ed Colgan

Presentation

The Countryside Council for Wales, an Assembly sponsored public body, is seeking with this project to unify a dispersed staff body into one building, with the option for including CCW's local office as well. They are also seeking to achieve an exemplar 'green' building, to reflect CCW's commitment to sustainable living and working. The new building is to accommodate 270 people (336 if the local office is included) and the aim is to complete by 1st April 2006. The procurement method will be design and build, with lease back.

The proposals tabled by UK Land & Property as the chosen developer, show the building occupying a prominent position on the site, on raised ground near the entrance, and taking full advantage of surrounding views. The design seeks to minimise circulation distance and encourage maximum interaction between staff. Two central service cores and an atrium have a 15 metre deep floor plate wrapped around them to create an oval footprint. The building floorplan and section are designed to facilitate natural ventilation and optimise communal space. There is provision for rainwater and greywater collection and treatment, as well as a

sustainable drainage scheme, and landscaping will include wildflower meadow areas. The 'Environmental Preference Method', developed in Holland and used throughout Europe, has been employed to assist and inform material specification. Allowance has been made for possible future expansion (as well as contraction if the local office is not included).

Panel's Response

Initial discussion concerned the choice of site. The development brief did state a preference for a brownfield, town centre site, but once other considerations had been factored in, Parc Bryn Cegin was considered to be the best overall choice. Accessibility for staff and minimising travel was an important factor.

This proposal needs to be seen in the context of the future development of the whole Bryn Cegin site. The WDA indicated that a site development brief was to be prepared. This scheme sets a high standard for landscaping and other ecological features, that we would like to see expanded through the rest of the site. WDA representatives agreed that this should be seen as setting future standards rather than a 'one-off' development.

The developers intend to develop a site-wide travel plan and to sponsor a low-emission shuttle bus, strengthening links with the centre of Bangor. Existing cycle routes will be promoted and signage continued into the town. There may be some control on numbers of parking spaces, with a progressive reduction over a number of years [this has been imposed by Local Authorities in some areas]. The possibility of a new rail halt was discussed.

In response to questions about the passive solar aspect of the design, the architect stated that solar control was primarily dealt with by glazing type rather than shading, and that some passive heat gain in winter months may be lost in favour of visual comfort. Fenestration patterns are not fixed and may change to reflect the different demands of north/south facades. Insulation levels and material types are likewise still to be determined.

The suggested timescale is very tight, and maintaining the desired quality throughout the process will be a challenge. The choice of slate for the roof finish appears to be at odds with the roof form, and the roof's relative lack of visibility. The WDA commented that there was public concern for the appearance of the building when viewed from surrounding mountains and that the preferred roofing material was welsh slate. The number of staircases (six) seems excessive, but is to do with minimising distances between desks.

Summary

- The Panel welcomes the comprehensive brief, with its high aspirations for quality and sustainability, prepared for this development by the client.
- We strongly support the intention to prepare a design brief for the whole site, running alongside the planning process, and following through on the quality of building and landscape features in this proposal. This should be completed as soon as possible.
- We are disappointed at the choice of an out-of-town, greenfield site. Although we recognise that other factors have influenced this decision, it is

still not ideal and may seriously compromise BREEAM ratings even when compensatory transport systems are implemented.

- We applaud the committed quality of the proposed building and the efficiency of form, although we questioned whether it can be procured within the team's aim of £12-£13/square foot construction cost. It also seems odd that the building has not been tailored specifically for this site and adopts a somewhat universal approach. For example, the orientation fails to maximise the main views, which are to the east.
- Exemplary energy efficiency measures should not be compromised as a capital cost reduction exercise. The display and exhibition spaces, although dramatic and impressive, may need to be rationalised as a result of ongoing cost analysis. If the floorplate is to contract (with the local office remaining outside this building) then we suggest the design be fully re-evaluated.
- We welcome the introduction of a travel plan designed to reduce car use, and support the proposed bus link, improvements to cycle routes and the suggested new rail halt.
- We recommend the inclusion of higher-than-standard levels of insulation in the building envelope and consideration of a more local and benign insulation material.
- The maintenance of quality in details and materials, especially within such a tight programme and relatively low budget, will be of crucial importance for the delivery of a building which genuinely meets the needs and aspirations of the client.

End