



**Status:**

**Public**

<b>Design Review Report:</b>	<b>21 January 2005</b>
<b>Meeting Date / Material Submitted:</b>	<b>12 January 2005</b>
<b>Location:</b>	<b>Drift Park, Rhyl</b>
<b>Scheme Description:</b>	<b>Refurbishment of West Promenade</b>
<b>Architect/Designer:</b>	<b>BCA (Brock Carmichael): Tom Hollick, Andy Thomson</b>
<b>Public Body:</b>	<b>WDA: Wyn Roberts</b>
<b>Client and Planning Authority:</b>	<b>Denbighshire County Council: Paul Smith</b>
<b>Planning Status:</b>	<b>Full application approved</b>
<b>Design Review Panel:</b>	
<b>Alan Francis (chair)</b>	<b>Nick Davies</b>
<b>Cindy Harris (officer)</b>	<b>Jonathan Adams</b>
<b>Richard Parnaby</b>	<b>Douglas Hogg</b>
<b>Phil Roberts</b>	<b>Kieren Morgan</b>
<b>Observers:</b>	
	<b>Gillian Wulff</b>
	<b>Peter Roberts</b>

## **Presentation**

Rhyl has adopted a regeneration strategy - 'Rhyl Going Forward' - to promote the basis for a prosperous sustainable community. There is an urgent need for improvement in the built fabric and infrastructure of this area, as well as tackling problems of social inclusion and health promotion, and stimulating the growth of small business enterprises. The five strategic themes serving as the basis for the improvement plan are: housing, physical environment, education, healthy living and business and enterprise. A schedule of ten key investments has been selected from these categories, of which this scheme to revive a section of the beach front is number three.

The west promenade area currently houses some run-down visitor attractions, including a derelict theatre, set in a sea of tarmac. It acts as a barrier between the town and the seafront, and a major part of the brief is to reconnect the two. It has the advantage of panoramic sea views, and is completely open to the elements.

The design takes its inspiration from the natural processes of beach formation and the gentle undulations of windblown sand dunes. The promenade is divided into

five sheltered Gardens, each 58 m wide, bounded by 1.5m high concrete walls that follow the lines of the existing beach groynes onto the shore. A 'crows nest' four meters high, for views and supervision, sits at the seaward end of each cross-wall. Each garden has a distinct theme and has sheltered and exposed areas, with canopies on the south side nearest to the town. The themes, running from east to west are: the paddling pool; the theatre; crazy golf; the 'play zone'; and a 'natural' garden. Fully accessible pedestrian routes run north/south adjacent to the groyne walls, and a central east/west route connects the gardens together, with seafront and promenade walks either side. A skytower on the eastern edge acts as an entrance threshold to the Park, linking the car park with the Children's Village, and existing seafront trades will be located in new kiosks in this area. All gardens will be open 24 hours throughout the year, with the exception of the paddling pool.

The design proposal emphasises the need for high quality, durable, sustainable and low-maintenance materials which will weather naturally, such as precast concrete, Corten steel, and Greenheart timber. Feature lighting powered by solar/wind, and heated seating, are all being considered. Public artwork is fully integrated into the landscape and modern versions of the old 'basket' chairs will be provided. The planting structure is based on groups of maritime pine trees, which will become windblown into distorted shapes, as well as other salt-tolerant and hardy plants. There will be some winter interest, once plants have died down, by an underpinning layer of grasses.

Community consultation has been a key aspect of the design process. Artists and maintenance workers have also been involved in the design development. The County Council is very happy with this proposal and funding from various sources has been applied for including, crucially, European Objective 1 funding.

### **Panel's Response**

The Panel acknowledges the run-down and unattractive appearance of the site currently, and the context of social problems and environmental degradation. The contrasting seasonal use patterns present the problem of out-of-season policing, with shelters providing seclusion for undesirables. We understand that this scheme is just part of the County Council's response and should not be seen in isolation. However, all parties are keen to see a kickstart to public investment in this area.

The Panel commends the adventurous approach of these design proposals in this extreme environment, but prefers the simplicity of the earlier designs, rather than the more cluttered final versions. We discussed whether concrete was an appropriate material in this situation, in terms of durability and attractive weathering. We were reassured, by images of a similar scheme designed by BCA for the Liverpool Waterfront, that well-detailed, precast, self-coloured concrete elements could work well. There are still technical difficulties to be resolved dealing with the irregular shapes of the canopies, and the detailing needs to be handled sensitively. The colour and size of the aggregate could be changed as a variation in the design detail. The Panel was also assured that the greenheart timber would be supplied from sustainable sources.

At least one of the crows nests should be made fully accessible so that the view can be enjoyed by all; an access officer from the local authority is involved and has already made recommendations about the theatre. The Panel recommend that these issues are resolved at an early stage.

It was pointed out that the concrete cross walls had moved from their alignment with the existing groynes. However, the line of the groynes is picked up by lines of timber posts set into the gardens, with the tops set at a constant height and containing solar powered lights.

The Panel thinks that the connection with the town is not sufficiently apparent and there should be more obvious linkages between the sidestreets running perpendicular to West Parade and the park and beach. The division into five equal spaces appears rather artificial and in some cases the proposed activities do not fully occupy the allocated space, or correspond with existing steps down to the beach.

### **Summary**

The Panel commends the design approach behind this scheme and thinks that it could well be an important first step in the regeneration of the seaside town of Rhyl. In particular:

- We recommend a return to the early simplicity of the design development
- There should be more direct links running north/south and aligned with the side streets and beach steps
- We remain slightly unsure about the proposed use of concrete, and recommend that crucial details are developed to ensure practical feasibility.
- We would appreciate seeing more 3D images, particularly of the canopies
- The statutory requirements for DDA should be addressed and resolved as soon as possible
- The planting schemes are simple, appropriate and robust but need to be protected while they are becoming established

End

**NB A Welsh language copy of this report is available upon request.**