

Statws/Status:

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DESIGN
COMMISSION
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CYMRU

Adroddiad Adolygu Dylunio:
Design Review Report: 17 May 2005

Dyddiad Cyfarfod / Cyflwyno'r Deunydd:
Meeting Date / Material Submitted: 5 May 2005

Lleoliad/Location: Downing, Flintshire

Disgrifiad o'r Cynllun
Scheme Description: New house in historic walled garden

Pensaer/Architect: TFH Architects [Tom Hughes]

Awdurdod Cynllunio:
Planning Authority: Flintshire CC [Peter Jones-Hughes]

Statws Cynllunio:
Planning Status: Application submitted

Y Panel Adolygu Dylunio/Design Review Panel:

Alan Francis (cadeirydd/chair)	Wendy Hall
Cindy Harris (swyddog/officer)	Ewan Jones
Geraint John	Lyn Owen
Kedrick Davies	

Cyflwyniad/Presentation

There is existing permission for a new house on this historic site, in the walled garden to the south of the grade II listed stable buildings. [The Hall itself was demolished in 1953 following a fire.] However, the client desires a more contemporary building and has employed TFH Architects to take the scheme through to planning approval. The present design is based on the results of historical research and visits to other walled gardens in the area.

As a result, it was decided to retain and refurbish the existing two storey lean-to building on the north side of the existing 4 metre high garden wall, and to build a

new linked residence on the south side, with a new double garage adjacent to the west. Two new doorway openings will be made in the old garden wall, one on each floor. The form of the new building is intended to reflect the style of existing glasshouses and vineries, such as those surviving at Nercwys Hall nearby.

Materials will be compatible with the conservation context and locally sourced where possible. A steel frame is designed to take all loads off the existing wall and to create a visual break between old and new, infilled with oak boarding and glazing. Care will be taken to match brick infill walls and 'bookend' gables with existing brickwork; sandstone copings will top the gable walls; window frames and roof trusses will be made from local oak; roofs will be Welsh slate. Internally, split level accommodation reflects the site topography.

The brief requires an innovative design that adheres to the principles of sustainability. Consequently, the passive solar design approach has large areas of south facing glazing, appropriate areas of thermal mass, overhanging eaves for summer shading, and 'superinsulation' of 440mm depth. Rainwater will be harvested via aluminium rainwater goods, and reused within the house.

There is shared access into the stable yard, where the listed outbuildings have been mostly refurbished. Access to the walled garden is in the north east corner. These proposals do not include plans to restore the garden as a whole or improve the landscape setting.

For the local authority the principle of a dwelling on this site is established. The previous consent related to a design that proved impractical and as an amended proposal, the current scheme is considered acceptable. The evolution of the design reflecting existing glasshouses is applauded, although the planners have some reservations concerning details on the elevation and would want to limit the height when seen from the stable yard.

Ymateb y Panel/Panel's Response

The Panel considered that the relation of the new house to the walled garden and its immediate setting was of crucial importance. In the light of this, the proposed location of the garage, and the consequent vehicular accessway in front of the house, was questioned. Although there is no landscape design or strategy in place, an element of external works around the house should perhaps be defined at an early stage. The planners would be keen to see some plans or intentions concerning the garden renovation, and pointed out that some archaeological work would be necessary before and probably during construction.

The contemporary design approach, integrating the original lean-to with a modern 'lean-to', astride the old garden wall, was commended. It was suggested that all of the enclosed garden wall could be left exposed, sacrificing insulation on a small section of external wall. The intended reference to the original glasshouse design was considered less successful, owing to the height of the new front wall. However, reducing the height and extending the roof slope would lead to an unacceptable level of shading to upper floors. A clearer definition between old and new would be helped by a row of rooflights where the valley gutter is shown in section, but this has been rejected on cost grounds.

The Panel applauded the sustainability measures shown in these proposals and would support a further extension of these features. For example, recycled steel

could be sourced for the frames, or local timber frames could be used instead. The potential for a ground source heat pump exists, given the relatively large area of land available. The brick walls are rather chunky for non-loadbearing elements, presumably due to the requirements for superinsulation but leading to a redundancy of materials. The Panel would prefer to see a simpler lightweight infill material between the bookend walls, possibly exposing the steel frame. We suggest that an Eco-homes evaluation would yield a good result and should be carried out.

Further details aroused comment, such as the repetitive verticality of the south elevation. This would be greatly improved by losing the brick 'pillars'. Given the claim to historical references, the roof area should perhaps be increased. The parapets could be finished with a lighter touch and brick copings may be more appropriate than sandstone cappings. The lack of a clearly defined front entrance could be problematic.

We returned to the question of the garage location, the architect explaining why the clients wanted the garage-cum-workshop at the far end, away from the main entrance and reception rooms, and close to the kitchen. He also pointed out that there had been a previous building on the proposed garage site. However, the planners confirmed that the garage could possibly be located to the east and the position of garage and living room could effectively be swapped. This would avoid the necessity of a vehicle accessway across the front of the house and provide more flexibility for future development of the garden. The Panel understood the client's preference, but thought that the unique nature of the historic walled garden deserved better protection.

The Panel regretted the lack of proposals relating to the restoration of the garden and landscape setting and considered that this could be a missed opportunity for the reinstatement of the walled garden as a whole.

Crynodeb/Summary

The Panel welcomes these proposals and commends the historical research on which they are based. [They are undoubtedly an improvement on the mock Victorian consented scheme.] We recognise the tensions which exist between the client's brief and aspirations, and the need to protect historic structures and gardens and develop them sensitively. In particular:

- We recommend that the location of the garage be reconsidered, with a view to moving it to the east end of the site
- The treatment of the front facade should also be revisited, with the aim of keeping it as light as possible and losing some of the vertical emphasis.
- We would welcome a more distinct visual break between the new part of the house and the spine wall. Brick copings to the new gable walls would help differentiate old and new work.
- The intended reference to historical structures should be made clearer, possibly by extending the roof area if this can be achieved without excessive shading.
- Some initial plans should be submitted dealing with external works, including the proposed route and surfacing of the roadway, and aspects of this might be conditioned
- We suggest that an Eco-Homes evaluation be carried out, so that the sustainable design and construction proposals receive credit, and further possibilities receive consideration.

Diwedd/End

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