

Statws/Status:
Cyhoeddus / Public



Adroddiad Adolygu Dylunio: 09 March 2006
Design Review Report:

Dyddiad Cyfarfod / Cyflwyno'r Deunydd: 01 March 2006
Meeting Date / Material Submitted:

Lleoliad/Location: Cattle Mart site,
Abergavenny

Disgrifiad o'r Cynllun Mixed use
Scheme Description:

Developer/Datblygwr: Henry Boot Developments
[Julian Painter]

Pensaer/Architect: Boyes Rees [Gary Loo]

Awdurdod Cynllunio: Monmouthshire CC
Planning Authority: [George Ashworth]

Statws Cynllunio: Outline permission exists
Planning Status: Full application submitted

Y Panel Adolygu Dylunio/Design Review Panel:
John Punter (cadeirydd/chair) Paul Vanner
Cindy Harris (swyddog/officer) Ed Colgan
Lyn Owen Douglas Hogg
Ewan Jones

Lead Panellist: John Punter

Sylwedyddion/Observers: Charlie Deng
Design Review assistant

Cyflwyniad/Presentation

This proposal is intended to be a sustainable mixed use development, comprising a large food-based supermarket, two other retail units, a library, cinema and 34 residential apartments. An earlier version of the scheme prepared by MacGregor Smith and Mountford Piggott was first presented to the Design Review Panel in January 2004. Our main recommendations after this review were:

- More residential units along Lion Street
- Coffee shop with glazed aspect [now incorporated]
- Move store to eastern boundary of site [now done]
- Encouraged retention of slaughterhouse complex [now to be demolished]
- Strengthen north/south pedestrian links with town centre.
- 'The western part of the site could be developed as residential *and the car park reduced in size*'. [First now done; not the second]
- 'Decking' of the car park in order to reduce surface parking.

Outline planning permission was granted in April 2004, and in the summer of 2004 it was announced that Henry Boot was the preferred developer. The Design Review Panel saw the scheme again in September 2004 and raised the following concerns:

- No clearly defined, distinctive or well designed public spaces. Dominated by car parking.
- Form of residential building on Priory Lane, and its position over car park.
- Frontage of residential units on Lion St [now no longer applicable].
- Pedestrian link between Market St and Bailey Park should be reinforced and strengthened by residential development fronting it.

Over the following months, the area of food and non-food retail units was increased, along with car parking, and the decision was taken to demolish the slaughterhouse buildings to accommodate a new library and cinema.

In July 2005, Monmouthshire County Council signed a legal agreement with the developer and in September the proposals were made public and comments invited. Around 125 responses have been received which show two main areas of concern. Some relate to the type of development and object to the location of a large food store on the site. Others are more concerned with the architectural treatment and materials. The architect has used a curved roof to soften the bulk of the food store and introduced natural stone on several elevations. He is aiming for a fusion between contemporary and traditional architecture, and has taken a supermarket in Ludlow as a useful precedent.

The Local Authority commented that several public meetings had been held, including one last week with the Abergavenny Development Forum. The site is in an area identified for retail use in the Local Plan. The Council wishes to avoid edge of town retail development by providing development opportunities within the town centre. The cinema has been included in response to public demand and the inclusion of residential uses is considered important. Together with the developer, an in principle decision was taken to pursue a contemporary design.

Ymateb y Panel/Panel's Response

The Panel supported the mixed use nature of these proposals and we appreciated that some of our early concerns had been met. We were primarily concerned with design issues although the size of the non-food component of the Asda/Walmart store, and the scope for further expansion, were a worry. The Panel now had major reservations about the scale, layout and design of the current scheme.

We found no evidence of a response to the conservation context. In particular Lion Street, with its fine-grained residential character, would have on its north side a single building over half its length and one with a largely blank facade, that did not follow the street line or provide any enclosure of the street. The project team explained that they were using some planting to soften the blank wall, and installing a window facing south towards Brewery Yard to animate the street and mark the entrance and link between commercial uses. They pointed out that the Retail Unit 1 proposed on the western part of Lion Street has a mansard roof, a more domestic scale and uses traditional materials. However, the Panel would much prefer to see residential or smaller retail uses along Lion Street and referred to well established urban design practice on town centre retail developments, which emphasises the importance of animating the edges of 'big box' retail units to hide their otherwise blank facades. The Local Authority representative stated that residential use would not be appropriate for a town centre retail area, and the developer insisted that housebuilders would not be interested in single aspect housing on this street, but the Panel strongly disagreed.

The Panel's criticisms of the lack of residential development on Lion Street were also related to the location and design of the residential provision on the western edge of the site adjacent to Priory Lane. We thought that this form of traditional style housing, but raised above the retail car park on 'pilotis' and partly over a basement car park ramp, was completely alien to Abergavenny. The proposed development would not provide an attractive place to live, nor would it help to civilise the pedestrian walkway. The representative from Henry Boot pointed out that they were not a residential developer, but they did have a partner who was confident of the marketability of this proposal, but not of any residential units on Lion Street. Both designer and developer stated that they would be happy to adopt a more contemporary design approach, if this was publicly acceptable. The Panel suggested that the residential block could be extended to the southern end of site and over Retail Unit 1, with retail opportunities incorporated in the ground floor corner area, thus providing a better relationship to the street and to other uses on the site. The developer agreed to explore this, although the Authority had doubts about the resulting scale. The Panel felt that the housing should address the street or the walkway properly, and could not do this if it was raised above the car park.

The car park will be a public Pay & Display facility. The car parking ratio for the residential is 1:1 and 1 space per 10 square metres of retail area, which is the standard out-of-town retail requirement. The Panel thought that this was an over-provision, given the existing car park to the north across the A40. It allows virtually no space for any public realm treatment, landscaping or the creation of the claimed 'courtyard'. The library/cinema block is turned into a traffic island by virtue of the traffic flow past the front door and across the main north-south pedestrian route, with no external space for congregating or socialising.

The all-important north/south pedestrian link is not given sufficiently high quality treatment or landscaping. It is dominated by car parking on both sides and its safety and attractiveness is severely compromised by the access ramp to the underground car park at the north end. At the southern end, there is none of the desired intimacy or sense of enclosure between the cafe and Retail Unit 1, and the space is further compromised by the intrusion of the pedestrian access to the underground car park. The designer stated that a proposal for landscaping exists but did not form part of the presentation. There is much work to be done to improve the layout of the car park and to create a more pedestrian friendly 'courtyard'.

The Panel explored the likelihood of significant congestion on the A40, with the greater amount of car parking and more retail space provided, plus the library and cinema. This was acknowledged as a possibility, but also as the price to be paid for a town centre scheme. The project team argued that this made the generous car parking provision even more important, and the design of the access would help to prevent backing up along the road. The team are looking at the possibility of one-way traffic round the library/cinema complex. The developer will make a financial contribution to public transport provision, and the Panel felt that the designs should show the bus stops and lay-bys. The Panel was particularly concerned that the sandstone walls that now enclose the market site be rebuilt to a height where they would screen the service yard and the car park. The architects and developers agreed to look at this.

The Panel suggested that the underground parking could be put beneath the food store, with an alternative entry point. The project team agreed to explore this option with the main retailer. It was recognised that the current location beneath the housing was an expensive option, as it involved the relocation of the existing culvert. If this were to remain, it could be opened up and used as a feature alongside the walkway.

The Panel was not convinced by the claim that the architectural styles related well to one another. We found the overall effect to be too busy and confused, with traditional architecture for the housing not complemented by traditional forms, and clashing with the very modern forms of the food store and Retail Unit 2. As for the library/cinema block, this failed to relate to the other buildings and turned its back on the main road with a blank facade. The Panel was not convinced that the liberal use of sandstone to clad the foodstore achieved any unification of the architecture or a better relationship to the context. It was an entirely cosmetic approach.

The sustainability strategy for this scheme rests mainly on the mixed use nature of the development and its central brownfield location. The M&E consultants are investigating other measures which could reduce energy use or offer other environmental benefits.

The Panel noted that the Local Authority has accepted a reduced land value in return for the provision of the library/cinema, and in addition has made available £3m to fund a new cattle market. The Authority does not feel pressured by any particular timescale and emphasised that the priority was to achieve a development that everyone involved could feel proud of.

Crynodeb/Summary

The Panel welcomes the opportunity to review this scheme at this stage, although we would have preferred to see it prior to submission of a planning application. We find the current proposals to be unacceptable and we think that a major redesign is necessary. In particular:

- The proposed intensification of use on the site places an even greater emphasis on the need for ingenious urban design, the careful handling of the mix of uses and their scale, and the reduction in conflict between pedestrian and vehicular movement.
- We would like to see the restoration of Lion Street as a mixed use street, with finer grained and active uses and enclosed on both sides. Since the south side of the street is a conservation area, a more sympathetic architectural treatment is imperative.
- A residential block on 'pilotis' over a car park is not acceptable. We would like to see some residential units on Lion Street and we think the idea of extending the block over Unit 1 merits further exploration. All housing should be entered directly from the street or the walkway at ground level.
- The reinforcement and attractive treatment of the north/south pedestrian route is fundamental, and is an issue we have raised as a priority in the two previous reviews. The whole route needs a high quality treatment, good landscaping to provide shelter and protection from vehicles, and the north and south entrances should be made more inviting. The southern entrance should be narrower and the pedestrian space within the courtyard be more substantial, while the negative impacts of the car park ramp on the northern entrance should be ameliorated. There should be a shared surface with pedestrian priority where the walkway crosses the car park ramp. The pedestrian crossing over the A40 should be aligned with the route as it emerges from this site.
- We would like to see the basement parking taken under the food store, and we think this would bring significant advantages in terms of overall site layout, creating the opportunity for ground-oriented housing and a real courtyard atmosphere at the heart of the scheme..
- There needs to be a much more robust, hard and soft landscape treatment and a use of trees to help improve pedestrian amenity, and break up the expanse of car parking.
- A greater coherence in terms of architectural treatment is necessary. We do not object to a contemporary approach, but it should have good environmental credentials and should relate positively to the townscape and vitality of the streets of Abergavenny.
- Although it is unfortunate that the slaughterhouse buildings cannot be reused, we do not object to their demolition, given the inclusion of two new and valuable public uses. We do consider that the library and cinema need more thought as regards their setting and relationship to pedestrian movement patterns.

Diwedd/End

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