

Statws/Status:

Cyhoeddus / Public



Adroddiad Adolygu Dylunio: Design Review Report:	12 May 2006
Dyddiad Cyfarfod / Cyflwyno'r Deunydd: Meeting Date / Material Submitted:	3 May 2006
Lleoliad/Location:	Corner of Castle Street & Avenue de Clichy, Merthyr Tydfil;
Disgrifiad o'r Cynllun Scheme Description:	Mixed use. Leisure/retail.
Cleient/Asiant: Client/Agent:	Cordea Savills [Neil Rowley]
Developer/Datblygwr:	Diageo
Pensaer/Architect:	Holder Mathias [Terry Morley David Gallimore]
Awdurdod Cynllunio: Planning Authority:	Merthyr Tydfil CBC
Statws Cynllunio: Planning Status:	Previous consents expired. Full application submitted April 06.
Y Panel Adolygu Dylunio/Design Review Panel:	
John Punter (cadeirydd/chair)	Kieren Morgan
Cindy Harris (swyddog/officer)	Phil Roberts
Elfed Roberts	Paul Vanner
Ed Colgan	

Sylwedyddion/Observers:

Charlie Deng Design Review Assistant
Angela Williams, Architecture and Design, Scotland

Cyflwyniad/Presentation

The proposal is for a mixed use development on a key site on the south east corner of Avenue de Clichy and Castle Street. It comprises A1 and A3 retail uses on the ground floor, with a cinema and leisure use on the first floor. It is intended that this will complement and extend the adjacent St Tydfil's shopping centre (owned by the developer) and would not prejudice the longer term redevelopment of the adjacent bus station.

There is currently a poor quality urban environment around this open grassed site, dominated by the existing bus station and the backs of commercial properties to the east. To the west is the avenue and the River Taff with Merthyr College on the west bank. A masterplan prepared by Powell Dobson [which has no formal planning status] shows a consolidation of the bus station on a smaller footprint and a new, wide and curving pedestrian link from the shopping centre to the south, to the civic centre to the north. Although not a faithful interpretation of the masterplan, this proposal is intended as the first phase of a larger development and responds positively to the line of the bus station enclosures and to a proposed new 24 hour footbridge that will cross the avenue and river into the College car park.

There is no parking within this proposal in recognition of the project's central location and a large existing car park across the river, which has much lower use in the evenings when this scheme will make greatest demands on existing parking.

The architectural treatment proposes a brick frame expressed as a colonnade on the ground floor on the east side, with large timber panels recessed behind the frame on the tall first floor level and a tall narrow window completing the infill. This treatment is broken on the south west corner where Unit 6 is expressed as a blank brick box. The glazed entrance foyer on the north east corner provides a focal point. Roof plant will be hidden in a 'well' at lower roof level, created by raised parapet walls. The undercroft accommodates services, stores and fire escape stairs. Flooding issues have been responded to by raising the ground floor more than a metre above the avenue.

Although the Local Authority representative was not present, it was reported that they required an urban gateway building, with the focal point on Castle Street, which should relate in scale and orientation to the existing civic centre buildings.

Ymateb y Panel/Panel's Response

The Panel supported the principle of introducing more retail and leisure uses into the town centre, without additional parking provision. We recognised the importance of the gateway site and supported the proposed massing, which acknowledges this as well as the civic buildings to the north. We also agreed that the development should not turn its back on the river, although only unit 2 provides windows overlooking the avenue. We would prefer to see the framed treatment completed along the whole of the western elevation, with more glazing which would benefit from late afternoon

sun. The developer is confident of unit 2 attracting an A3 use. Likely uses for unit 6 might be a bingo hall, nightclub or health and fitness suite.

The relationship of the building to the Avenue de Clichy was discussed, with the Panel wondering whether the proposed 'back-of-pavement' location should be changed to give a greater setback and create more of a boulevard feel, and the designer stating that he thought an urban block more appropriate. The local planning authority should have clear views about how new buildings should relate to the Avenue, and whether this solution is acceptable.

There is currently no significant public realm on or around this site but desire lines are evident from worn tracks in the grass. The north/south pedestrian link between the Civic Centre and the shopping centre is vitally important to future developments in the town. The designers have adopted the view that the actual building lines shown on the masterplan are not critical, but that the broad principles should be followed. The Panel considered that the project with its curved and colonnaded eastern facade was capable of reinforcing and accommodating this desire line. However, the relationship of the scheme to the proposed footbridge across the river, which is a continuation of the east/west link along Victoria Street, is problematic and the southern facade needs to relate much more positively to this bridge with some active frontage. We suggested that more fenestration could be incorporated into the south facade of unit 6.

The Panel sought clarification on the intended landscaping of Avenue de Clichy and in particular whether this would be hard or soft. We also queried why the north west corner was not given the same prominence as the north east corner, and were told that the latter defined the main entrance. We suggested that the balcony on the north west corner might break out of the structure, forward of the columns. On the eastern facade the Panel commented that it would be desirable for the colonnade to extend and physically connect to the new foyer to the north and the existing shopping centre to the south, to provide continuous weather protection along the new pedestrian route. It was also suggested that the columns of the colonnade should be slimmer to allow more light and visibility along the walkway.

There was discussion over the proposed materials and the Panel were told that the planning authority had been advised to use brick that would tone in with the Civic Centre. The Panel were not entirely convinced that this was the correct approach. We urged caution over the use of external timber cladding behind the frame of the building, but were told that this particular timber product was suitably durable.

It was acknowledged that this design was compromised by the lack of planning certainty, particularly with regard to the future of the bus station. While this remains in its present form, the space under the colonnade will be unpleasantly close to the perspex walls of the bus station enclosures, with a narrow, unusable 'dead' space in between. A potential solution to this might be the partial replacement of the existing perspex tunnel with a lightweight canopy fixed to the new frontage. The Panel regretted the lack of a clear steer from the planning authority on this, while acknowledging that the proposal still allowed the east side of the walkway to be successfully developed.

The Panel considered that the nature of the shell-only construction provided an ideal opportunity to incorporate energy efficient and low carbon technologies, which could

then be used as a marketing device, with the emphasis on lower running costs. The large roof space could be used for solar panels and/or rainwater harvesting. A 'green' or sedum roof would attenuate rainwater runoff and could provide recreation space. These measures are unlikely to be included unless they are a non-discretionary part of the infrastructure.

Crynodeb/Summary

The Panel welcomed the opportunity to comment on these proposals but were very disappointed at the absence of the Local Authority from the review. Although we understand that pre-application discussions have taken place, we can have little confidence in the design framework presented, without the commitment of the Local Authority to carry through public realm improvements in and around the bus station. Within these constraints, we consider this proposal to be an acceptable response to the site and the brief, but we feel substantial revisions are necessary. In particular:

- The blank southern facade would present a hostile face to the new footbridge. We would like to see more fenestration in unit 6, which would ideally be used as a health and fitness facility. The western elevation would be more refined if the frame was continuous and continued on to the southern facade.
- The colonnade should make better connection with the canopy over the entrance and would benefit from narrower columns on the ground floor, making it lighter, safer and more open to the street.
- The relationship with the avenue / boulevard is ambiguous and would benefit from a clear lead from the Local Authority. We accept that the 'back-of-pavement' treatment sets an urban tone, but think that this could be a missed opportunity to create a more positive relationship with the river.
- The shell construction should be used as an opportunity to include sustainable technologies leading to energy efficiency and financial savings.
- If the bus station is to remain in its present form for the foreseeable future, consideration should be given to incorporating a more attractive and convenient means of sheltering passengers than the perspex tunnels.

Diwedd/End

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