

**Statws/Status:**  
**Cyhoeddus / Public**



**Adroddiad Adolygu Dylunio:** 11 May 2006  
**Design Review Report:**

**Dyddiad Cyfarfod / Cyflwyno'r Deunydd:** 3 May 2006  
**Meeting Date / Material Submitted:**

**Lleoliad/Location:** Y Maes Caernarfon

**Disgrifiad o'r Cynllun** Public realm  
**Scheme Description:**

**Cleient/Asiant:** Gwynedd CC  
**Client/Agent:** [Dafydd Williams]

**Pensaer/Architect:** Taylor Young Landscape Architects [Peter Coe, David McKenna]

**Awdurdod Cynllunio:** Gwynedd CC  
**Planning Authority:**

**Statws Cynllunio:** Active planning application.  
**Planning Status:**

**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 Ann-Marie Smale

**Lead Panellist:** Elfed Roberts

**Sylwedyddion/Observers:**  
Charlie Deng Design Review Assistant  
Angela Williams, Architecture and Design, Scotland

## **Cyflwyniad/Presentation**

This public realm improvement scheme for Y Maes, the historic space in front of Caernarfon Castle, has been generated by a desire to reverse the economic decline of Caernarfon and the surrounding area by expanding its tourist base and retail offer. It is hoped that a high quality public open space in the heart of the town will act as a wider catalyst for private investment. The existing market will be retained with improved facilities and a new multi-functional space will be created. Public consultation has consisted of a series of focus groups, meetings with key stakeholders and a three-day public exhibition. Following on from a schematic masterplan produced in 2003, Taylor Young were appointed in 2004 to work with internal consultants, Gwynedd Consultancy, to develop proposals for Y Maes and the management of traffic within the town centre.

A townscape analysis showed the potential of the area in terms of historic building character and quality, and the importance of establishing good pedestrian linkages and creating a strong sense of arrival in the space. Improvements would include the return of a water feature, relocation of statues, shop front improvements and development of historical and heritage themes, along with removal of much of the clutter. Some existing trees would be removed where necessary and there is a stated preference for local, traditional materials using local skills. New lighting will improve the night time environment and there will be CCTV. A new set of 'sitting steps' will provide a direct and dramatic link down from Y Maes to Slate Quay and the waterfront.

A major objective is to minimise unnecessary traffic movements through the town. Roads leading into the square will have narrower carriageways, and on Bridge Street wider pavements. Limited short term and disabled parking will be provided in the square and there will be a coach drop-off point, but through traffic will be discouraged. New traffic signage in the town will reinforce this, but there will be an absence of signs and road markings in Y Maes itself, where traffic calming will be achieved by establishing pedestrian priority over vehicles.

## **Ymateb y Panel/Panel's Response**

The Panel welcomed the opportunity to review these proposals for tackling the poor visual and functional quality of this historic town centre space. We applauded the commissioning of competent consultants and the commitment to contemporary design principles. We thought the basic design concept was sound, including the simplification of paving, formalising of the market stalls, abolition of 'clutter' and the desire to repopulate and animate the square. The margins of Y Maes were well treated by creating a series of subsidiary spaces on the south, west and east sides, by moving existing statues and linking them with a new line of seating on the west, and retaining the Cenotaph and adding a fountain alongside on the south side.

The Panel was initially uncertain about the strong geometry of the layout at the centre of Y Maes, and how appropriate this was in the context being the point where traffic would conflict most with pedestrians. We accepted the need for a dedicated market space in the trapezoidal section at the northern end, but we were not convinced of the need for the large, strongly demarcated square to the south, especially as it does not function as a square but as a dropping off place for coaches, and a through route for those accessing neighbouring properties. We were informed

that the change of surface materials signified where traffic was allowed to go, but we felt that a single uniform and undifferentiated surface would be more in line with the design concept.

The Council representative stated that there was a wish to avoid any connotations of roundabouts or circles, and to create the sense of a pedestrian dominated space for any drivers entering. The aim is to create ambiguity in the mind of drivers, so that they will reduce speeds and establish eye contact with other users of the space. Traffic should be limited to vehicles accessing the residential area to the north or servicing shops on the square. There will be a controlled parking zone but no lane or directional markings. Sockets for bollard will be installed in case they are needed in the future. The through route from Bridge Street to Slate Quay [one way] will be retained but with an option of partial closure at certain times. The Panel thought that it would be desirable in the long term to effect a permanent closure of this route to traffic, but they went along with the gradual approach to full pedestrianisation.

The Panel considered this to be an interesting and innovative approach to traffic / pedestrian accommodation in town centres, but its success would depend on certain caveats. It would be very important to prevent drivers arriving in the square accidentally, and this would require good signage on approaching routes. 'Pedestrian Zone' signs would be more positive and convey a more accurate impression, than 'Access Only' signs. The local Council does currently have problems with enforcement of traffic regulations, but will have greater powers after April 2007. We were informed that the junction of Bridge Street with Y Maes would have priority for cars exiting from the square, and this would reinforce the sense of restricted access.

The Panel applauded the concept of the wide steps linking Y Maes with the castle and Slate Quay, and would encourage further development of this feature to maximise the creation of a sociable space.

With regard to the palette of materials, the Panel supported the use of high quality local materials, but thought that three different kinds of slate might provide too much variety and create problems of future maintenance. The designers stated that they were using different colours/types of slate to lighten the space, but the Panel argued that granite (from Trefor) might provide a better and more adaptable surface. We advised that the Council put in place a protocol to ensure that any further digging up of the square by the Statutory Undertakers would be reinstated to the same standard. The designers confirmed that service ducts would be built in.

The Panel thought that such a large space would need lighting on columns as well as building-mounted fixtures, using the same lantern head. We wondered whether a standard design for the market stalls would detract from the vitality of the market, although we appreciated the need to raise the standards of the stalls. We did have some concern about the suggestion to instal shelters in front of buildings on the northern edge of the square

It was confirmed that this proposal is a live planning application and is currently being considered by an area planning committee. The Panel expressed the wish to see the proposals for Slate Quay follow on from this scheme to assist the regeneration of the area and reinforce the link with the river.

## **Crynodeb/Summary**

The Panel strongly supports the aspiration to create a contemporary and high quality public open space in Y Maes as a catalyst for wider regeneration. We consider these proposals to be an acceptable response to the site and the brief, with some minor revisions. In particular:

- We are excited by the innovative and informal approach to traffic management and establishing pedestrian priority. However, there needs to be strong traffic management and deterrent measures established beyond the site, for this approach to work.
- We think that the flexible, progressive approach taken by the design team towards pedestrianisation and further future road closures, is correct.
- We would like to see a greater simplification of the surface treatment of Y Maes and a reduction in the proposed variety of materials. Maintenance issues should be considered at this stage, and inform the specification.
- We think that the proposed steps down to Slate Quay will greatly enhance the quality and accessibility of the space, and we would like to see a bolder exploitation of the views and greater encouragement for people to linger and gather.
- We are greatly encouraged to learn that these proposals have been developed with the active involvement of highways officers, and we commend them for their imaginative and bold approach.

## **Diwedd/End**

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