

Statws/Status:

Cyhoeddus / Public

DESIGN
COMMISSION
FOR WALES
COMISIWN
DYLUNIO
CYMRU

Adroddiad Adolygu Dylunio: Design Review Report:	22 March 2007
Dyddiad Cyfarfod / Cyflwyno'r Deunydd: Meeting Date / Material Submitted:	14 March 2007
Lleoliad/Location:	Aberystwyth
Disgrifiad o'r Cynllun Scheme Description:	WAG office building
Cleient/Asiant: Client/Agent:	WAG [John Dew, Robin Shaw]
Developer/Datblygwr:	Carillion [Andy Jones, John Swinton]
Pensaer/Architect:	Powell Dobson [Jeff Tucker]
Cynllunio/ Consultants:	Hoare Lea [Richard Dalley] Chandler KBS [Gerwyn Bowden] Soltys Brewster [Simon Brewster] Aukett Fitzroy Robinson [Giles Alldis]
Awdurdod Cynllunio: Planning Authority:	Ceredigion CC
Statws Cynllunio: Planning Status:	Application submitted 02/02/07
Y Panel Adolygu Dylunio/ Design Review Panel: John Punter(cadeirydd/chair) Cindy Harris (swyddog/officer) Charlie Deng (swyddog/officer) Carole-Anne Davies, CEO, DCFW	Phil Roberts Douglas Hogg Alan Francis
Lead Panellist:	Alan Francis

Cyflwyniad/Presentation

This scheme was seen previously at Design Review in November 2006. It is a high profile development, and is at the heart of the WAG relocation strategy. A planning application was submitted in February 2007, and the team expect a response by mid-May.

The project team summarised the basic design principles as:

- A strong commitment to sustainability, based on the achievement of a BREEAM Excellent rating
- The two buildings [for WAG and Ceredigion CC] to function as a coordinated development and together to make a strong statement on one of the main approaches into the town.
- Full accessibility and an integrated landscape strategy, combined with specific but different levels of security requirements. A central plaza including reflective pools will provide a communal green space and staff amenity. The proposed 'green corridor' along Parc y Llyn is in line with the emerging LDA masterplan for Aberystwyth.
- A reasonable level of acoustic insulation compatible with the openable windows required for natural ventilation. The central atrium provides this for the rear wing and forms a strong visual link between the two buildings across the site. A separate glazed screen gives acoustic protection to the front wing.

Recent developments in the design process include improved pedestrian links in response to our earlier comments. The ground floor plan has now been signed off and the planning of the upper floors is underway. It has been decided to locate some of the service functions in an external 'energy centre' north of the central plaza. The landscape design has proceeded in line with the boundary security strategy. External materials will be locally and regionally sourced where possible. A visit to the Wessex Water building near Bath, which is seen as an appropriate precedent, has helped to inform the design development.

The M&E consultant reported that two 12 kW wind turbines are now included, along with 20m² of solar water heating. The space heating requirement will be met entirely by the biomass [woodchip] boiler located off site and serving a district heating scheme; there will be no mains gas connection. Shallow ponds will be used to pre-cool ventilation air and an exposed coffered concrete ceiling will help to stabilise internal temperatures. Rainwater harvesting will be used for WC flushing. The number of lifts has been reduced by one and kitchen facilities have been enhanced.

The landscape strategy is based on a linear structure, along with the focal point of the central plaza. It has been developed in consultation with CCW and LDA and security requirements have been addressed as sensitively as possible. 'See through' security fencing will be incorporated into perimeter

hedging and a glazed screen will provide security around the WAG side of the central plaza. Biodiversity will be increased and local materials used for landscaping and furniture. Oak and cherry trees will be planted externally and a line of box-pruned trees will run through the atria connecting them to each other and to the central plaza. A new pedestrian entrance has been provided to the west, linking more directly to the town.

Ymateb y Panel/Panel's Response

The Panel was informed that the degree of intended public access and civic presence was still evolving and under review. The provision of a 'one stop shop' is a new development and together with the cafe will be fully accessible, but public access to meeting rooms and the restaurant will be restricted without prior arrangement. The Panel was still unclear as to whether this building was to be a regional seat of government, or essentially an office building whose main purpose was administration rather than public interaction. The team thought it was somewhere in between and more of a working office.

The Panel was not convinced by the rationale for two identical buildings. We were told that the briefs were virtually identical and, because of the desire for a strong visual link, the same design philosophy was therefore applied to both. The similarity of the two buildings was also intended to reinforce the political message about regional and local governments working in partnership. However, we were concerned that their identical appearance would affect their legibility for members of the public, and this would not be helped by the main entrances facing away from each other at opposite ends of the site. Strong signage would be necessary to guide users and this should be developed as part of the design as soon as possible.

The Panel thought that the successful treatment of the central external space was a crucial factor in integrating the buildings with each other and with their context and function. Currently, the division of this space is problematic and prejudicial to the desired message of partnership and open access. We would like to see the main entrances of both buildings relocated onto a fully accessible central landscaped space and the high security barrier pulled back to the line of the WAG building. This would greatly improve the legibility, with a single pedestrian entrance from which the public could be clearly directed and where they could enjoy the amenity of the landscaped gardens and plazas as they progressed to the entrances of the buildings. Ideally, the whole of the ground floor atrium space should be open to the public, or else controlled by barriers with a more central One Stop Shop. More private staff amenity space could be provided at the opposite ends of the buildings adjacent to the staff entrances, and the car park access to the building could remain as proposed.

The Panel queried whether the orientation of the building was correct and noted that the absolute symmetry of the facade detailing appeared to dictate the location of the solar shading, rather than the actual sunpath or solar tracking. It was agreed that this should be investigated and that the

shading should function in a coordinated way. There might well be need for differential shading on the facades facing the central space.

The Panel found the proposed roofscape clumsy, particularly the skylights with solar panels to be added, and we would like to see the design refined in this respect.

The Panel noted that, despite the intention to provide a 'green corridor' linking back to the town, the proposed Law Courts building immediately to the west has a main entrance facing the street and no landscaping to the front, and so does not subscribe to this strategy. We had some concerns about the degree of use, amenity value and maintenance of the triangular green spaces bordering Parc y Llyn. In our view these 'left over' spaces were unlikely to be used and we would prefer to see the parking arrangement adjusted to create a landscaped area through which the pedestrian route could pass, giving more protection from the traffic. The Panel was pleased to hear that the security fencing was no longer solid and that there would be a flexible level of security, with gates remaining open during the day if security levels were low. If the central glass wall is to remain, it was agreed that high quality detailing and structural simplicity would be crucial. The Panel doubted whether this could be successfully achieved and urged the team to consider the alternative layout suggested in this report.

The Panel strongly supported the sustainability aspirations of the brief and the design response, particularly the 100% reliance on the biomass district heating scheme for space heating. We did question whether a 10% improvement in carbon emissions over that required by Building Regulations was sufficiently high given the rapidly evolving WAG carbon neutral policy. We suggested that the area of solar water heating could be increased and used as a means to pre-heat water, prior to entering the biomass system. The Panel would like to see the use of locally sourced timber maximised, particularly in light of the report commissioned by WAG and produced by the BRE in 2005 which identifies the potential for local timber on this scheme. We were not convinced that an aluminium roof finish was the best environmental solution, given its high embodied energy, and still believed that a 'green' roof would be a viable option. We questioned the opaque roof on the atrium but were assured that daylight levels in the atrium had been modelled and were satisfactory. We were surprised to learn that underfloor heating was proposed for this space; we thought this should be unnecessary and passive heating options should be explored with a greater degree of glazing on the atrium roof.

The Panel sought reassurance from the team that these sustainability measures and technologies, as well as high quality external finishes, would be affordable within the budget. We were informed that the team fully expect to be able to deliver the scheme as proposed. We thought that more details on the external material specification should have been part of a detailed planning application.

Crynodeb/Summary

The Panel was pleased to have the opportunity for a further review of this important scheme and we appreciate the serious response made to our previous comments. Some of our earlier ‘in principle’ objections remain, including the choice of site, although we recognise that this is now irreversible. We think the design concept with identical buildings indicates a modest, functional office block, rather than a regional seat of government, and we are unsure as to whether this accords with the client’s intentions.

We think that major revisions are needed in the following areas:

- The central plaza as currently proposed compromises the legibility and accessibility of the scheme. As the key focus of the plan and its principal design asset we would like to see it made fully accessible and developed as a genuine focal point and the main pedestrian entrance way to both buildings. Car users would have the option of using the currently proposed entrance. The perimeter fence should be pulled back to the line of the WAG building.
- The identical nature of both buildings means that signage will need to be bold and should be designed now to integrate well with the facade.
- The distribution of the solar shading should respond to functional rather than purely design criteria.
- Given the high level of perimeter security, the relationship of the buildings with the street becomes even more important. We applaud the new western entrance, but we are not convinced of the viability of the ‘green corridor’ and we would like to see the triangular green spaces at the front reconfigured to include a public pathway and more genuinely usable public space
- As always, we support the commitment to high environmental performance, although we think improvements could still be made, especially given the projected increase in regulatory standards and public expectations. We are not convinced by the location of the new energy centre and consider its effect on the central space to be negative, and the off-site location of the biomass boiler is not ideal. We think the failure to provide more glazing on the atrium roof is a missed opportunity for solar collection and daylighting.
- We were pleased to have assurances on the affordability of the proposals and would wish to see high quality materials specified and protected by planning conditions

Diwedd/End

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