

Statws/Status:

Cyhoeddus / Public

DESIGN
COMMISSION
FOR WALES
COMISIWN
DYLUNIO
CYMRU

Adroddiad Adolygu Dylunio: Design Review Report:	21 June 2007
Dyddiad Cyfarfod / Meeting Date:	13 June 2007
Lleoliad/Location:	A465 Heads of the Valleys Road
Disgrifiad o'r Cynllun Scheme Description:	Landscape Strategy
Cleient/Datblygwr: Client/Developer:	Welsh Assembly Government [Andy Falley, Tim Dorken, Steve Spode]
Pensaer/Architect:	White Young Green [Phil Bryan, Lee Morris]
Awdurdod Cynllunio: Planning Authority:	Monmouthshire County Council, Brecon Beacons National Park Authority, Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council, Caerphilly County Borough Council, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council,
Statws Cynllunio: Planning Status:	n/a Line Order made 1999
Y Panel Adolygu Dylunio/ Design Review Panel:	

Wendy Richards (cadeirydd/chair)
Cindy Harris (swyddog/officer)
Charlie Deng (swyddog/officer)
Gerard Ryan

Martin Knight
Mike Biddulph
Ewan Jones

Lead Panellist:

Martin Knight

Declaration of interest: Wendy Richards declared that she is chair of Landscape Institute Wales, and two members of the presenting team are on her committee.

Cyflwyniad/Presentation

The preferred route for this section of road was announced in 1995. Draft orders were issued in 1998 [the equivalent of Planning permission for roads], followed by a public enquiry and confirmed by the Secretary of State in 1999. Thus the line of the road is established and cannot be changed. Section 4 from Tredegar to Dowlais Top was completed in 2004 and Section 1 from Abergavenny to Gilwern is currently under construction. It is anticipated that all remaining sections will be completed over the next 10-12 years.

This trunk road dualling scheme is seen as a pre-requisite for the regeneration of the Heads of the Valleys region, and the quality of the physical environment is extremely important to the 'Turning Heads' programme. The same public arts consultant is being used for both this framework and the wider regeneration proposal. This framework is based on a Landmap approach.

The aim is to reflect a sense of place and the diversity of the physical and cultural landscape. Permeability and biodiversity will be reinforced by improving connectivity and linkages. The sequence of experience for road users, marked by transition zones and 'gateways', is seen as crucial. Key views are exploited, and the opportunities to stop and explore the surrounding areas will be maximised. The team have begun to develop more detailed guidance in the form of design codes relating to specific issues, eg landform, cuttings, vegetation, structures, and highway furniture. The overall aim, reflected in the vision statement, is to design a high quality, sustainable and integrated scheme, and to ensure its deliverability through appropriate procurement mechanisms.

Ymateb y Panel/Panel's Response

The Panel commended the design team for the clarity of their presentation and was encouraged by the way in which the framework concepts were identified and developed, particularly the dynamic sequence of experience, landscapes and views. We thought that this was an encouraging start and advised that a commitment to excellence in design and delivery mechanisms should be embedded in the framework documents. With over 100 structures to be built including 12 major bridges and viaducts, a high level of visual quality was essential.

The Panel requested more details on how the procurement method would protect the desired quality. We were told that the remaining four sections of the works would be procured via the ECI process. This involves the contractors at a very early stage to help develop the design, along with ecologists, landscape architects and other relevant consultants. The team was confident that this mechanism would help deliver the desired standards, in contrast to the D&B procurement route which has been used up until now. This Landscape Framework, established and agreed upon at an early stage, will also be invaluable. We were told that monitoring will be carried out by the project team, and that there would be peer pressure from other projects in the region to deliver on the vision. The team is reviewing the benefits of using a single contractor for all four remaining sections.

The Panel pointed out that parts of the completed Section 4 had been used in the presentation document as examples of bad practice. In particular the Panel cited the impact of multiple rows of lamp standards around junctions, and thought that where lighting was necessary it should be handled more sensitively and innovative lighting solutions sought. It was acknowledged by the presenting team that mistakes had been made in the past and had prompted the approach embodied in this Framework. Future work would be based on the aim of a much better integration between road improvements and landscape design.

The Panel endorsed this approach and advised that a step change in practice would be necessary to achieve an exemplar scheme. Lessons should be learned from past mistakes and used to inform future practice, as well as identifying the key components of successful schemes such as the A470. Any future consultation and testing should make full use of up-to-date 3D visualisation techniques. Furthermore, we suggested that professional advisers working for the client should be used to review the contractors progress – also known as 'concept guardians'. It was confirmed that consultants would be retained throughout the project, to maintain continuity. We urged that all design and contract documentation be as comprehensive as possible to avoid ambiguity. The commitment to

design quality should be embedded in the tender documents and protected throughout the value engineering process.

In our view, departure from the DMRB standards does not need to be minimised as stated in the presentation document, especially where they would conflict with the design objectives. We understood that safety standards have to be respected, but we urged a flexible approach to achieve a balance between safety, function and design quality. We thought that a proper risk analysis could be used to support innovative design decisions. The Panel cited the example of 'reverse engineering' which we have seen on previous schemes, where we were impressed by the priority given to environmental considerations. We sensed a reluctance on the part of the team to challenge highways standards and we repeated our view that the vision would not be realised without such challenges.

Given the large number of Local Authorities affected, the Panel stated the importance of working with the various Planning and Highways departments, as well as the Heads of the Valleys regeneration programme.

With regard to the role of public art, this should be commissioned as early as possible in the design process. The Panel stated that 'objects on roundabouts' would not be appropriate and that artists' input should be integrated into the landforms. Any 'gateways' should be allowed to emerge naturally out of the landscape, and become an integral and longlasting part of the surrounding environment. The design team confirmed that this approach coincided with their brief.

The Panel observed that where realignment takes place, the old road would need redesigning for a different function.

The designers stated that they were satisfied with the quality of work so far, although the development of the framework was still progressing. Eventually the principles will be refined spatially, and transition zones will be developed rather than actual gateways. We thought that critical views should be identified so that they can be protected and enhanced. The impact of road improvements in the urban areas it passes through should be addressed, together with abatement measures. With regard to the proposed Design Code, we thought this needed more development and detailed requirements. At present this does not fulfil the definition of a Code, which is typically site specific and quantifiable.

Crynodeb/Summary

The Panel was pleased to review this important framework document which we trust will be used to inform future detailed design. We strongly support the contextual analysis and the design approach which follows from that. Our further comments are as follows:

- This should be an exemplar scheme and the brief should refer to the achievement of design excellence.
- The implementation of the design objectives should be ensured by an appropriate procurement strategy and monitoring. We would like to see the appointment of a retained 'concept guardian' by the client group throughout the life of the project.
- We would encourage the team to adopt a flexible approach to DMRB standards and challenge them where necessary. Design quality and environmental sensitivity should be prioritised.
- We support the development of a full Design Code, which needs to be more prescriptive than the current version
- Completed sections of the road should be reviewed and improved where necessary to meet the current design objectives
- More illustrative material should be included in the final Framework document, eg to identify important views. This should be used to inspire and inform, and updated to reflect changes in the landscape and urban fringe though the lifetime of the project
- Public art should be integrated into the landform
- The impact on urban and residential areas should be addressed, and 3D visualisation used to illustrate impacts.

We look forward to seeing this scheme again as the design develops.

Diwedd/End

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