

Addroddiad Adolygu Dylunio Design Review Report

Review Status: **Public**

Meeting date:	21st January 2009
Issue Date:	29th January 2009
Scheme Location:	Cambria Centre, Coleg Harlech.
Scheme Description:	Education / Leisure
Planning Status:	Application submitted November 2008

Part1: Presentation

This proposal includes new buildings to accommodate conference facilities, business genesis units, new teaching facilities, student accommodation and a link block. The existing Theatr Harlech will be upgraded with some amendments to Wern Fawr [Grade 11* listed] and the Screen Wall [Grade 11 listed]. The existing tower block has been sold to the adjacent [St Davids Hotel] site owner and leased back to the college until 2012.

This scheme has been in the making for the last 5 years, and the team have had to meet the challenges of the severely constrained site. The current proposal provides all facilities under one roof, will be DDA compliant, and is considered vital for the development of the whole region. The team have taken a holistic approach to sustainability and adopted a framed structure with separation of layers giving future flexibility. There is a requirement from funders to achieve BREEAM Excellent and to generate 15% of the energy demand on site.

The Local Planning Authority generally support the scheme and have received no objections to date. They are awaiting a response from Cadw, but their earlier comments have been resolved. It is intended to take this to Committee in February 09.

Summary of key points arising from discussion, to be read in conjunction with Part 2 of this report.

The Panel was pleased to review this important scheme and welcomed the clear presentation. However, the Design and Access statement did not correspond to the plans and needs updating and revising to include Welsh, rather than English, planning guidance. The model was particularly useful in conveying the essentials of the scheme. We understand the severe constraints of this site and the client's desire to incorporate more

covered public space. We support the basic plan and principles but some aspects of the proposal need major revisions. In summary:

- The lower blocks have an adverse impact on the listed building and the accommodation block demands a better quality of architectural detailing and finishes. As it stands it is unacceptable.
- The form of the link block should be reconsidered and alternative solutions explored. We would like to see a simpler, more restrained form.
- The inefficient layout of the accommodation block needs resolving. The function of the courtyards should be reconsidered.
- We support the re-cladding proposals for the theatre, which give a more dignified appearance. The issues of materials and details were not discussed, but these would be of great importance in the context of the listed building and World Heritage Site.
- We accept the proposed route for the elevated walkway and the rationale for entering the theatre at high level.
- The roof treatment for the new blocks should specify native species and the solar panels should be located at a higher point where there is more space and they are less visible.

Part 2: Discussion and Panel Response in Full

The Panel appreciates the difficulties of building on this site and the importance of providing access to all levels. The zoning diagram and general arrangement of blocks, with the central linking spine, is logical and appropriate. However, there are aspects of this proposal which detract from the overall composition and are likely to compromise the quality of the scheme as a whole.

The relationship of the new lower blocks to the listed building is problematic. Ideally we would like to see these four-storey blocks replaced by smaller units stepping down the cliff face, but we realise that could be a costly option. However, the current layout would be greatly improved by a variation in the height of the blocks, to respond to the listed building above, and an improved architectural treatment for the accommodation block in particular. This needs to be consistent with the quality shown in the teaching block. The lack of windows on the south elevation should be reconsidered.

The link block with its curved roof form appears dated and intrusive in the overall composition. A simple inclined escalator, which could be sheltered and security controlled to allow differential access to different levels, could deliver a better setting for the theatre and the listed building.

The internal plan of the new accommodation block appears awkward and inefficient. We understand that two corridors are considered necessary to allow the grouping of accommodation units into clusters with independent access. However, the courtyards or lightwells appear to be redundant, especially given the lack of daylight that there will be at ground level. The layout could be revised to give a shallower floor plan, or the courtyard areas could simply be roofed over and used for communal recreation. It is worth considering whether some variation in building height (perhaps stepping down to the

south) and/or a footprint that responds to the curve in the cliff face would help to integrate the development better with the landscape.

The Panel accepts the argument for extending the proposed new bridge link into the top level of the theatre, even though this will mean visitors needing to descend to the reception on the ground floor. The advantages of arrival into an elevated glazed space with views over Cardigan Bay outweigh the awkwardness of the circulation. In addition the alternative route via the old courtyard would have too great an impact on this protected and intimate space. We suggested that some shelter could be provided on the exposed side of the new link.

We applaud the commitment to achieve BREEAM Excellent and a strategy which prioritises reducing energy demand in the first instance. The green roofs should be planted with a mix of local grasses rather than the non-native sedum. The solar thermal panels would be better located on top of the theatre, rather than on the southern end of the accommodation block.

The Panel was impressed by how thoroughly the team have explored all the available options, and the collaborative approach they have developed. We understand that the constraints of the site will inevitably lead to some compromise or solutions which are less than ideal. In the next few weeks we would like to see the team revisit the proposal to try and achieve a lighter touch and a better response to the site topography.

The Design Commission for Wales Design Review Panel and staff welcome further consultation and will be happy to provide further feedback on this report and/or where appropriate, to receive further presentations. Thank you for consulting the Commission and please keep in touch with us about the progress of your project.

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

Appendix 1: Attendees

Asiant/Client/Datblygwr: Agent/Client/Developer	Coleg Harlech [Mike Sharps, Roger Griffiths]
Pensaer/Architect:	DWA Architects [Andrew Cross]
Consultants:	Peter Bretts Associates [Gavin Walker]
Awdurdod Cynllunio/ Planning Authority	Snowdonia National Park [Gwilym Jones]
Y Panel Adlygu Dylunio: Design review panel: Alan Francis [Chair] Cindy Harris [Officer]	Richard Parnaby Jonathan Hines Kedrick Davies Michael Griffiths Ann-Marie Smale

Lead Panellist:

Richard Parnaby