

Addroddiad Adolygu Dylunio Design Review Report

Review Status: **Public**

Meeting date:	17th February 2010
Issue Date:	26th February 2010
Scheme Location:	St Michaels Church, Aberystwyth
Scheme Description:	Leisure / education
Planning Status:	Application submitted November 2009

Part1: Presentation

The proposal is for a new building to serve a variety of functions – exhibition, information, cafe, parish outreach and youth work – attached to the listed old Vestry of St Michael’s Church. A previous application for a two storey building was refused on grounds of scale and detrimental effect on neighbouring buildings and the conservation area within which the site sits. The applicants feel they have addressed those issues with a new application for a much smaller development, with a deliberately contemporary design which respects important views and is subservient to the old vestry building. They aim to achieve a BREEAM Excellent rating for the new building, which will be linked to a new underfloor heating system in the Church powered by a biomass boiler.

There has been extensive consultation with the congregation and diocese, as well as the Local Authority and Cadw. Unfortunately the representative from Cadw was unable to attend this review due to illness, but sent a message of support for the scheme. The Local Authority was not represented but advised us the day before this review that the new application would be refused under delegated powers. This was unexpected news for the applicant and they stated that they would appeal this decision.

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 scheme and welcomed the proposal in principle, because it would help regenerate and enhance the locality. We think the design approach, of a single storey building responding to the site and the views is good, but we would make the following major recommendations:

- We do not agree with any of the five reasons given by the Local Authority for refusal.
- The proposal needs to be set in context with an appraisal of the character and appearance of the conservation area, its spaces, and the setting of nearby listed buildings and monuments.
- This study should inform the development of a revised site plan which establishes stronger but also more subtle links between the new building, the vestry and the church, and exploits the opportunities for shelter and weather protection, as well as views into and out of the building.
- A Design and Access statement should be provided, to 'tell the story' of how the design has developed to this point, and to justify the design decisions made.
- The Panel was not convinced by the justification provided for the proposed 'teardrop' plan. A more efficient floor plan should be considered to allow for effective use of the available space, better facilities and future adaptability.
- We are unconvinced by the proposed movement strategy around the new building.
- We believe the purpose of the proposed service yard is unclear and that its location will prove problematic.
- We support the aspiration for BREEAM Excellent and the link with the church's biomass system. We noted the high cost of a lead roof and suggested consideration of other options including a green roof for the new building.

Part 2: Discussion and Panel Response in Full

The Panel would have liked to see a conservation area appraisal for the area around the site including the listed buildings. While we understood that this was not included in the brief, we thought it was important to provide some contextual analysis to support the proposal. The architect stated that the nearby children's playground may be closed due to lack of funds, and that the Old College Grade I listed building to the north will be put up for sale.

The Panel supported the principle of restoration of the vestry and thought that the proposed development should be used to enhance the churchyard, car park and footpath to the seafront. It will be important to provide enclosure and weather protection to the building's environs while simultaneously maximising public access.

A full Design and Access statement is necessary to support this application and provide a clear logic and rationale for the proposed design, beginning with the constraints and opportunities offered by the site. Further justification is needed for the location, plan form, elevations and roof form of the building, and the reasons for the physical connection with the vestry. We were informed that the vestry itself had to be retained as the Local Authority would not grant permission for demolition. The architect stated that the form of the new building is intended to start enclosing the space between it and the church; to provide shelter on this exposed site; to appeal to younger members and be inviting to general visitors; and as a response to the austerity and formality of the neighbouring buildings.

The Panel has no objection to a contemporary design approach, but the building form and floor plan are not particularly functional or adaptable and could constrain the use of the building as a public amenity and welcome cafe on the seafront. We are not convinced that

the proposed design is the best response to the site, the vestry or the seafront. The design team may wish to research good precedents, such as the building designed by Michael Hopkins for the David Mellor cutlery factory in the Peak District National Park, Derbyshire.

The Panel thought that the overall site planning should be looked at again in a more holistic way. The physical link to the vestry should be re-examined, along with the possibility of a more direct link with the church entrance. Some sheltered outdoor space could be provided which would take advantage of the views across Cardigan Bay. The extent and location of glazing to the north and west should be revised to exploit these views from inside the building, while giving adequate wall space for exhibition material. We had doubts about the small service yard to the south and thought that this could become an area for vandalism in the future. The best protection against future vandalism lies in maximising community use of the building and its surroundings, providing good natural surveillance through the building design and developing an imaginative external lighting scheme.

We had doubts about the proposed re-routing of the public pathway which currently passes through the vestry. The proposal to re-route round the new building with the ground level in the vestry lowered and restored to its original level to provide sufficient headroom for an upper storey (which was never part of the original vestry) seems unnecessarily complex and costly.

We welcome the aim to achieve BREEAM Excellent and suggest that a BREEAM pre-assessment of the design is carried out as soon as possible to ensure that sustainability considerations are well integrated with the design development. The link with the biomass system in the Church seems entirely appropriate and could provide an educational link for school groups. We noted that this would involve digging up part of the car park, and this could be an opportunity to instigate some landscape improvement of the area. The lead roof finish is appropriate but very expensive, and would mean that any rainwater runoff should be treated as toxic. We suggested that other materials be considered and that a green roof might be a more appropriate choice.

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

St Michael's Church Aberystwyth
[Rev Stuart Bell]

Pensaer/Architect:

LCRW Architects [Rory Wilson,
Lionel Curtis]

Consultants:	n/a
Awdurdod Cynllunio/ Planning Authority	Ceredigion CC
Y Panel Adlygu Dylunio: Design review panel: John Punter [Chair] Cindy Harris [Officer] Simon Hartley	Wendy Richards Simon Carne Elfed Roberts
Lead Panellist:	Simon Carne
Sylwedyddion/Observers:	Matthew Kennedy [Grwp Gwalia]