

# Addroddiad Adolygu Dylunio Design Review Report

## Review Status: **Confidential**

Meeting date:	30th March 2010
Issue Date:	8th April 2010
Scheme Location:	Fabian Way
Scheme Description:	University campus
Planning Status:	Outline application submitted March 2010

## Part1: Presentation

The proposed new science campus for Swansea University has been many years in the planning and is consistent with the history of the university and its concentration on craft and technology. The current campus is very crowded and facilities are inadequate. The university wishes to build on its reputation for science research and development and to attract investment from global companies.

The site location is a brownfield site that will require remediation. It is accessible by dual carriageway and has good bus connections. A shuttle bus will be provided to link the two campuses. Site levels will be raised as a minimum to the 7 metre AOD level to account for a 1:250 year flood risk, and possibly higher.

The vision for the masterplan is based on the concept of a 'city state'. The first design parameter concentrated on movement patterns which have set the two access points and a primary loop route through the site, which runs mainly east/west. Secondary routes, running mainly north/south, define individual blocks with strong edges and semi-private internal courtyards. The scale of blocks steps down from a maximum of 6 storeys to the north, to 1-2 storeys to the south, where the grain becomes finer and more permeable, and a series of finger blocks is envisaged. A raised landscaped buffer is planned to the north adjoining Fabian Way and incorporates surface parking.

The proposal is consistent with the Wales Spatial Plan but would be a departure from the Local Plan which designates this site as part of a 'green wedge'. The planning application has been prepared on the basis of consultation with key stakeholders, and four public consultation events have been held since the application was submitted. A Section 106 agreement will be used to improve public transport provision and infrastructure.

There have been extensive pre-application discussions with the Local Authority. From their viewpoint, the main issues to be addressed are access and environmental impact, especially given the nearby SSSI. The proposed departure from the 'green wedge' will need to be tested. The parameter drawings will be used as 'key fixes' to set constraints on the form of development.

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

The Panel greatly appreciated the opportunity to review this important scheme. The presentation material was thorough and well documented, although it was not immediately apparent which aspects of the proposal were fixed and which were purely illustrative. In particular we welcomed the high degree of public accessibility, the nature and layout of the central public spaces, and the genuine mixed use. We thought that the basic design approach was good although we have the following major concerns and recommendations:

- We questioned the campus-based approach to university expansion, along with the edge-of-city location, preferring to see the university remain an integral component of the city. However, on the basis of our discussions, we recognized that a thorough search had been undertaken for prospective sites, and that the gift of this site to the University overrode any other considerations. We were reassured to learn that the SSSI will enjoy future protection.
- The main approaches to the site and the 'first view buildings' are not conducive to a gateway location. We support the suggestion for architectural excellence for the multi-storey car park. However, we are unconvinced by the service strategy for the R&D units and its likely impact on the arrival experience.
- We endorse the allowance made in the masterplan for future pedestrian, cycle and vehicle links to the site to the west, and pedestrian and cycle links to the west. However, the development of the site to the west will be of critical importance to both the campus and the dockland development further west, and we suggested that a strategic planning brief should be prepared to guide future development on this site.
- We are pleased to learn that a shuttle bus service will be provided and will be routed through the site. We think this should include a night service to allow for students to access part-time employment and the facilities of the city centre and original campus.
- We would like to see the northern edge of site develop a more positive relationship with Fabian Way which addresses this major highway, ensuring that the bus stops and the routes to and from them are safe and surveilled. Placing the campus entirely behind a tree screen seems a rather perverse idea that denies rather than celebrates its existence.
- While we agree that design codes are unnecessary, especially given the large first phase which includes most of the site, the precision of the masterplan will need to be ensured, and the quality of design and detailing will need to be tightly controlled. This places a particular responsibility on the Local Planning Authority at the detailed stage.
- We think it is an urgent necessity that a landscape architect be appointed to join the team as soon as possible. A public realm and landscape strategy would be useful to

establish site wide qualities and characteristics and ensure an integrated approach to design.

- We are not convinced by the illustrative layout of the finger blocks to the south and advise that full microclimatic studies be carried out to inform the eventual layout, in particular wind studies to inform massing and orientation.
- A commitment to more ambitious sustainability standards would raise the profile of the scheme and may help to secure future funding. It is important that a site-wide energy strategy is used to drive the design development from now on, in order to optimize costs and carbon savings. This scheme should set the standard for low carbon campuses of the future and establish Swansea University as a technological leader in the field.
- We support the team's approach to phasing, and their intention to control the procurement and delivery process through to completion.
- We recommend that a series of architects be employed on the project to ensure diversity and individuality within the control of the masterplan and the masterplanner.

## **Part 2: Discussion and Panel Response in Full**

The Panel complimented the team on the quality and detail of the presentation material. It was agreed to structure the discussion under the following headings:

### **Site location.**

The Panel questioned the 'edge of city' location given that the city centre was in urgent need of regeneration. The team on the other hand viewed the location as central to the region of Swansea Bay. We were informed that five alternative sites had been considered including SA1 and Llanelli, and sequential tests had been used.

The campus-based approach to university extension was discussed. The Panel favoured a less separate, more integrated approach, with the University an integral part of the city, while the client emphasised the distinctive experience of campus based education. Science parks are an established part of the knowledge economy, and their integration with university campuses is now common practice.

The Panel was informed that the 13 acre site to the west is owned by St Modwens, and land beyond that towards and including Kings Dock is owned by ABP. It is assumed that development on this site will be connected to the campus and the masterplan allows for this. However, there will be no further incursion on the 'green wedge' to the east and the SSSI of Crymlyn Burrows will be protected.

### **Access and transportation**

The main access into the site will be at the far eastern end of the site, through a traffic light controlled junction with Elba Crescent from Fabian Way. The position of the secondary access is not finally fixed, but will allow access from the east and egress to the west only. All parking will be kept to the north of the site, including a multi-story block in the north west corner of the site, although all parts of the site will be accessible for servicing. There will be no on-street parking and students will not be able to keep cars on site (as a condition of their tenure). It is anticipated that the shuttle bus route will access the centre

of the site, although the frequency of the service has not yet been agreed. There will also be new dedicated bus routes linking Coed Darcy to the city, running past the campus.

The potential for a major access point from the west, perhaps a grade separated junction with Fabian Way, depends largely on the future use of ABP land. We thought it would be useful if the two Local Authorities involved - City and Council of Swansea and Neath Port Talbot CBC - could develop a strategic planning framework for the land between this site and Kings Dock / SA1. We noted that the east/west layout of primary routes on the masterplan allows for future links.

### **Relationship with Fabian Way**

In our view this development should make a positive contribution to the creation of a more sociable space and a marker building along Fabian Way, rather than turning its back on this major approach into the city. It would be helpful in this regard if one building could be placed north of the access road to establish a landmark and civic face on Fabian Way. We explored the possibility of semi-basement parking to replace the raised buffer and parking area. The team stated that in their view the buffer was necessary to protect the site amenity from the impacts of a busy main road.

The approach to the site from the east would be dominated by the rear of industrial buildings and from the west by a multi-storey car park, neither of which offers an appropriate image for a gateway development or a prestigious science and innovation centre. The designer stated that he had recommended an architect with an excellent reputation be engaged to design the car park, and confirmed that there would be no parking on top of this block. While we applauded the strategy of centralising car parking to create a pedestrian dominated central area, we were nevertheless concerned about the quality of the arrival experience, especially if that were to include servicing areas for the R&D blocks to the north east. The team thought that servicing requirements would be minimal and could be done from the street, but the Panel thought that the layout would need to be more flexible to accommodate larger vehicles and servicing areas.

### **Architecture and building typologies.**

The team confirmed that the parameter plans showing primary routes were fixed, whereas the secondary routes could be subject to variation [shown by the hatched areas on the plan] to allow for flexibility and further development requirements. The building lines for the main blocks are likewise open to a small variation, of 1 to 1.5 metres, although the area of active uses fronting areas of public realm will not be recessed. In general the Panel supported the design approach of collegiate perimeter blocks with a strong street presence and multiple entrances.

We questioned whether the finger blocks would deliver good views, while understanding that they were purely illustrative. Despite the advice already received, given the degree of exposure, wind modelling should be carried out to test different block layouts and ensure an acceptable microclimate around and between all the residential blocks. Servicing arrangements for these block should also be tested further.

With regard to the architectural character of the site as a whole, there is no proposal for design codes to control development. While we had no objection to that, we thought that the team should secure an agreed public realm strategy to tie the scheme together, and ensure that budgets were adequate for high quality design and details. Given the tight

programme envisaged [completion of the majority of the site by September 2013] it will be important to establish measures to protect the variety and quality of development and ensure overall coherence.

### **Public realm and landscape**

The Panel welcomed the nature, diversity and scale of the central public spaces, the thought that had gone into them, and their pedestrian dominance and accessibility by public transport. We were less convinced by the proposed Bay Square and thought that its relationship with the SSSI and the triangular area of dunes to the south should be given more thought, taking account of the needs for SSSI access. There are no details on the design of the promenade which we thought could become one of the most important and frequented public spaces in the scheme. We doubted that trees would survive in such a harsh environment.

Our main concern in this area related to the lack of any landscape input to date, and we strongly advised that a landscape architect should be brought into the team as soon as possible to help resolve these issues.

### **Energy / environment**

A project of this size and significance should be driven by ambitious targets for environmental performance, and its design should exhibit sustainability considerations. This is not evident in the masterplan overall, or the Design & Access statement which commits only to minimum standards [BREEAM Very Good and CSH Level 3]. The possibility of the campus becoming an exemplar of sustainable development in the higher education sector, in a post-peak-oil future, should be seriously assessed, bearing in mind possible funding streams. The necessary commitments need to be made now, and a site-wide energy strategy built into the design development immediately, otherwise any low carbon measures will risk becoming expensive and inappropriate 'add-ons'. The team and their consultants will need to take a view as to what extent any barriers to achieving a high BREEAM rating are due to location or to built form.

### **Delivery**

The Panel was pleased to learn that there will be no barriers to public access throughout the scheme, although access to the internal residential courtyards will be controlled. There will be a development agreement between the University and St Modwens and the client will own and manage the public realm.

Phase 1 will deliver 2,500 student accommodation units [out of a total of 4,000], the Rolls Royce building and the Legacy building. It will also include a critical mass of mixed uses and public spaces in the central hub, to ensure viability from the beginning. A detailed planning application will be submitted later this year and we would like to review the details of that phase well in advance of submission. The completion date for phase 1 is likely to be the third quarter of 2013. Different architects will be used for different buildings and the team is aware of many useful precedents. We supported this approach while being concerned that the timetable is too ambitious to resolve all the necessary design, planning and delivery details.

**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

University of Swansea [Iwan Davies]  
St Modwens [Neil Williams]

Pensaer/Architect:

Porphyrios Associates [Demetri Porphyrios,  
Samina Shahzady, Kathryn Roos]

Consultants:

Savills [Nick Matthews]  
Khamai [Nigel Hardy]

Awdurdod Cynllunio/  
Planning Authority

Neath Port Talbot CBC [Geoff White,  
Melissa Hall, Chris Davies, Will Watson]

Y Panel Adlygu Dylunio:

Design review panel:

Alan Francis [Chair]

Cindy Harris [Officer]

John Punter

Michael Griffiths

Richard Parnaby

Lynne Sullivan

Lead Panellist:

John Punter

**Declaration of Interest:** Alan Francis is Town Architect for Coed Darcy and is working with St Modwens and the Princes Trust on that scheme