

Addroddiad Adolygu Dylunio Design Review Report

Review Status: **Public**

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| Meeting date: | 21st April 2010 |
| Issue Date: | 12th May 2010 |
| Scheme Location: | Tesco Machynlleth |
| Scheme Description: | Large retail |
| Planning Status: | Planning application submitted June 2009 |

Part1: Presentation

The site is a former cattle market and builders merchant, located on the north-western edge of Machynlleth and accessed off Heol y Doll, the principle north-south route through the town. The current proposal has the building located on the northern portion of the site. The rear of houses on Heol y Doll abut the southwestern boundary of the site. There is a steep bank along the northeastern boundary; because of this, the roof of the building will be overlooked from the northeast by houses on Ffordd Mynydd Griffiths. A small industrial building occupies the adjacent site to the north. Part of the site falls within the conservation area and the proposed building is located immediately north of this conservation area boundary.

The proposed food-store will be 2,565 sq m in size with 162 car parking spaces. It is a single storey, simple rectangular block with a virtually flat roof. The basic cladding comprises large panels of curtain wall glazing, 'smooth ivory cladding' and 'larch timber cladding panels'. The building is branded with a large 'Tesco' sign projecting above the front roof edge.

Some sustainable features are proposed, including a structural timber frame to part of the building, larch cladding, 4 roof lights, small natural ventilation 'chimneys' and 2 small wind turbines above the entrance. A public recycling compound is provided in the car-park. The project team is aiming for a BREEAM rating of Very Good.

The design team explained that the proposal had evolved from two earlier proposals in which the industrial site and other adjoining properties were included in the development site, enabling a larger building. One option proposed the building located on the south-west portion of the site with a frontage directly onto Heol y Doll and road access was provided from the north-east of the site.

A detailed planning application was submitted in summer 2009. The application is currently being considered by WAG in respect of its impact on the town highways including the proposed road access into the Tesco site. Due to this, the Local Authority has not yet determined the planning application. Planning officers have expressed a number of concerns regarding the application including: the impact on the quality of the public realm and local distinctiveness in the town; the suitability of elevation materials, in terms of maintenance and long term appearance; its proximity to listed buildings and to the conservation area; and the potential negative impact on the existing retail trade in the town. Officers informed the Panel that they are currently dealing with a planning application for an extension to the local Co-op.

The Tesco proposal is currently supported by Councillors, who believe that the benefit to residents of having a large supermarket in the town, together with its recycling centre, would outweigh any negative impacts.

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

This is a challenging site and any development of this size, regardless of the building type, requires a great deal of sensitivity and careful design if it is not to cause a significantly negative impact on the delicate historic character of the town. We think that the proposed scheme is poor and we have major concerns which are summarized below:

- The proposed development is too large for the town. Increasing the total retail floorspace of the town by 75% appears to introduce a scale of development and operation which precludes opportunities to create good townscape, local distinctiveness and the enhancement of existing character.
- The form, elevation design and location of the proposed building on the site are all detrimental to the character of the town. The handling of the interface with Heol y Doll is insensitive and will have a negative impact on the character of the street.
- The highway engineering measures proposed to handle the anticipated increase in road traffic seem excessive, in particular the need for two exit lanes. The requirement for large articulated lorries to turn in and out of the site from Heol y Doll will have a damaging impact on the town centre and on Heol y Doll in particular.
- The safety of pedestrians on Heol y Doll, with its narrow footways, will be adversely affected by the increase in quantity and size of vehicles. This will in turn discourage local residents from walking to the store and increase local use of private vehicles.
- The development makes no contribution to the quality of public realm in the town.
- The site planning makes no contribution to the street frontage along Heol y Doll.

Part 2: Discussion and Panel Response in Full

The project team recognised that the town has a historic and distinctive character but have not sought to reflect this in the design, as they feared the result could be an unsuccessful pastiche. Instead, they suggest the new building should 'stand out in contrast' and have proposed a standard Tesco store design. Some small adjustments in materials and various

sustainable features are intended to make reference to the Centre for Alternative Technology located three miles to the north. The team suggested that these materials and features should be accepted as an adequate response to context.

Based on the site's 20 minute drive time 'catchment area', the promoter's research has indicated that residents in Machynlleth currently leave the town to carry out their main food shopping elsewhere. It is therefore claimed that there is a need for a major store in Machynlleth to meet residents' needs and provide a significant shopping destination for residents from outside the town. It is also claimed that the Spar and Co-op stores – both located on the main shopping street [Maengwyn Street] a short distance from this site - are used for 'top-up' shopping only. Whilst not specifically a design issue, the Panel was concerned that the proposal relied heavily on this argument which itself was being challenged by the Local Planning Authority's commissioned retail impact study.

It was evident from the explanation of the design development process that the size and location on the site of the retail unit has been determined largely by the size of the available site. The Tesco representative explained that if the industrial unit to the north of the site had been available, the proposed retail unit would have been significantly larger, and up to 50% of the retail floor-space would have been used for non-food related products.

The Panel welcomed Tesco's recent increased commitment to reducing energy consumption and carbon emissions from their stores. However, the extent of the sustainable features proposed for the Machynlleth store would not be exemplary, and only the current minimum BREEAM rating would be met. The approach to reducing energy use stems from a research programme, and does not seem to take account of local circumstances. The design team admitted that the small wind turbines that are proposed would have a negligible effect on carbon reductions. Whilst the provision of meaningful carbon reductions was welcomed, the Panel advised that they needed to be incorporated in tandem with a bespoke scheme, and not as an alternative to a contextual approach.

Although the design team aimed to make the store 'stand out in contrast', they also explained that the building location had been chosen to avoid direct views from Heol y Doll. We considered that decision to be oddly in conflict with the proposal as a whole.

The decision to locate the store to the north-west of the site was also partly justified by the perceived need to 'hide' the service yard and lorry delivery area. However, as the site is overlooked from houses to the southeast and the northwest, the service areas will inevitably be visible. In the current proposed location, overlooked from Ffordd Mynydd Griffiths, the service area may not only be visible from the side, but also from above.

The development of the street frontage to Heol y Doll is of particular concern. The fact that there are other historic retaining walls at some points along Heol y Doll, reflecting changes in ground level, does not justify the decision to design the frontage in such a negative way – with a high wall along half its length and the remainder of the boundary occupied by the signalised road junction. The development should enhance this boundary and increase the active frontage. An earlier iteration of the design had in fact included an active frontage onto Heol y Doll, which might have gone some way towards addressing the Panel's concerns with regard to the siting and impact of the store on the street scene.

The Panel was also concerned with the large projecting sign which was likely to contribute negatively to visual impact.

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

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| Asiant/Client/Datblygwr: Agent/Client/Developer | Tesco Stores Limited [Mark Thorne] |
| Pensaer/Architect: | Inspire Design Ltd [Andrew Cook, Chris Young] |
| Consultants: | DPP - Planning Consultants [Meryl Lewis] Scott Wilson [Gill Smith] |
| AwdurdodCynllunio/ Planning Authority | Powys County Council [John Pearson, Andrew Paddison] |
| Y Panel Adlygu Dylunio: Design review panel: Alan Francis [Chair] Elly Englefield [Officer] Jonathan Adams | Simon Carne Simon Hartley Lynne Sullivan Ed Colgan |
| Lead Panellist: | Jonathan Adams |
| Sylwedyddion/Observers: | Glyn Jones [Flintshire County Council] Ian Stevens [Conwy County Council] |