** This report relates only to the version of the scheme seen at Design Review on July 21st 2010. **

DESIGN COMMISSION FOR WALES
COMISIWN DYLUNIO CYMRU

Addroddiad Adolygu Dylunio
Design Review Report

Review Status: Confidential

Meeting date:	21st July 2010
Issue Date:	3rd August 2010
Scheme Location:	Abergavenny Cattle Market
Scheme Description:	Retail
Planning Status:	Pre-application

Part1: Presentation

This is a new proposal for a site which has seen several previous proposals for mixed use development. These have been the subjects of five previous Design Reviews since 2004. The current proposal is for a new supermarket and library with associated parking at grade.

The pedestrian route from Market Street and Brewery Yard will be extended northwards through the site towards Fairfield Park using high quality materials. Soft landscaping is included, and a site for public art is provided at a focal point on Lion Street.

The supermarket building displays a modern vernacular, with indigenous materials such as sandstone, timber and slate. The library will have a prominent rotunda entrance in a double height, glazed front elevation and covered walkway. Both buildings share a common architectural language. The supermarket will achieve BREEAM Very Good, while the target for the library is BREEAM Excellent.

A public consultation exercise will be held in September, to be followed by the planning application. The Local Authority is broadly supportive of this proposal, and would prefer to see this site developed for a supermarket, rather than the alternative out-of-town site.

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

The Panel supports the principle of use as proposed, and in this instance accepts that the need for a viable town-centre retail use outweighs the lack of mixed use and reduced density, which had caused problems with earlier proposals. Unfortunately the level of detail included in the pre-review material was inadequate for a full and proper assessment.

Overall, we think this is a poor design response to the site and the context, and in our view there are major issues which remain to be resolved. In summary:

- This model of supermarket building is outdated and unsustainable, and we doubt that this proposal will prevent out-of-town development in the long or medium term.
- The 'attached' elements on the elevations are unresolved and a pastiche reference to context. They need to be better integrated with the main structure.
- The internalized nature of the food store and its effect on the façade treatment should be revised to introduce more daylight and inside/outside visual connections.
- The library building should have its own character and identity, reflecting the difference in function from the supermarket and the greater degree of design freedom which this offers. It should be the subject of a separate planning application.
- Where possible boundary walls should be retained or rebuilt with existing stone, particularly on the north elevation to the A40, where they should be separate from the building façade.
- The landscape treatment should be robust, bold and simple, using local species and materials.
- The Panel was unhappy with the proposal to clad the west elevation in public art, seeing this as a negative use of art to hide the building behind. If the integration of art is a defining part of the brief for the food store, then firm proposals for professionally-procured public art should be included with the planning application.
- The lack of a specific site-wide energy strategy is disappointing, as is the modest BREEAM target for the supermarket, and we urge the client to commit to higher standards and invest in low carbon energy solutions.

Part 2: Discussion and Panel Response in Full

The Panel recognised that the principle of mixed use development on this site had been abandoned. The simplification of uses, while not ideal, avoids the danger of overdevelopment which had characterised some of the earlier proposals. These had also relied on underground parking which is now thought to be economically unviable, and had its own problems.

The Panel was disappointed at the standardised treatment and floor plan of the supermarket building. We thought that certain elements such as the slate roofs and canopies appeared to be tacked on to the basic 'box', rather than being an integral part of the design. The lack of significant glazing on the roof and on the north, south and west facades, leads to a lack of connection with external surroundings and an over-reliance on artificial lighting within the deep plan floor space. While we understood that the facades reflected the internal uses [eg food preparation areas] we thought the lack of natural daylight and connection with the outside was regrettable. The Panel noted that other large food retailers have improved this aspect of their designs, by using roof lights over central spaces and planning store interiors to allow significant glazed facades with direct visual connection between inside and outside. It would be unfortunate if the remaining areas of glazing to the south and west were obscured by signage and we thought this should be controlled and committed to at this stage.

The Panel doubted whether the design for the library, as an important public building, had genuine civic quality, although this was difficult to judge from the information provided to us. We were informed that at a recent meeting the client was very satisfied with the design and public realm proposals. The architects will now be appointed to oversee the design through to completion. This building will be included with the planning application for the supermarket although it will commit to a higher BREEAM rating.

Although the presentation provided ample detail of the historic context, it was unclear what impact, if any, this had made upon the proposals. The Panel noted the importance of the historic boundary walls and urged that they be retained where possible, and that the existing stone be re-used for any new walls, to reflect the character of the adjacent conservation area. The project team confirmed that they are trying to retain the wall to the north east but that most of the northern boundary wall will be lost to accommodate the new entrance. We thought that any reference to the historic building profile on the northern facade was therefore inappropriate, but the material should be re-used to retain the historic relationship with the park opposite.

The landscape treatment of the public realm areas – largely lines of box hedges - appears very suburban and bears little relationship to the character of Abergavenny. We would prefer to see a predominance of simple hard landscaping with high quality materials, although some trees and larger planting could be incorporated. The team agreed to reconsider this while noting that the soft landscaping had proved popular in recent consultation. We thought that the existing route along Priory Lane would continue to be used unless this new route offered a positive attraction.

The retail client's commitment to sustainable low carbon technology, and particularly the target for a 30% carbon reduction by 2020, does not sit easily with a BREEAM rating which is the statutory minimum. While we understood that a BREEAM pre-assessment had been started, we advised that more specialist input was needed on, for example, the importance of introducing natural daylight, and the potential payback for solar PV through feed-in tariffs. A list of possible low carbon technologies, with no firm commitments, is inadequate as a sustainability strategy for a development of this size and significance, and should not be acceptable for a planning application. We urged the team to explore a CHP system which could be linked with the library.

The Panel encouraged the team to explore examples of current best practice and these include the BREEAM 'Excellent' retail store at Greenwich, subject of a CABE Case Study, and a more recent store for Sainsbury in High Wycombe.

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	Wm Morrisons Supermarkets plc
Pensaer/Architect:	Bowman Riley Architects [Stephen Haestier, Darren Bush]
Consultants:	Peacock & Smith Planning Consultants [Chris Creighton]
AwdurdodCynllunio/ Planning Authority	Monmouthshire CC [George Ashworth]
Y Panel Adlygu Dylunio: Design review panel:	
Ewan Jones [Chair]	Martin Knight
Cindy Harris [Officer]	Glen Dyke
Phil Roberts	David Harvey
Lead Panellist:	Martin Knight
Sylwedyddion/Observers:	Trevor Skempton [DCFW Commissioner] Mike Williams [SDC, BRE] Chris Morgan [BBNPA] Councillor Katherine Silk [BBNPA] Kevin Jones [BBNPA] Dennis Carney [BBNPA]