

Addroddiad Adolygu Dylunio Design Review Report

Review Status: **Public**

Meeting date:	21st July 2010
Issue Date:	3rd August 2010
Scheme Location:	Aberystwyth
Scheme Description:	New RC Church
Planning Status:	Post – application, just validated

Part1: Presentation

The background to this project was the commissioning of the architects to assess all the church estates in and around Aberystwyth, with a view to rationalising land uses. As a result of this appraisal, carried out in 2008, it was decided to maximise the revenue potential of the Borth and Aberystwyth town centre sites, in order to fund a new church at Penparcau on the edge of Aberystwyth. Part of the Penparcau site has been designated for residential use and it is intended to sell that on for development, so that the new church will ultimately be cost neutral.

The church will accommodate 300 worshippers, and the church hall 150 users. A new presbytery is also included to the south, and the church entrance has been aligned to address the road access and protect the privacy of the presbytery. 32 parking spaces are provided on either side of the main vehicular access to the north west.

This proposal has been subject to internal consultation within the church, and approved. It is intended that one developer would develop all three sites and be responsible for detailed permissions. However, the new church has been submitted as a detailed application.

The Local Authority has no objection to the principle of rebuilding the church on this site, and closing the town centre church. However, this design approach does not match their aspiration for this site, and they prefer the design developed for the town centre site.

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

The Panel welcomed the opportunity to review this important proposal for Aberystwyth. However, we think that the material is insufficiently developed for a detailed planning application, and is a poor design response with major issues remaining to be resolved. In summary:

- We regret that a town centre solution for the siting of a new church could not be made to work. While we understand that this solution has the approval of the client body, we think it is important that the needs of all parishioners are taken into account and balanced against the undoubted financial advantages of out-of-town development.
- The proposed siting is not compatible with promoting more sustainable modes of transport, and we think it will lead to significant parking problems with the residential development to the north.
- More information on the site context, views in and out, topography and large retaining walls, would have helped our assessment.
- We think that a masterplan should be developed for the whole site to integrate the various components and ensure future flexibility.
- The scale and dominance of the church calls for an exemplary design solution. However, the current proposal is uninspiring and lacks any animation in the facades. The church hall and presbytery appear as later extensions to the church rather than as part of an integrated development.
- A detailed application should contain details of proposed materials and finishes, and we assume these have been included in the validated application.
- We would like to see some connectivity established to the south, to improve pedestrian access.
- We support the commitment to achieve BREEAM Excellent, but the resulting sustainability strategy needs to be included in the DAS and embedded into the evolving design.
- We are concerned that the proposal is progressing on the basis of an out-of-date procurement model and would like to see a reappraisal of the financial assumptions.

Part 2: Discussion and Panel Response in Full

The Panel found it difficult to assess this proposal in its context, given the lack of information on the surrounding sites. Even for the application site, no site section was provided, or topographical information to indicate the degree of slope, the amount of cut and fill that would be required, and the consequent height and impact of the retaining walls. From the limited information available, we thought that this large building would be likely to dominate the rest of this site to the north, existing residential development to the east, and future residential development to the south west.

The Panel questioned the location of the new building on the part of the site least accessible to non-car users, although we accepted that locating it on higher ground to the north could make the building even more dominant [unless a different design approach was adopted, using the levels and landscaping to integrate the building with the site]. We also doubted the logic of approaching the church site through the proposed new housing estate which, given the very limited on-site parking, would have a significant impact on the

amenity of future residents. We understood that a traffic analysis had been carried out but that it did not specifically address the problems of off-site parking.

We are concerned that Penparcau will suffer from a combination of dead-end developments with poor pedestrian connections. In our view, a masterplan should be prepared for the whole of the Penparcau site, so that the housing layout is developed in tandem with the church design, and the implications of the siting of particular elements can be examined. Similarly the landscape and boundary treatments need to be developed for the site as a whole, with a view to accommodating future developments to the south west. For example, the access road currently shown at the edge of site may eventually be in the middle of a much larger residential estate and the proposed retaining walls could dominate adjacent properties.

The Panel noted that the financial analysis of the different development options was based on figures which were two years old. Although the client believes that the analysis holds good, we would prefer to see any proposals based on up-to-date estimates of revenue available from the various sites, to ensure that any profit overage within the procurement model does not affect the budget available for the RC Church project. It was confirmed that all approvals and employers' requirements documents will be in place before a contract is signed with developers. Given the proposed Design & Build procurement method, it is particularly important that materials and details are defined now, as part of the planning application, in order to ensure the desired quality.

The Panel was pleased to hear that a BREEAM Excellent rating will be a contractual requirement, and that the pre-assessment has indicated that this is feasible. A suitable site for solar panels has been identified on a flat roof to the south of the main building. However, there was no evidence presented to show the strategy for achieving this rating and we can only assume that all the relevant information has been included in the Design and Access statement.

Finally and at a general level, the Panel has serious concerns about the relocation of essential public and community functions away from existing town centres. While we appreciate the financial constraints involved for this project, as for many others, the long term and cumulative impact will mean a loss of vitality and social engagement in town centres; a degradation of the physical fabric; and increased use of private transport.

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:

Diocese of Menevia [Peter Lindsay]

Agent/Client/Developer

Pensaer/Architect:

James & Nicholas [Jeoff Houlker]

Consultants:

n/a

AwdurdodCynllunio/
Planning Authority

Ceredigion CC [Owain Davies]

Y Panel Adlygu Dylunio:

Design review panel:

Ewan Jones [Chair]

Cindy Harris [Officer]

Glen Dyke

David Harvey

Martin Knight

Phil Roberts

Lead Panellist:

David Harvey

Sylwedyddion/Observers:

Trevor Skempton [DCFW Commissioner]

Chris Morgan [BBNPA]

Councillor Katherine Silk [BBNPA]