

# Addroddiad Adolygu Dylunio Design Review Report

## Review Status: **Public**

Meeting date:	3rd November 2010
Issue Date:	11th November 2010
Scheme Location:	Piercefield Lane, Aberystwyth
Scheme Description:	Residential
Planning Status:	Full application submitted September 2010

## Part1: Presentation

This steeply sloping greenfield site will require a great deal of infrastructure to develop, and will deliver 79 new dwellings with a mix of family, executive and affordable accommodation with on-plot parking. The housing design and layout is based on the developer's previous experience and is seen as a 'tried and tested' solution.

The proposed access arrangements are the result of intensive negotiations with the Local Authority highways engineers. They wish to retain the ability to use the lower route as a through road in the event of emergency, but to control routine access with collapsible bollards to prevent it being used as a 'rat run', given the congestion on the A487.

The site is allocated for housing in the UDP, and was added by the Inspectorate with a note requiring a sympathetic response to the natural setting and additional landscaping. The Local Authority want to see a high quality of design and sustainability, given that this will set the standard for future developments in the area. They are concerned about the amount of hard landscaping and the loss of existing trees and hedgerows; greater effort should be made to retain these. More details of proposed and existing levels are required. They would like to see play areas located more centrally. The possible nuisance from the adjacent farm has not been addressed, despite this being a reason for an earlier refusal.

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

The Panel realises that this is a very difficult site to develop, and that the proposed highway solution is not favoured by the design team. This is obviously a significant constraint but there are also other major issues to be resolved. In summary:

- We think that the through road link is a completely unacceptable requirement, especially without public funding, and should be abandoned.
- A more compact development with less road surface and more usable public and private green space would deliver a design better suited to the site and probably one that would be more commercially viable.
- The conventional requirement for a 23m distance between windows is no longer widely used and should not prevent a more compact layout, particularly on such a steeply sloping site, and given sufficient private separation to the rear of properties.
- Given the size and status of this scheme within the locality, we would like to see the applicant commit to a Code for Sustainable Homes Level which is higher than the statutory minimum. Solar orientation should be used as a driver in the site layout and an alternative to electric heating [eg solar water heating] should be explored.
- House plans and materials should be site specific and reflect the particular constraints and opportunities, including orientation of roofscape.
- The relationship between buildings and street should be improved, to create a more sociable streetscape as advocated in Manual for Streets.
- Revision of parking arrangements and a reduction in overall numbers, would help improve the quality of the street environment and reduce the amount of hard landscaping.
- An improved landscape strategy which embeds the development in the site and mitigates the visual impact, is crucial and will help to improve quality and add value.
- Play areas should be more centrally located, generous, and designed to integrate well with the neighbourhood.
- A variation in built form and height might be considered, to create feature buildings at the termination of particular views; views from streets into the surrounding landscape will help avoid the impression of a conventional cul-de-sac.
- The relationship with the proposed new church to the north east should be considered in any boundary treatment, and an attempt should be made to coordinate this scheme with the developers of this adjacent site.

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

The Panel questioned the viability of the proposed scheme, given the high infrastructure costs, and wondered whether a reduced quantum of development might produce a better designed scheme which would also be more commercially attractive.

Given the semi-rural and edge-of-settlement nature of the site, we thought that the layout was too highways dominated. We would like to see an increase in the amount of green space, and a landscape strategy which knits the development into the site and softens the visual impact of the development. The Panel considered the involvement of a Landscape Architect was crucial in formulating this strategy which would result in improved quality and added value. Ecological corridors need to be wide enough to provide genuine links.

The highway link to the south is a considerable constraint on the site layout, especially as no public funding for this appears to have been provided, and we acknowledged that this was not the preferred option of the design team. In our view the through route should be abandoned, reverting to the previous version of essentially two cul-de-sac developments

with separate access routes. This would leave a larger green wedge to the south of the site, while still allowing some development to the west of Cae Job which could be accessed from Maes Crugiau. Pedestrian connections should be created at the end of the access roads, linking through into the green spaces.

The house designs presented appear to have been developed for a relatively flat site. For example, the application of predetermined house types and access arrangements which are unsuited to the topography of the site has resulted in the central green space being enclosed by rear garden fences. New house plans are necessary which address this particular site, to make best use of the very specific site constraints. Generic solutions will not deliver the exemplary design required by the Local Authority.

We were concerned by some of the roof treatments including verge and fascia details which seemed to be founded in pattern book housebuilder construction rather than local references. If timber is to be used as a cladding material it should be better integrated into the elevational treatment, and should be specified to cope with the extreme weathering prevalent on this site.

The Panel would like to see a more compact site layout, with reduced distances between building frontages. Bringing the buildings closer to the street would improve the streetscape. The development of key public areas and feature buildings to close vistas or create entry points to the development, would help to create a sense of place. The proposed parking levels are very high, and a mix of on and off street parking would allow a reduction in the amount of hardstanding to the front of plots. In our view, an improved relationship between buildings and street, together with more generous gardens and landscaped public spaces, would deliver better quality and value.

Play areas could be located more centrally within the site, without causing problems of noise or nuisance, provided they are well designed and appropriately sized with good natural surveillance.

The Panel had concerns about the relationship with the proposed new Catholic church to the north east of the site, and especially the raised boundary wall between the two sites which is proposed. Ideally these two projects would have been considered in tandem and a common access might have been mutually advantageous. However, we were informed that the timing of the two projects was unlikely to coincide.

The Panel understood that the development would achieve the statutory minimum of Code for Sustainable Homes [CSH] Level 3+. An energy assessment of the proposal has recommended good fabric performance, together with air source heat pumps [ASHP] and mechanical ventilation with heat recovery [MVHR]. This combination has been used on many other projects to achieve the required rating. We would prefer to see an even better fabric performance and a site-wide heating strategy rather than individual units. An alternative to the use of electricity for space and water heating should be explored. We advised the team to consult the latest finding from the Energy Savings Trust on the actual performance of ASHPs.

Most of the houses appear to face east/west, which misses the opportunity for passive solar gain, and there are very few south facing roof pitches, which would be suitable for solar thermal panels. The elevations shown in the house types have similar fenestration

patterns and do not appear to respond to different orientations; the elevation drawings do not display any renewable or low energy design features such as MVHR vents.

**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	Crugiau Properties Ltd
Pensaer/Architect:	James, Jenkins, Thomas [Iwan Thomas, Byron Jenkins, Richard Leng]
Consultants:	n/a
AwdurdodCynllunio/ Planning Authority	Ceredigion CC [Owain Davies]
Y Panel Adlygu Dylunio: Design Review Panel: Alan Francis [Chair] Cindy Harris [Officer] Roger Ayton	Simon Carne Richard Keogh Martin Knight Toby Adam
Lead Panellist:	Richard Keogh
Sylwedyddion/Observers:	Julia Podedworny [student]