

# Addroddiad Adolygu Dylunio Design Review Report

## Review Status: **Public**

Meeting date:	8th December 2010
Issue Date:	21st December 2010
Scheme Location:	Mumbles Pier and Foreshore
Scheme Description:	Leisure / Residential
Planning Status:	Outline application submitted September 2010 All matters reserved except strategic access

## Part1: Presentation

This is an outline application for a comprehensive redevelopment of the Mumbles headland and foreshore for residential, hotel and leisure use. According to the team, all proposed buildings are within the settlement boundary, on previously developed land. The site falls within the Gower AONB. It is recognised that this development will cross-subsidise the renovation of the pier, which is the subject of a separate application. A proposal to provide a new RNLI offshore station at the end of the pier to replace the existing outdated boathouse is also the subject of a separate application.

The design team have explored several different layouts and versions of built form, and their relationship with the cliff and the headland. They have sought to minimise the impact from Bracelet Bay to the south, and on the approach from the west, maintaining the distinctive view of the three rocky outcrops. The existing promenade will be extended outwards to form a boardwalk which will separate pedestrians from vehicular traffic. Stopping points and possibly kiosks will be incorporated along its length. The public realm around the retained and refurbished pavilion will also be extended, upgraded and enhanced.

A public consultation event was held last year, and another one more recently in November 2010. In response to feedback from the earlier event, the scale of the buildings was reduced so that they do not protrude over the silhouette of the cliff, and parking levels were increased. The Local Authority recognises the controversial nature of the proposal, with petitions circulating that are in favour of and opposed to the development. They are keen to ensure the retention and renovation of the Grade II listed pier (which will attract a £3m subsidy from this development) and the improvement of tourist facilities in the area.

The Local Authority is awaiting a response from the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) assessing the submitted visual impact assessment, before finalising their appraisal.

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

The Panel welcomed the opportunity to comment on this significant proposal for Mumbles. We are surprised that an outline application is considered acceptable and realise that in this case, the ultimate test of quality and success will depend largely on the planning conditions attached to any permission. In our view major issues remain to be resolved. In summary:

- We do not consider that the scale of this proposal has been sufficiently well justified, particularly with regard to the hotel block.
- The image of the headland building viewed from the pier (fig 10.7a) and presented on the day of review, made it clear to us that the visual impact would be significant. Other 'before and after' images also presented on the day demonstrated that the visual impact would be significant from a number of locations.
- The design concept for the headland building needs to be clarified. Given its significance, we think this would be a good candidate for an architectural competition.
- We noted that the headland building could become either a hotel or residential block, and in view of the sensitive location we think there should be a commitment to its proposed use at this stage.
- The townscape character analysis of Mumbles which has been done is disappointing and not reflected in the proposed designs.
- We welcome the early delivery of the public realm but we think that a strategy is required and ambition for quality should be described. Commitment to a public arts strategy throughout the development should be made and integrated into the public realm.
- The continuous dead frontage of the accommodation blocks is a major flaw.
- The sustainability targets are modest and do nothing to 'raise the bar' or anticipate future legislation. This is not in accordance with the key objectives of the Mumbles Pier Development Framework.

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

The Panel questioned whether an outline application (with all matters reserved apart from strategic access) was appropriate for this very significant intervention, where it will be important to control the quality of subsequent development. We accepted that the application will establish key parameters for the development, but emphasised the importance of attaching conditions to any permission which should allow the Local Authority to exercise strict quality control in the future.

The team presented a 3 dimensional model of the scheme which was useful to guide discussions. The Panel questioned what had driven the scale of these proposals. Considerations of commercial viability, together with the design aim not to breach the skyline of the cliff, were important factors. In addition, we were informed that the Action

Plan which formed part of the Mumbles Pier and Foreshore Development Framework (adopted as SPG) recommended development of 5-6 storeys, while emphasising the sensitivity of the site.

It was accepted that the greatest visual impact would probably be from long distance views. The visual impact images which formed part of the presentation material were rather dark, small (6 to a page) and difficult to interpret, and were taken from high vantage points – a seagull's eye view in effect. The team produced a full A3 image which we had not previously seen, of the headland building from ground level, at a point roughly halfway along the pier. From this we judged that the impact of this building would be significant, and not slight as claimed. Further images circulated to the Panel after the meeting confirmed this initial view. While we understood that the footprint of the new building was smaller than the existing one, we thought that the urban form shown in fig 10.7a was overbearing and not appropriate in this context.

The implications of pulling the building clear of the rock face were discussed, but the team thought that the recessive and stepped-back form lessened the impact from ground level. An intimate view of the cliff face (which is actually a quarry) is created by the inclusion of a lightwell behind the building. However, bearing in mind that the use of the headland building is to be determined and that such details are illustrative only, the Panel sought clarity on the design concept. At the moment it is not clear whether the design intention is to create a building as part of the landscape, or as a deliberate man-made intervention.

The current proposal falls between these two stools and we recommended the design team decide which approach to take as part of the 'key parameters'. With regard to the residential blocks, a more thorough and insightful character analysis of Mumbles would help the designers to develop a distinctive architectural language which reflects the landscape and topography, while recognising the importance of the destination site. The Panel was concerned that the proposed buildings were typical of many sea front developments, not one of such importance and significance. The particular qualities of Mumbles as a place should be referenced, for example the rhythm of the existing gables and the spaces between buildings in Oystermouth, in the development and modelling of the blocks. While we recognise that this is an outline application, we think that a rigorous character appraisal would form one of the 'key parameters' to inform more detailed design work at a later date.

The Panel was concerned that the row of accommodation blocks on the approach from Knab Rock had car parking at ground level and no active frontages facing the road. While acknowledging this, the team pointed out the active uses all the way round the pavilion and headland building, along with a new access to the beach. We noted that the public area between the hotel and pavilion would be shaded for much of the day, but accepted that the building line of the hotel has been pulled back behind the existing building, to widen that space.

While the Panel agreed with the aim to create open spaces of different size, from intimate to large scale, the public realm proposals currently lack a rationale, definition and ambition, and need to be tested against objectives that define the desired design quality, including a public art strategy and materials.

It was confirmed that the public realm proposals will be delivered first, along with the sea wall which forms the flood defences and defines the development plots. The restoration of the pier will need to be dovetailed with the RNLI proposal for a new lifeboat station.

The Panel expressed disappointment that such a significant scheme contains only a modest commitment to environmental performance standards, equivalent to the statutory minimum of BREEAM Very Good and CSH level 3+. This is despite the statement in the UDP that sustainable development would be an integral principle of the planning and development process, and the key objective set out in the Development Framework, to 'create a high quality sustainable development'. Ideally we would like to see a commitment to achieve BREEAM Excellent and CSH Level 4. Given the mix of uses and quantum of development, options for energy and heating should be considered and included as part of the site development strategy.

**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	AMECO (John Bollom)
Pensaer/Architect:	Powell Dobson Architects (Andrew Nixon, Kevin Matthews)
Consultants:	Savills (Catherine Griffiths, Geraint John)
AwdurdodCynllunio/ Planning Authority	CC Swansea (Steve Smith, David Owen)
Y Panel Adlygu Dylunio: Design Review Panel: Wendy Richards [Chair] Cindy Harris [Officer] Kieren Morgan	Ashley Bateson Jonathan Hines Toby Adam Simon Carne
Lead Panellist:	Jonathan Hines
Sylwedyddion/Observers:	Carole-Anne Davies (DCFV)

**Declaration of interest:** Ashley Bateson declared that Hoare Lea works with Powell Dobson on other schemes, but he has had no involvement with

this proposal.