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Design Review Report

Llanbedr Hall, Denbighshire
7th November 2013



Declarations of Interest

Panel members, observers and other relevant parties are required to declare ***in advance*** any interests they may have in relation to the Design Review Agenda items. Any such declarations are recorded here and in DCFW's central records.

Review Status

PUBLIC

Meeting date	Thursday 17th October 2013
Issue date	7 th November 2013
Scheme location	Llanbedr Dyffryn Clwyd, Denbighshire
Scheme description	Residential
Scheme reference number	79D
Planning status	Pre-application
Declaration of interests	None declared

Consultations to Date

A previous proposal to demolish Llanbedr Hall and replace it with a four storey terrace of 9 houses was considered at Design Review in November 2012. The Panel supported the principle of the demolition and of new residential development. However, it expressed major concerns about the height, mass, design and location of the terraced form, and recommended a dispersed, low impact approach that respected trees, key views of this rural landscape setting and the need for solar access.

A Planning Appeal for a different scheme, not previously seen by the Design Commission, was dismissed in February 2013 (APP/R6830/A/12/2181528). The scheme, which was dismissed, consisted of a series of detached dwellings dispersed in the landscape. The Commission has not seen the detailed drawings for this proposal. The reasons for dismissal cited by the Inspector were:

- The proposed houses would represent a substantial extension of the built area into the relatively undeveloped countryside and would consequently be harmful to the landscape and AONB

- Developing away from the existing footprint is exceptional and in this particular case (for reasons stated above) it would not satisfy the policy requirement for an overall environmental improvement

The team has been engaged in continuous pre-application discussions with the Local Planning Authority throughout the process of this re-design.

The Proposals

Llanbedr Hall is a large house of the mid-Victorian period with associated outbuildings. It was originally set within a managed parkland setting of undulating open green spaces and belts of mature trees. However, in recent years the house has been used for other purposes such as flats and a restaurant (but is currently empty) and the quality of the grounds has been eroded by lack of maintenance. The building is not listed.

The site is located within the Clwydian Range Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), on a prominent escarpment overlooking the Vale of Clwyd. There are spectacular views of the Vale from the site through breaks in the trees, and of the site from the Vale, where the Clwydian Range forms a picturesque and rugged backdrop.

The developer has commissioned a new architect to prepare an alternative proposal for new residential development on the site. In essence, this revised proposal for 12 new dwellings shares many similarities to the previous proposal reviewed by the Commission. It is a four-storey single terraced block of houses together with associated parking and private curtilages in approximately the same location as the previous design. The revisions are subtle: its form is a stepped crescent of 'townhouses'; the architectural language is of contemporary design with timber clad elevations and a sleek covered roof-terrace. Llanbedr Hall itself is retained, albeit as a feature within the grounds, and an attempt is made to retain the original sweeping curve of the drive into the grounds from the gateway to the north.

Summary

There were several key points specifically identified by the Panel:

- The Panel remains supportive of the principle of development of this site, including the demolition of the Hall and replacement residential development.
- The Panel continues to have major concerns about the massing and scale of a four storey terrace of townhouses, and the impact this would have on the sensitive landscape setting. In its current form, the Panel cannot support this proposal.
- It is recommended that the design team re-think the diagram of architectural principles. A strategy is required which is appropriate to the site, yet commercially viable. This should address all relevant Planning Policy and should respect the AONB. We refer the LPA and team to our report of 29 November 2012 wherein we raise the importance of setting out a *..‘clear design strategy for a development which is demonstrably justified by national and local Planning Policy and is appropriate to the AONB and the rural parkland setting.’*
- A solution might involve replacing the existing Hall with a new volume of accommodation, together with smaller, subservient volumes surrounding it; an approach based on the traditional relationship between large rural houses and their ancillary, subservient outbuildings.

Discussions and Panel Response in Full

The team provided an update on development of the scheme since the previous Design Review:

Subsequent to the previous review, a Planning Appeal for a scheme for nine dispersed houses (not the scheme reviewed by DCFW in November 2012) was rejected.

The team has since met with the Local Planning Authority (LPA) to gain their views on the scheme. The LPA have made it clear that the Hall could be replaced with houses or flats using the Replacement Dwelling Policy, but that it should be replaced with a single building. The Replacement Policy does not necessarily mean complete demolition of the existing building, although they understand that the Hall is not now structurally sound.

The Local Development Plan has been adopted since the appeal, which has made the Replacement Dwelling Policy more flexible. The team thought ongoing discussions with the LPA had been positive.

Current Proposal

There are two distinct elements to the scheme: the residential development and the conversion of the Glasshouse. It was agreed that this review would focus on the residential development, and that the Glasshouse element would form a separate Planning Application. The Glasshouse element involves an increase in building area compared to the existing Glasshouse consent. The Panel were supportive of some increase in the built footprint to make better use of the existing structures on the site.

The current scheme proposes that the shell of Llanbedr Hall is retained as a facility for the on-site community, perhaps containing a swimming pool and walled garden. The towered corner would be a focal point on arrival to the site. The Panel was not convinced that this strategy was the right approach to dealing with the existing dilapidated building. If it is not to be reused, it should be demolished as it potentially provides an ideal location for new development.

The terrace of 12 dwellings has been stepped in plan to follow landscape contours and the curve of the existing driveway. The Panel suggested that images showing views of the new proposal from the driveway approach would be useful to demonstrate the approach sequence and to show the impact of the scheme on the site.

The materials selected for the facade include brick and timber. The brick is used on the lower level to reflect the idea of a walled garden. Four types of timber are used on the upper levels to blend the 12 units together and soften views of the building.

The overall height of the building has been reduced since the previous Design Review, and the elevation has been stepped to break up the appearance of the mass. Only the south end of the terrace would be visible through the trees from afar. The Panel thought that a site model would be useful to see how building sat in the landscape, and it would have been useful to have had a drawing, such as a cross section, showing the height reduction.

Development Strategy Approach

The Panel welcomed the efforts made to retain the driveway and reduce the impact of the development through the height reduction, stepped elevations and choice of material

palette. However, concerns about the scale, footprint and urbanising impact of a four storey terrace block on this sensitive site remain.

The Panel commented that a revised proposal must address the comments made by the Planning Inspector at the Appeal, even though the comments relate to a different strategy. Future proposals must also deal with each relevant element of Planning Policy, particularly those relating to the AONB.

The team confirmed that a full Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) had already been carried out. The Panel reminded them that this should inform the design approach, and that it would be important to make reference to this in any future Planning Application. The Panel was pleased that this had been undertaken.

Although the site is within an AONB, the LVIA shows that views into it are largely hidden by trees. In recent years, there has been development in the surrounding areas, and there are plans for more housing nearby.

The client explained the inherent conflict between designing a hidden, low impact scheme and the LPA insistence on having one single building. One smaller building would not be financially viable.

The Panel reinforced their opinion that the urban type of building form proposed was not appropriate on this site, despite the LPA's reported suggestion of the proposed scale and location on the site. The Panel acknowledged that the team was in a difficult position given the Planning Inspector's rejection of a dispersed scheme of smaller units and concerns about impact on the AONB, the LPA's preference for a single building, and the need to develop a financially viable scheme.

It was suggested that the team take a step back, look at the options and come up with a clear development strategy for this site. They should remember that any strategy must be based on Planning Policy, and the LPA will need to be clear about and adhere to their policy.

The Panel thought that the developer had perhaps been ill-advised about retaining the shell of the existing Hall, and suggested that demolition of the Hall and a replacement new-build on the same spot would offer a sensible and appropriate way forward for the development. This would provide an appropriate location for an amount of development, anchored to the site of the Hall. The Panel's view is that development in this location

would not need to follow the footprint or style of the hall, but would maintain a major occupied building form in this key position within the surrounding complex of buildings. This would then leave a smaller quantum of the required development to be placed elsewhere.

The Panel suggested an analysis of precedent rural buildings and how they are organised in the landscape to inform the design. For example, there is a composition of simple, orthogonal buildings surrounding, but subordinate to the larger volume of Llanbedr Hall. This language of primary and subservient buildings could offer an appropriate solution to achieving the required volume of development on the site without having a detrimental impact on the AONB.

Given the history of this site and the attempts to bring forward a viable development, the Commission and the client thought that greater benefit would have been drawn from the discussion had the LPA sent a representative or provided written comment. The client expressed concerns about the weight the LPA would afford DCFW's comment and was clearly frustrated that the scheme had been through so many iterations over many years, guided by the LPA, but they had all been rejected. He was concerned that in his view the LPA had directed him towards the single large building in the location shown in the presentation, whilst the Design Review Panel cannot support the building scale and form in the location proposed.

In its previous report of 29 November 2012 the Commission expressed its concern about the 'to and fro' of negotiations and the length of time it had taken for the project to come to the Commission. It is regrettable that a further year has elapsed and we sincerely hope all parties will find a way to achieve a positive outcome.

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A Welsh language copy of this report is available upon request.

Attendees

Agent/Client/Developer: Rod Cox

Architectural/Urban Designer: Randall Turner – Andy Foster Architects
Rhys Davies – Cadnant Planning

Planning Authority:

Design Review Panel:

Chair Ewan Jones

Lead Panellist Elfed Roberts

Wendy Richards

Martin Knight

Kedrick Davies

Amanda Spence, Design Advisor, DCFW

Observing: Mike Harvey – South Wales Police