

Design Review Report

DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

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	12th September 2013
Issue date	20 th September 2013
Scheme location	White House Hotel - Abersoch
Scheme description	Mixed use
Scheme reference number	21 (72B/40C/210)
Planning status	Planning App submitted April 13
Declaration of interests	None declared

Consultations to date

A planning application was submitted in April 2013 with public and statutory consultations undertaken as part of the planning application process.

Summary

This is the third time this development has been presented at Design Review; earlier iterations were presented to the Commission in 2006 and 2011. This time the scheme was brought forward by the Local Authority as the current scheme promoter did not wish to consult the Commission further.

The principle of a hotel and leisure development of this site in Abersoch is accepted by the Local Authority and is supported by DCfW. The proposal comprises a 42 bed hotel, pool and spa along with and 18 apartments. An earlier planning permission in September 2007 was never implemented and the scheme has since been redesigned.

The site sits in a predominantly residential area in reasonably close proximity to the adjacent AONB. The Panel is supportive of the principle of development but the design needs to be refined to bring forward a viable and good quality scheme:

- The derelict building is 2.5 storeys with a pitched roof whilst the proposal is for a 5 storey building. The Panel felt that the height was not necessarily an issue if it was well designed and in response to the site, but that consideration might also be given to lowering the spa and swimming pool areas to address some of the impact.
- Bulk and its visual impact is an important issue. The possibility of separating the hotel building from the apartments might alleviate this, alongside consideration of a variation in roofscape.

- The Panel was made aware of Local Authority preference for the provision of an affordable housing element in line with their policy which would seem to be a stumbling block to delivering an acceptable proposal.
- A landscape proposal should be developed and form part of the submission.
- The close proximity of the proposed development to Hunters Moon, a neighbouring residence is significant. Service access, deliveries, refuse bin storage and potential party wall conflicts are likely to adversely impact that property.
- The principles of development are, nevertheless, strongly supported. A better quality scheme which maximises the many qualities of the site could make a major contribution to Abersoch.

Discussion and Panel response in full

The scheme was brought to DCFW by the Local Planning Authority officers who are minded to refuse permission for this scheme. The Panel acknowledges that this is an important site in a good location that should not detract from the AONB and/or views into the site. The development includes 18 holiday apartments to be sold on the open market and the Panel is aware that the LPA would like to see 30% of these available as affordable housing, potentially delivered through a commuted sum and not necessarily accommodated on this site. . We understand there are discussions ongoing with the LPA regarding viability. No offer of a commuted sum in lieu of the provision of affordable housing has so far been made.

The design proposed is of uniform height some 4 metres higher than the current derelict building. Considering the location of this development and the potential visual impact on the surrounding area the Panel thought that consideration should be given to mitigating the impact of this bulk and massing. This might be achieved by a variation of roof form, perhaps lowering part of the building (possibly by sinking the spa and swimming pool area) and re-modelling/increasing the height of other parts of the upper stories..

The Panel also suggested that the impact of the development and the practicalities associated with use might be better served by separating the apartments from the hotel. This might simplify the building planning, improve efficient use of the site and reduce the visual impact of its bulk.

The close proximity of the proposed hotel to Hunters Moon, a neighbouring residence would compromise the privacy and enjoyment of the Hunters Moon residents. Noise and disturbance from deliveries and servicing bin storage would be a major disturbance and, from the drawings available, it appears that an important boundary wall between the properties would need to be raised. A site section addressing this impact was not available but should be provided.

Site vehicle and pedestrian access is generally from the south. The proposal includes separate entrances to the hotel and spa area with external ramps and steps. The Panel thought this could be simplified, perhaps with a single entrance. Parking is located both to the front and rear. This results in additional complexity of planning and the need for a further entrance on the north side.

In summary the Panel's views are largely a repeat of the previous review in 2011. Whilst the Applicant has made some attempt to mitigate the bulk and massing of the proposal this has been very marginal. Further work on visual impact has been done but this has not resulted in any improvement in design.

The Panel's view of the scheme in 2011 was that it was very much "work in progress" The same key concerns remain: scale, relationships to neighbouring properties, complexity of form, response to site, impact of key views and landscape strategies.

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

Attendees

Planning Authority

Gwenan Jones
Gwynedd CC

Design Review Panel
Chair

Alan Francis
Simon Carne – Lead Panellist
Jonathan Adams
Steve Smith

Observing
Recording

Carole-Anne Davies
Sue Jones