

Addroddiad Adolygu Dylunio Design Review Report

Review Status: **Confidential**

Meeting date:	18th August 2010
Issue Date:	31st August 2010
Scheme Location:	Llys Nini, Swansea
Scheme Description:	Visitor Centre
Planning Status:	Pre-application

Part1: Presentation

The RSPCA at Llys Nini is seeking grant funding to build a visitor centre with seminar rooms and business starter units, to complement and ensure the viability of their existing animal welfare centre. A 'vision strategy' for the development of the centre will be used to support the funding bid and the planning application. The site lies within a designated 'green wedge' to the north of Swansea, but as an established rural SME [small/medium enterprise] the applicant would be seeking to justify the proposal with reference to the new TAN 6.

The proposal is for two new blocks – one to house a shop, cafe and exhibition space; the second for workshop space – situated in the current car park to the north east of the animal welfare centre [AWC]. The existing route into the site will split to create a new access way to this development, leaving the AWC with its separate [existing] access. The buildings will be designed to achieve BREEAM Excellent.

The Local Planning Authority acknowledged that the policy context would need to be clarified, and that any decision would balance a presumption against development in a green wedge against economic development, tourism and sustainability benefits.

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

The Panel was pleased to review this interesting proposal, although we found that the lack of clear architectural plans in the presentation material made it difficult to understand how the design had evolved to this stage. We commended the high level of ambition and commitment behind the proposal and regretted that the client was not present to hear the

discussion first hand. We appreciate that the planning context will need to be discussed in detail with the Local Authority, and in addition we think that there are major design issues to be resolved. In summary:

- The upgrading and improvement of the existing site entrance will be a necessary part of the success of the project as a whole.
- An access strategy for the whole site should be developed with the help of a landscape architect.
- Consideration should be given to widening the existing access road and retaining shared access with the AWC.
- A co-ordinated approach to the landscape design and external works should be given detailed attention by a landscape architect.
- Signage should be kept to a minimum and large graphics should be avoided.
- The profile and massing of the larger block should be reconsidered, to reduce its apparent bulk and achieve a better relationship with its neighbour and the landscape.
- Rooflights or clerestory windows should be introduced to improve daylight levels internally.
- A shared, welcoming and well-designed entrance space, providing shelter and high quality public realm, should be developed between the two blocks.
- While commending the commitment to BREEAM Excellent we thought that the energy, ventilation and layout strategy was unnecessarily complicated and expensive. A low energy building could be achieved using simpler, well-tested solutions.
- We would be happy to see this again at Design Review, as the design develops and prior to a planning application.

Part 2: Discussion and Panel Response in Full

The Panel recognised that the proposal was still at an early stage and the presentation material was very much 'work in progress'.

The Panel noted that the existing entrance to the site was unattractive and unwelcoming, and we advised that a holistic access and signage strategy should be developed for the whole project. The main entrance area needs clarifying and developing; further down the track, feature structures and shelters indicating progress along the route would be appropriate, and could be considered as an overall art strategy, linked into a landscape masterplan. We questioned the necessity of driving a new road across a green field to achieve a separate access from the AWC. However, we were informed that the field in question is an ex-tipping site and that there were good operational reasons for the AWC to have its own dedicated access road, which would be difficult to widen owing to high, well-established hedges on both sides. The use of super-graphics on the northern elevation of the larger block is redundant, as they would not be seen on the approach to the building.

Overall we thought that the disposition and massing of the two blocks was appropriate, along with the contemporary agricultural references in the design approach. However, the larger block seems bulky and overbearing, and appears as an extrusion of the more elegant smaller block. We thought the buildings should be better integrated with the landscape,

and the relationship between the two would benefit from the input of a landscape architect.

While we appreciated the additional information presented relating to the developing block sections, which clarified the sunken lightwell over the cafe and details of the solar wall and ventilation stack, this needs careful study and evolution with an informed environmental strategy to achieve simpler and more elegant forms. The distinctive roof forms should be used to introduce more daylight into the centre of the building and this could be more effective [and less prone to leaking] than the sunken rooflight. There may be some merit in swapping the positions of the two blocks, so that the long roof of the larger block faced south.

The Panel suggested that the two blocks could be linked by a covered walkway but we were informed that the space between the blocks would occasionally be needed for vehicular access to the reed beds. We would still like to see the space developed as a shared entrance space with both entrances facing onto it, and would prefer to see vehicular access to the reed beds re-routed.

The Panel welcomed the commitment to BREEAM Excellent but we were concerned that the energy and ventilation strategy was unnecessarily complicated and needed refining and testing with the help of M&E expertise. At this stage of development, the input of structural and environmental engineers is essential to set realistic and appropriate strategies that will synchronise with the architectural approach. Until this is done the design needs to remain sufficiently flexible to be able to respond. In particular we questioned the effectiveness of the Trombe wall on the south facing gable of the larger block, and the wisdom of insulating the inner core from the outer circulation area. We were told that rammed earth and 'hemcrete' construction had been considered but the team had opted for well insulated structural timber panels.

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

RSPCA Llys Nini

Pensaer/Architect:

Huw Griffiths Architects [Huw Griffiths,
Jonathan Morris, Ashley Davies]

Consultants:

Asbri Planning [Damian Barry]

Awdurdod Cynllunio/
Planning Authority

CC Swansea [Steve Smith,
Jane Lamnea]

Y Panel Adlygu Dylunio:
Design review panel:
Wendy Richards [Chair]
Cindy Harris [Officer]
Mark Hallett

Michael Griffiths
Ashley Bateson
Lynne Sullivan
Kieren Morgan

Lead Panellist:

Michael Griffiths

Sylwedyddion/Observers:

Liz Walder [RSAW]
Richard Keogh [DCFW]