

Statws/Status:

Cyfrinachol / Confidential



Adroddiad Adolygu Dylunio: 16 June 2006
Design Review Report:

Dyddiad Cyfarfod / Cyflwyno'r Deunydd: 5 June 2006
Meeting Date / Material Submitted:

Lleoliad/Location: Former 70 Degree Hotel,
Abergele Road, Old Conwy

Disgrifiad o'r Cynllun Residential
Scheme Description:

Cleient/Asiant: Duxburys Commercial
Client/Agent: [Andrew Bather]

Developer/Datblygwr: Country & Metropolitan Homes
[John Beardsell]

Pensaer/Architect: McCormick Architecture
[Wyn Roberts, Sean McCormick]

Ymgynghorwyr Cynllunio: RPS [Richard Gee]
Planning Consultants:

Awdurdod Cynllunio: Conwy CBC [DN Walters,
Planning Authority: Paula Jones]

Statws Cynllunio: Pre-planning
Planning Status:

Y Panel Adolygu Dylunio/Design Review Panel:
Alan Francis (cadeirydd/chair) Elfed Roberts
Cindy Harris (swyddog/officer) Jonathan Hines
Nick Davies

Cyflwyniad/Presentation

The presenting team emphasised that this scheme was still at the stage of design development. It has been strongly influenced by the existing structure, which was a landmark in its time, and by the need to respond to Abergele Road and the residential development to the south and east. Outline permission exists to demolish the former hotel and build 19 houses. This proposal is for a denser development of 50 units, comprising a mix of apartments and townhouses. The original consent was conditioned by a requirement that the detailed design be developed in conjunction with a Steering Group of local councillors and residents. This group agreed that there was an opportunity for a greater mix and density on the site. There will be a contribution made towards affordable housing provision off site.

The site is a prominent cliff top, with steep drops to the main A55 running along the coast to the north, and to the town of Old Conwy to the west. There are spectacular sea views and the site is correspondingly highly visible from the north and west. The architects wished to create a landmark building to the north west of the site, with a strong horizontal emphasis suggesting that it is wrapped around the cliff. This apartment block features a central beacon tower, suggesting a reference to lighthouses which could be illuminated by uplighting at night. The block is 3 storeys when approached from the rear, but the sloping ground accommodates an extra storey in a stone plinth on the front [north west] elevation. Excluding the lantern on top of the tower, it will be no higher than the existing building. The perceived mass is reduced with progressively lighter elements towards the top. The block is located to open up key views across the site from the south.

Three other blocks located to the north, east and south comprise a total of 21 town houses of 2-3 storeys.

The amount of green space will be increased as a result of this scheme, with more soft landscaping to the south in the form of gardens and terraced areas around blocks C and D. The apartments [block A] will have a public open space overlooking the cliff. Boundary treatments, hard landscaping and the plinth of the apartment block will be in local buff coloured stone. Roofing slate is likely to be Penrhyn blue, although block A will have a flat roof with a grey single-ply membrane. Window frames will be aluminium. The town houses have a more traditional treatment, but will use the same palette of materials, including painted render.

The Local Authority considered it important to consult the Commission at this point, before the design became too fixed. They appreciate the way in which a new road access into the site has opened up views and permeability. The current layout makes sense of an important but difficult site, with two frontages to north and south. There is a strong feeling that a quality landmark building is required in this location.

Ymateb y Panel/Panel's Response

The Panel agreed with the Local Authority that the proposed basic site layout was sensible and logical. We thought the designers were right to retain the existing access, which benefits from the luxury of a layby on the crest of a bend on Abergele Road. However, we

were concerned that the views from block D might be prejudiced by block B to the seaward side. It was agreed that any shading of block B by block D would be minimal. The largest town houses in block D, fronting Abergele Road, needed to relate to their context while maintaining a reasonable degree of privacy for their occupants. We did not think that the blank side wall presented to Abergele Road [as shown in perspective 6 in the documentation] was conducive to an active street environment. This tension between the desire for privacy on the one hand; and active, overlooked and safer streets on the other, in relation to blocks B and D, could result in the threat of 1.8 metre high fencing, if not now then in the future. We believe this would be a retrograde step, and the likelihood of its happening should be designed out. At this early design stage, it might be worth considering whether the 'island' block would be better suited as apartments

The Panel thought that the architectural treatment for the main apartment block was promising, but urged greater horizontal emphasis through cladding treatment and possibly larger glazed areas. Any potential problem with glare should be reduced by the type of glass used. We thought that the floor to ceiling heights should be more generous, and that an extra 300mm in height on each floor would better accommodate the transfer structure required by the stepped section and the deep plan space, and would not detract from the desired horizontality. The relatively deep plan combined with low ceilings could be oppressive. The designer should be alert to fire issues around party walls in the glazed lantern, which could lead to loss of the current visual strength of the vertical glazed slot.

The architectural relationship between the main block and the other blocks, however, was thought to be more problematic and uncomfortable. The town houses have a vertical emphasis with pitched roofs and the Panel would like to see more integration between the two treatments, including a more similar form and style, although we acknowledged that a common palette of materials would go some way towards achieving this.

The Panel considered that a successful landscape scheme would depend on the correct species selection and taking advantage of sheltered spots. We were told that a landscape architect from McCormicks is about to start work on the scheme. We suggested that a 'home zone' treatment could be applied to the internal streets and that the pavements and left over spaces around parking areas should be omitted. Block D could be moved north to front the internal road, leaving all gardens facing south and with less need for privacy barriers because of greater distance from houses. The Panel questioned what appeared to be a high overall parking ratio and was told that this was a Highways requirement. We thought that it was excessive, given the access to public transport, and a reduction in parking spaces would give greater scope for the creation of landscaping and amenity spaces.

The Panel was told that the steering group was in favour of gated access to the site, although the developer was happy to allow a greater degree of public access. A public viewing platform might be provided to the west of the site. We did not support gated access and considered that it would contravene the aspirations of inclusive design and sustainable communities contained in TAN12. We suggested that small gates accessing individual houses could be punched through the boundary wall of block D, but were told that Highways did not favour this solution as it could lead to uncontrolled parking on pavements.

The Panel questioned whether there was a problem of overlooking and/or overshadowing of the house to the north east, but would need to see proper sections with measurements to determine this. The closest new dwelling presents a high blank gable wall next to its

boundary and, in the absence of information about this relationship, we advised that the layout and design at this interface be reconsidered. We would have liked to see a full section through the site and advised that this would need to be produced in the near future.

The Panel acknowledged the sustainability of the location, with a bus route running along Abergele Road and good pedestrian linkages to south and east. We urged that a single district heating scheme be considered and the infrastructure for such a facility be installed as a minimum. We would like to see a proportion of the development's energy use provided through renewable energy generation on site. Wind tunnel tests should be carried out to identify any problems, especially between blocks A and D.

Crynodeb/Summary

The Panel appreciated the wonderful opportunity for development afforded by the unique nature of the site. We agreed with the local authority that a landmark building was needed to celebrate its prominence and respond to the context. We found these proposals to be an acceptable response to the site and the brief, with some minor revisions. In particular:

- The architectural treatment and relationship between blocks should be more integrated
- More horizontal emphasis should be given to the apartment block elevations, and floor to ceiling heights increased.
- The relationship of the block D houses to Abergele Road should be resolved to promote an active street scene while providing a degree of privacy.
- A 'home zone' treatment of internal streets, including the possibility of shared surfaces, should be considered.
- We think that the services of a landscape architect should be employed on the scheme as soon as possible.
- We do not support gated access and think this is ultimately divisive and prejudices long term security.
- We think that the overall parking ratio should be reduced.
- We would encourage the adoption of a sustainability strategy designed to minimise energy use and the installation of some renewable generation.
- We were disappointed in the quality of advance information provided to the Panel, which did not include any elevations or sections. We think that section drawings through the site, including adjoining properties where appropriate, should be produced as soon as possible.

Diwedd/End

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