

Design Review Report

Land adjacent to Waterloo Hotel,
Betws y Coed

DCFW Ref: N87

Meeting of 19th January 2017



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

Meeting date	CONFIDENTIAL 19 th January 2017
Issue date	30 th January 2017
Scheme location	Betws y Coed
Scheme description	Mixed Use
Scheme reference number	N87
Planning status	Pre-application

Declarations of Interest

None declared.

Consultations to Date

Informal discussions with planning officers at the National Park have taken place and a request for pre-application discussion has recently been made. This scheme is afforded Confidential status by DCFW at this time as it differs from the earlier consented scheme and remains at pre-application stage.

The Proposals

The proposal site is located on the outskirts of Betws-y-Coed, approximately ½ mile south of the village centre. The site is accessed directly from the busy A5 road with residential buildings to the north and the Waterloo Best Western Hotel to the south. Adjacent and up-slope of the site are chalets (also used by the hotel) and a minor road. Beyond the A5 and to the east of the site lies open grazing land which forms part of the River Conwy flood plain. There are far-reaching views across the natural landscape towards the trees and hills opposite. The site itself is level, roughly rectangular in shape and measures approximately 0.5 hectares. The site is currently used as a car park with very large existing trees along the west boundary. Access to residential units is to the rear of the car park and directly from the A5. A Japanese knotweed control site is located opposite the site. The site is within the Snowdonia National Park.

The scheme proposes a number of new buildings with flexible retail space on the ground floor and additional hotel accommodation above. Some changes to the landscape design, parking and routes through the site are proposed in a masterplan which covers the whole site, including land on the opposite side of the road from the hotel building, which slopes down to the river Conwy.

Since the previous review of this scheme, which took place in March 2016, additional tree houses, leisure areas and a restaurant have been proposed for the land between the A5 road and the river.

In 2006 planning permission was granted for a different scheme on the site and a material start was made in 2011.

This scheme was reviewed by the Design Commission for Wales on 20th October 2015 and 16th March 2016; the reports from the previous reviews should be read in conjunction with this report.

Main Points in Detail

This is the third time the Design Commission for Wales has reviewed this scheme and many of the issues identified in the previous two reviews have not been fully addressed or resolved.

Therefore, it is important that the previous reports are referred to again, alongside the issues outlined below, as the Design Commission still has a number of significant concerns with the scheme presented at this review.

The following points summarise key issues from the review and should be considered to inform work ahead of making a planning application:

Major Problems Identified

- Crucial aspects of site analysis are still absent
- Some site analysis has been done, but has not been meaningfully applied to and tested in the proposals
- Aspects of masterplan are incompatible with planning policy
- The lack of engagement with other consultants and technical experts such as structural engineers, environmental experts, quantity surveyors, civil engineers means that the proposals cannot be tested against clear parameters, leaving too much untested and unknown
- Some of the proposed accommodation is in a flood plain
- Some of the proposed accommodation is on a greenfield site, as yet not informed by an ecological survey
- The relevant highways authority has not yet been formally consulted
- The scheme proposes the removal of mature trees without an arboricultural survey
- Sound, good quality landscape design and site planning is not evident
- Surface water flooding is identified but not responded to
- Parking proposals and management are not resolved
- The current passive design strategy is incorrect
- The energy and services strategy is not resolved
- Overshadowing of the hill and trees has not been studied – such a study will have an impact on environmental strategy and landscape design
- Studies of precedent or local vernacular have not been meaningfully integrated

- The currently complex building forms, deck and balcony will be challenging and costly to resolve in detail
- The deck to hotel accommodation creates unpleasant spaces beneath
- Roofs currently appear too steep to be green roofs
- Policies have been identified but not been considered in the design

Ambition, Feasibility and Value

The client's ambition and energy for this project, as seen in the evolving brief, is positive. There is potential for elements of the brief to create an exciting and valuable addition at a key entrance point into this town in the National Park. However, in order to be successful the proposals must be feasible. There are numerous parts of the scheme presented at this review which will not be possible to achieve, or which have not been resolved or tested in enough detail to demonstrate that they are feasible.

The Design Commission fully understands that the scheme needs to be commercially viable for the client. At the same time it must also be feasible in terms of planning, construction and ongoing running and maintenance. The architect, with the input of other specialists, should use the analysis and early design process to thoroughly test the proposals and explain to the client which parts of the brief are viable and feasible. Throughout the design process the design team should be testing the scheme to define the parameters. Pre-application discussions with the planning authority will help to determine which elements of the proposal contravene planning policy or need further exploration.

The client will also expect to get good value from his investment in this scheme. The early, pre-planning stages of the design process are crucial to achieving good value and it is important that the input of a variety of design professionals and technical specialists takes place at this stage so that a fully informed, resolved and integrated proposal is reached. It will also be helpful to talk to potential tenants for the retail spaces and their space and other requirements and to consider compatibility with the wider hotel/leisure offer.

Design and Technical Expertise

The Design Commission strongly recommends that a range of competent design professionals, specialists and statutory consultees are engaged before further design work proceeds. Many of these will be requirements for a planning application and/or to satisfy building regulations.

As part of the site analysis and investigations, there are a number of technical issues which need to be addressed immediately as they will have a significant impact on what and where it will be possible to build on the site:

- Natural Resources Wales (NRW) should be consulted in relation to flood zones
- A tree survey will identify important, valuable trees on and near the site
- An ecological survey may identify further constraints, such as areas that might not be suitable for development, but also may highlight opportunities
- The relevant highways authority should be consulted in relation to pedestrian crossings points and access points on/off of the trunk road
- Potential retail tenants could advise of scale and positioning of retail units

For a project of this nature and significance, the architect should be working closely with other built-environment professionals as part of an integrated design team. These should ideally include, but are not limited to:

- Landscape architects
- Environmental/services engineers
- Cost consultants
- Structural/civil engineers

Engagement with and input from the above should:

- Contribute to site analysis (identify constraints and opportunities)
- Inform the site strategy and masterplan
- Define the project brief and parameters
- Inform an integrated energy and sustainability strategy
- Inform a cost plan with detail appropriate to the project stage
- Inform a structural strategy for the buildings and other structures
- Inform the drainage strategy and take part in discussion with NRW

We also refer the design team, client and planning authority to two guidance documents written by DCFW for Welsh Government:

Site and Context Analysis Guide: Capturing the value of site:

<http://gov.wales/topics/planning/policy/guidanceandleaflets/site-and-context-analysis-guide>

Practice Guidance: Planning for Sustainable Buildings:

<http://gov.wales/topics/planning/policy/guidanceandleaflets/practice-guidance-planning-for-sustainable-buildings/?lang=en>

Target Market and Visitor Experience

The target markets for the hotel and retail need to be identified and clearly set out so that facilities can be designed accordingly in terms of size, layout and quality of finish, as well as to accommodate servicing requirements.

Careful thought should be given to the qualities of the spaces which will be created and how these will have an impact on the experience of visitors. The scale of spaces, amount of natural light, views in and out, landscape design and material qualities will all influence what the places feel like and how successful they will be. Some of the spaces in the proposed scheme will feel dark and oppressive due to being under the deck. Attractive spaces which people want to spend time in and return to will be commercially beneficial. It will be useful to storyboard the different routes, e.g. approach, parking, area visited etc. that the two main user groups - hotel guests and retail customers - will take to inform the proposals, taking into account their length of stay.

There was no information relating to costs per metre squared at the review. This is a basic but useful indicator of the potential quality of finish which could be achieved. It is important that the budget is sufficient for the quantity and quality of accommodation being proposed. Late changes to the brief or unresolved design issues would be likely to eat into the budget, meaning a reduction in quality.

Simplify

As with the previous two reviews, the scheme is overly complex both in terms of ideas and building forms. We reiterate that unnecessary complexity is likely to add cost and makes achieving good quality more challenging.

The idea of a 'slice' through the site, connecting footpaths in the forest to the river has good potential and makes use of the natural assets of the site and context. There may be merit in strengthening this as the main concept for the proposal and simplifying the number of other ideas. This new 'route' could be usefully used to organise elements of the brief on the site and lead past the new public node (not forgetting the other constraints and opportunities identified in the site analysis). The relationship between each of the uses on the site and the 'slice' will need to be carefully planned to make this concept work.

Further review

The Design Commission is concerned that this is the third review of this scheme to take place, yet basic, fundamental design issues have not been properly addressed or resolved. The Commission is happy to discuss the concerns outlined in this and previous reports in more detail with the client, design team and planning authority in order to help the design process progress in a positive direction.

Comisiwn Dylunio Cymru Design Commission for Wales is the trading name of DCFW LIMITED, a Private Limited Company established under the Companies Act 1985 and 2006, Company No: 04391072 incorporated in England and Wales. DCFW is a non-statutory consultee, a private limited company and a wholly owned subsidiary of the Welsh Government. Registered office: 4th Floor, Cambrian Buildings, Mount Stuart Square, Cardiff CF10 5FL T: 029 2045 1964 E connect@dcfw.org. The comment recorded in this report, arising from formal Design Review through our Design Review Service, is provided in the public interest for the consideration of local planning authorities as a material consideration and other users of the Design Review Service. It is not and should not be considered 'advice' and no third party is bound or required to act upon it. The Design Review Service is delivered in line with DCFW's published protocols, code of conduct and complaints procedure, which should be read and considered by users of the service.

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

Attendees

Architect/Planning Consultant:	Andrew Kelly, ASK Architects
Local Authority:	Richard Thomas, Snowdonia NPA
Design Review Panel:	
Chair	Simon Richards
Lead Panellist	Cora Kwiatkowski
Panel	Michael Gwyther-Jones

Chris Jones
Jen Heal, Design Advisor, DCFW
Amanda Spence, Design Advisor, DCFW
Carole-Anne Davies, CE, DCFW

Observing:

Andrew Richards, Arts Council Wales
Jane Colhoun, Arts Council Wales