

Statws/Status:
Cyfrinachol / Confidential



Adroddiad Adolygu Dylunio: 2 March 2007
Design Review Report:

Dyddiad Cyfarfod / Cyflwyno'r Deunydd: 14 February 2007
Meeting Date / Material Submitted:

Lleoliad/Location: Aberystwyth

Disgrifiad o'r Cynllun
Scheme Description: Law Courts

Cleient/Asiant: Her Majesty's Court Services
Client/Agent: [HMCS] [Melinda Thomas]

Developer/Datblygwr: David MacLean Developments
[Kevin Higgs]

Pensaer/Architect: Atkins [David Morris,
William Martin]
Feilden & Mawson [Hywel Davies]
Ceredigion CC

Awdurdod Cynllunio:
Planning Authority:

Statws Cynllunio: Pre-application
Planning Status:

Y Panel Adolygu Dylunio/
Design Review Panel:
Alan Francis (cadeirydd/chair) Richard Parnaby
Cindy Harris (swyddog/officer) Jonathan Hines
Charlie Deng (swyddog/officer) Ewan Jones

Lead Panellist: Ewan Jones

Sylwedyddion/Observers:

Carole-Anne Davies, DCFW

Cyflwyniad/Presentation

The site is located between one of the main roads into Aberystwyth and a railway line. It lies on the valley floor and is overlooked by low hills to the north and south. It is within 10 minutes walk of the town centre and public transport links. Vehicular access is via a new spine road to the north, leading into a secure yard. Footpaths and cycle ways are provided to the south along Park Avenue and to the west between this site and a primary school, leading to a new bridge across the railway.

This proposal is for three courts – civil, youth magistrates and criminal - all at first floor level, with one multi-use room, administration and support functions below. All the upper courts benefit from daylight through clerestory glazing. The architects have tried to make a complicated set of adjacencies simple and legible and the internal layout reflects a hierarchy of public / semi-public / private space. A large double height concourse behind the main entrance runs the full length of the building and leads to a stair/lift core at either end, expressed externally as fully glazed elements. A four metre high stone wall encloses the site to north, east and west, and this same element runs through the building to the rear of the concourse. The raised, recessed entrance suggests the gravitas associated with a prominent civic building.

The scheme will be procured via a private developer and the client is shortly to appoint David MacLean as the preferred bidder. There are a number of constraints, some concerned with segregation of function and security; others with noise impact from the main road and railway line. There has been extensive consultation with the end users and the client is satisfied with the legibility and openness as presented.

The simplicity and legibility of the building form is carried through into the environmental response. Natural ventilation will be used where possible, combined with displacement ventilation and mixed mode where necessary. The glazed stair towers will be used as heat chimneys for passively venting hot air. The building will be linked into the proposed biomass heating system serving the new Welsh Assembly Government and Ceredigion Council buildings on a neighbouring site to the east, and internal areas will be zoned according to patterns of use. The Law Courts will achieve a BREEAM Excellent rating; a wind turbine and solar water heating are proposed.

Ymateb y Panel/Panel's Response

The Panel was informed that the design process was between RIBA stages C and D. The Panel's view was that it was at a slightly earlier stage and we noted that there were inconsistencies and missing information in the presented material, such as a lack of contextual information, no evidence of the structural solution, or a servicing strategy. We were informed that a separate site exists between the Law Courts and the WAG / Ceredigion Council buildings to the east. The planning application will be

submitted in the near future and then further consultations will follow before the design is finalised. The project budget is around £10m, or £225/sq ft. The procurement method will be Design + Build, with the architect novated at least until RIBA Stage E, and possibly later.

The Panel questioned whether this edge-of-town site was an appropriate location for a civic building. An alternative site on Mill Street, which was more central, had been discounted for a number of reasons including access.

The Panel thought that the roof design was the least successful aspect, especially the impact of the protruding rooflights on the end elevations. We thought that there should be more, smaller lightwells to light circulations spaces in the main body of the building. We considered that a profiled metal roof finish was not appropriate for a civic building and suggested sedum for the main building, as well as the single storey administration wing.

The Panel questioned the provision of two separate staircases housed in glazed towers, and suspected that this was driven by the requirements of a formal architectural approach, rather than by usage volume or patterns. The architect agreed that they were there partly to frame the entrance, and confirmed that both staircases acted as a means of escape in case of fire and needed to be separated from the main spaces. We suggested that the two stairwells and lifts be combined into one central core, and that functions and destinations be separated at first floor level. A central accommodation stair without doors would enhance accessibility and legibility internally.

If the glazed towers are to remain, their success will depend on the quality of detailing of the curtain walling system and we were surprised to learn that standard curtain walling is being considered. We were told that cleaning and maintenance would be done by a 'cherry picker'. There were clear contradictions between the idea of fireproofing the stairs and providing ventilation to the main spaces, and some form of fire dampers to close off the ventilation in case of fire would be required. The whole glazed unit would need protection from overheating. It was acknowledged that the towers came first as a design element, followed by the ventilation strategy.

The Panel commented that the strong symmetry facing the road will largely be lost on people approaching the building at an oblique angle, but the architect argued that it would add interest for passers-by. We were told that the raised plinth was largely a response to anticipated flood levels, but was also an architectural way of enhancing the sense of arrival. The Panel thought that this was diminished by the heavy disabled access ramps which block the central part of the elevation.

The Panel thought that the concourse should be wider around the main entrance to accommodate a greater density of people, rather than a uniform width throughout. We thought that the entrances to the stairwells, if they remain, should be made

more welcoming and legible, and the architect agreed that these details were not fully resolved.

The Panel questioned whether the external enclosing wall needed to be so high and so extensive. We accepted that it would be necessary at the rear but not necessarily along each side [east and west] of the site. In response, the team stated that the yard and parking area have to be secure. We thought that the way in which the wall passed into the building was an interesting architectural device, but could be confusing as there is no entry to the building at that point. Our main concern was that such a high and impenetrable barrier detracted from the public realm around the site.

It was confirmed that the BREEAM Excellent rating would be based on a post-construction assessment. The Panel suggested that the biomass district heating could be used for cooling as well. However, the M&E consultant pointed out that this was not a heavily air conditioned building and that chilled beams will be used in the court rooms. We noted that there was no evidence of wind turbines or solar water heating shown on the plans, and we were told that a free standing 12 kW wind turbine could be located on site. We suggested that two smaller turbines could replace the antennae at the top of the glazed towers, which were likely to be expensive and unnecessary.

Crynodeb/Summary

The Panel welcomed the aspirations for a high quality and sustainable civic building. We are not convinced by the choice of site and would have preferred a more central location. However, we think this proposal has the potential to succeed if the following major issues are addressed:

- The roof design should be rethought, and the possibility of introducing lightwells considered to bring daylight into the circulation areas of the deep plan space. We would like to see a green roof used as an alternative to profiled metal sheeting.
- We are concerned that the glazed stair towers will be prone to overheating and their function as fire escapes could compromise their function as solar chimneys. Detailed design and component quality will be critical for the front elevation and we are not convinced that standard curtain walling can deliver this. We think the internal circulation would work better with one central stair/lift core.
- We think that the high surrounding wall will detract from the quality of the public realm around the building. The pedestrian link and the school to the east, and the significant public buildings to the west, deserve a better response. We question the necessity for bollards at the front, in view of the raised plinth.
- While we understand the architectural desire for symmetry, we think this has the effect of restricting the entrance to the building and the internal circulation, and this is compounded by the external ramps.

- More consultant input is needed, especially with regard to landscaping. The structural solution should be expressed on the drawings.
- We support the decision to achieve BREEAM Excellent and to link into the biomass district heating system, but we would like to see the renewable energy generation better integrated with the design. We are not convinced by the antennae which have no function and will be extremely expensive.

Diwedd/End

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