

**Statws/Status:**

**Cyfrinachol / Confidential**



**Adroddiad Adolygu Dylunio:** 18 December 2007  
**Design Review Report:**

**Dyddiad Cyfarfod / Meeting Date:** 5 December 2007

**Lleoliad/Location:** Station Road, Bangor

**Disgrifiad o'r Cynllun** Residential  
**Scheme Description:**

**Developer/Datblygwr:** Metier Group [Aidan Murphy]

**Pensaer/Architect:** FJ architects [Phil Clay,  
Ian Dickinson]

**Ymgynghorwyr Cynllunio:** Iwan Evans Planning Consultant  
**Planning Consultants:** [Iwan Evans]

**Awdurdod Cynllunio:** Gwynedd CC  
**Planning Authority:**

**Statws Cynllunio:** Pre-application  
**Planning Status:**

**Y Panel Adolygu Dylunio/**  
**Design Review Panel:**  
Richard Parnaby (cadeirydd/chair) Phil Roberts  
Cindy Harris (swyddog/officer) Lyn Owen  
Charlie Deng (swyddog/officer) Michael Griffiths  
Ann-Marie Smale

**Lead Panellist:** Phil Roberts

**Sylwedyddion/Observers:** Alison Smith, WAG

## **Cyflwyniad/Presentation**

The brief was for a residential apartment scheme including a proportion of affordable housing. The proposed site is adjacent to the main train station and transport interchange in Bangor. The dramatic change in levels, going north up Station Road, makes this a very prominent site with good views to the east and south. The proposed height of the building is justified by reference to a number of relatively tall buildings within the Bangor area. The proposal includes the widening of Convent Lane to the north of the site.

The building's footprint has been reduced, in response to concerns from the Local Planning Authority, and minimal car parking standards have been agreed. An early design decision was to use a timber frame construction, in the interests of buildability and sustainability. External finishes include traditional render, coloured cladding panels, and timber louvres to the external staircases and possibly the balconies. Two projecting fins mark the entrance and provide a focal point for the building; the angle formed by the fins is replicated in the balconies on the east and south elevations.

It is intended to illuminate the fins and the stairwells at night. An area for public art has been identified on the south facing end wall, which will be highly visible on exiting from the station.

The developer aims for the scheme to achieve an EcoHomes Good rating. The structural timber will be FSC certified, with good levels of insulation. The site itself is in a sustainable location, next to public transport and with minimal parking provision. The landscaping will be kept simple with boundary planting and a green strip to the east and south.

Although unable to be present, the Local Authority have written to support this proposal. They welcome the high density and minimal parking on this central site, along with the 17 affordable housing units and the provision of a prominent piece of public art. In pre-application discussions they have encouraged a modern design solution.

## **Ymateb y Panel/Panel's Response**

The Panel welcomed the proposed residential use on this central site, but we had major concerns over the proposed massing and density and we considered that this proposal was an overdevelopment of the site.

The Panel thought that the general site layout, with one block addressing Station Road and a secondary block to the rear, was acceptable. However, we noted that the resulting east/west axis has the unfortunate effect of creating single aspect, north facing units, most of which are the affordable units. The internal layout as proposed does not help this situation and some

corner apartments [eg nos 108 and 120 on the first floor, repeated on subsequent floors] have living areas with very little natural daylight, which the Panel considered virtually uninhabitable. We thought it was vital to reconsider this arrangement, to improve both the amenity for residents and the asset value of the development.

The Panel was puzzled that the [in our view acceptable] pattern book layout of the north facing units was not replicated for the opposite, south facing apartments, especially given the modular nature of the construction. We thought that the south facing units, while they had an ample floor area overall, were too narrow and deep in plan. Without more frontage they will feel meanly dimensioned.

The Panel urged that, in amending the design to address the planning problems noted above, the design team should re-visit the form of the building and the external modelling. We advised that, if it is really necessary to have a “kink” in the block facing the road, this should occur centrally, at the same point as the entrance (but bearing in mind our comments on the entrance below). We thought the ‘fins’ surrounding the main entrance were an unnecessary addition, did not add to the architectural quality and would be expensive to build.

The Panel advised that re-locating the entrance more centrally on the northern elevation would allow for a better site layout, internal circulation and possibly the introduction of dual-aspect units. We thought that two stair cores may well be sufficient, rather than three, and we questioned how acceptable external staircases would be to residents. We were surprised that the communal area at third floor level would be used as an external drying area, and we could not see how this would work. We were not convinced by the proposed public artwork on the blank southern wall; we would prefer to see that wall opened up with fenestration and public art better integrated with the building fabric.

The Panel wondered what was specific to North Wales in this design. The architect explained that local reference was expressed in the materials, in particular the Welsh slate plinth. With regard to the five storey timber frame construction, the Panel advised that issues of settlement and shrinkage needed to be considered, especially given the multi-jointed panelised cladding material proposed.

The Panel noted the efforts that had been made to minimise parking and we thought this was acceptable, provided that the Local Authority considered it to be adequate without generating on-street parking pressure in the vicinity. It was reported that the Local Authority was satisfied and that the scheme was aimed at local workers. We encouraged the provision of cycle parking and storage spaces.

It was agreed that the landscape strategy was largely a question of boundary treatment. It was confirmed that the existing fence to the south belongs to Network Rail, and it is their responsibility to maintain it. The substation will be relocated, with the new one on the western end of site, behind the parking. We encouraged the team to provide a direct means of accessing the 'courtyard' area, which would involve relocating the core / service riser. We thought that the design of this communal 'courtyard' area was poorly conceived, its use was unclear, and it would impact on the privacy of the adjacent ground floor flats. This space could be sub-divided to provide semi-private outdoor spaces for these flats. Informal bench seating would increase the general amenity value of the green spaces.

The Panel considered that an EcoHomes Good rating was very unambitious and not a significant improvement on the statutory minimum. We would like to see the scheme aim for EcoHomes Excellent, which will soon be the minimum requirement for all social housing in receipt of Social Housing Grant [currently the minimum requirement is for EcoHomes Very Good]. We supported the use of FSC timber and urged the team to avoid individual electric heating solutions for each apartment.

### **Crynodb/Summary**

The Panel supported the proposed use for this central site, and the basic site layout. However, we consider the proposal to be an unacceptable response to the site and its context. In particular:

- We have reservations about the proposed density and are not convinced that the height or massing are appropriate in this situation
- We think the architectural treatment is weak and unresolved. The proposed 'fins' and public artwork are inappropriate and there should be no distraction from a good, simple design concept with high quality detailing.
- The internal layout is very poor and delivers an unacceptable level of amenity in places.
- A good start to revising the layout would be to relocate the main entrance to the north, and to ensure that each unit has good daylight levels.
- The sustainability strategy is disappointing and lacks any aspiration to rise to the challenge of genuine low-carbon development
- We would like to see a strategy for the provision of some properly landscaped external space, both public and private.
- We support the minimum parking provision, provided that it is based on an evaluation of realistic demand by the Local Authority
- The quality of the presentation material was poor, lacking a clear site and context analysis and basic information, including site sections, that

would allow the Panel (or any other audience) to form reliable judgements about the impact of the proposals.

**Diwedd/End**

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