

Addroddiad Adolygu Dylunio Design Review Report

Review Status: **Confidential**

Meeting date:	21st January 2009
Issue Date:	3rd February 2009
Scheme Location:	Betws y Coed
Scheme Description:	Public Convenience
Planning Status:	Pre-application

Part1: Presentation

In 2007 a business case was prepared for a new Public Convenience in Betws-y-Coed, based on a 20p service charge. The existing facility on this site is by far the most used public convenience in the county, but is in a poor condition. Conwy CBC who are driving this project also wish to use this opportunity to divert visitors into Station Road, where there are cafes and shops, instead of driving straight through the town. They wish to incorporate a TIC [Tourist Information Centre] function into this building, as the existing TIC is not centrally located.

A design competition was held and the brief specified a 'high quality, fully sustainable and carbon neutral' building. The winning team have developed an organic building form inspired by the existing desire lines running across Cae Llan. The green roofed canopy extends across two 'pods', one for the public conveniences and one for the Tourist Information Centre.

The Planning Authority, Snowdonia National Park, is keen to work closely with Conwy CBC on this project and supports the principle of a new 'landmark' building. The team hope to submit a planning application in two months' time.

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

The Panel welcomed the ambition and commitment of the client Local Authority, as well as the simple and appropriate design concept. If the quality shown could be faithfully translated into a finished building, this would be an exemplary scheme which should enhance the reputation of this part of Snowdonia. Our reservations relate to doubts that this is achievable. In summary:

- The CGI images are seductive, but need further testing and specialist engineering input to inform the detailing. If the proposed solutions do not deliver the desired quality, alternatives should be sought. For example, a metal roof finish may work better than turf to achieve the desired form, and a timber frame may have benefits over steel.
- The TIC strategy needs re-thinking to produce a holistic response for this area, even if this means changing the brief for this project.
- The footprint of the TIC 'pod' and the full height glazing should be reconsidered.
- The signage strategy should be identified at an early stage as it will have a major impact on the building's appearance.
- The attendant's office should be well insulated, heated and daylight.
- We would support a deviation from BREEAM requirements if this was justified as the best environmental solution. Water efficient appliances should be the starting point of the sustainability strategy. The usefulness of solar thermal panels should be evaluated, provided that a suitable location can be found.
- All timber should be locally sourced.

Part 2: Discussion and Panel Response in Full

The Panel applauded the simplicity of the concept and built form, the creation of new public realm, and the response to pedestrian desire lines. However, the quality of the finished scheme will depend greatly on the execution of the design. The elegant simplicity shown on the CGI images will need to be faithfully translated and we question whether this is achievable within the given budget.

For example, the cantilevered roof is shown with a very slender section at the edge, and we think that this detail needs the input of a structural engineer before it can be deemed workable. We understand the architectural intention for the roof to appear to float, but this will not necessarily be achieved simply by using a steel frame. The curved glazing shown in the clerestory will actually be timber framed and faceted, or alternatively omitted altogether, while the vertical timber will discolour badly at the bottom if it goes all the way to the ground. These examples when taken together all serve to detract from the clarity and simplicity shown on the drawings.

The slender roof profile is more likely to be realised with a sheet metal roof finish rather than turf, and we thought this could be attractive and appropriate. A structural timber frame with stressed skin ply could be used to achieve a thin roof and elegantly framed glazing. Every effort should be made to source the oak cladding from local forests.

The Panel was informed that the TIC 'pod' was likely to be a satellite office for the existing TIC. We think it is illogical for a small town such as Betws to have two TICs and suggest the Local Authority reviews its policy and provision, if possible creating a new facility that is efficiently run and centrally located. The current site is an attractive location in terms of commercial/business uses due to its high visibility and footfall. The TIC element of this scheme could be extended into the open covered space between the two pods. Considerable thought needs to be given to the use of full height glazing in the TIC pod, to ensure this is appropriate given the likely internal layouts, storage requirements and the need for signage.

Attendants will operate the Public Convenience full time and it is therefore important that their office be adequately sized, insulated, heated and daylit. We understand there is the possible requirement for a police and/or mountain rescue post, and this would be a suitable location.

The Panel supports the sustainability aspirations of the client and the intention to carry out a bespoke BREEAM assessment. Given the function of the building, we think that water conservation and efficiency should be paramount - using spray taps, low flush toilets and waterless urinals - and rainwater recycling would not necessarily be the best environmental option. This approach may conflict with BREEAM requirements, in which case we advise the team to be clear and explicit about the reasons for their choices, and be prepared to justify them. This would be more important than achieving a particular BREEAM rating.

Given the north facing pitch of the roof, there is no obvious location for solar water heating panels. If a green roof is specified it should be finished with a native meadow mix rather than sedum. We noted the incompatibility between green roofs and rainwater harvesting.

Procurement will be through a traditional contract, with the architect retained throughout. It is hoped to complete this project by Easter 2010.

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	Conwy County Borough Council [Hywel Jones]
Pensaer/Architect:	Seven Architecture [Ian Chapman]
Consultants:	WCP Associates [Gavin Garner]
Awdurdod Cynllunio/ Planning Authority	Snowdonia National Park Authority
Y Panel Adlygu Dylunio: Design review panel: Alan Francis [Chair] Cindy Harris [Officer]	Richard Parnaby Jonathan Hines Michael Griffiths Kedrick Davies
Lead Panellist:	Michael Griffiths

