

Addroddiad Adolygu Dylunio Design Review Report

Review Status: **Confidential**

Meeting date:	8th December 2010
Issue Date:	16th December 2010
Scheme Location:	Birds Lane Cowbridge
Scheme Description:	Retail
Planning Status:	Pre-application

Part1: Presentation

This proposal is for a sensitive site in a conservation area, with a number of listed buildings nearby. It has been in the ownership of RS Bird Ltd for the last 240 years, and this company will retain ownership and maintain an office on the site. Previous retail use on the site ended 18 months ago when the Garden Centre went into receivership and the existing buildings are in a poor state of repair.

Although the food store is the main anchor, a mixed retail offer including non-food outlets is seen as important for viability. The design of the low rise supermarket is deliberately contemporary, with stone and rendered elevations around a fully glazed north facing frontage. The row of non-food retail units, of one to two storeys, aims to reflect the scale of the High Street within the development site.

Service vehicles are separated from customer vehicles at the entrance to the site and the service road, with an integral walkway, runs along the eastern boundary and river bank to a service yard enclosed with a security and acoustic fence. Mature trees to the south and west will shield the development from its neighbours. An existing public right-of-way through the site will be re-routed.

A public consultation event was held recently over three days, and brought an overwhelmingly positive response. The Local Authority support a contemporary design approach and are pleased to note that a retail assessment will be forthcoming, as there are a number of vacant units on the High Street. (This was disputed by the site owner who stated that only 2 out of 112 units are currently vacant). They wish to protect the river bank as a public amenity and have concerns about the effect of backs of retail units on the river edge, the view towards them and the service access from the adjacent riverside public space.

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

The Panel was pleased to review this proposal for an important site in a historic town. However, given the significant omissions from the presentation material and the imminence of the planning application, we think this proposal is unsatisfactory. In summary:

- We think the programme for submitting a planning application should be reconsidered, and more time allowed for a more complete submission.
- This should include a rigorous contextual analysis, and a landscape and public realm strategy, all set out clearly in the Design and Access statement (DAS).
- The site layout should then be revisited in the light of the above findings.
- In particular, better use should be made of the river bank as public open space.
- We would like to see a more distinctive contemporary architectural approach which is grounded in an understanding of the qualities of Cowbridge as a place.
- We think that the developer should commit to achieving BREEAM Excellent for this site, rather than the statutory minimum of Very Good. Serious consideration should be given to increasing daylight levels in the bulk of the food store.

Part 2: Discussion and Panel Response in Full

The Panel noted that various documents were missing from the presentation material, including a transport assessment, landscape strategy, and BREEAM pre-assessment. We were informed that these are mostly now available in draft form, and that the BREEAM pre-assessment is being carried out.

There will be a commitment to achieve BREEAM Very Good in the planning application although the end user stated his strong preference for an Excellent rating. The Panel advised that, in order to achieve Excellent, there should be a firm commitment at this stage. In our view this standard is becoming more accepted and increasingly adopted by major supermarket providers. We recommended that daylight levels within the depth of the store should be increased by using rooflights. This would involve changing the supermarket's current practice of installing false ceilings throughout the store, but we thought that this practice should be reviewed, to improve environmental performance. A different roof form could facilitate this, while also referencing the existing grain of buildings in the town.

The Development Brief for this site prepared by the Local Authority emphasises the importance of the public realm, but we found little evidence that this had been seriously considered. The planning consultant pointed out that this brief dates from 2004, but acknowledged that a Landscape Architect had not yet been involved in the project development. The Panel stated the importance of incorporating the design of public space at an early stage and in tandem with the design of the built form. We thought that if landscape and urban design considerations had been to the fore and had generated the early design, this would have resulted in a much improved site layout. Currently the site

plan is dominated by car parking provision, resulting in little space available for public realm or landscaping.

The Panel would like to see an enhancement of the river bank into an attractive area of public space, rather than a partially fenced service road with retail units backing onto it. We were informed that a new bridge across the river at this point was not under consideration by the developer, and that this was not justified in terms of access or permeability. However, we thought that in terms of opening up the river bank, a bridge would be a major attraction and a positive enhancement for the benefit of both the site development and the wider community. Furthermore, we thought it was unfortunate that the most sensitive part of the bank would be sterilised and cut off for use as a service yard. This area could have been exploited as a useful public amenity, as part of a site layout informed by a landscape and public realm strategy.

The Panel considered that more work needed to be done on a contextual analysis of the site and its relationship to the townscape of the high street, demonstrating how this has informed the design development. We accepted that this work may have been done, but it is not evidenced in the drawings presented, and should be incorporated into the DAS. At the moment the proposed development does not appear to respond to its context or offer a distinctive sense of place, and gives the impression of a generic out-of-town design transposed into a town centre. A 3D model would help in demonstrating that an appropriate relationship between this proposal and the historic town centre has been achieved.

There will be a managed control of surface water runoff into the river, rather than a reliance on simple soakaways. The car park surface is yet to be decided, and the Panel recommended that porous surfaces be used where possible. More cycle parking should be provided, nearer to the main supermarket entrance. We noted that there were two pedestrian routes into the site from the High Street, and advised that these should be more clearly shown on the drawings.

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

RS Bird Ltd (Jeffrey Bird)
Waitrose (Martin Gorman)

Pensaer/Architect:

Kennedy James Griffiths (Simon Kennedy)

Consultants:

Alder King (Dale Evans, Claire Stretton)

Awdurdod Cynllunio/
Planning Authority

Vale of Glamorgan (Sara Thomas)

Y Panel Adlygu Dylunio:
Design Review Panel:
Wendy Richards [Chair]
Cindy Harris [Officer]
Simon Carne

Kieren Morgan
Ashley Bateson
Toby Adam
Jonathan Hines

Lead Panellist:

Ashley Bateson

Sylwedyddion/Observers:

Sue Jones (DCFW)