

NB. This report was confidential when it was seen at pre-application stage and relates only to the version seen at that stage. It has been made public since the planning application was submitted in May 2011

Addroddiad Adolygu Dylunio Design Review Report

Review Status: **Confidential**

Meeting date:	19th January 2011
Issue Date:	1st February 2011
Scheme Location:	Blaengors Farm, Carmarthen
Scheme Description:	Residential
Planning Status:	Pre-application

Part1: Presentation

This proposal is for a new dwelling to replace a derelict farmhouse on an isolated rural site. Access is down a 300m track and the site enjoys good views and solar access despite a row of tall conifers to the east.

The clients wish to build a two storey house constructed from structural insulated panels (SIPS), and they have used the services of the panel manufacturers to provide indicative plans which have been the subject of pre-application discussion with the Local Authority. They have set out their design priorities in a draft Design & Access statement and these are:

- functionality – a design that allows for disability and ageing
- a relatively low budget – every penny spent wisely
- environmental sustainability – with a mortgage from the Ecology Building society
- form – with large first floor living space to maximise light and connection with the outdoors.

The Local Authority consider that this proposal does not follow the policy on replacement dwellings contained in the UDP, and have particular concerns about the proposed size and scale which they think is disproportionate in its context. Furthermore, in their view, the design of the proposed dwelling does not respect the character of the existing house or the area.

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

The Panel was pleased to be asked to advise and assist on the development of this proposal, which appears to have reached a stalemate in negotiations between the applicant and the Local Authority. In our view the current proposal is unsatisfactory and fails to fulfil the brief given by the client, in a way which meets local and national planning policies.

We think that the clients should employ an architect with experience of this kind of project, to help them evaluate different design options, maximise environmental sensitivity, and liaise with the Local Authority on their behalf. Ultimately, this approach should be the most effective in terms of costs, time and long-term satisfaction. The current proposal, drawn up by a timber panel contractor who is not commercially independent, could lead to a conflict between the interests of the client and the contractor.

Part 2: Discussion and Panel Response in Full

The Panel stated clearly that we thought the current design failed to adequately fulfil the clients' stated brief and priorities. Standard solutions have been offered which are not appropriate for this particular site and brief. In particular, the internal planning of rooms and spaces is very inefficient, and certainly needs revision.

The clients explained that they require generous internal spaces to accommodate their lifestyle. The Panel noted that although the proposed house is relatively large in floor area it is also inefficiently planned. We are confident that it would be possible to meet the clients' needs for generous living and recreation spaces in a smaller area and create a more attractive and interesting interior.

Furthermore, the advice the clients have been given on sustainable design and construction could certainly be challenged. The Panel thought that the clients would benefit greatly from the services of an independent, professional intermediary who understood their requirements, the character of the site and context, and the concerns of the Local Authority.

Specifically, an architect with experience of designing new bespoke houses in a rural setting would be able to set out a clear analysis of the existing buildings, site and context, as a starting point for the development of a design which reflects the client's particular wishes and lifestyle. This should satisfy the demand for certain types of internal spaces, as well as delivering a building which is environmentally sustainable and economical to maintain. The Panel understood the clients' desire for an upper room filled with light and a sense of connection to the outdoor space, but we thought that there were other more satisfactory ways of achieving this than the current proposal. We encouraged them to think about precedents in terms of houses they have seen which they admired, aspects of which might be incorporated into their new home.

In our view, a traditional architectural design should not be a planning requirement, and an experienced architect would be able to produce and justify a contemporary design in this situation (if required), whose quality should ensure a favourable reception from the statutory authority. Alternatively, the clients and their architect may decide to pursue a

traditional form but using modern materials and details. In a similar way, the designer should not feel bound to follow the exact footprint of the existing building and it may be that changing the orientation by 90 degrees, or adopting an L shaped plan, would give far better solar access and views, as well as reducing the sense of scale. Connection with external spaces could then be achieved by glazed doors on the ground floor opening on to a sunny courtyard.

The clients have already considered various ways of ensuring a good environmental performance. However, all planning proposals for new houses now have to meet a minimum standard under the Code for Sustainable Homes (CSH) of Code Level 3+. They may well wish to achieve a higher standard, such as Level 4 or 5, but in any event a CSH assessor will be needed to undertake a pre-assessment of any design proposal, and advise on necessary steps to attain a particular level under the Code.

As promised, we include the following contacts and reading which will hopefully help the client to progress this scheme in a way which is more satisfactory to themselves and the Local Authority.

Contacts:

For advice on finding a suitable architect

Royal Society of Architects in Wales.

4 Cathedral Road

Cardiff

CF11 9LJ

T 029 2022 8987

F 029 2023 0030

Email: rsaw@inst.riba.org

Website:

<http://www.architecture.com/Regionsandinternational/UKNationsandregions/Wales/RSAW.aspx>

Reading:

The Place of Houses Charles Moore, Gerald Allen and Donlyn Lyndon – originally published in the 1970s but new edition currently available on Amazon.

The Most Beautiful House in the World Witold Rybczynski an engaging story of building a house in New England. This is in print and available on Amazon.

The Green Self-Build Book by Jon Broome, available on Amazon.

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

Mr and Mrs Bryn Thomas

Pensaer/Architect:

Custom Homes

Consultants:

Awdurdod Cynllunio/
Planning Authority

Carmarthenshire CC

Y Panel Adlygu Dylunio:

Design Review Panel:

Ewan Jones [Chair]

Cindy Harris [Officer]

Richard Parnaby

Steve Smith

Simon Carne

Andrew Linfoot

Lead Panellist:

Richard Parnaby

Sylwedyddion/Observers:

Angharad Williams (research student,
University of Bath)