

# Addroddiad Adolygu Dylunio Design Review Report

## Review Status: **Confidential**

Meeting date:	18 November 2009
Issue Date:	1st December 2009
Scheme Location:	Carmarthen
Scheme Description:	Office / Residential
Planning Status:	Pre-application [Priory Street] Outline approval exists [Merlin Street]

## Part1: Presentation

Bro Myrddin Housing Association owns two possible sites in Carmarthen and wishes to build a new office headquarters with associated affordable housing. They sought advice from the Commission on which site was preferable for the office development of 10,000 sq ft. Their key criteria are: accessibility for residents, staff and the general public; an increased public profile in the area; budget; and deliverability.

Site A [Merlin Street] is central to the town, but hidden on approach from the town centre by the new cinema. Site B [Priory Street] fronts a busy road and would offer a more visible frontage. There are important issues of access and archaeology to be addressed in developing this site for any purpose. Indicative block plans for both sites were presented, and dimensioned plans and 3D images for site A only.

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

The Panel understands the early stage of this project, and the consequent lack of detailed information or proposals. On the balance of the information we have been given, the Panel would prefer to see the new headquarters built on the Priory Street site [Site B]. Our observations are summarised below:

- Site B is preferred for reasons of scale, access, corporate identity and timing. However, massing studies should be prepared to ensure that the proposed scale is

appropriate, and this should be a starting point for the preparation of a detailed development brief.

- Care should be taken to ensure that any supporting development to the rear of site B is well integrated with surrounding routes and services.
- We would like to see revised, minimum parking standards, which will nevertheless be dependent on the size and type of development. This should be informed by travel patterns of staff and other users. A rationalisation of parking working with the adjacent sites to the rear of Site B would allow for increased amenity space.
- The developer should begin discussions with the Local Planning Authority, to explore acceptable solutions for each site, but with particular reference to access for site B from Priory Street, and to the archaeological issues on the site.
- We would like to see part of the Merlin Street site retained for residential use.

## **Part 2: Discussion and Panel Response in Full**

The original plan was to develop an office block on site A of 6,000-7,000 sq ft. The required office accommodation then grew to 10,000 sq ft, increasing the scale of the block and reducing the number of housing units, from 34 to 28. The client is confident that the revised size, to include archive space, meeting and conference rooms, has sufficient future flexibility, and will provide them with a permanent solution.

The Panel advised that an urban design analysis of the context of each site would help identify the correct solution, together with a wider feasibility study addressing developable value and the issue of corporate identity. These would then inform detailed design briefs which should be developed for each site.

The Panel thought that the 4 storey office block on Merlin Street would be an inappropriate scale for its context. The materials, urban form, legibility and defensible space all need to respond to the changing context. The relationship between different uses within the site needs to be carefully considered especially if, as suggested in the event of the choice of Site B for the new office, the southern part of this site is sold on for commercial use and the northern part retained for residential development. The Panel agreed that a smaller scale commercial use on Site A, mixed with some housing, would be appropriate for this town centre site.

These concerns suggest that site B [Priory Street] would be the better option for the new headquarters building. The larger site would allow a larger footprint and lower height (2 storeys was suggested by Bro Myrddin) for the office block, with more ground floor accommodation possible and therefore better public access. There would be additional benefit in helping to regenerate the street and the ability to develop a prominent corner block to promote the corporate image.

However, we were concerned that the location of residential units to the rear of site B and adjacent to a car park and football ground, would render them isolated and disconnected. A better use for this part of the site may be for community workshops, particularly on a temporary basis, and this should be explored through public consultation.

The Panel questioned whether the current parking provision was too high, and advised that the car parking requirement for the office might be merged with the existing car parks to

the rear of site B, to rationalise provision and minimise its impact on this site. It was suggested that BREEAM minimum standards for parking might help in this regard.

The exact type of social housing provision is still to be determined. The Panel suggested that the developer could liaise with the nearby hospital to assess local need.

**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	Bro Myrddin Housing Association [Paul Davies]
Pensaer/Architect:	Lewis Partnership [Philip Lewis]
Consultants:	n/a
AwdurdodCynllunio/ Planning Authority	Carmarthenshire CC [Morgan Jones, John Llewelyn]
Y Panel Adlygu Dylunio: Design review panel: Ewan Jones [Chair] Cindy Harris [Officer] Lyn Owen	Michael Griffiths Maria Asanjo Simon Carne
Lead Panellist:	Maria Asanjo
Sylwedyddion/Observers:	Lu Sun [Cardiff University] Kieren Morgan [DCFWD]