

# Addroddiad Adolygu Dylunio Design Review Report

**Review Status: Confidential**

**NB. This report should be read in conjunction with the report on Castle Lane**

Meeting date:	30th September 2009
Issue Date:	8th October 2009
Scheme Location:	Castle Gardens Swansea
Scheme Description:	Residential
Planning Status:	Pre-application

## Part1: Presentation

The latest thinking on the City Centre development brief has revised some important spatial linkages. In particular, a major pedestrian route is envisaged running east from Oxford Street and the north eastern corner of Castle Square, down to the Strand and Parc Tawe.

This scheme responds to this new linkage and proposes the [previously consented] demolition of the Grade II listed cinema to open up access and vistas to the Castle. It concentrates development on the upper part of the site, along Worcester Place, in close proximity to the medieval walls of the old castle. Any new development would be constructed in such a way that archeological remains were not damaged. Levels around the existing castle walls would be lowered to correspond with historic levels and remove more recent rubble. Discussions with Cadw are ongoing and will include the merits [or otherwise] of demolishing the Grade II listed cinema, in order to improve the setting of the Grade I listed castle.

The lower eastern part of the site is left as a grassed bank, which is seen as an appropriate response to a busy traffic route. A simple pedestrian crossing on the Strand would replace the high level bridge.

The scheme provides 35 no. 2-bedroom units, in three blocks of 3-4 storeys. The blocks are widely spaced to allow daylight in and views out, and to form spacious courtyards that will act as view corridors for the apartments in the Castle Buildings to the west. Residents' access would be through these courtyards. The south western ground floor unit is a possible location for a Tourist Information Centre. The elevations are characterised by deep

chamfered window openings with internal and external balconies. The finish is white render on timber frame with internal loadbearing concrete block walls.

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

The Panel acknowledged that this was a difficult site and applauded the ambition to develop it and improve the surroundings of the Castle. While we commend the quality of the contextual analysis, we are unable to support this scheme for the following reasons:

- The lower part of the site facing the Strand needs to be developed as an integral part of the scheme, and a stronger urban edge provided for the Strand. The Local Authority should drive this aspect of the scheme with a clear planning/design brief.
- The execution of the pure architectural form could be difficult to realise and will need a very high quality of detailing, specification and supervision. This should be reflected in the budget, and if it cannot be done to this standard, it should not be attempted.
- We welcome the new linkage and the opening up of views to the Castle.
- We have no objection to the demolition of the existing cinema.
- Given the inaccuracy and inadequacy of some of the internal dimensions we were shown, it will need to be demonstrated that these spaces can be made to work. If they cannot be made to work without alteration, this will in turn affect the elevations.
- The aspiration to achieve Code for Sustainable Homes Level 4 across the site should be made a firm commitment by the client, especially given their experience of achieving this elsewhere in Swansea.

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

The Panel recognised the challenging nature of the site and commended the team for their response. We support the intelligent way in which the new route has been used to open up the area around the Castle and improve access and views. The conservation aspects of the proposal obviously await input from Cadw, but we would have no objection to the proposed demolition of the cinema. The scheme is also dependent on external sources of funding to acquire ownership of the cinema, and carry out enhancement works around the Castle.

The rest of the site is owned by CC Swansea who would be joint venture partners in this development. They would also have responsibility for maintaining the planted lower bank fronting the Strand. We were unhappy at the unimaginative treatment of this area and would like to see it dealt with as part of this scheme. We believe it would be a wasted opportunity to leave a weakly resolved and undefined area, with all the characteristics of 'left over space'. If it were fully integrated within the development we think this would enhance its overall viability. We would encourage the team to develop a working relationship with Cadw that would allow the proposal to extend south of the existing medieval wall that crosses the site.

The environment of the Strand would be improved by providing a strong urban edge at this point and there is no conflict between this and protecting the environs of the castle. We appreciate that this relatively small scheme is being expected to resolve a number of external considerations, and we would like to see more leadership from CC Swansea in helping to resolve these issues and creating a more viable quantum of development on the site.

According to the information we had been given, the internal space standards would not be workable. The architect accepted that they were not accurate but asserted that the spaces would be made to work as the design developed. We were assured that visibility lines would be protected and overlooking would be avoided between these blocks and Castle Buildings.

The architectural style is striking, but will need to be immaculately executed or it will not age well. The pure form shown on these images could be compromised by drainage, flashing and cill details, and the costs of resolving these details while protecting the concept, needs to be reflected in the budget. Any signage for the TIC will also impact on the purity of the form. The detailed design will need to resolve the difficulty of rendering right down to ground level. The deep window openings and internal balconies will affect daylight access internally, and this needs to be checked to ensure adequate daylight levels.

The sustainability statement appears to address the relevant issues, but in fact relates only to aspirations. The client confirmed that they wish to go beyond the minimum environmental standards and we encouraged them to commit to achieving Code Level 4 across the site and possibly exceeding that with certain units. They have confidence that a similar scheme of theirs in SA1 has achieved Code 4 with relatively low additional capital costs.

**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

Coastal Housing [Robin Blakley,  
David Fry, Steve Griffiths]

Pensaer/Architect:

Friedrich Ludewig [Acme Architects]

Consultants:

BDP [David Littler]  
NLP Planning [Gareth Williams]

AwdurdodCynllunio/  
Planning Authority

City and Council of Swansea [David Gill,  
Huw Mowbray, Steve Smith]

Y Panel Adlygu Dylunio:

Design review panel:

Alan Francis [Chair]

Cindy Harris [Officer]

Ann-Marie Smale

Roger Ayton

Phil Roberts

John Punter

Lead Panellist:

Phil Roberts

Sylwedyddion/Observers:

Simon Hartley [DCFW]

Gerard Ryan [DCFW]

Terry Morley, Julian Morgan,

[Holder Mathias Architects]