

# Addroddiad Adolygu Dylunio Design Review Report

## Review Status: **Confidential**

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|---------------------|---------------------|
| Meeting date:       | 18th August 2010    |
| Issue Date:         | 26th August 2010    |
| Scheme Location:    | Castle Lane Swansea |
| Scheme Description: | Mixed use           |
| Planning Status:    | Pre-application     |

## Part1: Presentation

This scheme was previously reviewed by DCFW in September 2009. Since then the design has been amended to reflect some of the realities of delivery, as well as our comments.

The general aim to improve connectivity between the city centre and Parc Tawe remains. This project is seen as part of a sequence of open green spaces and urban connections linking the two areas. By reintroducing housing into the city centre these connections will become more animated and civilised.

In response to DCFW's concerns about scale and overdevelopment, the number of units on site has been reduced from 28 to 24. The proposed copper cladding material has been tested against actual tenders and the budget, and the team is confident that it is deliverable. The blocks and courtyards have been reconfigured and the pedestrian bridge over the Strand has been omitted. The elevations have been calmed, roof terraces are omitted [apart from a terrace on the commercial block] and all balconies will be inset from the facades. There will be no basement, to minimise excavation, and parking spaces have been reduced from 25 to 6.

The Local Authority is generally supportive of this proposal for a key regeneration site with the proposed mix of uses and a more contextual design response. They appreciate the huge amount of research and design development which has been done to support the proposal. We were informed that a feasibility study has been commissioned to enhance public access to the Castle and provide a visitor centre.

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

The Panel welcomed the impressive degree of research and analysis which supported and informed this presentation. However, we think that an imminent planning application would be premature and major issues remain to be resolved. In summary:

- We accept the proposed height, scale and quantum of development, and we welcome the mix of uses.
- The final resolution should be simple and elegant, to achieve a good fit between relatively large blocks, a mix of uses and a small constrained site.
- The copper cladding is appropriate but needs no further embellishment. It may be worth considering the use of different finishes to reflect different uses.
- The detailing of the cladding and junctions between different materials should be of the highest quality.
- The plinth height on both blocks should follow the established precedent of presenting a very robust finish at street level with the metal cladding out of easy reach – we are therefore not convinced of the dropped plinth at ‘shoulder height’ for practical or compositional reasons.
- We are doubtful that the raised courtyard within the commercial block will enable good daylight quality and natural ventilation for the office space above.
- Further work is needed to refine the internal layouts and ensure that the spaces will function as intended.
- The adequacy of internal daylight levels needs to be clearly demonstrated.
- We would like to see a firm commitment to achieving Code Level 4 and BREEAM Excellent. Whatever the commitment is, it should be clear and specific.
- The environmental and servicing strategy should be integrated with and inform the design development.
- More detail is needed regarding the proposed roof plant area, showing plant area required, how it is to be incorporated into the roof pitches, and access arrangements. Any shrub / groundcover planting to be implemented must be given adequate growing conditions and an ongoing maintenance commitment.

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

The Panel commended the detailed analysis of the site and its context, and the ways in which this had influenced the design development and added to the richness of the scheme. The overall architectural concept is good and we welcomed the adjustment of the building line to respect views of the castle. We also appreciated the detailed response to our previous comments, and we have no objection to the current scale and quantum of development.

However, this remains a very ‘busy’ scheme on a constrained site. While we understand the wish to avoid blandness, the building itself should be restrained, elegant and beautifully detailed. The use of copper on the elevations is well justified, but a single treatment is recommended. Different colours, embossing or patterns in the brickwork plinth should all be avoided.

The organisation of the principle [residential] courtyard seems to work, although we would have liked to see some solar studies to confirm this impression. The team accepted that this courtyard would be in shade for a lot of the time, but they had increased the depth to the maximum feasible. We questioned this distance [12m] in terms of affording adequate privacy to residents from the commercial block, but were told that this was acceptable to the Local Authority and the client.

We were less convinced of the amenity value of the raised courtyard for the commercial block. This small courtyard has been designed to break up the elevation along Castle Lane, which might otherwise be overbearing, and to allow extra daylight into the offices and views out. We thought that the plan could work better if the courtyard was 'flipped', so as to act as a lightwell to the deep plan. In our view a continuous elevation for the commercial block along Castle Lane would not detract from the street scene.

With regard to the internal plans for individual units, we thought that the spaces were barely workable and would be further impacted by details such as concealed downpipes and vents to the roof. The inset balconies are so small that they are in danger of being lost in the process of detailed design. In our view a further iteration of detailed internal planning is necessary and may help to identify and resolve some of these issues.

The Panel had concerns that some internal areas will receive little daylight penetration. Although we were informed that extensive daylight studies have been done, the results of these studies, and ways in which the fenestration pattern was influenced as a result, were not presented. The project team was satisfied that the design meets the requirements of CSH [Code for Sustainable Homes] Level 3 for daylight, and additional [lower level] windows have been provided over and above what was considered strictly necessary.

The Panel questioned whether the roof gables had a functional relationship with the internal plan. We were informed that the roof pitches do correspond to the residential units, and that is why the front and rear pitches do not completely align. We thought that the roof plant area appeared as an afterthought and may sit awkwardly within the roof form. We were unconvinced by the proposal to screen it with roof-top planting where access and maintenance arrangements were not shown, and the rationale for sizing the plant area was unclear.

Although originally designed to meet Code Level 4, this is now seen as an option. We were pleased to hear that the fabric had been designed to meet Code Level 4, so that the decision to upgrade could be made relatively easily. We urged the team to be clear and specific about their current commitments, and to commit to the highest possible Code level. To this end, suitable sites for solar thermal panels should be identified now. We did not think this would be a suitable site for the use of biomass.

All windows should be fully openable to assist natural ventilation and individual control. There should be clear evidence that the mechanical and ventilation strategy has been integrated with the design development – for example showing the position of service risers where mechanical ventilation is proposed. The full daylight analysis should be included with the planning application.

The Panel sought assurance that design quality would be protected through the detailed design and construction phase. The client confirmed that the whole design team would be retained until after RIBA stage E. No contracts would be signed until after Stage E was complete. Sample wall panels are being produced, showing key details.

**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**

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| Asiant/Client/Datblygwr:<br>Agent/Client/Developer  | Coastal Housing Group [Steven Griffiths,<br>David Sharp, Stephen Yancek]   |
| Pensaer/Architect:  | Acme Architects [Friedrich Ludewig]  |
| Consultants:  | Nathaniel Lichfield & Partners<br>[Helen Ridgway]<br>BDP [Mathew Edis]     |
| AwdurdodCynllunio/<br>Planning Authority  | CC Swansea [Steve Smith, David Gill]                                       |
| Y Panel Adlygu Dylunio:<br>Design review panel:<br>Wendy Richards [Chair]<br>Cindy Harris [Officer]<br>Mark Hallett | Lynne Sullivan<br>Michael Griffiths<br>Kieren Morgan<br>Ashley Bateson     |
| Lead Panellist:   | Lynne Sullivan   |
| Sylwedyddion/Observers:   | Richard Keogh [DCFWD]<br>Liz Walder [RSAW]<br>Carolyn Pugsley [Freshwater] |