

Statws/Status:

Cyfrinachol (Confidential)



Adroddiad Adolygu Dylunio:
Design Review Report:

16 Mehefin 2005
16 June 2005

Dyddiad Cyfarfod / Cyflwyno'r Deunydd:
Meeting Date / Material Submitted:

1 Mehefin 2005
1 June 2005

Lleoliad/Location:
Disgrifiad o'r Cynllun
Scheme Description:

Merthyr Tydfil
Comfort House, Regeneration

Ymgynghorwyr Cynllunio:
Planning Consultants:
Client/Agent Cleient/Asiant:
Pensaer/Architect:

N/A
Latham Developments
Design Management
Partnership

Awdurdod Cynllunio:
Planning Authority:

Merthyr Tydfil CBC
Gavin Lewis,
Head of Regeneration
David Jones,
Regeneration Project Leader

Statws Cynllunio:
Planning Status:

Pre-planning
Application planned
end of June 2005

Y Panel Adolygu Dylunio/Design Review Panel:

John Punter (cadeirydd/chair) Carole-Anne Davies, CEO (swyddog/officer)
Douglas Hogg, Wendy Hall, Ewan Jones, Phil Roberts

Lead: Douglas Hogg

Cyflwyniad/Presentation

Officers of MTCBC regeneration team explained the context of the site and the pivotal position of the existing building on the southern approach to the town centre. This very poorly maintained and box-like 1960s building blights the end of the High Street, and will do the same to the new space to be created between it and St Tydfil's Church. The latter is a Grade 2 listed building that commands the western side of the existing, rather overgrown public space.

The bottom end of the High Street is being developed as a Café Quarter picking up on a clutch of cafes and pubs in the locality, with the street to be pedestrianised, repaved, and remodelled to allow outdoor eating and drinking on the pavements. The space in front of the church will include a performance space, facility for farmers markets and seasonal fairs. The treatment of this "arena" is to include public art.

The existing building currently accommodates a gym and local council social services facility on the ground floor. The upper floor appears to be vacant. The owners have proposed to refurbish the building by refenestrating it to provide floor to ceiling glazing on much of the ground floor, and three quarter height windows on the first floor. A new drum shaped feature will be created on the corner of the building to emphasise the entrance and create a meeting room on the first floor, and this will protrude a few feet above the flat roof. The new building would be suitable for a café bar on the ground floor and the upper floors could be let as office space (350 m²). There is car parking for eight cars, and servicing from the rear.

The WDA is to consider grant funding for the refurbishment of the building. Design Management Partnership, appointed by the client Latham Developments who own the building, have been asked to examine options for the refurbishment in the context of a public realm scheme by Austin Smith Lord.

MTCBC has submitted an Objective One funding bid, which was approved in May 2005, to fund the project to detailed design stages of the public realm enhancement in preparation for a planning application to be submitted at the end of June 2005.

Ymateb y Panel/Panel's Response

The Panel began by outlining the significant challenges in the refurbishment and re-use proposal. Whilst the "recycling" of buildings is an approach that DCFW often applauds, in the interest of economical and sustainable development, the Panel had numerous reservations of the viability of this approach on this very poor building.

The Panel emphasised that any treatment to a building of this poor quality and condition needed to be much more than a "facelift". Attention might be paid to creating a pitched roof to make the building respond better to its context and the scale of the existing streetscape, though this would be difficult given the depth of the building. The three storey version of the refurbishment was preferred and would create more options for mixed use. The proposal to add a circular tower could be interesting but it would need to be taller and bolder.

More could be done with the budget, and an innovative architectural approach could improve the fenestration and canopies. Alternatives might include more radical treatment,

fully exposing the concrete frame, emphasising the glazing and incorporating fabric canopies to enliven the façade. More extensive terraces might be accommodated with the access ramps and a well considered landscape design for this semi private/public space fronting the 'new square'.

The Panel also suggested that the addition of a third storey, perhaps with a reduced footprint, might help deliver a longer life solution capable of generating greater value, and that the grant assistance could be used to encourage this approach.

Alternatively, an artist or artists might be engaged to devise some temporary use and/or intervention to provide character and interest in the building in the short term. Consideration of a future long-term use could then be properly assessed later.

Crynodeb/Summary

The Panel considered the building to be of sufficiently poor quality to warrant demolition both because of its state of repair and its negative contribution to the character of the area even if properly maintained.

- Prior to further design work the structural soundness of the building should be thoroughly investigated and its life expectation assessed in relation to the costs of refurbishment.
- It is likely this comparison would indicate that in the longer term greater value for the public investment will be delivered by demolition, and the Council needs to seriously consider compulsory purchase.
- DCFW could not in this instance endorse refurbishment as a prudent use of public money – the site is too important as a potential focal point of the square and the investment would not deliver the extent of uplift required.
- The new scheme needs to be of good quality to attract quality tenants in this key position. This site is key to the success of the project.
- The panel suggested that MTCBC set out their requirements for a quality design team to work up any new proposal – particularly in light of the grant funding.

DCFW would welcome further consultation on the proposal as it develops and if useful to MTCBC.

Diwedd/End

A Welsh language copy of this report is available on request.