

Statws/Status:
Cyfrinachol / Confidential



Adroddiad Adolygu Dylunio: 17 October 2005
Design Review Report:

Dyddiad Cyfarfod / Cyflwyno'r Deunydd: 6 October 2005
Meeting Date / Material Submitted:

Lleoliad/Location: Llanberis Rd, Caernarfon

Disgrifiad o'r Cynllun Criminal Justice Centre
Scheme Description:

Cynllunio: Turner & Townsend
Consultants: [Simon Mann, Mike Howarth]
Faber Maunsell
[John Dickinson]

Cleient/Asiant: Dept of Constitutional Affairs
Client/Agent: [Clare Pillman, Melinda Thomas]

Pensaer/Architect: HOK [Femi Oresanya,
Nilanjana Mohanram]
WPSB [Jon Wallsgrove]

Awdurdod Cynllunio: Gwynedd CC
Planning Authority: [Hywel Thomas]

Statws Cynllunio:
Planning Status: Pre-planning

Y Panel Adolygu Dylunio/Design Review Panel:
Alan Francis (cadeirydd/chair) Paul Vanner
Cindy Harris (swyddog/officer) Nick Davies
Wendy Hall Elfed Roberts

Lead Panellist Paul Vanner

Cyflwyniad/Presentation

This project has been a long time in development, and is the product of good, productive collaboration between the client, the Local Authority, consultant partners and stakeholders. It is necessary because the present Crown and Magistrates Courts are housed in substandard accommodation, with an ever increasing workload. The magistrates court in Bangor was closed 2.5 years ago and the site sold as the first stage of this development. The Welsh Language Unit provides services for all courts in Wales, and currently occupies inadequate accommodation in Holyhead.

The site on Llanberis Road, half a mile to the east of Caernarfon, was bought earlier this year and the school which occupied it was demolished. The new buildings will house two bespoke Crown Courts, one Magistrates Court and one multi-purpose court, along with all the necessary administrative support including the Bangor Probate Registry and the Welsh Language Unit. A financial appraisal has been conducted, as well as a geo-technical survey. This will be the first new court building in Wales following the creation of the new amalgamated court service, and is seen as a flagship project for the court service and North Wales as a whole. The client is committed to achieving an excellent building and to using the design review process to optimise design quality.

For the architects, the idea of a transparent justice process was an important starting point, followed by a response to this gateway site on one of the main roads into Caernarfon. The intention was to create a building with real civic quality, maximising street frontage and views east and west, but also relating to adjacent two storey residential development. The building will be highly energy efficient with a BREEAM 'Excellent' rating and will be DDA compliant in line with the government's 'Better Public Buildings' initiative. There will be natural ventilation where possible although this will be difficult to achieve in the cellular administration block. The courts will have fan-assisted ventilation and the custody suites will have full mechanical ventilation.

The main entrance to the site is on the north west corner and vehicular access runs along the western boundary to secure parking at the rear. A small number [10] of disabled and public parking spaces are provided to the west of the main building. The four storey solid block housing the courts is set back and appears suspended above the double height, highly-glazed public reception area, which wraps around the court block to the north and west and aligns with the street. The internal layout of the courts accommodates four separate circulation zones. A grand ceremonial staircase offers framed views to the castle, town and strait to the west. Similar views are also available for the public waiting areas on first and second floor. A two-storey administration block is also highly glazed to the north and is set back from the road at an angle. It could be extended with an extra floor if necessary in the future. Caernarfon bricks – blue and red – will be used on the main elevations with aluminium panels on the court block 'tower'.

The local authority are keen to see the new building relate well to its context, incorporating a residential scale while still displaying its important civic function. They would like more information on views looking towards the site from the town and castle. The site is well served by public transport and is walkable from the town centre.

Ymateb y Panel/Panel's Response

The Panel recognised the importance of this new development and appreciated the quality of the design team. We welcomed the bold contemporary design and the transparency of the main entrance and waiting area, designed to reassure and include the building's users. However, we were not convinced that this would be a recognisably local building, and we thought that the raised level of the site, one metre above pavement, means that the building fails to address the street and could be intimidating. We wondered whether the building needs to maintain a consistent ground floor level or whether a stepped section might not be more appropriate. The barrier created by the boundary wall to Llanberis Road could be softened by planting, terraces and external seating areas.

The austere massing and interlocking blocks of varying heights was considered a good design solution, but we thought that more attention needed to be given to the interface between the blocks. In particular, the way in which the administration block meets the main block appears awkward and unresolved. The horizontality of the office block was felt to be excessive and the high level of glazing competes with the main entrance area. A more vertical emphasis to a reduced amount of glazing could be used as a link to the more vertical grain of the adjacent residential properties. The Panel thought that the smaller block should appear more separate and distinct from the main block. A different glazing/framing system which expresses the intermediate floors would be more appropriate.

Blue brick was chosen in preference to slate as a cladding material, for reasons of economy. The architect confirmed that the majority of brickwork would be stack bonded, although they were still looking at the details. The Panel suggested that precast brickwork systems might be appropriate. The Panel also emphasised that the parapet line should be kept pure and further attention given to the coping detail – brick on edge is notoriously difficult to make work in this situation. Any rooftop plant should be well screened (at present no roof plant has been shown). The detailing around windows needs careful attention, and the team's present thoughts - metal trims etc - might be difficult to handle without difficult and clumsy joints appearing. The Panel thought that other elements of contrasting horizontal banding were best avoided altogether.

It was confirmed that the procurement route will be 'design and build', but with the architects novated at a relatively late stage [E / F] and after the costed scheme has been approved for planning. The Panel expressed concern that the detailing would be left to the contractor, as we considered the quality of detailing to be vitally important to the scheme's success, but we were assured that this applied to repetitive details only. The intention is to engage artists, offering 2 or 3 commissions, once the basic shell has been agreed. Artwork will be incorporated into the fabric of the building [such as the glazing], or woven into the external works [eg the gates]. The Panel recommended the appointment of a landscape architect to assist the design development.

The travel plan and parking provision has been contentious. In spite of the short [but uphill] walk from the town and regular bus services, there has been a demand for more parking spaces and there is a possibility that public parking will be extended in conjunction with the boxing club and adult learning centre to the south. The Panel examined the location of the front door and likely taxi drop-off point. We thought that the main entrance would be better located on the north west corner, providing a more direct transition between outdoor and indoor public space, as well as being closer to the disabled parking spaces, and further away from the office wing.

The Panel recommended that the feasibility of including a low-carbon heating system be examined and agreed that a 'Termodec' type system might be used in order to minimise reliance on mechanical ventilation and air conditioning.

The Panel agreed with the local authority that more perspective views were needed, looking both ways along Llanberis Road. We found the green space to the north and east of the administration block incongruous and unlikely to be used as an amenity. There is a danger of it becoming neglected and receiving insufficient maintenance. We would prefer to see the building follow the site boundaries more closely and any left over space converted into genuine amenity or more internal space.

The Panel queried whether the Welsh Language Unit should have more of a public frontage but this was not thought to be appropriate by staff.

Crynodeb/Summary

The Panel appreciates the significance of this project and the good working relationships within the team that have brought it this far. The recognised expertise of the architectural team has ensured a high quality contemporary design with an appropriate scale and massing. In an ideal world this building would have been in the town centre, but we acknowledge the shortage of suitable sites. In addition, we would make the following points:

- Concerns about parking provision remain and while recognising these, the Panel would like to see more encouragement given to sustainable transport methods
- We think that the quality of the arrival experience is a key issue which might be compromised by the entrance location, adjacent public space and change in levels.
- The position and fenestration of the administration block should be re-examined, along with coping and opening detailing.
- Awkward areas of left over space should be integrated into the building footprint.
- The Panel applauds the sustainability aspirations expressed and urges further consideration be given to low carbon heating systems.
- The Panel endorses the approach to the inclusion of public art and its integration into the building fabric and externals. We would like to see the use of local slate in this context.
- The Panel consider the appointment of a landscape architect to be essential to the design development.
- The success of this scheme will largely rest on an uncompromising commitment to excellent detailing. The proposed procurement route of 'enhanced design & build' will allow the architects to ensure that this happens.

Diwedd/End

NB A Welsh language copy of this report is available upon request.