

Addroddiad Adolygu Dylunio Design Review Report

Review Status: **Confidential**

Meeting date:	22nd April 2009
Issue Date:	1st May 2009
Scheme Location:	Cyfarthfa Castle, Merthyr Tydfil
Scheme Description:	Visitor/Resource Centre
Planning Status:	Pre-application

Part1: Presentation

The client brief for this new centre is to maximise the potential of the existing site, while respecting its historic setting, views and context. It is intended to fulfil a broad range of community and educational uses, including a cafe and children's play area.

There has been one pre-application meeting with the Local Authority, whose concerns include the surface and treatment of the access road, links with the rest of the park, and the colour of the splash pad and wet play area. A planning application is imminent.

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

The Panel supports the principle of this project but several major aspects require further consideration and resolution. In summary:

- The brief for this project needs further refining to clarify the proposed uses. User groups should be consulted over specific provision regarding eg. acoustics, lighting, blackout facilities and the demanding requirements of school groups. The arrival facilities need further review.
- Attempts to 'float' the building above the slope might be misguided and the design development should instead focus on strongly connecting the building with the landscape.
- The approach and entrance to the building needs to be legible but discreet, to achieve the sense of discovery.
- The tarmac finish to the approach road should be reviewed.

- Careful siting and levels of viewing stations and management of the landscape, rather than wholesale pruning or tree surgery, should allow glimpses of long distance views.
- A commitment to achieve BREEAM Excellent should be allowed to determine elevational features such as the amount of glazing. The corridor should be well daylight and the ventilation and shading strategy tested by modelling.
- Native grasses should be used as the finish for the green roofs, and if green roofs are specified, rainwater harvesting would not be a cost effective measure.
- All timber should be FSC certified as sustainably sourced and timber or composite windows should be used in preference to aluminium.

Part 2: Discussion and Panel Response in Full

The precise use of the proposed building was clarified as being part visitor centre, part learning/resource centre. While we understood the desire for flexibility, the difficulties associated with the design of multi-use spaces have not been fully addressed. The brief should be tested further to ensure that it meets the aspirations of the client and further research is needed with user groups to meet their specific requirements.

The design intention is for the building to 'float' on the sloping landscape, but in fact the building is partly dug into the slope, to enable disabled access. The aspiration for a 'floating' building is not achieved in this design and Farnsworth House is not an appropriate precedent.

The intention that the building should be partly hidden in the landscape and form part of the process of discovery, needs to be complemented by a clear but discreet wayfinding strategy. The circuitous path from the castle car park should be designed to lead visitors towards the building, even though it will not be visible from the castle. The disabled access to the rear should incorporate more than a 'drop-off point', as groups of disabled children may require special facilities which will need to be accommodated. Alternatives to tarmac should be explored for the surface of the approach road.

The exploitation of key views is a major part of the design statement, but from the proposed viewing platform the views will be partly obscured by trees and the building itself. The architect stated that the ziggurat viewing terrace to the rear is aspirational and that some trees will be radically reduced in height to open up the views.

We support the target of BREEAM Excellent and would like to see this made a firm commitment. The cross ventilation strategy and solar shading needs testing by thermal modelling. Every effort should be made to introduce natural daylight into the corridor, through toplighting. A ground source heat pump using vertical boreholes will be combined with underfloor heating. A BREEAM pre-assessment exercise is ongoing and the results of this should be allowed to determine the degree of glazing.

Given the stated intention to use natural materials, the choice of polyester-coated aluminium window frames should be reconsidered. If timber frames are used for the large south facing glazing they will need to be carefully detailed to maintain an elegant appearance. The cedar cladding and timber decking should be certified as sustainably sourced, and ideally as much local timber as possible should be used. Native grasses and

wild flowers should be considered for the green roofs, in preference to sedum. These will tend to self-seed anyway, and are more likely to flourish on the north facing roof. It should be noted that green roofs in general are not compatible with rainwater harvesting.

Facilities will need to be provided for large groups arriving in wet weather and the details of this should be negotiated with the client. The WC cubicles face the common corridor and we question the dignity of the arrangement.

The budget for the project is approximately £3000/sqm, to include the access road, security and lighting.

It would have been helpful to have seen this proposal in the light of the Council's proposals for the Park as a whole.

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	Merthyr Tydfil CBC
Pensaer/Architect:	Capita Symonds [Emyr Dafydd, Paul Devitt]
AwdurdodCynllunio/ Planning Authority	Merthyr Tydfil CBC [Judith Jones]
Y Panel Adlygu Dylunio: Design review panel: Alan Francis [Chair] Cindy Harris [Officer] Phil Roberts	Elfed Roberts David Harvey Ed Colgan
Lead Panellist:	David Harvey
Sylwedyddion/Observers:	n/a