

Addroddiad Adolygu Dylunio Design Review Report

Review Status: **Confidential**

Meeting date:	20th May 2009
Issue Date:	3rd June 2009
Scheme Location:	Ebbw Vale Learning Zone
Scheme Description:	Education
Planning Status:	Pre-application

Part1: Presentation

BDP has been commissioned to design the whole Learning Campus, of which this proposal is a part, within the framework of the Alan Baxter masterplan which received outline consent in 2007. A previous version by the same architects was reviewed by DCFW in March 2004. The brief emphasises the importance of establishing links with the town and creating a welcoming and non-threatening environment for students, along with sustainability guidelines which apply to the whole site.

Following a series of stakeholder workshops, the preferred design option shows a north facing atrium fronting a public square and housing functions designed to draw the public in to the building. Behind this lies a pair of teaching wings served by open plan administration spaces with courtyards between them, each with a different character, and open car parking to the south. The scale rises from two to four storeys from south to north.

The project is a collaboration between the University of Wales in Newport, Coleg Gwent and Blaenau Gwent CBC and is due for completion in 2011/2012. It has outline consent and a reserved matters application is expected to be submitted in September 2009.

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

The Panel supports this exciting concept, and commends the clear presentation and positive response to our questions. Our initial concerns relating to sustainability and procurement have been satisfied and we think this is an acceptable approach subject to relatively minor amendments. In summary:

- We support the client's desire for an open and welcoming building and urge that active uses be established in and around the building to give a level of animation and security.
- The Panel has some concerns regarding the long eastern elevation and the relationship between the building scale and pedestrian detail on this important site route.
- We consider that the architectural treatment would benefit from further refinement to resolve aspects such as the opaque/glazing ratio in the elevations, in particular to the north.
- We endorse the sustainable approach to materials selection, the commitment to BREEAM Excellent and the site-wide energy strategy.
- The external public realm needs to be considered as a whole, specifically in the contribution that the building and its uses make to the adjoining routes and spaces.
- The internal layout and circulation appears superficially simple, but further interrogation and discussion revealed potential difficulties. It was suggested that the footprint and internal plan of the building should be re-examined and justified, so that route lengths are minimized and directions are clear and intuitive.
- We did not discuss the overall setting of the building in its context, the quality and sunlighting of the internal courts or semi-enclosed gardens and would like to see this proposal again at Stage D.

Part 2: Discussion and Panel Response in Full

The team confirmed that these buildings would be linked to the Energy Centre and be part of the site-wide CHP district heating system, which will be gas fuelled initially but with the potential to transfer to a lower carbon fuel once a certain demand threshold has been reached. The scheme will achieve an EPC carbon index of 40 [equivalent to BREEAM Excellent] through passive design measures as far as possible but with the possible addition of on-site renewables. A full M&E strategy has been completed and the additional costs for achieving this standard have been included in the budget. The procurement of the site-wide energy strategy needs to be considered carefully to ensure that a low carbon community energy system and connection to the Learning Centre can be delivered in a timely manner.

There was little evidence presented of the interface of this scheme with the rest of the masterplan, in terms of access routes or transport interfaces and we sought reassurance that pedestrian, cycling and public transport movement will be facilitated. The team stated that a sustainable site-wide transport strategy has been developed and needs testing against predicted volumes and patterns of travel. The firm intention is to establish a bus route through the site in advance of any development.

The main materials specified will be subject to a sustainability test, and the elevations suggest a standing seam metal roof, dark brickwork up to plinth level and some local timber cladding. The roof forms hovering over the internal atria together with the external terraces work particularly well, but the stairs at the end of the building would be better absorbed into the envelope, giving a much simpler form.

The design has to satisfy the opposing demands of permeability and security. We support the client's desire for maximum openness and think that the eastern elevations in particular appear too monolithic, defensive and unresponsive to the pedestrian, representing a massing and scale that seems to be in contrast to the community of interests and activities that the building seeks to accommodate. High levels of activity throughout the daytime and evening will provide a level of security and it is important that a cafe, sitting areas and other active uses are provided in the atrium and across the square, and the two spaces interact together as far as possible.

The internal circulation appears fairly tortuous and this may be improved by simplifying and strengthening the basic 'diagram', and possibly providing a physical link across the western end of the blocks. Revisions may involve a physical reorganisation of uses but it is important that the internal space is as connected and legible as the main entrance facade.

It was confirmed that the rear slope to the west will be stabilised and planted as part of an overall landscape strategy and more details of this would be welcomed, including the inside/outside relationships generally to courts and streets and the wider context of the building in its setting.

Delivery will be via a Design and Build contract, with the architects retained until after RIBA Stage E.

There was no time to discuss the question of whether the proposed sports and leisure component and the associated playing fields would now be developed at the southern end of the site. The Panel would want to look carefully at how the southern end of this building would relate to this new complex, and create equally attractive synergies and spaces to those at the northern end.

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	Blaenau Gwent CBC on behalf of the Learning Campus Partnership [Richard Crook, Clive Hamersley]
Pensaer/Architect:	BDP [Helen Groves, Neil Sansum]
Consultants:	n/a
Awdurdod Cynllunio/ Planning Authority	Blaenau Gwent CBC

Y Panel Adlygu Dylunio:

Design review panel:

John Punter [Chair]

Cindy Harris [Officer]

Roger Ayton

Simon Carne

Michael Griffiths

Ashley Bateson

Kedrick Davies

Lead Panellist:

Ashley Bateson

Declaration of Interest: Ashley Bateson declared that Hoare Lea are working with BDP on other projects.