

# Addroddiad Adolygu Dylunio Design Review Report

## Review Status: **Confidential**

Meeting date:	15th October 2008
Issue Date:	27th October 2008
Scheme Location:	The Works, Ebbw Vale
Scheme Description:	Education Resource Centre
Planning Status:	Pre-application

## Part1: Presentation

The proposal is for a small education building for use mainly by school and community groups, located in the Hot Mill Character Area of The Works site, close to the existing Pumphouse and to the site of a proposed new primary school. The site is rich in biodiversity and the Gwent Wildlife Trust is involved as a partner in managing this resource. The construction will use the Ty Unnos system developed by the Welsh School of Architecture as a model for affordable rural housing using local spruce. The Local Planning Authority are very positive and support the establishment of community and educational links at an early stage of the overall project.

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

The Panel fully supports the aims and ambitions behind this innovative proposal and we hope to see it developed as an exemplar project. The design proposals within the 'red line' planning application boundary are acceptable and require only minor revisions. However, we have major concerns about the future impact of the proposed new road and the uncertainty over its exact size and location. We think the siting of the building should be reconsidered in the light of this and other constraints. In summary:

- The high standards for carbon reductions and energy efficiency are commendable and we would like to see the same high standard applied to water use and waste treatment by developing on-site solutions.
- The use of an innovative and experimental construction system is welcomed, as is the predominant use of local renewable materials.
- We are not convinced that the siting and orientation of the building is optimal given present and future constraints.
- The design should be further simplified and the number of window types reduced.
- More work needs to be done to define and exploit the north and south elevations and to vary the roof overhangs to suit the orientation of each facade.
- An artist should be commissioned to help develop the cladding system in particular, at an early stage. There should also be more integration of the scheme with the overall arts strategy for 'The Works'

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

The location and orientation of the building was justified by the design team in terms of a response to the industrial context, the location of the existing ponds, an intimate relationship with the water, and exploitation of views across the valley to the west. The Panel was not convinced that the orientation was optimal and warned of the dangers of overheating through the glazed western facade.

The location of the building was brought further into question by the intrusion of the PDR into the site, cutting across the ponds. The exact extent of this was difficult to determine as the drawings were not consistent, but it does appear that the building is located on the most constricted part of the site. The route of the PDR is fixed, and is programmed for phase 3 of the works. Obviously the team will try to ensure a minimal land take and have partly compensated for the loss by incorporating more land to the south, but we were nevertheless concerned that it could have a huge impact on the site and the building.

The overall simplicity of the design and the layering approach to the cladding works well, and reinforces the design intention for a subtle, slightly hidden building. However, there are too many window types for such a small building and we have concerns that the north and south elevations are essentially the same. The internal plan and relationship of the building with its context may work better if the toilets are relocated and the southern end opened up more to the surrounding vegetation. The roof overhangs should respond to the different orientations and outside uses.

It will be important to engage artists at an early stage to help develop the cladding system and the Panel was pleased to learn that an artist has been commissioned to

develop a concept design for the whole site, based on extensive community engagement.

The Panel applauded the high environmental and energy standards set for all developments at The Works, including the commitment to reduce regulated emissions by 60% against Part L 2006. However, the use of 'Passiv Haus' principles of designing for very low energy use might have negated the need for any heating system. It was accepted that the proposed air-to-water heat pump was the worst case scenario and the team will look at using mechanical ventilation with heat recovery [MVHR] in the thermal modelling.

A similarly rigorous approach to efficiency of water use would be welcomed especially for this small experimental building on a wetlands site. We urged the team to consider alternative methods of on-site sewage treatment, such as reed beds, which could be used as a demonstration project and have educational benefits.

The extensive consultation with all teachers in Blaenau Gwent as to the facilities they require, combined with the experience of the Gwent Wildlife Trust's operation of its Magor Marsh facility, should ensure that this resource responds to the needs and aspirations of the community. Coach parking, servicing and disabled access are all provided for.

**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.**

**Please note that DCFW's Design and Access Statement Guide is now available on our website [www.dcfw.org](http://www.dcfw.org)**

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

### **Appendix 1: Attendees**

Asiant/Client/Datblygwr:  
Agent/Client/Developer

Blaenau Gwent CBC  
[Christian Cadwallader]

Pensaer/Architect:

Design Research Unit, WSA  
[Steve Coombs, Matthew Jones]

Consultants:

Halcrow [Andrew Webb, Ryan Glancy]  
ERM [William Hazell]  
Gwent Wildlife Trust  
[Julian Branscombe]

Awdurdod Cynllunio/Planning Authority

Blaenau Gwent CBC

Y panel adlygu Dylunio:

Design review panel:

Ewan Jones [Chair]

Cindy Harris [Officer]

Ashley Bateson

Lyn Owen

Wendy Richards

Ann-Marie Smale

Lead Panelist:

Ashley Bateson