

# 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:	Refurbishment and new extension. Records Office, Cafe and Exhibition Space.
Planning Status:	Pre-application

## Part1: Presentation

This proposal is for the redevelopment and extension of the Grade II\* listed General Office Building on The Works site. The new extension will provide accommodation for the Gwent Records Office, and the existing building will house a 'Visitor Welcome Hub', public exhibition space with interactive facilities, cafe and offices.

There have been consultations with Cadw, and the Local Planning Authority support the redevelopment and sustainable use of the building. A detailed planning and listed building consent application is imminent, but this does not include the public square.

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

The Panel is very supportive of the sustainable reuse of this hugely important building, which we understand is within the top 7% of historically significant buildings in Wales. It is also the only significant retained historic building in the whole development area. However, we have serious reservations about the design of the new extension and we think that the presented material is unacceptable as the basis for a detailed planning and listed building application. In summary:

- Respect for the character and plan form of the existing building should be paramount and the design of the new extension should be more subtle and background.
- Important aspects of the design need to be resolved to protect the desired quality, and a planning application at this stage would be premature.

- Entrances should be more generous and the main entrance lobby a simpler form, perhaps extending across most or all of the western elevation and providing a visual link with the new extension.
- We support the energy strategy, based on a biomass district heating system and trust that this will be implemented in due course.
- The landscape scheme for Station Square needs to be simplified and should relate more to the historic context and character of the listed building.
- We would like to work with the project team and Cadw to review this proposal again before a planning application is made.

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

The Panel could see no justification for the development of this particular design for the new extension. While we understand the desire not to add to unsuitable accretions from the past and to make a bold statement about the new use which has enabled the renovation of the whole, nevertheless this appears to be an 'object' building, without sufficient reference or subservience to the form and pattern of the existing listed building. We appreciate the better enclosure of the square, the alignment of the eaves heights and building lines, and the attempt to achieve a 'light touch' connection with the existing building. However, the new element appears incongruous and inappropriate in this context. We would welcome a contemporary solution which does not attract attention away from the main building.

We are particularly concerned that that an imminent planning application seems premature. The accompanying material should show more detailed and consistent information and, at least for a listed building consent application, should be developed to RIBA Stage D. Planning conditions are not an appropriate way of dealing with important aspects of the building design.

An example of these unresolved aspects is the south facing elevation, shown with two skins. This would appear to be an arbitrary and unnecessarily expensive solution unless justified, and consideration should be given to using the heat generated in the space between glass and masonry. Details of the design and function of this main elevation need to be resolved prior to a detailed planning application, and effective rationales presented for design decisions.

The BREEAM targets of Excellent [new build] and Very Good [existing] are welcome. We regret the necessity to install a temporary gas boiler but we strongly support the intention to move to a biomass district heating system eventually, and to install the necessary infrastructure for that now. It is unfortunate that some internal offices have no windows and will therefore require mechanical ventilation.

The angle and form of the new entrance lobby is unconvincing and could be better integrated with the old and new elements. The entrances as currently shown are rather mean and should be made more generous and welcoming.

The pedestrian route to the south, leading from Station Square to a bus stop on Steelworks Road, should be improved and made welcoming and accessible. The foreground to the east facade, which is the most architecturally significant, should have a high quality

treatment and opportunities should be maximised for viewing this facade from the ascending pedestrian routes opposite.

The landscape proposals for Station Square appear overly busy and complicated. There are better opportunities for adventurous hard landscaping elsewhere in the masterplan. A high quality treatment here should reflect the local context and particularly the existing building materials rather than contemporary choices. Station Square needs to be considered within the context of the hierarchy of squares from the town centre, and the character and detailing of each should complement its surrounds / setting. In this case, this will be the only square with a historic building forming one edge and it should respond to this. The management and maintenance of this space needs to be considered and after capital expenditure, a revenue stream needs to be identified to continue the appropriate level of maintenance. We were informed that an Estates Management Company will be responsible.

In urban design terms, the form, massing and active frontage of the adjacent blocks need to be considered in more detail. The new theatre will back on to the square and is next to the record office, which poses the risk of an area of dead frontages to the north of the square. We urged the team to avoid this, and to close off the route between the theatre and record office, accepting its use as a service area.

It will be important to ensure a continued, coordinated approach for the realisation of the master plan. It is crucial that the overall vision and detail of the design briefs is not lost through the individual design of blocks. It was confirmed by the project team that Stride Treglown Davies, the architects for this scheme, are also the architectural advisers for the whole of 'The Works'.

**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:

Stride Treglown [Pierre Wassenaar]

Consultants:

ERM [William Hazell, Geraint Bowden]

Halcrow [Ryan Glancy, Andrew Webb]  
Alan Baxter [Gesine Junker]  
Kia [Tom Astley]

AwdurdodCynllunio/  
Planning Authority

Blaenau Gwent CBC

Y panel adlygu Dylunio:  
Design review panel:  
Ewan Jones [Chair]  
Cindy Harris [Officer]

Ashley Bateson  
Wendy Richards  
Lyn Owen  
Ann-Marie Smale

Lead Panelist:

Ashley Bateson