

**Statws/Status:**  
**Cyfrinachol / Confidential**



<b>Adroddiad Adolygu Dylunio: Design Review Report:</b>	<b>25 February 2008</b>
<b>Dyddiad Cyfarfod / Meeting Date:</b>	<b>13 February 2008</b>
<b>Lleoliad/Location:</b>	<b>Blaenau Ffestiniog</b>
<b>Disgrifiad o'r Cynllun Scheme Description:</b>	<b>Community Arts Centre</b>
<b>Cleient/Asiant: Client/Agent:</b>	<b>Menter y Moelwyn [Alan Norton, Eifion Williams]</b>
<b>Developer/Datblygwr:</b>	<b>As above</b>
<b>Pensaer/Architect:</b>	<b>Baart Harries Newall [Mark Newall]</b>
<b>Awdurdod Cynllunio: Planning Authority:</b>	<b>Gwynedd CC</b>
<b>Statws Cynllunio: Planning Status:</b>	<b>Pre-application</b>
<b>Y Panel Adolygu Dylunio/ Design Review Panel: Alan Francis (cadeirydd/chair) Cindy Harris (swyddog/officer) Charlie Deng (swyddog/officer) Ewan Jones</b>	<b>Steve Smith Ann-Marie Smale Ed Colgan Phil Roberts</b>
<b>Lead Panellist:</b>	<b>Phil Roberts</b>

**Sylwedyddion/Observers:**

**Joanne Smith [SRD, Planning]  
Tom Woolley, [N Ireland MAG]  
Rhiannon Griffiths [UWE]**

**Cyflwyniad/Presentation**

Founded in 2001, Menter y Moelwyn has been successful in raising funds for the initial design and planning for the conversion of the old Market Hall in Blaenau Ffestiniog. This is a relatively deprived community, suffering the effects of the decline of the slate industry, and the aim of Menter y Moelwyn is to raise the pride and self-esteem of the local population, especially young people, by making art and cultural events more available. They want this project to be sustainable in the long term, by providing educational and training opportunities.

The architect was appointed in 2005, with a brief to refurbish the main building and to replace the former caretakers house with a new entrance facing the town, designed to create a striking first impression and to make a bold, contemporary statement.

The Local Authority in a written statement has commented that the latest preferred option is in their view more acceptable than previous versions. However, they think that there is some way to go before the design compliments rather than competes with the setting and design of the existing Victorian hall.

**Ymateb y Panel/Panel's Response**

The Panel appreciated the client's wish for a contemporary forward-looking approach but we thought it was also important that there should be some reference to the context of traditional buildings and townscape. We thought that the entrance elevation was in need of simplification and design restraint. In particular, the junction of the old and new building was currently awkward and unsatisfactory and we thought that the new extension should touch the bulk of the older building more lightly and elegantly. The ultimate success of the bold contemporary statement would reside in the quality of materials and detailing.

The Panel acknowledged that the use and extent of colour on the new elevation could be contentious, and advised that a more muted colour or different materials should be used which blended better with the predominantly monotone townscape. The effect should be one of a more subtle intervention in the townscape and a more sparing use of contrast.

The Panel thought that the raised staircase tower on the north elevation was overly dominant and this compromised the legibility of the entrance, which appeared to be tucked away underneath it. We noted the problems of locating staircases against glass elevations, in terms of cleaning and maintenance, and recommended that the elevation was changed or the stairs relocated. It was confirmed that there was a separate entrance for the lettable offices on the second floor. The Panel advised that the specification of an external lift would have significant maintenance, cost and security issues. We urged that storage areas for cycles and for refuse / recycling should be designed in at this stage, to ensure adequate space and access.

In terms of the internal layout, the Panel noted that the latest version showed a very cramped space for the lobby and foyer on the ground floor and for the entrance to the theatre on the first floor. We understood the growing complexity of the brief over time, but nevertheless thought that some of the earlier floor plans were better organised. We thought it was crucial for this community building to be spacious and welcoming at its entrance point and we had concerns about the lack of 'breathing space' in the building, especially for people arriving in inclement weather. We advised that access and egress would need to be approved by a fire officer.

The Panel questioned whether the kitchen was in the right place and how it was to be serviced, in terms of refuse collection and deliveries. We suggested that it could be a more open glazed space, with activity visible from outside the building. We thought that the ground floor layout was overcompartmentalised, leading to small rooms with very high ceiling heights. We would like to see the art gallery given more flexible space and the toilets and service areas relocated to the rear, east wall.

The Panel was informed that the car park area to the west was the subject of a separate strategy for the area [Blaenau Ymlaen] to improve the physical appearance of the town centre. Nevertheless, we thought that this strategy needed to be fully integrated with the Market Hall scheme, as the successful conversion and extension of the building would be greatly influenced by its setting.

The Panel stated that there should be a much stronger commitment to sustainable design and construction and ideally to achieving BREEAM Excellent. We recommended that an M&E consultant experienced in low carbon buildings should be included on the design team as soon as possible. The Panel noted that the suggested solution of a ground source heat pump might involve large scale excavation of the site, and consequent expense. The location of solar water heating panels should be shown on the plans, and certainly included on the planning application. We had reservations about the proposed roof finish, of stainless steel standing seam sheets, with slate slabs laid in the trays, and thought that if necessary the roof pitch should be increased to accommodate a traditional slate roof.

The Panel advised that an acoustician should be consulted on the interface between performance space and bars. We recognised that the theatre had operated satisfactorily without such advice previously, but the new additions and improvements to the building would inevitably mean its characteristics would change and need checking. Similarly an M&E consultant should have a particular input on the servicing and ventilation of that space.

The Panel was pleased to learn that the client intended to procure the scheme through a traditional contract and to retain the architect throughout the construction and commissioning period. However, we recognised that there may be future funding constraints, and we would be concerned about protecting the desired quality if the contract became a Design & Build one.

### **Crynodeb/Summary**

The Panel was pleased to review this exciting and ambitious proposal and commended the enthusiasm and commitment of the client body. We support their aspirations for an exemplary contemporary building, although we do not necessarily agree that a bold statement is appropriate in this context. We think that the current design proposal is an unacceptable response to the site and the brief and the solution lies in making it more subtle but still unique. In particular:

- The entrance elevation needs to be simplified and the junction of old and new elements treated with a lighter touch.
- The quality of materials and detailing will be critical for the overall success of the building
- The treatment of the surrounding areas of the market square and car park [in terms of landscape, lighting, etc] will be as important as the building itself in determining the overall success of the scheme. It therefore needs to be fully integrated with these proposals as soon as possible.
- We would like to see the internal layout revised to allow more breathing space around the new entrance [as shown on earlier plans] and as a foyer to the auditorium; and a more flexible layout on the ground floor of the old building.
- We would encourage the team to commit to achieving BREEAM Excellent, and to engage the appropriate professional consultants.
- The functioning and quality of the performance space will require specialist advice on acoustics and ventilation
- We urge the client team to pursue the traditional form of procurement and to retain the architect throughout, although we warned against the risk of agreeing a fixed price with a contractor at too early a stage.

### **Diwedd/End**

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