

Statws/Status:
Cyfrinachol / Confidential



Adroddiad Adolygu Dylunio: 16 May 2006
Design Review Report:

Dyddiad Cyfarfod / Cyflwyno'r Deunydd: 3 May 2006
Meeting Date / Material Submitted:

Lleoliad/Location: Monmouth

Disgrifiad o'r Cynllun Visitor Centre
Scheme Description:

Cleient/Asiant: Monmouthshire CC
Client/Agent: [Colin Phillips, Rick Longford]

Pensaer/Architect: Alec French Architects
[Nigel Dyke, Gayle Stevens]

Awdurdod Cynllunio: Monmouthshire CC
Planning Authority: [Edward Holland, Jenny Lewis]

Statws Cynllunio: Pre-planning
Planning Status:

Y Panel Adolygu Dylunio/Design Review Panel:
John Punter (cadeirydd/chair) Kieren Morgan
Cindy Harris (swyddog/officer) Phil Roberts
Elfed Roberts Paul Vanner
Ed Colgan Ann-Marie Smale

Lead Panellist: Paul Vanner

Sylwedyddion/Observers:

Charlie Deng Design Review Assistant
Angela Williams, Architecture and Design, Scotland

Cyflwyniad/Presentation

The historic border town of Monmouth is a gateway to Wales and the Wye valley. Although it has a relatively stable local economy, a certain level of under-performance and the potential for improvement has been identified. This scheme is part of a wider regeneration project relating to the bridges over the river Monnow. A regional tourism assessment will underpin funding applications for this development. Community consultation and stakeholder workshops have been held and a public exhibition will take place over the next month. The design of the scheme is still being developed and this presentation represents work in progress.

Parking is a critical issue within the town, which has to be addressed and certainly not exacerbated by these proposals. A coach drop-off point will be provided and the car park will provide 180 spaces and have high quality finishes. In addition, flood issues on this riverbank site will determine the extent and location of development, and the current proposal responds to the Environment Agency's flooding concerns. Consequently, there is a seven metre wide protected zone between the toe of the flood defences and the building, where no substantial planting will be allowed. The defences are seen as a design opportunity rather than constraint and the earth bund will accommodate new steps and seating areas. The open space and the building design are intended to promote access to the river, and respect the Grade 1 listed bridge. The new public square is designed to enhance the approach to the bridge, and the new building with its cafe/terrace relates well to the bridge and the river.

The client and stakeholder groups wanted a contemporary building but using traditional local materials. Stone, timber, glass and copper will be used for the reception building, which is single storey so as not to compete with the medieval bridge. A 'beacon' rooflight will allow daylight in and provide a dramatic statement after dark. An artist has been involved in the design of the rooflight and glazed wall panels. As well as the cafe, a shop will sell local produce and there will be historical interpretation of the town and the bridge.

The local authority conservation officer is content with the way these proposals are developing. There have been no adverse comments from Cadw.

Ymateb y Panel/Panel's Response

The Panel recognised the importance of this site to the development of tourism in the town of Monmouth and appreciated the problems involved in developing a riverbank site with existing flood defences. We welcomed the contemporary design approach, the exploitation of the flood defences to provide a promenade, and the creation of a substantial public space as a forecourt to the historic bridge.

However, the Panel thought that the proposed building was rather too modest, well-mannered and recessive, and needed to be more assertive both to fulfill its function as a

gateway to the town and as a focus for the car park and the new square. The listed bridge is sufficiently strong in form and scale to withstand any encroachment, as long as a reasonable distance is maintained. The deference of the new building results in a lack of dialogue or relationship between the two built forms, and creates ambiguous spaces that lack definition. We found the design of the visitor centre acceptable rather than exciting, and lacking an innovative response to the aspirations of the brief. The Panel preferred the first two design options shown, which appeared to reach out and be more welcoming to visitors and cafe users. We thought the building could be higher than single storey and pointed out the existence of a three storey building nearer the bridge. The architect stated that he was content with the modest scale, as long as it was well organised and detailed.

The Panel queried the proposed size of the square and was told that it was based on research of other squares in the town. However, we pointed out that these older squares were almost certainly harder edged and more contained and enclosed. The designer maintained that the scale of the new square was appropriate to the context and the type of activity envisaged there. The Panel was disappointed to note that the treatment of boundary roads was not part of this scheme, as their inclusion would have led to a more integrated approach.

The relationship between the building and the square was examined and the Panel would prefer to see more enclosure provided by the building. This could be achieved by an L shaped building or by extending its walls beyond the internal footprint. The setting makes the building almost a pavilion and it needs to respond appropriately, perhaps by embracing its immediate spaces. We were informed that a greater roof cantilever over the terrace had been objected to by the Environment Agency. The precise angular relationship of the building with the square gives the impression that it is retreating from the public space. The Panel warned that there would be significant shading of the square by the building which is 3.5 metres to eaves level. The merits of orientating the building and glazing towards the square rather than towards the car park were discussed.

With regard to the internal layout, the Panel thought that the provision of high level windows only to the office and meeting room was not conducive to a good quality internal environment. By contrast, the WCs were located on a corner with the benefit of two elevations. We found the relationship of the roof lantern with the floorplan was uncomfortable.

It was confirmed that a landscape architect is involved in the design and that the car park will be heavily planted. The architect explained his intention to create a plateau across the whole site, with a uniform surface running through the building and linking the square with the car park. Planting and landscaping on the river embankment will be limited and no mature planting or trees will be allowed. The Panel felt that this barren landscape was very much at odds with the treed landscape of the other reaches of the Monnow and the Wye which give the area its character and quality

Crynodeb/Summary

The Panel appreciated the opportunity to review this important proposal for the enhancement and regeneration of part of the historic town of Monmouth. We support the contemporary design approach of a modern pavilion and the clean simplicity of the square's layout and furniture. We consider this scheme to be an acceptable, if rather muted, response to the site and the brief, albeit with some major revisions. In particular:

- We think the building should be more welcoming by being more exciting and innovative while remaining rooted in its site.
- The quality of the detailing on the building and the choice of materials will be critical for the success of the design.
- We are not convinced that the square is of an appropriate size and scale and think it would benefit from more enclosure.
- The relationship of the building with the square needs re-thinking in terms of the angle, degree of enclosure and shading.
- We would have liked more information on the proposed landscaping of the car park. The lack of a biodiverse landscape on the riverbank is very disappointing, although we understand that this is an Environment Agency requirement.
- We think the internal layout could be revised to improve the quality of the space and the transparency of the building.
- We have concerns about how well the 'beacon' and roof lighting will work

Diwedd/End

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