

# Addroddiad Adolygu Dylunio Design Review Report

## Review Status: **Confidential**

Meeting date:	18th March 2009
Issue Date:	31st March 2009
Scheme Location:	George Street, Newport
Scheme Description:	Magistrates Court
Planning Status:	Pre-application

## Part1: Presentation

The architect explained that the proposed court building had been designed to be unique within the site because of its function. The building has been aligned with the historic grids of the old wharfs to the east of the site, and so the building grid is offset from the grid layout for other buildings within the George Street development site and the adjacent roads. A new public square is provided to the south of the building, and parking is located to the north. The building form is almost a pure cube, perforated with random window openings.

There have been limited pre-application discussions with the Planning Authority who accept that the proposal conforms to Supplementary Planning Guidance in terms of scale and massing, but who still have some concerns over car parking. They are awaiting details of finishes and materials but will require a high quality treatment.

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

The Panel supports the design ambition for this important civic building, but we think the design strategy is fundamentally flawed in terms of the building form and its location on site. This aspiration has also been compromised by the parking strategy. In summary:

- The documentation should have referred to and reflected the development brief for the site.
- The location of the main entrance is at odds with the centres of population and the heart of the city. The building appears to turn its back on the city centre. If the

entrance location is to remain, then more needs to be done to ensure that the building responds better to those arriving on foot from the city.

- Sustainability considerations should have been used more deliberately to drive the design development. The requirement for BREEAM Excellent is supported, but the deep plan building form makes this very difficult to achieve.
- A more linear form was identified as an early option and could have been used to give more street presence and shield the parking.
- The quality of detailing and finishes needs to be excellent and this will need protecting through the Design and Build process.
- The random-looking fenestration arrangement and the parapet openings need to be well justified.
- The public realm and boundary treatment needs to be as high quality as the building itself. Pennant stone would be a more locally appropriate material than Caithness stone, and gabions would refer more to the treatment of the Riverside Park rather than the corporate palette of the George Street site.
- The decision to relocate the parking from the ground floor of the building to an adjacent area of the site will severely compromise the setting of the building, the quality of the public realm, and the approach from the city. Ideally, there should be no surface or ground floor parking in this city centre location.

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

Certain decisions about site strategy which have been taken at an early stage appear to have caused problems with the developing design. The location of the building on the site does not reinforce existing street lines, as required by the George Street Development Brief, as the relevant SPG. As a result awkward spaces are left over, which the design team is struggling to incorporate into a coherent composition and convincing urban solution. The development of this site represents a last chance to knit the whole George Street site together and should therefore address the corner decisively.

We suspect that most users of the building will approach from the north and west where the main urban areas of Newport lie. However, the main entrance is located to the south east which causes obvious problems with legibility and accessibility. While we appreciate the effort to encourage people to arrive by bus from Usk Way, and the desire to present a civic face to the main road and river front, it is regrettable that the entrance and new public square face away from the city centre.

The proposed built form is a highly serviced box and this conflicts with the aspiration for BREEAM Excellent, making natural daylight and ventilation more difficult to achieve. Given the absolute requirement for BREEAM Excellent from the client, the necessary sustainability measures should have better informed the design development, and the advantages of a shallow floor plan could have been explored more thoroughly. Any renewable technology options need to be identified as soon as possible, with the advice of a specialist M&E consultant, and integrated into the design development.

The pattern of fenestration needs to be more than 'random' and should be clearly explained and justified. There is no presented evidence of the desired quality of finish, although we were told that the bronze coloured brickwork would be well detailed. The

detailing of brickwork around the punched openings will be difficult to achieve in a clean simple manner that will weather elegantly. The punched holes in the parapet wall appear to have no purpose and we think they should be omitted, giving the 'box' a heavier lid and purer form.

The design has been recently amended to provide parking at grade to the north of the building, rather than underneath the building at ground level. This is detrimental to the design as a whole and, irrespective of the quality of the surface area or the boundary treatment, the first sight of the development for anyone approaching from the north will be a car park behind a mesh fence. The Panel would like to see the Local Authority requiring underground parking for all city centre sites.

The Panel supported the provision of a pedestrian route across the site to Usk Way, which should be clearly defined and well positioned in relation to a pedestrian crossing. We were told that servicing requirements were not large, and waste storage and recycling were located within the building. A cafe would be desirable but we accept may not be viable in a court of this size.

In general, the design concept of a 'perfect cube' is likely to be compromised by the parking arrangement, and the desired quality will need to be protected throughout the D&B procurement process.

**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	Her Majesty's Court Service [Julie Wilson] Ministry of Justice [ Jon Wallsgrove]
Pensaer/Architect:	HOK [Stephen Herbert, Anna Tennent]
Consultants:	Turner & Townsend [Mark Drewe]
Awdurdod Cynllunio/ Planning Authority	Newport CC [Ian Carter]
Y Panel Adlygu Dylunio: Design review panel: Wendy Richards [Chair] Cindy Harris [Officer] Lyn Owen	Lynne Sullivan Ann-Marie Smale Richard Parnaby Simon Carne

Lead Panellist:

Richard Parnaby

Sylwedyddion/Observers:

David Harvey [DCFW Panellist]