

Addroddiad Adolygu Dylunio Design Review Report

Review Status: **Confidential**

Meeting date:	21st April 2010
Issue Date:	11th May 2010
Scheme Location:	Penlon, Bangor
Scheme Description:	Student Accommodation
Planning Status:	Pre-application

Part 1: Presentation

The proposal is for student accommodation of 167 bedrooms arranged in 4 blocks in approximately 8 room clusters. There is a demand for student accommodation in Bangor due to the new medical school and the consequent increase in student numbers.

The site is a former builders merchant yard that has remained empty for a long time. It is not currently designated for housing. The site has a long history of industrial/commercial use although it is surrounded by residential properties. The existing derelict industrial buildings have no design merit and will be removed, whilst an original stone wall will be retained and act as the site boundary.

The design team aspire to deliver buildings which will have a positive impact on the area. Their aim is to maximise development and sustainability potential, while respecting neighbouring residences which are generally two storey, with some three storey dwellings to the south and on the High Street.

The site slopes from south to north at an approximate gradient of 1 in 20, falling approximately 4m. Buildings will vary in height between 2 and 3 storeys with a proposed landmark feature on the south east corner. The development will offer student accommodation with a large landscaped area, 20 car-parking bays and 2 cycle shelters which are in different areas of the site. The aim is to achieve a BREEAM rating of Very Good.

An alternative layout was submitted to Gwynedd County Council for 290 units, which was considered overdevelopment by the Local Authority, hence the reduction in unit numbers now tabled.

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

We are supportive of the principle of bringing the site into residential use, and the regeneration of a site which has been poorly developed in the recent past. However, we think the current proposal is poor and we have some major reservations that remain to be resolved:

- The scale and form of the development must be led by a design response to the site, rather than a client expectation for unit numbers. Analysis over a wider area is necessary to understand the character of the area and further inform the progress of the scheme.
- The design team need to assess the site in more detail before developing block layouts. The form, size and treatment of the buildings should take reference from a site analysis including access, topography, aspect and prospect, respecting the local character which surrounds the site. The organisation of the student room clusters, as well as the proposal to step down the slope, should be handled in a more sensitive and contextual way.
- Alternative locations and layouts for the car parking and cycle stores need to be explored, to avoid large areas of hard finishes dominating views into important parts of the site.
- Although we are supportive of a strong street frontage to the southern boundary, the development should not try to be a 'landmark', but rather reflect the grain and interest of the locality.
- We wonder whether improvements could be made to the road junction fronting the site, so as to reduce the large areas of tarmac which exist. The existing entrance to the site could then be reconsidered and possibly moved east, so as to allow buildings each side of the entrance.
- We would encourage the aspiration to a BREEAM rating of Excellent.
- Some concern was expressed over the effectiveness of air source heat pumps, especially in cooling mode. Alternative systems should be investigated and natural ventilation optimised.
- In order to maximise their use, it is important that cycle routes and storage are well overlooked and convenient.

Part 2: Discussion and Panel Response in Full

The Panel thought that the standard of presentation material was poor, with no North point, misleading or missing section lines, and little in the way of contextual analysis.

The principle of residential use is accepted, although the integration of students in a predominantly residential area needs to be carefully considered. The predominance

of residential buildings in the immediate area is an important factor, in spite of the site's accessible location to the University. However, it is critical that the development is properly integrated into the local pattern and character, with any student amenity space planned so as to avoid disturbance to the neighbouring residential buildings.

A design that develops out of consideration of site constraints and opportunities and which tells a convincing story is required, to demonstrate how best the site can be developed and justify an appropriate density of development.

In our view there is a lack of response to the residential character and scale of the immediate neighbourhood. In particular, the three storey block to the north of the site is unsympathetic and in danger of overlooking existing properties. We thought that a similar density could be achieved with 2.5 storeys using 'rooms in the roof'.

The 8-room clusters are not expressed in the massing and do not appear to relate to the vertical circulation cores. We would like to see the massing reflect the internal layout and the sloping site, to give a finer grained scale to the built form. Some re-orientation of the blocks would improve the effectiveness of solar PV panels.

The Panel was informed that typically 8 student bedrooms are to be clustered around a communal facility. Although no detailed resolution of this was presented, we were concerned that this could lead to lengthy internal corridors, especially given the block layouts suggested.

Consideration of other site layouts should be explored. By moving the access slightly to the east, this would allow for a strong block on the south west corner, while avoiding any 'landmark' gestures. Alternative site layouts could allow for a more central student amenity space with soft landscaping along the boundaries to soften its impact. We recommend that a landscape consultant is brought on to the team to advise on the creation of amenity space and neighbourhood interface.

The Panel thought that parking should be more dispersed through the site in smaller double-stacked clusters as part of an overall landscaping strategy, and integrated with an improved block layout.

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	Hughes Bros [John Hughes]
Pensaer/Architect:	RGR Partnership [Thomas Evans, Eric Roberts]
Consultants:	Alyn Nicholls & Associates [Alyn Nicholls]
Awdurdod Cynllunio/ Planning Authority	Gwynedd County Council
Y Panel Adlygu Dylunio: Design review panel: Alan Francis [Chair] Elly Englefield [Officer] Lynne Sullivan	Jonathan Adams Simon Hartley Simon Carne Ed Colgan
Lead Panellist:	Lynne Sullivan
Sylwedyddion/Observers:	Glyn Jones [Flintshire County Council], Cara Owen & Glyn Gruffudd [Gwynedd County Council]