

# Addroddiad Adolygu Dylunio Design Review Report

## Review Status: **Confidential**

Meeting date:	22nd September 2010
Issue Date:	6th October 2010
Scheme Location:	Penlon, Bangor
Scheme Description:	Student accommodation
Planning Status:	Pre-application

## Part1: Presentation

This scheme previously came to Design Review in April 2010. Since then, the design team has been expanded to include Landscape Architects, and an extensive townscape and landscape analysis has taken place. Following the landscape analysis, communal courtyards between the blocks have been introduced, with more tranquil areas around the perimeter of the site and tilia [lime] tree planting.

The blocks are made up of 6 -10 units per each communal kitchen and hall, which is an increase from the 6-8 unit clusters previously proposed. The central block has been re-oriented in line with the other two blocks. The block at the front of the site has been set back further from the road with a garden frontage behind the extant high stone wall. The existing entrance position has been retained along with the stone boundary wall. The parking arrangement has altered from one straight line of 20 spaces sited at the south western edge of the development, to three separate parking areas of 18 spaces in total, located between the blocks.

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

The Panel supports development on this site and student accommodation here is a viable proposition. The site and townscape analysis is a good start and has moved the project forward considerably but there are still some major issues to be resolved. In summary:

- The landscaping is now a better developed element, but the architecture in comparison lacks conviction. The Panel strongly recommends that serious

professional architectural input is now sought, so that the built form and landscape can evolve together and the site planning can be improved.

- We have concerns about the level of detail provided for this outline application, some of which is premature.
- The institutional character of the scheme, created in part by single central access points to large blocks, should be revised. When internal layouts are re-considered, we think that the 10 unit clusters may prove unviable and we recommend units of 6 as current good practice.
- We support the commitment to BREEAM Excellent and advise that the design will need to respond to issues identified in a preassessment exercise. The sustainability strategy should be used as a strong design driver, and should better inform the block and courtyard layout and orientation
- The visibility of the rear block furthest from the entrance should be ensured, along with a safe and legible pedestrian route to access it, which is separated from any vehicles.
- We accept that privacy issues have been largely resolved with the siting and use of planting.
- We agree that the stone boundary wall should be retained, though not necessarily in its entirety. Its treatment should reflect the dialogue between architectural and landscape aspects, and between addressing the road and providing security and privacy.
- We noted that the client had requested a large setback from the road, to deter graffiti or damage to the frontage, but we thought that the stone wall would be a sufficient defence.

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

The Panel was pleased to receive the townscape analysis, which has led to a revised site layout. However, while this provides a firm basis for the design development, its implications now need to be taken further to deliver a scheme with an appropriate sense of place. Currently, the simple diagrams shown in the design principles analysis (eg microclimate) have been translated into actual buildings, but they still do not reflect the scale and grain of their neighbourhood context. Professional architectural expertise is needed to ensure the desired quality and to give confidence that the scheme will respond well to its context and meet the needs of future users.

Although the client aspires to clarity of site planning, with a 'clear movement route through the site', the rear block is invisible from the main entrance, and the route through the site to access this block is flanked with blank gable walls and has no natural surveillance. Similarly, in spite of the aim to create tranquil garden spaces at the periphery of the site with bedrooms oriented towards them, the blocks are not oriented to take advantage of these spaces.

We thought that the use of forest trees was not appropriate in this location, and has the effect of dissociating the site from the street. While we accepted that the setback from the street of 4 – 5 metres reflected the building line along the High Street and across the road, we think that a harder urban edge would be more appropriate in this setting than mature

trees. It was confirmed that the stone wall will be taken down to roughly chest height, and the setback will allow for usable outdoor space to be developed around the front block.

The Panel noted that the number of units per kitchen/living room has increased and we think that this will lead to long internal corridors, which may be too long for single staircase access. The massing of the buildings could be informed by smaller groups of rooms around cores, instead of single central cores with long corridors. The courtyards need to be better defined and enclosed by the buildings. We suggested that connectivity could be improved by introducing a pedestrian access on the crank point of the southeastern boundary and the junction of the High Street with Strand Street. This could then lead through to a central courtyard, although we understand that there are level differences to be accommodated.

The Panel supported the commitment to achieve BREEAM Excellent, and urged the team to carry out a BREEAM pre-assessment as soon as possible. An awareness of the inherent characteristics of the site and considerations of low carbon performance, should be used as main drivers for the site layout and all aspects of design. According to the sunpath analysis provided, the orientation of the blocks is not optimal for passive solar gain. In fact the blocks are oriented predominantly northwest / southeast, which may cause overheating problems without adequate shading.

The Panel was informed that an air source heat pump powered by solar PV will deliver a 30% carbon reduction, and this solution has been supported by the Carbon Trust on other projects. The highly insulated timber frame blocks will be naturally ventilated, and rainwater recovery will supply WCs.

We have concerns about the level of detail provided for this outline application. Elevations and internal layouts are premature at this stage, until a strong and robust site plan and block form have been developed, based on a contextual analysis, room clustering philosophy and sustainability considerations. The townscape analysis has been done and this now needs a strong architectural response. The way the drawings are presented implies that the scheme is further developed than can reasonably be claimed. We advised that a rough model should be constructed, showing the difference in levels, to illustrate block layout options.

The Panel was told that the developer will manage the residences, as he manages other similar projects in the locality.

**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 [Eric Roberts]

Consultants:

Landscape Projects [Neil Swanson]  
Water Source Technology [Kevin Moore]

Awdurdod Cynllunio/  
Planning Authority

Gwynedd CC

Y Panel Adlygu Dylunio:

Design review panel:

John Punter [Chair]

Cindy Harris [Officer]

Mark Hallett

Jonathan Adams

Phil Roberts

Lynne Sullivan

Steve Smith

Chris Jones

Lead Panellist:

Lynne Sullivan

Sylwedyddion/Observers:

Andrew Linfoot [DCFW]

Guo Zheng PhD student

Southeastern University, Nanjing

Professor Yu Cheng Wu, National Cheng

Kung University, Tainan, Taiwan