

Design Review Report

DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

Panel members, observers and other relevant parties are required to declare ***in advance*** any interests they may have in relation to the Design Review Agenda items. Any such declarations are recorded here and in DCfW's central records.

Review status

CONFIDENTIAL

Meeting date	Tuesday 16 July 2013
Issue date	Tuesday 30 July 2013
Scheme location	Pontprennau Primary School
Scheme description	Primary School
Scheme reference number	83A
Planning status	Pre-application
Declaration of interests	None recorded

Consultations to date

The design review registration document states that Statutory Consultation is currently in progress with the community, regarding the principle of the development. Detailed information on the specifics of the scheme are not yet in the public domain and the consultation with DCFW is at this stage treated as confidential.

The Proposals

The Panel welcomed such an early consultation as an opportunity to consider the spatial planning of the site and add value to the Local Authority (LA) process. The Panel acknowledged that the project is at the developmental stage and that three preliminary options were under consideration.

The proposal is to build a two-form entry primary school in Pontprennau to meet the needs of the local community. The available budget is c £6.5m in a mix of LA and Welsh Government (WG) funds. The site is small (62M x 162M), slopes steeply to the south and is considered by the LA to be 'confined'.

The design approach is one which responds to Building Bulletin 99 (BB99) and the existing Pontprennau Community Centre is to be incorporated into the development to be used as a hall and canteen facility.

Summary

The Panel acknowledged that the site constraints and budgetary limitations make it very challenging to deliver a new school that meets the standards and the teaching philosophy embodied in BB99.

The three options presented can be summarised as follows:

Option 1 is a deep plan arrangement located adjacent to the Community Centre; Option 2 is a series of 3 blocks that step up the slope of the site; Option 3 is described as a 'passivhaus' proposal, comprising 2 blocks linked to the Community Centre by a central transverse passageway.

It was agreed by the Panel, and by the team presenting the proposals, that Option 2 was not viable as it fragmented the accommodation and resulted in excessively long circulation routes.

From the discussion of Options 1 and 3 it emerged that each had some advantages, while neither was really a convincing proposal in its own right. The consensus was that the optimum solution would probably comprise elements of both Option 1 and Option 3, but that it would need to be a distinct, fourth option that relates more efficiently to the Community Centre; that provides well orientated and well day-lit classrooms, and that allows each of the distinct parts of the school (nursery, KS1 and KS2) to function securely without disruption from the other parts.

The following items were highlighted in detail:

- The proposed access points are unclear and warrant further design development. The current proposals constrict access to and movement through the school.
- The proposed options do not fully consider orientation and the impact of solar gain to the classroom areas, which could affect comfort levels in the key learning areas. The Panel wondered whether optimal solutions for comfort in the classrooms and the most efficient circulation routes, were negatively affected at this stage by concerns for an 'either/or' BREEAM/Passivhaus approach to energy efficiency.
- Whilst the arrangement suggested in Option 3 would provide a more comfortable learning environment for pupils and staff, the block forms do not make sufficient allowance for the physical constraints of the site and as a result the external space between the blocks is compromised.
- The Panel understood the need to incorporate the existing Community Centre building into the development but felt that, as these shared facilities would not be centrally located within the development, movement to and from this area could be problematic. Internal layouts and efficiency of circulation and corridor space is currently compromised.

- The proposed location for staff parking was discussed at length. The Panel suggested that the absence of drop-off areas or visitor parking spaces could open up the possibility of locating the staff parking at the top of the site with access and egress via St Mellons Road. This could make it possible to use the full width of the site at the southern end, which could in turn lead to a more effective solution to the relationship between the various parts of the school and the Community Centre, and a more effective solution to pupil/parent access. Consideration of future uses in adjoining areas, such as those emerging through the LA Local Development Plan (LDP) might also be borne in mind.
- The landscape strategy is unclear at this stage and along with other fundamental design considerations, warrants further site analysis of both landscape and traffic management.
- The Panel emphasised that the quality of the internal learning environment is the priority and that the landscape solution needs to respond accordingly.

Discussion and Panel response in full

The Panel welcomed consultation on this development at such an early stage.

The site is surrounded by residential, retail and commercial development. The site allocation is small and currently lies behind a well-used Community Centre and Church Centre. Residents of Pontprennau value both these facilities and the team were keen to ensure that the community would not be disadvantaged by the development of the school.

The topography of the site is challenging, with a steep slope resulting in approximately 12M height difference between the south and north of the site. It is a greenfield site and detailed ecological assessment is necessary to determine any protected species and/or important trees/flora and fauna.

The new school buildings are intended to adjoin the rear of the Community Centre, creating a link between the buildings. The school needs to use the Community Centre's hall and canteen facility efficiently in order for the project to be viable and fit for purpose. The Community Centre is also well used and enjoyed. Existing parking at the Community Centre would be reduced for day users although the school parking bays will be made available for Community Centre use during the evening.

The team explained the landscape strategy as free-flowing, using irregular shapes to encourage interest and free movement through the site. The Panel thought that maximising the learning environment was the key and that the landscape solutions should complement this.

Using the Community Centre as a hall meant that the 'heart' of the school would be in the wrong place to make the best of movement and circulation through the school. The design team explained that they had considered this option but concluded that it was not possible for financial and other reasons. The possibility of converting the Community Centre into teaching space and providing a new hall, for shared community use, in a more suitable central location was also dismissed by the presenting team,

because of its greater cost and because the form of the existing Community Centre building did not appear suited to this adaptation.

Of the three design options presented the Panel thought that the 'passivhaus' approach of Option 3 would provide the more comfortable learning environment with classroom areas north facing, maximising natural light and providing greater control over solar gain. The Panel did stress, however, that a 'passivhaus' approach did not necessarily demand the architectural forms that were proposed but that the block forms should be tailored to the specific constraints of the Pontprennau site.

The Panel were confused by the various access points throughout the site. There is an existing lane between the Community Centre and the playing fields which has the potential to be used as an access point for nursery and reception children, whilst infant and junior children could enter the site from the road between the Community Centre and the neighbouring church.

The lack of provision for parents to park whilst dropping children off was discussed. The Panel was informed that this reflected Cardiff Council's strategy to encourage alternative transport modes and reduce parental car use on the school route, within a half mile radius. Whilst the Panel appreciates and welcomes efforts to reduce carbon and encourage use of pedestrian/cycle routes and public transport, it also recognises that Heol Pontprennau is already very congested during busy periods and cautioned that further thought was needed to avoid increased traffic pressure in the immediate locality.

The Panel raised the possibility of moving the staff parking bays to the north of the site with access via St Mellons Road. The Panel was informed that the Local Authority would be concerned about the loss of habitat arising from the removal of hedgerows lining St Mellons Road. The Panel was also informed that the Council was considering the closure of the section of St Mellons Road that runs across the north of the site. The Panel suggested that any decision on road closure should be suspended until the design of the school was finalised.

The Panel also observed that it should be possible to create a parking area at the north of the site with only a minor loss of the hedgerow and that the benefits could outweigh the disadvantages. There was a discussion of the number of staff parking spaces that would be needed. The Panel felt that it would be consistent to minimise the number of spaces provided, given the Council's policy on car use and parking for parents.

The Panel acknowledged the challenges of this steeply sloping site and its environs and the need to incorporate the existing Community Centre building to meet the necessary footprint. The Panel was mindful of the early stage of development and hoped that the discussion added value and assisted the client and design team their thinking and in finding ways to respond positively to the constraints.

The Panel encouraged the team to return to design review if the project timetable allows and would welcome further consultation.

DCFW is a non-statutory consultee, a private limited company and wholly owned subsidiary of the Welsh Government.

The comment recorded in this report, arising from formal Design Review through our Design Review Service, is provided in the public interest for the consideration of local planning authorities as a material consideration, and other users of the Design Review Service. It is not and should not be considered 'advice' and no third party is bound or required to act upon it.

The Design Review Service is delivered in line with DCFW's published protocols, code of conduct and complaints procedure, which should be read and considered by users of the service.

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

Appendix 1

Attendees

	<u>Cardiff Council</u>
Client/Developer	Mike Gwyther-Jones Graham Dalton Michele Duddridge-Hossain Andrew Bates Mian Soleem Daniel Rossiter Glenie Hoang (observing)
Design Review Panel Chair Lead Panellist	Alan Francis Jonathan Adams Lynne Sullivan Christopher Jones Richard Parnaby
Observing Recording	Carole-Anne Davies, DCFW Sue Jones, DCFW