

Statws/Status:

Cyfrinachol / Confidential

DESIGN
COMMISSION
FOR WALES
COMISIWN
DYLUNIO
CYMRU

Adroddiad Adolygu Dylunio: 23 October 2007
Design Review Report:

Dyddiad Cyfarfod / Cyflwyno'r 03 October 2007
Deunydd:
Meeting Date / Material
Submitted:
Lleoliad/Location: Post House site, Bridgend

Disgrifiad o'r Cynllun Mixed use Commercial Office / Retail
Scheme Description:

Cleient/Asiant: Compute (Bridgend) Ltd [Nick Hegarty]
Client/Agent:

Developer/Datblygwr: N/A

Pensaer/Architect: LOM [Patrick Hastings, Simon Marrett]

Ymgynghorwyr Cynllunio: DPP [Arfon Hughes, Francesca Savini]
Planning Consultants:

Awdurdod Cynllunio: Bridgend County Borough Council
Planning Authority:

Statws Cynllunio: Pre-planning
Planning Status:

Y Panel Adolygu Dylunio/ Ashley Bateson
Design Review Panel: Lyn Owen
John Punter (cadeirydd/chair) Ed Colgan
Cindy Harris (swyddog/officer) Michael Griffiths

Lead Panellist: Michael Griffiths

Cyflwyniad/Presentation

The design team has been working on the scheme for over 18 months, having five meetings over that time with the Local Authority planning officers and conservation officer. However, the latest version of the proposal was presented only two weeks ago and the officers have not yet given their views on this. A planning application is intended to be submitted by the end of the year.

The proposed serviced office development mixed with retail and restaurant is located in the conservation area in Bridgend, opposite to Bridgend train station. The site has a significant change of level of two office storeys, and includes a listed fire station to the rear and a disused post office (locally listed) at the head of Court Road.

The proposal is a response to the site context and the conservation area picking up the rhythm and proportion of the old post office and recognising its focal role in Court Street. Three blocks of office accommodation are carefully arranged around a central atrium, presenting three storeys of accommodation to the principal elevations with two more storeys set back above. The listed fire station facade is kept as a rear entrance and some retail uses are suggested on the first two (basement) levels. A pedestrian route through the building is proposed, linking Station Hill/Court Road down two levels to Derwen Road. 20 basement parking spaces are provided with an entrance from Station Hill. The old Post House facade is reinterpreted with a three storey stone facade behind a glazed rainscreen. The proposal also accommodates a full floor and a mezzanine for a restaurant on the top with an external terrace.

A BREEAM Excellent rating is the ambition of the design team. A central atrium is provided within the building to introduce natural ventilation and daylight. The floor plan depth is kept shallow to allow for cross ventilation. A double skin facade is proposed to give additional thermal benefit and circulation space. The proposal may use an aquifer underneath the building for summer cooling and ground source heating.

Ymateb y Panel/Panel's Response

It was recognised that Bridgend has long lacked capital investment and quality redevelopment. The Panel welcomed the proposed quality of investment, and considered serviced offices a viable use in this gateway location opposite the station. There was a discussion on the servicing and escape arrangements from the high level restaurant. The Panel expressed some disappointment at losing the old Post House, and suggested that if

its facade was to be reinterpreted, closer attention should be paid to its proportions. The viability of the proposed basement retail was another concern, given the fact that the retail unit is set back from the façade and Derwen Street is not a retail street. However the Panel was partially reassured when told that it will probably be a cafe unit, which would benefit from the office use.

The overall massing was the major issue for discussion. The Panel accepted that a gateway building needed a certain height and mass, but the building should still fit into its context comfortably when viewed from all directions, particularly from longer views across the town. The Panel considered that the provided photomontage View D signalled an overdevelopment of the site. Although it was not taken from street level, people crossing the dual carriageway would get this view and it would set an unfortunate precedent, especially given its location in a Conservation Area. There were concerns about the impact of a modern, sleek, highly glazed, city-type building in the more domestic setting of the Conservation Area, and the Panel concluded that a five storey commercial building constituted an unacceptable impact on this key corner site.

The Panel welcomed the introduction of a pedestrian route through the site, but doubted its utility and practicality, and its prospects of surviving post-occupation when issues of security and maintenance would probably dictate its closure as a public route.

The Panel was particularly concerned about the economic viability and the deliverability of the scheme. This would be an expensive building with very high quality finishes and we thought that local rents could not justify such expenditure. The developer stated that he was confident of Bridgend's regeneration and of securing a tenant who would be prepared to pay the asking rent. He did not intend to reduce the quality of the scheme. The Panel agreed that the likely cost of £3000/sq m predicted by the developer seemed reasonable. While we would welcome this level of investment, we considered the investment to be very high-risk indeed.

The Panel noted that this scheme was aiming to deliver the highest standard of office development that we had yet seen at Design Review. We urged the developer to maintain the natural ventilation strategy, model the building's solar and cooling performance, and monitor solar gain. The Panel welcomed the idea of using ground source heating and cooling with thermal mass as an energy strategy, and suggested that the BREEAM evaluation should be used as a design tool. A BREEAM Excellent rating would provide an additional marketing advantage.

Crynodeb/Summary

The Panel wished to support the developer's ambitions and commitment to delivering a sustainable well-designed building with very high quality finishes. However, the scheme raises the issue of precedent and the desirability of inserting a very contemporary, large scale 'city' building into a conservation context in a medium sized town. In particular, the impacts of the building's massing and scale on the conservation area were of great concern. The economic potential of the project was recognised, but the risk was considered to be very high. In summary:

- We have serious doubts about the economic viability of the scheme, given the expensive, high quality construction and materials proposed and the likely limited economic return from the local property market.
- We are concerned about the bulk and height of the proposed building and its consequent impact on the conservation area. The building appears to fit neatly into the existing fabric from some perspectives, but the view from Court Road and the longer cross-town views D and E signal an unacceptable impact and an overdevelopment of the site.
- We think that the height should be reduced by at least one, and ideally two, storeys. Some remodelling of a lower roofline would help to mitigate the impact but in our view would never be entirely successful.
- We support the developer's commitment to sustainability, and consider that the development should maintain the BREEAM Excellent commitment and that this should be conditioned in any planning consent

Taking all of the above into account, and while we applaud the design and sustainability aspirations of the developer, we reluctantly conclude that the proposal is unacceptable in this context.

Diwedd/End

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