

# Addroddiad Adolygu Dylunio Design Review Report

**Review Status: Confidential**

Meeting date:	19th January 2011
Issue Date:	1st February 2011
Scheme Location:	Riverside Hotel Abersoch
Scheme Description:	Residential
Planning Status:	Pre-application

**Part1: Presentation**

This is a proposal for new residential accommodation on the site of an existing hotel which the owner wishes to redevelop, as the existing use is no longer financially viable. The proposed future use is not yet decided but is most likely to be private apartments sold on the open market, with an affordable on site component, to be determined.

The height of the blocks is set at two and a half storeys. The orientation and topography of the site has led to the location of the blocks to the north of the site, set back from Lon Engan, but with better access to views and solar gain. Flood risk is a constraint on development but the Environment Agency has accepted undercroft parking, provided that it is protected from flood water.

The Local Authority has held several pre-application meetings with the applicants over the last few months and the current design is the result of these negotiations. They still have some concerns about the proposed scale and height of the blocks when viewed from the bridge and adjacent highway.

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

The Panel has no objection to the broad quantum of development as proposed, and the provision of affordable housing outside the settlement boundary. While we understand that the development of this project has involved exploring several design options, it is important that any future options are part of and integrated with a solid and consistent design concept, based on a perceived need and responding to the context, rather than

simply responding to different inputs on a case-by-case basis. Currently the proposal is too unresolved and requires major revisions. In summary:

- This project needs a clear concept, which may seek to strike a balance between the demands of context and sustainability, around which to coordinate and integrate further development of the design.
- The end uses of the development needs to be clarified to enable the design work to proceed, and the uses of different parts of the site also need to be resolved.
- We think that the site section, developed for reasons of solar access, may be a good starting point for the design concept, but needs to be developed much further in relation to the town context.
- We do not think that the proposed open space at the eastern end of the site will be successful and we consider that the townscape vista should be terminated by either the existing Victorian building or an appropriate new design.
- The linearity of the central blocks is very rigid and does not respond to the character of Abersoch.
- We would encourage the client to commit to achieving CSH Level 4, and include a strategy for doing this with the planning application.

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

The Panel thought that the revised drawings presented on the day were a positive development. However, there was a lack of any contextual or townscape analysis, and no evidence that the proposed design responded to predominant features in the town.

The Panel was concerned that the proposed area of open space on the eastern corner of the site, at the junction of Lon Engan with the A499 and where the current Victorian building stands, will not be well used. While we appreciate the desire to create some public space in the town centre, this will not be an attractive place in which to linger or socialise, surrounded as it is by roads and with a large blank retaining wall to the south. We consider that a strong built form is needed in this location, to create a focal point on the corner as well as closing the vista from the west. This could take the form of a new building or preferably the existing Victorian three storey building could be retained, possibly refurbished as a private dwelling.

The Panel had no objections to the proposed scale and density of accommodation. It was confirmed that the affordable units will be located to the west of the site, as this is the only development that would be allowed beyond the settlement boundary, but they will have the same architectural treatment and quality of finishes as the rest of the site. However, the indicative design of these blocks at the western end of site appears to be quite different from the central blocks. Planted areas to the north and west of the site will be available as communal open space for the site residents.

The Panel thought that the linearity and uniformity of the central blocks would benefit from a slight relaxation and the introduction of small variations, similar to the earlier iterations contained in the pre-review material.

In our view, the section drawing and the commitment to a southerly orientation is a good way to start the conceptual 'story' but this now needs to be taken forward in a clear and consistent way that forms a strategy for all aspects of the scheme. A coherent land use and landscaping strategy is also required to deal with the site as a whole. The setback of the new blocks from the current building line creates a public walkway which is below street level and which will be shaded for most of the time. The Panel was concerned that this area should be well maintained and overlooked. We would like to see private open spaces provided to the north, facing the planted bank and river. While the architect agreed that this would be possible, the Panel emphasised that the site layout and uses should be established at an early stage and should inform the design development.

The Panel was not convinced by the extent of timber cladding proposed in this location, although we accepted that a case could be made for the environmental benefits of building with timber frame (and therefore not responding to context). Whatever design choices are made, there needs to be a strong design explanation presented, to justify those choices as better than the alternatives.

Although we had no information on the sustainability strategy, the team stated that they would be aiming to achieve CSH Level 4. We encouraged them to commit to this standard in the Design & Access statement, and include a broad strategy for achieving this, based on a preassessment carried out by a certified CSH assessor. For example, the glass laminated PVs, shown as canopies over the south facing balconies, would have the dual advantage of renewable energy generation and solar shading.

**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

Mr Ian Bartle

Pensaer/Architect:

Milsom Architects (Jan Milsom,  
Graham Milsom)

Consultants:

J10 planning (Justin Paul)

Awdurdod Cynllunio/  
Planning Authority

Gwynedd CC

Y Panel Adlygu Dylunio:

Design Review Panel:

Ewan Jones [Chair]

Cindy Harris [Officer]

Steve Smith

Richard Parnaby

Andrew Linfoot

Simon Carne

Lead Panellist:

Steve Smith

Sylwedyddion/Observers:

Victoria Jones (Design Wales)

Angharad Williams (research student,  
University of Bath)