

# Addroddiad Adolygu Dylunio Design Review Report

## Review Status: **Public**

Meeting date:	10th December 2008
Issue Date:	17th December 2008
Scheme Location:	St David's Hotel Harlech
Scheme Description:	New hotel and holiday apartments
Planning Status:	Pre-application

## Part1: Presentation

Proposals for this site were previously reviewed by DCFW in October 2006 and subsequent comments were made in November 2006 and January 2007 in response to revisions. The site now includes the student accommodation tower to the north, purchased by the developer from Colleg Harlech. This proposal is for a 130 bed hotel and 76 holiday apartments. On the upper plateau, the stepped profile of the hotel block in plan and elevation respects the views of mountains to the north. The sustainability strategy refers to the SNPA draft guidelines and aims for a BREEAM Excellent rating. Recycled demolition materials from the existing building will be re-used where appropriate and most roofs will be sedum covered.

The Local Authority confirmed that the principle of use was accepted and conforms to Local Plan policy. They welcome the proposed demolition of the residential tower while noting that this brings the proposed development within the conservation area. They consider the view from Harlech Castle will be an improvement on the existing, although they have concerns about views from the beach and the golf course. Vehicular access arrangements are not fully resolved. There will be an occupant restriction on the apartments to avoid continuous, year-round occupation. The economic benefits of the scheme are recognised, although there has been very little community response. The intention is to take this to the Planning Committee in January 2009.

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

The Panel approached this proposal as fundamentally different from that seen previously, due to the greatly increased size and altered layout. We consider this increased scale to be unacceptable on this site and our comments on design and layout are based on this view. The level of development proposed would make any acceptable design difficult, if not impossible, to achieve at this sensitive location.

The Panel was seriously disturbed at the insufficient level of information provided for the proposed development on this extremely sensitive and historic site. The location in the National Park, in a Conservation Area, and with World Heritage status, all oblige the developer and the Local Planning Authority to pay close attention to the qualities of the site and the character of the area, to provide clear indications of the impact on the environment and the landscape/townscape, to provide full details of materials and elevations, and to convincingly demonstrate how a very high quality of design will be delivered. The Panel is concerned that the applicant is simply preparing to sell on a planning permission, and is not investing anything like enough effort to establish the feasibility of the project on this very difficult site, leave alone the necessary design quality.

This proposal is unacceptable with regard to the details and quality of material provided, and with regard to the proposed form, elevations and massing. In our view it should be refused in its present form. We are also convinced that the proposals are a major overdevelopment of the site, notwithstanding the demolition of the tower block of Coleg Harlech. We would make the following additional points:

- Additional supporting information is required in the form of a biodiversity study, landscape strategy and sustainability strategy.
- All information provided should be precise and accurate. All photomontages and graphic images should be realistic, consistent and comparable. A full set of key views of the development should be simulated.
- More fully-detailed site sections are needed to make explicit the relationship between the upper and lower plateau.
- The sustainability strategy should set minimum standards and justify site-specific solutions.
- We think this proposal is an overdevelopment of the site and this is the source of many of the problems identified.
- While we understand the desire for economic development in the locality, the sensitivity of the site is of paramount importance.
- The proposed elevations lack quality and do not relate to their context in any way.

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

It was confirmed that the current proposal is approximately 10 metres higher than the existing building at its highest point, although some sections are lower. The ground level will be raised by one metre to accommodate basement parking. The Panel noted the inconsistency of some of the views presented, in that existing images were taken from a point closer to the site than proposed views. We tried to establish whether the view from the Castle as presented had been verified as accurate. The misleading perspectives are regrettable and all such drawings need to be rigorously tested.

For a site of this sensitivity, within a National Park, Conservation Area, and with World Heritage listing, we were alarmed at the lack of adequate contextual information and material to support the planning application. Indeed, the application should not have been accepted and registered by the Local Authority. Accurate site sections are absolutely essential to understand and assess the impact and quality of the proposal, and these have not been provided. A biodiversity survey has been requested, but should have already informed the design and the detailed application. Similarly, a landscape strategy should have been part of the supporting information and TPO trees should be indicated on the site plan. A 3D model would be invaluable in illustrating the proposed scale and massing of the building in its context.

The design intention is to break up the mass as far as possible, and Italian hill towns were cited as an architectural reference. The single building footprint and its height render such a design approach impossible. The proposed elevations show a complete lack of response to the context of the town of Harlech.

The service road linking the upper and lower plateaux is proposed with a 1:6.5 gradient and we doubted that this would be functionally adequate. The nature and route of the pedestrian access to the hotel from the west is unclear and appears to be through lifts from the basement car park. The appointment of a public realm / landscape designer is necessary and urgent.

We noted the aspiration to achieve BREEAM Excellent and advised that there should be a firm commitment to BREEAM Very Good as a basic minimum. Low carbon technologies which are likely to be suitable for this site should be investigated with a view to inclusion in the scheme. An approach using ground source heat pumps had not been thought through, given the geology. We welcomed the suggestion that this site could combine with Coleg Harlech in seeking a more sustainable solution to energy generation and delivery.

There will be some community facilities in the accommodation blocks – a cafe and concierge office – to protect future use. The proposed replacement for the student accommodation tower is likely to be of a similar scale to the northermost block of this development – ie seven storeys.

If development does proceed on this site, it will be important to demonstrate an element of public gain, and we suggested this might be a 'green bridge' to provide safe pedestrian access across the railway line.

However, before the application is even considered by Committee, the applicant needs to invest in the provision of precise, accurate site and contextual information and additional studies, in order to justify the proposed development and demonstrate the high quality which should be demanded for a World Heritage Site. In the absence of this we are unable to comment further on particular aspects of the design.

**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	Aitchison Associates
Pensaer/Architect:	Gruffydd Price
Consultants:	N/a
AwdurdodCynllunio/ Planning Authority	Snowdonia National Park Authority [Richard Thomas]
Y Panel Adlygu Dylunio: Design review panel: John Punter [Chair] Cindy Harris [Officer]	Jonathan Hines Mark Hallett Ed Colgan Lyn Owen Roger Ayton
Lead Panellist:	Ed Colgan
Sylwedyddion/Observers:	Jianqiang Wang [Cardiff University] Eleanor Englefield [DCFWD]