



Design Review Report:	14 December 2004
Meeting Date / Material Submitted:	1 December 2004
Location:	Carmarthen
Scheme Description:	Retail Foodstore
Client:	Tesco [Steve Douglas, Rhys Davies, Neil Sampson]
Architects / Design Team:	Gordon White & Hood [Damian Withers]
Developer:	Morbaine [Keith Williams]
Planning Authority:	Carmarthenshire County Council [John Thomas]
Planning Status:	Full application made
Design Review Panel: Alan Francis (chair) Cindy Harris (officer) Howard Wainwright Ben Sibert	Phil Roberts Robert Firth Wendy Hall Douglas Hogg
Observers: Gillian Wulff	Peter Roberts

Presentation

The existing Tesco store in Carmarthen needs upgrading and has insufficient parking and storage space for current needs, which are for 87,000 ft² of shop and storage space, a café at mezzanine level, increased car parking and a petrol filling station. The aim is to construct a new modern store, based on a cost effective and environmentally friendly design and with strong linkages to the town centre. The existing store will be converted for other retail use.

The proposed site for the new store is raised and prominent, particularly from the main approach to Carmarthen from the south. It is on the outskirts of the town, and is currently used as a rugby ground, squash court and local authority car park. There is a bowls club and cycle track to the north, with a Victorian park beyond, and a viewing stand backing on to the northern boundary of the site. There are allotments to the west; light industrial and major retail buildings are located to the south east.

The store itself is located to the west of the site to maximise its distance from the Victorian park, but is orientated to face the town. The designer has kept it as low as possible, and its roof line is in line with the eaves height of the bowling club. Views from the park will thus be possible over the top of the store. A service access road runs from an existing roundabout to the south, and enters the site from the south west. The embankments to the south will be planted with semi-mature trees, forming part of a high quality perimeter planting scheme. The footpath on the northern edge will be improved, and pedestrian links created to the town and the park.

The standard Tesco design requirements are for: a comfortable environment for shoppers and workers; efficiency and ease of construction [standard components, large internal volumes, efficiency of resource use and service provision]; light and airy internal spaces; and a large shop front. All plant will be located on a low roof to the rear and pipe run lengths minimised. All structural elements and components are recyclable. The front glazed elevation and canopy are wrapped round the south east corner of the building fronting the main road, to meet a stepped ceramic rainscreen cladding, which also features on the north elevation. The main cladding panels, originally white, are now likely to be buff or silver/grey. The roof structure will be broken up, with three low-pitched gable roof features, evoking the surrounding form of terraced housing, but not linked to the internal space. Stone-faced blockwork columns frame the main entrance, with the large illuminated sign enclosed in the gable below the roof line.

The local authority representative indicated that they would prefer finer metal supports to replace the stone pillars. Their preference is for a white or silver/grey external finish with roof features in a dark grey.

Panel's Response

The Panel began by exploring the nature and extent of the 'strong pedestrian links' with the town. The main east/west footpath on the northern edge of site and all other rights of way will be upgraded with full disabled access, including ramps up to the higher level of the bowls club and park. Seating and decorative paving will be installed and a hopper bus service provided, as part of a section 106 agreement. A landscape consultant will be involved in the planting of the south embankment. The panel urged that a landscape architect be appointed as soon as possible to advise on the detailed design and planting of the main entrance, as well as on species selection and growing medium throughout the scheme. We would like to see more than one seating area provided, possibly at a focal point at the top of the northern slope where people might naturally stop and enjoy the view, some trees in the car park [this was rejected as being unpopular with customers] and existing trees, which have to be moved, retained and re-used.

We discussed the merits of relocation of the petrol filling station to the other side of the access road, but deferred to the client's preference. Negotiations with the

Highways department are ongoing concerning the impact of the new road layout on local traffic and a review of traffic functions for the whole of Carmarthen is underway. Car park lighting will be on low mast fittings, at a height of 4-5 metres above ground, and shielded to cap upwards pollution and ensure minimum overspill. Permeable parking surfaces are high maintenance and therefore unlikely to be used. The Panel would still like to see this option explored, especially given the large area involved, and recommend a more varied and tactile mix of surface finishes.

The current plans show no large sign breaking the skyline on the southern elevation and we urge that this remains the case. The change to vertical panels on the rear elevation was questioned and it was agreed by all that this change should be reversed.

The panel questioned the sustainability strategy and suggested the inclusion of a 'green' sedum roof and active solar systems. The client stated that the company was very keen on resource efficiency. This design uses only 50% of the steel which would have been necessary 7-8 years ago and a much thinner ground floor slab. The lightweight cladding also reduces the steel content and is a good insulator. Energy use in new Tesco stores is half that of older stores. Excavation material will be taken to a nearby industrial site which needs fill. Tesco are currently looking at using sedum roofs on large mixed use developments, where the roof is a very visible element. They are also trialling the use of photovoltaic panels, in cooperation with BP, and these can always be retrofitted if/when they become economically viable.

The panel advocates some daylight provision inside the store, ideally from clerestory lights in the roof features. Unless the 'false roofs' have some function such as this, we recommend that they be removed and the money saved spent on high quality materials for the car park finish, footpaths and planting.

Summary

The Panel appreciates the efforts made by the client and the designer to establish and improve links with the town centre, and to implement resource and energy efficiency measures. In particular:

- The panel welcomes the planting proposed to the perimeter edge, but remains concerned about some aspects of the car park layout, particularly the overall impact of the parking without any tree planting within it.
- The bus service and other links to the town are positive aspects of this scheme
- The roof features should be dispensed with unless they perform the function of providing daylight to the interior - which would be our preference
- Every effort should be made to minimise the effects of light pollution on this raised site. Lighting cowls should ensure that, even when there is no car park overspill, fittings are not visible from the main A40 road.
- The colour of the surface finish should be sensitive to the local context and stated preferences
- We welcome the dropped signage on the southern façade and trust that this will not be changed at a later date
- We support the local authority's preference for slender steel columns to replaced the stone columns

- A landscape architect should be appointed to join the design team as soon as possible.
- The panel urged Tesco to bring forward their sustainability agenda and in particular look at roof coverings, natural lighting, passive ventilation, as well as soft and hard landscaping.

End

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