

Addroddiad Adolygu Dylunio Design Review Report

Review Status: Confidential

Meeting date:	18th November 2009
Issue Date:	1st December 2009
Scheme Location:	The Works, Ebbw Vale
Scheme Description:	Revised Masterplan, Secondary School
Planning Status:	Pre-application

Part1: Presentation

The masterplan for The Works site was always intended to be flexible enough to respond to changing circumstances and new opportunities. Funding has recently become available for a new secondary school on the site, together with a special needs school, an energy centre and multi-storey car park, and the masterplan has been adapted accordingly. The Learning Campus which was reviewed by DCFW in May 2009 has received consent and is due to start on site early in 2010.

The development as a whole is still shaped by high sustainability targets and benchmarks. The masterplan is designed to maximise movement and connectivity, and create walkable neighbourhoods. Mixed use remains a prime objective, especially the integration of educational and community uses, and an active public realm.

One effect of the revised masterplan is to reduce the numbers of residential units from 700 to 380. Early stage concepts for the design of the secondary school were presented. The new primary and special needs schools will be located towards the south east of the site near the wetlands area. The proximity of a local substation is thought not to be a problem.

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

The Panel welcomed the opportunity to comment on the revised masterplan at this early stage and acknowledged the flexibility and robustness of the original masterplan to allow for this revision. While we appreciate that this is work in progress, we have major concerns about the proposal as it stands:

- A major concern relates to the nature of the public spaces being created. These need to be well defined and enclosed with active uses.
- In particular it is essential to promote an early active use for plot 21, to the north of Station Square, including commercial and possibly residential uses.
- The single linear block of the secondary school should be broken up into more distinctive elements, while retaining a street frontage character to the spine road.
- The Arts Centre should have a distinctive function and identity with wide public accessibility, notwithstanding joint funding with the secondary school.
- A movement strategy should be developed which informs transport and parking provision.
- It is important that the original vision of a mixed use site is retained. We would be reluctant to see any further reduction in housing provision on the site and support any additional housing within mixed use elements.
- We welcome progress on the energy centre and a commitment to linking the secondary school and all public buildings into a district heating system.
- We look forward to further collaboration and consultation as the project moves on to the next level of detail.

Part 2: Discussion and Panel Response in Full

It was confirmed that the Arts facility is included in the new funding programme and will replace the proposed theatre on the plot to the north [plot 21]. The future use of this site will be crucial to the successful enclosure of Station Square, and the client thought that this would be a good commercial opportunity.

However, the Panel was concerned about the possibility of the public realm around the station 'bleeding away' to the north, if plot 21 were to remain vacant for some time. Exactly the same danger exists for the Main Square, to the north of the Learning Zone. It is crucial that these important public spaces are contained particularly on their northern edges, and that proposed frontages are kept active. With this in mind the location of the proposed school and arts centre administration block, currently to the west of Station Square, should be reconsidered.

There is an excess of poorly defined and uncontained public realm space inappropriate for the new town centre functions, which in turn have been undermined by changes to uses in the central area. The result is that none of the spaces are likely to be consistently busy. A reduction in scale of the open spaces, along with better containment and active uses, would be worth pursuing. The design team share these concerns and are working towards an acceptable solution.

The Panel thought that the Arts Centre needed a separate identity and the widest possible public access to emphasise its role for the whole community. This would help to define and enliven the public space to the North. Ideally, this would be achieved with a separate building, but it was recognised that joint funding and uses may not permit full separation. While we welcomed the way in which the school building engaged with the street frontage to the west, it remains an exceptionally long form within the masterplan and needs to be broken up into identifiably separate units.

Movement flows into and within the site require further examination, and this data should inform the location of the main school entrance, public transport routes, drop-off points, and the rest of the masterplan. We would like to see the route between the school and plot 21 kept small scale and intimate, for pedestrian use only.

We thought that the primary and special needs schools were not well integrated with the secondary school, but accepted the reasons for their location near to the Environmental Resource Centre and understood that they would have their own sports facilities.

There are two possible sites for the new car park to serve the north of the site, and the client will aim to keep parking standards as low as practicable, with maximum standards for the school and the site as a whole.

It was confirmed that the new Energy Centre will supply all public buildings at the northern end of site and extra capacity will be built in. The basement space to the south of the secondary school will be used as a learning space of some kind, with the possibility of a high level walkway linking the school with the Leisure Centre.

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	The Works Project [Richard Crook]
Pensaer/Architect:	Alan Baxter [Gesine Junker] BDP [Helen Groves] Blaenau Gwent CBC Architects [Jim Allen]
Consultants:	None present
Awdurdod Cynllunio/ Planning Authority	Blaenau Gwent CBC
Y Panel Adlygu Dylunio: Design review panel: Ewan Jones [Chair] Cindy Harris [Officer] Simon Carne	Michael Griffiths Lyn Owen Maria Asenjo

Lead Panellist:

Lyn Owen

Sylwedyddion/Observers:

Kieren Morgan [DCFW]