

Statws/Status:
Cyfrinachol / Confidential



Adroddiad Adolygu Dylunio: 30 May 2006
Design Review Report:

Dyddiad Cyfarfod / Cyflwyno'r Deunydd: 17 May 2006
Meeting Date / Material Submitted:

Lleoliad/Location: Llandudno Junction

Disgrifiad o'r Cynllun Office building
Scheme Description:

Cleient/Asiant: Welsh Assembly Government
Client/Agent: [Allan Boyd]

Developer/Datblygwr: HBG Construction
[Andy Marsland, Ian Fleming]

Pensaer/Architect: Aedas [Bryan Hamilton]

Cynllunio: RW Gregory, M&E
Consultants: [Chris Bradburn]
Scott Hughes, BREEAM
[Wendy Hughes]
Aukett Fitzroy Robinson,
Design Champion [Giles Alldis]
Carbon Trust [Karen Griffiths]

Awdurdod Cynllunio: Conwy CC
Planning Authority:

Statws Cynllunio: Pre-planning
Planning Status:

Y Panel Adolygu Dylunio/Design Review Panel:
Alan Francis (cadeirydd/chair) Kieren Morgan

Cindy Harris (swyddog/officer)
Lyn Owen,

Jonathan Adams
Wendy Hall

Lead Panellist:

Lyn Owen

Sylwedyddion/Observers:
Charlie Deng

Design Review Assistant

Cyflwyniad/Presentation

The proposed new office building for the Welsh Assembly Government at Llandudno Junction is part of the WAG relocation strategy which includes new offices in South, Mid and North Wales. A quality-based tendering process resulted in the contract being awarded to HBG.

The site is a brownfield plateau, located to the north of the junction of the A470 with the A55, with little context but some suburban residential development to the north west. A site analysis identified good views to the peaks of Snowdonia in the west, down the Conwy Valley to the south west, and across to the Little Orme to the north east. The existing main site entrance on the western boundary will be retained. The building is located on the south west part of the site, with parking to the north and a service zone to the south east which is easily accessed from the main entrance. There is an attenuation lake in front of the building to the south west.

The brief, developed over a 15 month consultation period, called for open plan accommodation for 650 workers, with natural ventilation, a BREEAM 'Excellent' rating, and a design which exploited the historic local industries of slate and copper mining. It states that the building should be of an award-winning standard. There will also be a library, dining room, coffee bar and ministerial accommodation. Close to the entrance, and outside the main security barrier, a suite of accommodation for the family counselling service (CAFCASS) is proposed. The brief includes a requirement for flexibility of form and use, as well as the potential for future expansion. It is acknowledged that design development and detailing will need to continue while the brief is being refined. The budget equates to £120/sq ft, to include external works.

The design proposes three 3 storey blocks facing south / south west, with a 15 metre deep floorplan and a clear 3 metres floor to ceiling height. The blocks are joined by a completely glazed circulation wing which links to the reception area. The main door is lobbied and located at first floor level. There is a separate cyclists entry with changing facilities. The ground floor/basement has a coffee shop, exhibition space and service and plant rooms. The two upper floors are open plan office space, with a row of central columns running down the length of the block. The design has been developed with the BREEAM requirement in mind and initial calculations show that the building would be comfortably within the Excellent rating.

Unfortunately there was no Local Authority representative present. However, we were told that the level of car parking had been the subject of discussion with the authority. It is possible that a temporary car park will be developed on an adjacent site.

Ymateb y Panel/Panel's Response

The Panel was informed that the planning application is now expected to be submitted some time between September and December 2006, and that this proposal is the intended design. The Assembly spokesman indicated that work to finalise the occupying divisions was ongoing and could affect the internal layouts. Aedas will continue to lead on the detailed design development and negotiations with the local authority are continuing.

The Panel queried whether the access road was adequate for predicted traffic levels. We were told that there is a possibility of road widening but also a need to avoid the road being used as a short cut. A transport plan is being developed and public transport provision on to the site is being considered, along with a park & ride facility from the railway station one mile away. The single main entrance is considered adequate for all functions, including emergency vehicle access and refuse collection, and compatible with security requirements.

The parking provision is currently for 280 spaces. The BREEAM target is 240 and the local authority would prefer a 1:1 standard of 600. The latter is supported by local residents who have previous experience of excessive on-street parking connected with new developments. A temporary car park may be provided nearby until alternative transport options are established. It is not intended that this building would be used for large gatherings, for which there are facilities in Llandudno itself.

A landscape architect from Aedas will be appointed but has not yet begun work on this project. The Panel thought that their involvement was overdue and urged that this should happen as soon as possible. The pond is intended as a landscape feature and helps to fulfil the BREEAM requirement for enhancement of ecology and biodiversity. There is already substantial planting on the eastern boundary and the two tier slope to the south. Further planting will be carried out on the north west boundary along the continuation of the road and opposite the rear of existing properties. A secure boundary fence exists to the north and east but the design intention is for the landscape itself to provide a measure of security. There was discussion about the 'secure courtyards' and whether any public access would be allowed. The degree of public access into the building has now been clarified with two levels of security allowing partial access into designated areas.

The roof treatment – which is visible from Little Orme – will be single ply membrane, possibly ballasted with slate chippings, or sheet metal. A green roof is considered unnecessary as there is already provision for rainwater attenuation and thermal mass. The Panel noted that there are other advantages associated with green roofs, and that slate chippings are by nature sharp and pointed and could therefore damage the integrity of the membrane. The serrated profile of the glazed link roof includes walkways in between the upstands for maintenance and cleaning.

The Panel regretted that the attenuation lake could not be linked with a rainwater recycling system, eg for WC flushing, or used more effectively to cool incoming air. We welcomed the intention to include solar thermal and solar electric panels, and thought it was important that this building was seen to be generating at least a proportion of its energy use.

The Panel was informed that WAG's own art group is in charge of acquiring artworks and artefacts for this project. We would prefer to see public art integrated into the building and landscape.

The Panel recognised that the three block layout gave good daylighting and, in principle, natural ventilation possibilities, but did not appear to be either flexible or easily expandable. We were also not convinced by the 15 metre depth of plan, which is the limit for natural ventilation rather than the optimum. Any future division of the open plan space could prejudice natural ventilation and, while the BREEAM assessor confirmed that a 7 metre space ventilated from one side only was acceptable, the central columns preclude a central corridor. The client confirmed that they are not expecting to include any cellular offices, but did admit that meeting rooms were likely.

It was confirmed that a three storey height was preferred in the brief, with any greater height needing special justification because of concerns with visual impact. However, the Panel urged that the design team should not feel exclusively committed to this particular form. We thought that the external stair and lift shafts would be better placed within the plan, so as to maintain the strong form of the building and reduce costs, even allowing for the fact that external stairs have no insulation requirement. The current protrusions affect the internal layout and function as well as the fenestration. We were not convinced that the retaining wall was in the right position in relation to site levels and the internal layout.

The Panel noted that the high wall to floor ratio shown was a relatively expensive solution and differed from a conventional commercial approach. In addition the articulated retaining wall and the decision to sink part of the building into the ground, would attract additional costs. While acknowledging the benefits of a dramatic form, we were concerned that any shortfall in the budget should not result in a loss of quality in materials or detailing.

The Panel felt that the heart of building, which should be an open breakout space, was compromised by the location of the public toilet block, and the pinch point created between this and the lift shaft. The main divisions of work area and function have now been determined and will begin to inform the internal design. Light fittings should be compatible with the exposed concrete soffits.

The panel questioned the location of the CAF/CASS suite which will have particular needs to deal with stressed users, possibly including children. In response it was said that the present location is close to the entry but outside the security barrier, and has its own reception in order to avoid confusion to users; also that a final decision on locating the facility in this building had not yet been made.

Crynodeb/Summary

The Panel was pleased to have the opportunity to review this important public building. We welcome the brief and its call for an exemplary design with high standards of sustainability and Excellent BREEAM rating. We consider the proposals to be an acceptable response to the site and the brief, provided the client and team maintain design quality and manage the budget accordingly. If the current budget is to be maintained, major revisions may be necessary. Our particular recommendations are:

- A landscape architect should be involved with the design development before it progresses further.
- We applaud the commitment to natural ventilation, energy performance and low carbon fuels, and would encourage a similar commitment to on-site renewable energy generation. We would like to see the potential of the attenuation lake explored and integrated into the sustainability strategy.

- We recommend that work on a green transport plan be developed in advance of site development, and implemented as soon as possible to minimise car usage.
- We would like to see an approach to public art which fully integrates it into the structures and the site.
- We have major concerns about the form of the building, its affordability within the quoted budget, and its potential for future expansion. Whatever form the building takes, it should be compatible with the budget without any loss of quality.
- We think the feasibility of the 15 metre deep floorplan should be revisited especially in the context of any likely future subdivision of internal space.
- We would prefer to see the stair wells and lift shafts relocated within the footprint of the building.
- We would like to see the heart of the building retained as an open sociable space, uninterrupted by service functions.
- We recognise that there is a lot more detailed design work to be done and we look forward to seeing this scheme again before a planning application is submitted.

Diwedd/End

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