

Design Review Report

Ysgol y Llanau, Anglesey

DCFW Ref: 63

Meeting of 20th March 2015



Declarations of Interest

Panel members, observers and other relevant parties are required to declare ***in advance*** any interests they may have in relation to the Design Review Agenda items. Any such declarations are recorded here and in DCFW's central records.

Review Status

Meeting date

Issue date

Scheme location

Scheme description

Scheme reference number

Planning status

CONFIDENTIAL

20th March 2015

9th April 2015

Anglesey

School

63

Pre-planning

Declarations of Interest

None declared.

Consultations to Date

Consultation has taken place with Cadw particularly regarding the setting of the Grade II* listed church and Gwynedd Archaeological Trust relating the archaeological significance of the site.

Consultation has also been undertaken with key stakeholders but wider public consultation is yet to take place.

The Proposals

The proposal is for a nursery and primary school that will amalgamate three existing schools in the local area. The school will have five classrooms and a nursery classroom to accommodate up to 150 pupils. The hall and a community room will be available for community use.

Main Points in Detail

The review was carried out with only approximately a month until a planning application is due to be submitted which limits the potential for constructive input into the design, however, it is understood that there would be scope for the comments arising from the review to be considered within the rather tight time scale. The following points summarise key issues from the review.

Site selection

The site selection process that has been undertaken has identified this as the preferred site, however it still presents a range of issues and constraints including the proximity of the listed church, its status as an area of outstanding natural beauty, its archaeological significance and its location on the very edge of the village on agricultural land.

For the purposes of ensuring a constructive discussion about the design proposals, the site location was accepted. However, with such an exceptional site the expectations of the building design are raised. A building in this location must be of the highest quality design and respond to the features of the site through considered analysis and a clear design vision. A generic design is not appropriate.

Although the site presents many constraints, these also provide opportunities to guide and inform the design of the building including the topography of the site, views in and out, history of the site, pedestrian links to the village, solar path and prevailing wind direction. Currently the design lacks any reference to the exceptional qualities of the site and there is no evidence of a comprehensive site analysis. An analytical approach to the site using diagrams would enable the design to be led by the site context.

The siting of the building has been determined by the minimum required cut and fill to enable a flat site and ensure that the roof of the building is below the floor level of the church. A broader perspective is required when considering the impact of the building on the church, for example the impact of the view from the road to the church or key view points in the surrounding area. This may result in a reconsideration of the location and form of the building as the massing of the hall in its current position has a considerable impact on the view of the church. The amount of cut and fill could be reduced if a split level arrangement was considered for the school building.

In addition to site analysis a review of precedent buildings would benefit the design. This review should include schools and also examples of stand-alone buildings in the countryside to identify how these buildings sit in their context, their materials and form. This would help to steer the design language and vision of the building. Precedents suggested in the review include Hampshire Schools (for instance Queens Inclosure) and projects by Architype.

Internal layout

The layout of the school is likely to change in response to the site analysis and precedent review outlined above. Some specific issues relating to the internal layout were identified at the review, including:

- The location of the head's office; whether it should be closer to the administrative functions and the lack of daylight that it will suffer from. It is understood that further consultation will be taking place once a head teacher has been appointed.
- The sick bay being somewhat isolated.
- Whether the servery will work effectively at meal times.
- Currently the class rooms are a standard form whereas they might vary in response to their location within the building or the age group that will be using them.
- The introduction of glazed screens between the classrooms and the central "learning street" should be explored to determine how it might benefit the quality of the corridor space.

The concept of the “learning street” is an idea that could be developed further to inform the architectural vision for the school.

Sustainability

The intention to use ModCell construction which utilises straw bales, a timber frame and a “flying” local factory is commended and would be an innovative approach for a school building in this location. The implications of this construction method need to be worked into the design of the building.

Other sustainability considerations that have not yet been resolved include:

- The potential for solar power generation;
- Consideration of overheating from south-facing elevations;
- Whether alterations to the building design would enable passive ventilation rather than mechanical;
- Whether Passivhaus standards could be targeted to create a super efficient building.

External areas

Engaging a landscape architect in the design of the external areas will help to develop the initial ideas set out in the presentation. The proposals for the external areas will need to respond to the requirements of the school and also the rural, edge of village setting of the site. There are also climatic issues such as the need for shelter which might help inspire design solutions.

Conclusion

The Commission is thankful for the team travelling from North Wales to attend the review. A clear brief seems to now be in place for the requirements of the school. However, the current scheme presents a solution that, whilst highly “buildable” in nature, is insufficiently rooted in the site context and too generic in its design. The design lacks the ambition and excellence that is required for a site of this importance and a building that will have local significance. The architect is therefore encouraged to take a step back and ensure that a thorough site analysis is informing the design.

The tight timescales are acknowledged but if possible the Commission would like to see the proposals again when the comments have been taken on board.

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

Attendees

Agent/Client/Developer:	Education Department, Isle of Anglesey County Council (not present)
Architectural/Designer:	Gareth Thomas, Architectural Services Manager, Isle of Anglesey County Council Marcus Groves, Design Manager, Isle of Anglesey County Council
Local Authority:	Dewi Francis Jones, Planning Development Manager, Isle of Anglesey County Council
Design Review Panel:	
Chair	Alan Francis
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