

NB. This report was confidential when it was seen at pre-application stage and relates only to the version seen at that stage. It has been made public since the planning application was granted

# Addroddiad Adolygu Dylunio Design Review Report

## Review Status: **Public**

Meeting date:	21st January 2009
Issue Date:	3rd February 2009
Scheme Location:	Brackla, Bridgend
Scheme Description:	Archbishop McGrath New school
Planning Status:	Pre-application

## Part1: Presentation

This is a proposal for a new Catholic secondary school to replace the existing run down 1960's school buildings on a separate site in Tondu, 5 km to the north. Despite the delapidated state of the existing school, it is one of the best performing secondary schools in Wales. The site is allocated for this use in the UDP; it sits on raised ground, close to several residential neighbourhoods and adjacent to a number of other civic buildings, and to bus routes.

The design is still at an early stage [RIBA Stage B]. A site layout proposal was tabled along with indicative floor plans. It is intended to submit a planning application around April 09. The Local Authority have had discussions with the applicant on site, and are generally happy with progress.

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

The Panel welcomed consultation at this early stage of the project and recognised the potential for this prominent site to establish good links with the surrounding communities. We would have liked to see a better contextual analysis and more sections included in the presentation material, and we think that there are fundamental issues that remain to be resolved. In summary:

- We are concerned that the design has been developed this far without the benefit of topographical or geo-technical surveys. The workability of the design concepts needs to be tested thoroughly before the design progresses.

- The proposed scale is acceptable but the form, massing and roofscape all need to respond to the context.
- The current alignment of the two wings gives rise to a number of problems [eg non-rectangular classrooms] which could be avoided by separating the wings further to give greater freedom and clarity to the central space.
- The idea of the grand main staircase needs to be tested in the context of other space demands and its intended function[s].
- The internal circulation needs to be reconsidered to avoid awkward pinch points and congestion, and a judgment taken on whether to replace corridors with galleries and open break-out spaces.
- We question the necessity of a separate community entrance and whether the VAT restrictions are an insurmountable obstacle. If there is to be a separate entrance, it should be given a high quality treatment commensurate with the main entrance.
- A sustainability strategy needs to be developed now, to ensure that energy efficiency measures are incorporated into the design development, and a BREEAM Excellent rating is achieved with least extra cost.
- External materials should be robust and durable, and reference prominent local community buildings.

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

The proposed site is appropriate for this use and because of its topography offers a potentially impressive setting for a high quality civic building. However, the change of levels does present significant design challenges and we were concerned to learn that a topographical survey has only just been done. The relationship between the ground floor and the adjacent higher level playing field is extremely important and needs proper review through sections and the topographical survey to ensure it is appropriate.

The building's response to the site topography is critical and we questioned whether a linear form running counter to existing gradients was the best approach. A geo-technical investigation of the site should be undertaken urgently before a cut-and-fill operation is assumed to be feasible. We understand that this arrangement allows for the accommodation of the all-weather pitch at this end of site.

We support the principle of two wings opening out to create a welcoming entrance space. However, this particular configuration gives rise to some awkward internal circulation space at all levels and this may lead to congestion at peak times. While we understand that the alignment of the two blocks is designed to respond to the two boundary lines, this has led to a convoluted internal plan. If the wings were pulled apart, the circulation would be improved, the classrooms could be made more rectangular leaving non-rectangular spaces for common areas, and the rear [community] entrance treatment could be greatly enhanced.

The potential for omitting corridors altogether should be explored, as well as using communal spaces for break-out areas. Currently there is no evidence of spaces provided for transformational learning or flexible uses. The generous amount of space allocated to the main staircase needs to be justified and its function made explicit. The currently proposed staircase arrangement is impractical and appears to conflict with building regulations.

It is important that the separate community entrance be given adequate emphasis, in comparison with the main entrance. The community uses will be mainly centred on the sports facilities, and we were told that they have to be limited because of a VAT restriction for the next 10 years. In the longer term there will be a move towards creating a community campus, to include the newly amalgamated primary school to the east of the site.

As the scheme develops, the architectural language needs to become more cohesive. The material treatment should avoid an over-reliance on render, and would do well to emulate the Catholic Church in Bridgend or the prevailing brickwork of Brackla. An extended and lower level canopy over the main entrance would provide useful shelter. We agreed that the roof should be treated as the fifth elevation and if green/brown roofs are to be used, this should not be a token gesture on a small part of the roofscape, but integrated throughout. We regretted the lack of site sections and these need to be produced as soon as possible to inform the design development.

We support the commitment to achieve BREEAM Excellent, and we advise that an environmental strategy needs to be developed now, alongside the design development, so that the building form responds to the imperatives of low carbon performance. At the moment, very deep plan spaces are shown which will not be adequately daylight [and this is made worse by the three storey form], while the highly glazed end of the west wing is likely to overheat. There is a regrettable lack of natural daylight in the corridors. We would expect daylight levels of around 4% to be achieved in all teaching spaces. The diagram showing ventilation shafts to classrooms does not relate to the floor plans, but we were told that natural ventilation will be maximised and mechanical ventilation minimised.

IT facilities should be available throughout the school so that computer technology can be integrated into all teaching areas, rather than being treated as a separate subject.

It was agreed that outside play areas and gathering spaces need to be designed in now, especially the space outside the main entrance. The nature and location of boundary treatments should also be specified, and we thought that the school frontage could be treated as the secure line, given adequate surveillance. It is not clear how the kitchens will be serviced.

We would like to see public art treated as an integrated element within the development of the building.

**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

Archdiocese of Cardiff [Mike Bamber]  
Archbishop McGrath School [Philip Manghan]

Pensaer/Architect:

HLM Architects [Richard O Neill,  
Jamie Yeoman]

Consultants:

Davis Langdon [Wayne Ganderton]  
Arup [Matthew Chambers]

Awdurdod Cynllunio/  
Planning Authority

Bridgend CBC [Julie Jenkins, Julie Griffiths]

Y Panel Adlygu Dylunio:  
Design review panel:  
Alan Francis [Chair]  
Cindy Harris [Officer]

Richard Parnaby  
Jonathan Hines  
Ann-Marie Smale  
Kedrick Davies  
Michael Griffiths

Lead Panellist:

Jonathan Hines

Sylwedyddion/Observers:

William Cuthbertson [work experience pupil]

**Declaration of Interest: it was recorded that Ann-Marie Smale's employer, Powell Dobson Architects, tendered unsuccessfully for this project.**