

# Design Review Report

Land adjacent to Waterloo Hotel,  
Betws y Coed

**DCFW Ref: N87**

Meeting of 16<sup>th</sup> March 2016



## Declarations of Interest

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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.

<b>Review Status</b>	<b>CONFIDENTIAL</b>
Meeting date	16 <sup>th</sup> March 2016
Issue date	24 <sup>th</sup> March 2016
Scheme location	Betws y Coed
Scheme description	Mixed Use
Scheme reference number	N87
Planning status	Pre-application

## Declarations of Interest

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None declared.

## Consultations to Date

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Continued informal discussions with planning officers at the National Park are taking place. This scheme is afforded Confidential status by DCFW at this time as it differs from the earlier consented scheme and remains at pre-application stage.

## The Proposals

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The proposal site is located on the outskirts of Betws-y-Coed, approximately ½ mile south of the village centre. The site is accessed directly from the busy A5 road with residential buildings to the north and the Waterloo Best Western Hotel to the south. Adjacent and up-slope of the site are chalets (also used by the hotel) and a minor road. Beyond the A5 and to the east of the site lies open grazing land which forms part of the River Conwy flood plain. There are far-reaching views across the natural landscape towards the trees and hills opposite. The site itself is level, roughly rectangular in shape and measures approximately 0.5 hectares. The site is currently used as a car park with very large existing trees along the west boundary. Access to residential units is to the rear of the car park and directly from the A5. There are large existing trees to the west of the site. A Japanese knotweed control site is located opposite the site. The site is within the Snowdonia National Park.

The scheme proposes a new block with flexible retail space on the ground floor and additional hotel accommodation above. Some changes to the landscape design, parking and routes through the site are proposed in a masterplan which covers the whole site, including land on the opposite side of the road from the hotel building, which slopes down to the river Conwy.

In 2006 planning permission was granted for a different scheme on the site and a material start was made in 2011.

This scheme was reviewed by the Design Commission for Wales on 20<sup>th</sup> October 2015; the report from that review should be read in conjunction with this report.

## Main Points in Detail

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This review took place at a good, early stage in the project where there is scope for design review to improve the scheme as the design process progresses. The following points summarise key issues from the review and should be considered to inform work ahead of making a planning application:

### **Progress since previous review**

It is positive to see the architect's enthusiasm for the project and the common ambition of the architect, client and national park planning authority for a good quality contemporary scheme. The Design Commission still encourages a good quality contemporary solution on this site.

Whilst some of the points made at the previous Design Review have been acknowledged in the revised design proposals, the Commission had hoped that the proposals would have been more fully developed at this second review meeting.

It is useful that the wider site is now being considered through a masterplan rather than a standalone building within the site. If the masterplanning is done well it should enable the client to achieve best value from all of the facilities on the site. Relocating the hotel reception to create a 'hub' in the centre of the site is a sensible step.

However, the Design Commission still has a number of significant concerns with the scheme presented at this review. These are set out under the headings below.

### **Informative Analysis**

Good design is always informed by good analysis of the context. Careful understanding and analysis of the site and its surroundings should feed into the masterplan and proposals for the new building and landscape design.

It should be clear how the analysis has led to design decisions being taken (and tested, reviewed and refined) to result in a proposal which provides the best value solution.

There are a number of significant trees on the site but as yet there is no clear strategy or response to this fact. The tree survey, which we understand is currently being undertaken, should inform a strategy and design response. There may be constraints which impact on the design arising from the tree survey.

Good analysis of the environmental conditions and micro-climate of the site should inform an environmental and energy strategy. Analysis will give clues to the best location, orientation, form and fenestration for a new building and positioning of outside amenity space.

Good informative site analysis, presented diagrammatically, is the first step in explaining the rationale behind the scheme.

*Site and Context Analysis Guide: Capturing the value of site*, written by the Design Commission for Wales and Published by Welsh Government, provides guidance on value-adding site analysis. The guidance is available at the following link: <http://gov.wales/topics/planning/policy/guidanceandleaflets/site-and-context-analysis-guide>

### **Explanation and Communication**

It is not clear from the visual or verbal presentation of the scheme how the design has evolved and why it is like it is. The clear narrative explanation is missing.

At all levels of detail it is important that the design team 'tell the design story', explaining the logic and rationale behind the proposal - how the various objectives, constraints and opportunities have informed design decisions - to result in the best solution. Showing that different options have been considered and tested is an important part of this process and gives confidence that the best solution has been reached.

If a logical design story cannot be communicated clearly, it may indicate that the design process has not been rigorous enough and the solution does not represent best value. There is also a risk of problems arising during the design or construction process if all the options and design factors have not been tested and reviewed.

In particular, a clear explanation of the concept for the irregular form of the building will be important, as this idea will generate cost. Therefore, the benefits must be clearly set out. Any concept must be realistic and deliverable within the allocated budget. The concept should be carried through to the more detailed design stages and should not be lost or diluted by fenestration design, positioning of rainwater goods and service ducts, and material detailing, for example.

A well communicated explanation of the design process gives confidence to a variety of stakeholders including the client, planning authority and local community.

As well as communicating the design process it is important to accurately convey what the place will be like to experience, both as a hotel guest and a visitor to the retail facilities. Thinking about the different ways in which people will arrive, park, navigate, move around and spend time in places - storyboarding their experiences - will be useful. What does it feel like to stay in or visit the place? Accurate 3D images from eye-level perspective are useful for this and will allow the design team and client to check that aspirations and objectives for the scheme are being met.

The level of detail in the material presented at this stage is too basic and does not allow full appreciation and understanding of what is proposed. It is not clear what materials have been selected for construction. It is also concerning that once elevational and sectional detail is added to the building images (windows, balconies, door frames, mullions etc.) it is likely that the prismatic, boulder-like quality of the building forms will

be lost. Showing scale furniture and people in drawings of the hotel rooms, for instance, will reveal how well the room shapes will work.

### **Function and Access**

The Commission has a number of concerns relating to the function of the proposal and provision of inclusive access.

The locating of the main retail parking on the opposite side of the road to the building presents a significant health and safety challenge. Although a pedestrian crossing has been indicated on the drawings, it would be dangerous to have significant numbers of people crossing this busy main road. It is important that discussions with the relevant highway authority take place as soon as possible to determine whether this is a feasible and appropriate solution.

The latest proposed floor plans show many of first floor hotel rooms/suites without lift access. The Commission encourages the adoption of inclusive design principles in all projects and would therefore strongly recommend a review of the proposed access arrangements to ensure full inclusivity and compliance is achieved.

The irregular forms of the proposed new building would have a significant impact on the use of the rooms, the structure, M&E services and construction methods. The Commission encourages careful consideration of the value of such a form.

### **Scale and Massing**

The scale of the proposed building in relation to the existing buildings on the site and the adjacent residential properties are a concern. The irregular roof forms increase the actual and apparent height of the buildings.

The cranked north end of the proposed building would provide a useful visual marker for those travelling by car along the A5, as demonstrated in the physical model. However, this effect could be achieved with a simpler overall building form.

The proposed scale and massing gives the impression of a civic building. Civic buildings usually have a bigger budget than commercial buildings and there is a danger that good quality will not be achieved if the quality of detailing, materials and build quality required cannot be met.

### **Energy Strategy**

It is not apparent that the basic principles of sustainable design have been considered. The Commission promotes a passive-first approach to energy efficiency and sustainability, which requires careful consideration of the orientation, form and layout of buildings within a site, informed by site analysis. This approach is outlined in, *Practice Guidance: Planning for Sustainable Buildings*, which is written by DCFW and published by Welsh Government.

<http://gov.wales/topics/planning/policy/guidanceandleaflets/practice-guidance-planning-for-sustainable-buildings/?lang=en>

If sustainable technologies are to be used, they must be integrated from the start of the design process. For example, there are space and delivery considerations for the use of biomass heating which need to be addressed. Plant rooms, ducting, flues and rainwater

goods must all be designed in at an early stage, or it is likely that they will detract from quality.

### **Landscape Design**

The landscape context of this scheme, on the edge of the National Park, is valuable and demands a good quality landscape design response. Good landscape design can add value to a scheme of this nature by attracting visitors and contributing to a pleasant experience for those using the hotel and retail facilities.

It will be beneficial to appoint a landscape architect to the design team at this key stage to achieve the good quality, integrated landscape design approach which this scheme demands. The landscape design should extend beyond the specification of plant species and hard landscaping materials and should not be added to the project at a late stage. The best value can be achieved through an early integrated approach.

The as yet unknown use for the ground floor of the proposed building makes it harder to design appropriate outside spaces

### **Detail and Material Quality**

The excellent quality of design detailing required for this scheme, shown in the precedent projects, is not coming through in the material presented.

The choice of building materials should be appropriate to the site, building function and budget.

### **Budget and Procurement**

It is important that the proposal can be delivered to a high quality within budget.

There is a desire to use a palette of good quality, local materials such as local stone and timber; the forms of the proposed buildings are complex. These things will add to the build cost and need to be carefully managed prior to a planning application being submitted. Simplification of the building form would reduce the complexity of the details and could improve cost effectiveness.

It would be disappointing if a complicated proposal was granted planning permission and the quality of build was compromised because cost engineering was necessary. Collaboration between the architect, client and cost consultant at this stage would reduce this risk.

The budget should provide for the delivery of good quality landscape design which will be valuable on this site.

### **Further review**

The Design Commission would encourage the design team to present the scheme for further review prior to a planning application being submitted.

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

## Attendees

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Architect/Planning Consultant: Andrew Kelly, Baron and Smith Architects

Local Authority:

Design Review Panel:

Chair

Jamie Brewster

Lead Panellist

Mike Gwyther-Jones

Panel

Michael Griffiths

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