

Design Review Report

Land Adjacent to Waterloo Hotel,
Betws y Coed

DCFW Ref: 87

Meeting of 22nd October 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

22nd October 2015
10th November 2015
Betws y Coed
Mixed Use
87
Pre-application

Declarations of Interest

None declared.

Consultations to Date

Informal discussions with planning officers at the National Park have taken place.

The Proposals

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.

Proposed accommodation would comprise a hotel reception, conference facilities and retail use on the ground floor. The upper floor would include hotel bedrooms to be used in conjunction with the adjacent hotel. In 2006 planning permission was granted for a different scheme on the site, and a material start was made in 2011.

Main Points in Detail

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:

General Approach

It is encouraging to see an enthusiastic architect tackling this scheme, and a supportive local planning authority. The use of working models to demonstrate the design thinking was useful although it would be better if the context, including the topography, was part of the working model.

The proposed uses are appropriate for this site, and the project presents an opportunity to improve the existing site organisation. However, there are a number of difficult challenges which the design process must address.

A clear vision and set of objectives for the project (and wider site) would help to guide the design process and establish the kind of place to be created.

Site Strategy

There are a number of complex issues which this scheme needs to resolve, and it would be useful to take a step back and look at the overall organisation of the site and existing buildings before proposing any new individual building or buildings. A site strategy or masterplan should address the following issues:

- Sense of arrival – It should be clear where to enter the site in a vehicle, as a cyclist and as a pedestrian and whether there is a division between hotel and retail uses
- Site navigation – The layout of buildings and landscape design should naturally direct visitors to the right place without the need of lots of signage. Vehicle access to the rear of the hotel site could be improved
- Residential access – there may be opportunity to improve the rear access to the row of houses at the northern end of the site
- Servicing and deliveries – Provision should be made for deliveries, refuse collection and other servicing so that it does not unnecessarily interfere with visitors' enjoyment of the facilities.
- Parking – It is a challenge to accommodate sufficient parking without it dominating the site. The parking layout should be well-organised and should relate to vehicle access routes and building entrances
- Pedestrian routes – whilst it is probable that most visitors will arrive at the site by car, the pedestrian environment within the site is important. As far as possible, pedestrians and vehicles within the site should be kept separate.

- Existing trees – A tree survey should identify the Root Protection Areas (RPAs) of existing mature trees which add value around the site, and any new development designed to avoid them.
- Outdoor cafe space – Carefully located and well-designed external space for a cafe or spill-out space near the fitness centre would add value to the overall scheme
- Soft landscape design – the landscape of the site is currently dominated by hard landscaping and parking. A landscape buffer alongside the road could be used to make the site more attractive from the road and a better environment for visitors within the site.
- Potential issues arising through Japanese Knotweed should be investigated early.

Form, Massing and Materials

Contextual sections would be useful to show the proposed form of the building in relation to the surrounding topography, and demonstrate the distance views. These would also help to show what any balconies would be like in terms of views, overlooking and screening. In turn, views from e.g. the A470 and footpaths on both sides of the River Conwy back to the site should also be considered.

The Design Commission supports, in principle, a contemporary approach to this project, but would like to know more about the materials and details proposed and how they will relate to the local context.

There are a number of ways in which the massing of the new facilities can be approached. It may help to think of this project as an evolution of a 'holiday village' in conjunction with the existing accommodation (main hotel building and motel-style one-storey accommodation to the south of the site), rather than a single new building. This concept may lead to a series of smaller forms on the site which fit with the proposed new site strategy. Different options for massing should be tested to find the right solution. It should also be considered if the retail units are easy to distinguish from the other uses.

The possibility of joining the existing hotel building to a new building should be investigated, by replacing the access road running through the centre of the site with an alternative road skirting the site boundary, which may then provide a new access for the adjacent houses. This could then remove the need for a separate hotel lobby/concierge in the new block. It might make the organisation of the various uses proposed more coherent.

A simplification of the massing and ideas would provide a more elegant solution which, if well-detailed, could achieve the quality of the precedent projects shown by the architect in the review.

Energy Strategy

A site-wide sustainability and energy strategy should be integral to the design process from an early stage when there is most scope to design in passive design principles. The Welsh Government's *Practice Guidance: Planning for Sustainable Buildings*, written by Design Commission for Wales, provides a useful prompt for such a process.

Further review

The Design Commission would welcome the opportunity to review this scheme again once designs have progressed to the next stage, but with time for further work before a planning application is made.

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

Attendees

Architect/Planning Consultant:	Andrew Kelly, Baron and Smith Architects
Local Authority:	Richard Thomas, Snowdonia National Park
Design Review Panel:	
Chair	Alan Francis
Lead Panellist	Cora Kwiatkowski
	Alister Kratt
	Steven Smith
	Amanda Spence, Design Advisor, DCFW