

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 in January 2012

Addroddiad Adolygu Dylunio Design Review Report

Review Status: **Public**

Meeting date:	24th March 2011
Issue Date:	12th April 2011
Scheme Location:	Plas Pistyll
Scheme Description:	Leisure
Planning Status:	Pre-application

Part1: Presentation

This proposal was seen at Design Review in December 2010. Since then the client has commissioned a new architect to produce a revised design which takes the landscape and topography of the site as the inspiration for the design development.

It is proposed to remove the derelict Plas building and sensitively integrate the new hotel building into the sloping site. The original farm buildings will be retained, and new accommodation will be added to the upper part of the site, well away from the visually sensitive coast line. Various massing options for the new building on the Plas site have been explored and the current proposal shows a single block facing north west and stepping down the site. Minimum ground disturbance is envisaged with no net import or export of material. At-grade parking is incorporated beneath the top storey.

The local authority representative stated that one of the two current permissions was for the conversion of the hotel building, although they accept that this is impractical because of its poor state of repair. The other permission relates to work on the farm site. They are generally supportive of the proposals, but were cautious that the current development area for the proposals could not be mixed between the two application sites. They also warned that a 1 for 1 replacement of chalets for caravans on the farm site could not necessarily be assumed by the developer.

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

The Panel welcomed the opportunity to review a further iteration of this proposal. While recognising that progress had been made we thought that major revisions were still necessary. In summary:

- Our main concern is with the bulk and massing of the new hotel building, arising from the need to accommodate a given number of units within the 'red line' of the disturbance zone.
- The quantum of development to be provided should be determined by an analysis of the site and topography, and should not be allowed to prejudice a successful design solution. It would be useful if the development area / numbers could be agreed with the local authority at an early stage.
- We think the form of the hotel block should be broken up, possibly with courtyards or landscape fingers, to reduce the overall impact and improve the access routes from the car park.
- The 'brutal' form of the hotel block is particularly uncomfortable on the main approach from the east.
- The proposal for the farm site is broadly welcomed, although further evidence is needed that the existing quality of detailing will be maintained.
- The landscape proposals need further development, with a bespoke response for each site. The rich historical and natural characteristics of Pistyll could be exploited with the use of landscape routes and linkages between the sites.
- A prestigious development such as this should deliver a level of environmental performance over and above the statutory minimum and we urged the developer to commit to achieving Code Level 4 as part of the planning application.

Part 2: Discussion and Panel Response in Full

The Panel appreciated the unique character of the site in terms of its coastal landscape context, historical associations, neighbouring ancient monuments, and AONB status.

On the farm site, we were pleased to note the proposed demolition of the existing caravan bases and the development of the courtyard principles in the new accommodation units. However, no elevations of these buildings were presented to us and the Panel stressed the importance of retaining the variety, character and quality of detail present in the existing buildings. New material presented on the day showed the extension on the east side of the northernmost block reduced in size, in order to maintain views to the sea, and this was welcomed.

The description of the form of the new hotel building as strong and 'brutal' was accepted by all parties. This was particularly apparent on the main approach to the building and the view of the east elevation. The sections of the building appear convincing, but the plan form is overly compressed, leading to an uncompromising architectural language which has little relationship with the language of the farm site development. We think that a breaking up and relaxation of the form of the hotel building would benefit the scheme as a whole. A deeper embedding of the building within the slope would further reduce its impact, and we had doubts about the idea of the building 'hovering' over the site, which could lead to future maintenance problems. The design team confirmed that they were trying to keep the building footprint within the 'red line' zone of existing disturbance and suggested that a

clarification of the local authority's position in this respect might allow them more room for manoeuvre.

The Panel was particularly concerned about the approach to the units from the car park, which we thought would be via dark and unattractive corridors. The architect stated that these access routes offered weather protection and would be daylight, using sunpipes. Interesting features would be incorporated such as the living rock face, and possibly showcases displaying artefacts found on the site. It was a deliberate design intention to deny visitors any views of the sea until they emerged into the living accommodation, to increase the dramatic effect. The Panel suggested that corridors should be as short as possible and that breaking up the form of the block would allow for the possibility of increasing the quality of natural light along the route and possibly introducing some sheltered courtyard spaces opening off the corridors.

The architect stated that decompressing the proposed built form of the hotel might involve putting more units on the farm site. The Panel argued strongly against this volumetric approach and stated that the proposed quantum and density of development should emerge from an analysis of the demands of the site and topography. Currently the number of units is a self-imposed constraint and needs to be challenged if it is compromising the design quality of the whole scheme. A simple transfer of units from the hotel to the farm site should not be assumed.

The landscape treatment will be important and could be the unifying element between the two sites, mediating between the formality of the courtyards, the historical features, and the wilderness of the wider surroundings. The design team acknowledged that the landscape strategy needed further development and that each site required a different landscape response. On the Plas site, for example, the landform itself should be the guiding factor, whereas on the farm site more formal planting might be appropriate.

The Panel was informed that the proposed parking provision has been revised in line with the recommendations contained in our previous report, and will probably be 1.5:1. We were assured that although the design currently achieves Code for Sustainable Homes (CSH) Level 3, the aspiration is to achieve CSH Level 4. Given the status and prestige of this development, we would expect to see a commitment to CSH Level 4 included in the Design and Access statement. We understood that the north facing site has led to a design which maximises daylight rather than sunlight, and optimises views to the north and west.

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	Natural Retreats (Rob Fradley)
Architect/Urban Designer:	Ray Hole Architects (Ray Hole)
Consultants:	n/a
Third Party:	n/a
AwdurdodCynllunio/ Planning Authority	Gwynedd Council (Cara Owen, Gwawr Hughes)
Y Panel Adlygu Dylunio: Design Review Panel: Wendy Richards [Chair] Cindy Harris [Officer] Elfed Roberts	Chris Jones Toby Adam
Lead Panellist:	Chris Jones
Sylwedyddion/Observers:	Officers from Wrexham CBC and Flintshire CC