

Design Review Report

Canolfen Lleu

DCFW Ref: 292

Meeting of 16th March 2023



Review Status

Meeting date	16 th March 2023
Issue date	30 th March 2023
Scheme description	Mixed-use development
Scheme location	Water St, Penygroes, Caernarfon, LL54 6LY
Scheme reference number	N292
Planning status	Pre-application programmed for March

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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 and meeting Agenda items. Any such declarations are recorded here and in DCFW's central records.

There were no conflicts of interest declared.

Consultations to Date

This is the first consultation with the Design Commission. There has been consultation with the community and users of the proposed buildings. A pre-application meeting with the local planning authority is planned for later this month.

This report's status is public as per the guidance set out in 3.3.3 of our guide to consulting DCFW through Design Review http://dcfw.org/wp-content/themes/dcfw-child/assets/Consulting_The_Commission_Design_Review_2020_Eng.pdf.

The Proposals

The proposal is for a mix of community facilities, health services, a theatre, nursery, offices for Grwp Cynefin, independent living flats for older people, and a care home. Some of these facilities already exist within the village, with the project seeking to provide new facilities that better meet the users' needs and bring them closer together. The project's estimated cost is £52 million, much of which will be funded through public sector investment, representing a significant investment in the area.

Pengroes is a small village to the south of Caernarfon. Several smaller villages are close to Pengroes, including Talysarn and Llanllyfni, with the new service to be used by people living in the wider area. The site sits between the town centre and the local football club. The site is large in the context of Pengroes and occupies a significant part of the southeast quarter of the village. The site faces onto two key streets within the village, Victoria Road and Water Street, with trees and a walking/cycling route to the south.

Main Points

This is a highly ambitious project, with major public sector investment, which will have a significant effect on Pengroes and the wider area. However, with this come challenges and an even greater responsibility to deliver a high-quality result.

Strategy

The project proposes a concentration of facilities and services to serve Pengroes and the wider area. The vision and entrepreneurship of Grwp Cynefin have primarily driven this. The Design Commission supports the principle of mixed-use development but the underpinning decisions for including the different components of the project and the impact of their combined scale upon the village have not been clearly justified.

A clear explanation is needed of why these facilities are proposed in Pengroes and why combining them in one development in Pengroes is the best plan. Would some of these facilities be better located elsewhere in the area? Will the development result in the loss of facilities in other villages?

The proposal needs to be considered in the context of Pengroes: a rural village characterised by small shops and services spread around the village. Is a concentration of services at this scale in one part of the village appropriate in this context? What will be the impact on the village? Further thought needs to be given to what will happen to buildings that will become redundant because of this development, such as the existing health centre and pharmacy. Even if these are not within this projects 'ownership' they are an impact of this work.

The reasons why these different services are being brought closer together is unclear. Will people living in independent living accommodation really want to be linked with a care home? It is more usual to ensure independent living is seen to be as separate from 'care' as possible. Is it realistic that the nursery will share the care home's kitchen and carry food outside in poor weather? Consideration also needs to be given to concentrating different uses within one building, which may harm the street and village activity.

The retention of the police station and the desire to only decant the residents of the care home once is substantially constraining the design. These decisions should be reconsidered, given the significant scale of public investment.

Given the development scale, public transport improvements may be needed to enable people in the surrounding area to access the proposed facilities. Public transport will help reduce the number of people who need to drive there and could reduce space allocated to car parking.

The local authority should be a key partner in the strategic overview of how the development fits in the village and the wider area.

With several partners involved in the project, a clear client relationship is needed. This relationship must establish the decision-making processes for design and who will manage the different uses in operation. The client needs to be conscious of the pitfalls of the proposed design and build procurement process. Identifying the key priorities and establishing measures to secure design quality is essential.

Overall, a clearer narrative is needed to explain the rationale for the project, the vision for these centralised services, and why in Pengroes.

Design

The following aspects of the proposal are strengths: having buildings facing onto Water Street and Victoria Road; having the community facilities focused on the corner of these streets; having the theatre closer to the village centre; and locating the car parking away from the two main roads.

However, we have strong concerns about the proposed layout of the buildings on the site, the plan shape of those structures and the spaces created between them. Accommodating the proposed mix of uses is a fantastic opportunity and a challenge. The internal needs of the different uses and the desire to create a public square currently drive the design at the expense of a coherent site layout that would be appropriate to a small village.

The proposal comprises two large buildings which do not reflect the finer grain of the village. There are no clear fronts and backs to the buildings, with the corner building having to have two public fronts and the second building turning its back on the car parking, trees, and walking/cycling route to the southeast. The design results in a lack of enclosure of the public and private outdoor spaces and a lack of clarity between public and private. The internalisation of uses and large floor areas, and the resultant lack of entrances onto the street, could affect the activity and vitality of the streets.

A wider analysis of the fabric of the village and the people living there is needed to inform the design, including the scale, built form, streets, movement, and green infrastructure. Consideration should be given to enclosed blocks, with joined-up but independent buildings, and creating smaller buildings and spaces. There will probably need to be new 'streets' within the site. The buildings should face onto these streets, designed to reflect the village context, and connect with the surrounding streets, lanes, and paths to enable people to travel through the site.

The character along Victoria Road could be more continuous and terraced than along Water Street. The car parking may work better dispersed along the southeastern edge of the site and between buildings not independent of them. A less formal space could better accommodate a farmers' market by using streets or car parking spaces flexibly.

The green infrastructure can integrate the development with the surrounding landscape and respond to the urban character to the north and the rural character to the south. The belt of trees to the south appears to be an important defining characteristic for this edge of the village. Less (but more usable) public space, tighter routes and closer buildings should allow more trees to be retained.

Overall, the layout needs reconsidering with a greater focus on the urban form. Urban design principles appropriate to a village should inform the layout, tuned to the Pengroes context, to create a clearer and more resilient structure. This is a village not a town or city – precedents for site layout, routes and building plots should emerge from that scale not the imposition of forms and plans suited to larger, denser urban environments or suburban development.

Next Steps

The size of public sector investment and the level of ambition make this one the largest and most significant projects in Wales.

Given the scale of the development, particularly in the context of a rural village, the client should consider breaking the project down into smaller parts. A masterplan could establish a framework and rules for development to enable the subdivision of the site into plots to be designed and developed separately over time, likely by different design teams and delivered by different contractors.

This approach could make the project more manageable, resilient to funding decisions, create a more varied and interesting place, and enable the involvement of several smaller and more local construction contractors, potentially retaining more of the construction spend within north Wales.

The Design Commission would welcome a discussion with the client on this approach and can hold a workshop with the project team to support development of a masterplan.

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

Attendees

Agent/Client/Developer:	Gwyndaf Williams, Grwp Cynefin
Architect/Design Team:	Alice Stewart, Arcadis IBI Group
Landscape Architect:	Carl Horsdal, Arcadis IBI Group
Green Infrastructure Consultant:	Gary Grant, Green Infrastructure Consultancy
Planning Consultant:	Rob Davies, Asbri Planning
Local Authority:	Gwynedd Council John Idwal Williams Gwawr Teleri Hughes Adam Thomas

DCFW Design Review Panel

Chair:	Simon Richards
Panel:	Ewan Jones, Lead Panellist Toby Adam Jen Heal, Design Advisor, DCFW Max Hampton, Design Advisor, DCFW
Observer/s:	Carole-Anne Davies, DCFW, Chief Executive Gwen Thomas, Asbri Planning Margarita Janusevic, Arcadis IBI Group