

Conwy Culture Centre

DESIGN & ACCESS STATEMENT

Contents

General Details

Introduction

The Design Process

Planning Policy Context

The Site Context

The Site

Access

Character and Design Concept

Community Safety

Sustainability

Movement

Programme

General Details

- Description: Conwy Culture Centre
- Location: Bodlondeb Park, Conwy
- Postcode: LL32 8NG
- OS Grid Reference: SH779776
- Site Area: 0.46 ha
- Existing Building Gross Internal Floor Area: 278 m²
- Proposed Gross Internal Floor Area Demolition: 278m²
- Proposed Gross Internal Floor Area (New Build): 1,243m²
- Proposed Final Gross Internal Floor Area: 1,243m²
- Client: Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Conwy County Borough Council

Introduction

This Design and Access Statement is prepared in relation to the project to develop a new Culture Centre at Conwy. The centre will include:

- A new area library for Conwy, Deganwy and Llandudno Junction.
- A new home for Conwy Archive.
- An arts and heritage hub with interactive interpretation and historic collections on display.
- A youth and community space and facilities to support a programme of accredited training opportunities for all ages as well as volunteer support and development opportunities for people all over the county.

The Design Process

Engagement and Consultation with officers of Conwy County Borough Council has occurred throughout the design development stages of the project. It is acknowledged that further detailed consultation is likely to be required as the scheme progresses.

Meetings have taken place to establish design principles, an appreciation of the site context, the development of a clear vision and agreement over the design objectives of the brief. Engagement from an early stage has taken place with The Public, Community Leaders, Councillors and other Stakeholders, and has been very positive to date. Where appropriate the comments and observations of these Stakeholders and end users have been incorporated into the scheme. Consultations have taken the form of meetings with key individuals, and as Public Displays/Exhibitions at Conwy Library, as well as via the website of CCBC. Responses have been recorded throughout the process and fed-back into the design process.

In many cases discussions will be on-going, for example with representatives from various departments of CCBC to ensure that the new Centre responds to the functional requirements of the proposed brief, but is also a building with low management/maintenance costs, that consideration has been given to the life-cycle costs of building materials and components and that it is sustainable as a whole.

Planning Policy Context

'All new buildings should be of high quality, sustainable design and must respect and enhance their surroundings without harming local amenity'

Conwy Local Development Plan

Planning Policy

Reference has been made throughout to the current Planning Policy and Supplementary Development Guidance documents published by CCBC, The Welsh Assembly Government and The UK Government where applicable. In all cases the proposals have sought to adhere to these adopted policies and legislation. Specifically, reference has been made to:

- Conwy Local Development Plan 2007-2022 (Adopted October 2013)
- Welsh Assembly Government TAN 5 Nature, Conservation and Planning
- Welsh Assembly Government TAN 12 Design
- PD5454:2012 Guide for the storage and exhibition of archival materials
- Conwy Supplementary Planning Guidance LDP2: Parking Standards
- Manual for Streets 2007 Department for Transport

Planning History

The Planning History associated with the site relates to Educational Use. The Heritage Appraisal by Holland Heritage (Sept 2016) outlines that *'Ysgol Bodlondeb was built as a Girls School in 1897 at the south-east corner of the parkland at Bodlondeb'* and goes on to describe that in 1927 it became an infants' school, closing in 1998.

In 1999 the building was adopted as a location for a Youth Club and has been used as such, and by other community groups since.

Conservation Status

There are no listed buildings located on the site and the site lies just outside of the Conwy Conservation Area (right on its north-western edge at Town Ditch Road).

The site is located adjacent the Town Walls, which run on the opposite side of Town Ditch Road, and are clearly seen from the site and vice versa. The walls, together with the castle,

are part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site of the Castles and Town Walls of King Edward in Gwynedd.

Whilst the proposed site lies just outside the World Heritage Site itself, it does lie within and may affect the Creuddyn and Conwy Landscape of Outstanding Historic Interest. While this is not a statutory designation, chapter 6 of Planning Policy Wales (PPW) states that it is a material consideration in the planning process and must be given due regard when reaching a determination.

The Site Context

Conwy Town

Conwy is a walled market town and community in Conwy County Borough on the north coast of Wales. The town, faces Deganwy across the River Conwy. The community, which includes Deganwy and Llandudno Junction, had a population of approximately 14,200 at the 2001 census, rising to 14,750 at the 2011 census with the town itself having a population of approximately 4,000.

The town is well served by public transport, including a town centre station on the main North Wales railway line and, being located just off the A55 North Wales expressway, is well connected to the highway system.

The town is dominated by the Castle and town walls, making it a popular tourist destination. Visitor attractions and facilities include the Castle and the walls and Plasmawr (CADW), the Suspension Bridge and Aberconwy House (National Trust) the Conwy Tourist Information Centre (operated by the Local Authority) the privately operated Conwy Visitor Centre and Art Gallery (arts/crafts/gifts shop), as well as the 'Smallest House in Britain' and the Royal Cambrian Academy of Art.

The town also hosts annual festivals including the 'Gwledd/Feast' food festival and the North Wales Bluegrass Music Festival, held at Bodlondeb Park itself.

The Site

General

The Site is located at the southern corner of Bodlondeb Park, Conwy, at the junction of Bangor Road, Town Ditch Road and Mount Pleasant and lies opposite Porth Ffordd Bangor.

Bodlondeb Park is located to west of the Conwy Estuary, and to the north-west of Conwy Town Walls and the UNESCO World Heritage Site of The Castles and Town Walls of King Edward in Gwynedd.

History

The original Bodlondeb House and parkland setting was built by the Holland Family in 1742, on land which was part of Twttil Estate. The site was subsequently sold to Albert Wood, an industrialist from Saltney.

Existing Features

The main features which exist on the site are the existing buildings (the former school building and sub-station).

Initial design options considered the retention of these buildings, and the incorporation of the school as part of the Centre.

However, design reviews and development made it clear that the retention of the existing buildings would significantly limit the design opportunities on a compact site and would compromise views to Conwy Town Walls and Bodlondeb Park respectively.

Furthermore the fabric of existing 'school building' would need substantial upgrading and improvement to accord with current thermal insulation standards, also the services installation of existing ex-school building would need to be replaced or significantly upgraded to tie in with new the new services installations.

It was felt that retaining the existing school building would be likely to result in a clash of architectural language and that efforts to incorporate the it into the new building was compromising the quality of the new facilities, and limiting the opportunities, and that the demolition of the existing buildings should be seriously considered.

Therefore the site, including the existing school of 1897, has been the subject of a Heritage Statement (as previously referenced) setting out its history and significance, the summary of that that report notes as follows:

'It has demonstrated that the existing building is not in itself so significant as to require its preservation. Beyond that, as long as the constraints set out in this report, are taken into account, the proposed Culture Centre need not have a negative impact on the World Heritage Site's Outstanding Universal Value.'

The demolition of the buildings open up the following potential benefits:

- greatly enhance the proposed site's potential.
- allow the new main entrance to be located in its optimum location.
- will enable 'Pavilion in the Park' design approach to be realised.
- will enable the Bodlondeb Park boundaries to Bangor Road and Town Ditch Road to be 'mended' and open up uninterrupted views of the Park from the new Culture Centre.
- will enable new 'gateway' to Bodlondeb Park to be formed from the Town Ditch boundary of the site and will create a clear vista from Bodlondeb Park to Porth Ffordd Bangor.

Ecology

The site itself is not considered to be of high value in terms of ecological value. A 'Building Demolition Protected Species Survey' (Cambrian Ecology, May 2016) concluded that:

there was no sign of current, or historic bat use, and no specific mitigation or reasonable avoidance measures were recommended. No other protected or invasive specific issues were recorded (though the potential for nesting birds in the dense scrub was noted).

Sites of Special Scientific Interest are located nearby, within Bodlondeb Woods (also a Local Nature Reserve) to the north-east of the site, as well as in the railway cutting to the south-west of the site, (at the rear of Ivy Cottage) where the railway line appears from below the tunnelled section below the town walls.

This proposed development should have no detrimental effect on those sites.

Arboriculture

Both the south-western and south-eastern boundaries of the Park are lined with mature deciduous trees (stopping short at the junction with the school site). Whilst, at the time of preparing this report the results of an arboricultural survey and report are awaited, the intention is to ensure that all healthy trees are retained and protected (note: as the site is owned by the Local Authority all existing trees are considered to be protected).

The intention is that the existing landscape and ecology should be enriched by the proposed development.

Flood Risk

According to the NRW flood map the site is located outside of all areas of known risk (from reservoirs/rivers and sea and surface water).

Archaeology

Archaeological Investigations have been undertaken, and whilst a full report is awaited it has been confirmed that the only finding was a shallow ditch found in some undergrowth on site, though this is not believed to be of any historic significance.

Access

Pedestrian

The principal pedestrian access routes will be:

- from Conwy town centre (and via train): most pedestrians arriving from the town itself would need to pass under the town walls; most likely doing so via Porth Bangor. A new pedestrian crossing would be located on Town Ditch Road to provide pedestrians the right of way across from town to Bodlondeb Park and the Centre.

- via bus: the existing bus stop located directly adjacent the site on Town Ditch Road will remain and access from the bus stop to the Centre will be available via a choice of either nominally level (greater than 1:20 gradient) or stepped approach. Pedestrian approaching from Berry Street and the Quayside would also access the Centre along this (existing) route.

- from Bangor Road and Mount Pleasant (and public car parks): the existing pedestrian crossing would be retained to allow pedestrians to cross Bangor Road as per the present arrangement.

- from Bodlondeb Park (Council Offices, local secondary schools and public car parks): the existing footpath across the Park is to be integrated into site design and to have vista to Porth Ffordd Bangor. It is also proposed to provide new gateway into Bodlondeb Park along this route.

A Single main entrance and exit point to new building to be provided, located at south eastern corner of site, in a clear location and to suit all pedestrian access routes.

Inclined walkways to be provided to Bangor Road and ambulant stepped approach to Town Ditch Road, to suit pedestrian crossing locations and utilise natural site levels as far as possible, thus designing out as far as is possible formal ramp arrangements. The footway and

existing planter to southern corner of site to be integrated into the overall site layout design.

Cyclists

Bicycle access will be available, in effect right to the front door.

National Cycle Network (route no. 5) passes near to the site, with a section of traffic free route along the shoreline of Bodlondeb Park. Existing routes across the Park will link the Centre to the network route.

Cycle storage (racks) will be available at the Centre, located in a sheltered area.

Motor Vehicles and Parking

In order to retain the sense of the Public Park and to minimise the 'land-grab' and visual impact the scale of provision for vehicular access and on site car parking has been kept to a minimum.

A single vehicle access and egress point to site is planned from Bangor Road, at the western corner of site, with visibility splays (2.4 x 43 m) as required by Conwy Council. The existing boundary wall will need to be partly demolished and rebuilt locally to form the proposed access. Existing trees will remain - with tree and root protection as directed by arboricultural surveyors recommendations.

Parking provision is to conform to LDP2 Parking Standards. That requires a total 25 spaces; the strategy here is to provide the requisite number of parking spaces for disabled visitors, three in this instance, with the balance provided off-site, utilising existing public car parking facilities and undertaking improvements to them in order to increase the number of available spaces (at Pentre Wech, Mount Pleasant and Bodlondeb).

The only on site car park facility will be the three spaces designated for blue badge users; all three spaces are located directly off the vehicular access from Bangor Road, and within 50m walking distance of the main entrance. Additional disabled spaces are located at nearby public car park locations, including Mount Pleasant (approximately 75m away).

The project will include pavement improvements in a wider context at locations agreed with the Local Authorities Traffic engineers, including the provision new tactile crossing points at key locations and the creation of kerbed build-out with tactile crossing point and re-aligning/ re-marking the parking bays to improve the existing layout, and relocation of the disabled parking places that currently reside at the rear of Pentre Wech car park to a new location nearer to Bangor Road.

The vehicular access and service area at the site will provide for vehicles servicing the Centre, including all deliveries and collection of books and archive material, recycling and refuse collection and general deliveries (cafe etc), as well as parking for Mobile Library vehicles and access/hard-standing for emergency vehicles (turning head requirements based on a typical refuse cart, being the largest regular vehicle; in accordance with Traffic Engineers requirements.

A travel plan will be developed for the project, with the intention being to encourage the use of the excellent public transport links and encourage walk/cycle to the Centre and car sharing for staff.

From an aesthetic perspective whilst there are clearly technical requirements which must be adhered to the strategy is to minimise the visual impact by means of utilising a geo-grid system which grass will grow through and minimising the use of kerbs and hard surface finishes.

Inclusive Design

Please refer to the previous paragraphs (pedestrian and vehicular access and parking for statements relating to inclusive design matters relating to access in & across the site, movement to & from buildings and access to public transport & amenities.

All reasonable steps will be taken to ensure the building facilities are accessible and of benefit to all. Consideration will be given to the inclusivity of those with mobility impairments, sensory impairments and those with learning difficulties, with the intention being to remove or design out any barriers that create any undue effort, separation or special treatment.

The client is committed to ongoing consultation with local access groups, the results of which will continue to be fed back to the design team.

The Welsh Language

The Council will ensure that the project supports and sustains the long term well-being of the Welsh language.

In accordance Policy CTH/5 of the Local Development Plan a Community and Linguistic Statement has been prepared to accompany the Planning Application.

Character and Design Concept

Sustaining and Enhancing Local Character

In planning and architectural terms the proposed Culture Centre has a delicate balance to strike, with the aspirations of the brief for a contemporary and landmark building needing to be considered against the context of the sensitivity of the World Heritage Site.

The site is quite challenging in many respects. The site of the former school turns it back on the park, making no effort whatsoever to address it positively, indeed the boundary walls have the effect of breaking any visual link between the park and Porth Bangor, the natural point of entry into the top end of town from Bodlondeb Park. Furthermore, whilst there is no documentary evidence to substantiate the point but it is felt that the break in the tree lined boundary at this corner is probably as a consequence of the presence of the school.

For the building to sit comfortably in this setting it is felt that it would be appropriate to set it back somewhat from the very corner, this allows the project to 'heal' the broken tree lined boundary at this location, by forming a grass bank edge to be planted with new semi-mature trees.

This allows the building to be properly set within, and connected to, the parkland, thus providing the opportunity for the new Culture Centre to be truly a part of the fabric of Bodlondeb Park and the activities of the Park. In the same way as the 'Lodges' marks the other entrances into the Park the new Culture Centre will act as a new gateway or 'porth' to Bodlondeb Park and to increase the visual presence of the park from Bangor Road and Town Ditch Road.

The building has been orientated at an angle parallel to the line of the existing path which crosses the Park from Bodlondeb itself to Porth Bangor; this enables a re-connection of the town with the Park. The main entrance is sited directly on this route, at a juncture of the various other routes to the site, from town (across the new pedestrian crossing on Town Ditch Road) from the adjacent bus stop, and from Bangor Road, across the existing pedestrian crossing.

The proposed building should be attractive and inviting but also quiet and unassuming. Whilst the building should be contemporary, the materials and colour palette should reflect the parkland surroundings.

Promoting Legible Development

The proposed building will be recognisable and easily understandable for all visitors.

The main entrance will be clearly recognisable, and is located at the junction of each of the pedestrian routes which pass through the site. The entrance itself will be 'signposted', in both the literal sense (bilingually in both Welsh and English) and, where appropriate in other languages including Braille) and also architecturally, for instance by means of clarity in paving finishes and the use of an overhanging canopy for emphasis.

As previously outlined the building itself will act as a gateway and the sense of the creation of a 'marker' will be enhanced by the introduction of a landscape structure physically framing the entrance to the Park.

The Building massing, qualities and form

The sensitivity of the Historic Context is paramount in relation to the scale and massing of the proposed building: it is clear that the new Centre should not compete with Conwy Town Walls in any way. Furthermore one of the key views of the building will be from the top of the town wall itself, making the final design of the buildings roofs-cape a critical 'fifth elevation'.

With this in mind the vision for the building aligns with the 'pavilion/lodge' approach of a 'low-profile' building matching the horizontal emphasis of the parkland, and keeping the building 'close to the ground' in order to minimise its impact on views of the Walls and the Park (both towards and from).

Whilst respecting the need to ensure a comfortable internal environment the intention is to utilise extensive transparent areas to maximise views out of the building and to maximise use of natural daylight; this will also afford a greater amount of views into the new building , this generating engagement with the external environment.

Community Safety

Security will be provided via natural surveillance of the building from passing pedestrian routes and traffic on the adjacent roads and also through the cultivation of community ownership and the civic pride by ensuring the building provides attractive, high quality, safe public spaces.

A 'Secure By Design' consultation will be undertaken with the North Wales Police Architectural Liaison Officer.

Sustainability

General

The proposed Culture Centre will be a sustainable project, with good practice principles being applied across all aspects of the proposed design, construction and management of the Centre. This will be formally evidenced using the BREEAM tool – with an 'Excellent' rating to be achieved.

Enhancing biodiversity

The site itself is not considered to be of high value in terms of ecological value, as confirmed by the 'Building Demolition Protected Species Survey' (Cambrian Ecology, May 2016) which confirmed that there no bats or any other protected species on site.

However, where appropriate, opportunities to improve biodiversity and habitat potential will be taken in both the building itself, but also in the landscape scheme for the project. This includes the use of sedum roof for the majority of the building.

Land use will be maximised for community use and facilities, and where appropriate opportunities for the interpretation of the local environment will be introduced into the scheme.

Connectivity

Please cross refer to the 'Access' section of this Statement, as outlined in that section the Centre will have excellent public transport provision, thus promoting sustainable means of travel as a means of accessing the Centre.

A travel plan will be developed for the project, with the intention being to encourage the use of the excellent public transport links and encourage walk/cycle to the Centre and car sharing for staff.

Management

Specification of materials and finishes to consider lifecycle costing etc, including maintenance issues. Building Management System to be incorporated for the management of the Mechanical and Electrical system.

Energy Efficiency / Carbon Reduction

As a general design principle Passive/Low Energy strategies will be adopted – to include design of building fabric, building services installations and integration of renewable technologies.

The following will be incorporated into the building design:

The archive store will be located within a basement level; the principle reason for this is that this will ensure an inherently stable environment, minimising the need for costly

heating/ventilation/humidity control installation and running costs (all to be the subject of detailed thermal modelling).

Low water use (waterless urinals / low flush cisterns / percussion taps etc)

Renewable energy sources : Photovoltaic Panels to be provided.

The use of natural daylight will be maximised, whilst ensuring excessive glare is eliminated.

Large spaces to be naturally ventilated by using cross-ventilation, with a mixture of manual and automated vents/louvers.

Space heating to principal spaces : High efficiency gas condensing boilers as the primary heat source. Consideration has been given to the use of ground source heat pumps, however, this is unlikely to be a cost effective solution.

Materials salvaged from the demolition of the existing buildings will be re-used wherever possible (eg stonework etc).

Local materials to be used where possible. Also local contractors and suppliers to be used where possible.

Movement

Please cross refer to the 'Access' section of this Statement, as outlined in that section the Centre is so located as to be well connected and integrated into the local public transport infrastructure, thus promoting sustainable means of travel as a means of accessing the Centre.

Access from car parks and public transport nodes will be safe, clear, easy and attractive.

On-site refreshment and sanitary facilities will be provided for all visitors. In addition on site car parking spaces will be provided for blue badge holders and secure and lockable cycle storage will be provided for cyclists.

Programme

The existing Library at Conwy is due to close in Summer 2017

Library Services for Conwy, Deganwy and Llandudno Junction to be relocated and housed in the Bodlondeb Civic Offices until the new Centre is complete.

The new Library due to open in Summer 2018.