

The Works, Llanelli
Notes of consultation with Disability Access Group
Disabled Drivers' Association Hall, Llanelli, 12 March 2007

Present:

Ken and Ened Davies, Carmarthenshire Hearing Impaired Group
Liz Evans, Llanelli Carers
Eileen John, Disabled Drivers Association
Roy John, Disabled Drivers Association
Frank Allen MBE, Chair Llanelli Disabled Access Group
Mike Thomas, Llanelli Access Group
David Evans, Carmarthenshire Disability Coalition
Harry Rogers, Carmarthenshire Disabled Access Group

Facilitating

Claire Phillips (CP) Consultant to CCC
Siarlys Evans (SE) Consultant to Lawrays Architects

Summary of Key Issues

Full minutes of the consultation follow below, but listed here are the key issues which arose. These will be examined during further consultation, in conjunction with an Access Audit:

- Accessibility of the building for people with all types of disability, including issues relating to sensory impairment.
- Accessibility of the site in general – transport issues, public transport, parking, pricing, booking procedures and inclusivity for all age groups.
- The opportunity for the development to be a ‘Centre of Excellence’ in the way it caters for the needs of people with disabilities and the facilities it provides e.g. for conferences.
- Sustainability, both in financial terms and in respect of design

Minutes of the consultation meeting

1. Introduction and questionnaire feedback.

The meeting opened with a summary of The Works project by CP, and feedback of the results of the questionnaire completed by Access Group members, which are reproduced below:

A. Facilities:

Restaurants were the most popular choice in this section

The other most popular answers were:

Theatre

Area to Socialise

Café

Two people commented under this question that disabled access is essential.

B. Programme:

The most popular choice was **plays**, followed by

Musicals

Cinema

Other live music

C. Design

Most people were in favour of a **traditional** design, to complement the Tinning shed. The second most popular option was Modern.

D. Materials

The most popular answer was **Natural colours**, followed by

Slate

Wood

Brick

Sustainable materials

E. Discouraging factors

Seven people listed **Access** as an important factor. The following comments were made:

“Disabled access needed; steps/stairs, narrow access”

“Parking facilities essential –no steps”

“Disabled access essential”

“Parking is essential”

“Would be discouraged by lack of wheelchair-accessible toilets and lack of disabled parking places”

In the tick box section of this question, **Parking** was again the most important potentially discouraging factor, along with

Transport difficulties

Cost

Child care issues

SE explained that 'the Works' was a Big Lottery funded project that was one of three in Wales that had been nominated for further development. Work was proceeding on the design and public consultation to provide further definition that would culminate in a submission to the BLF in May of this year.

2. Discussion of Access Issues

SE presented the project in more detail, emphasising that the application is being made to the Big Lottery fund requires the new building to be 'iconic'. This requirement needs to be balanced against other criteria such as:

That it works well as a development, and fits well on the site

SE commented that 'access' is a wide ranging term which also covers the location of the site. In this case it is very close to a road which acts as a barrier between the site and Llanelli town centre. It will therefore be very important to look at how the centre will be reached from the town. In the long term pedestrian and public transport routes need to be developed. Two of these are important: Pont Agen and Old Castle Road. A route running north to south from Pont Agen towards North Dock has been created which forms a diagonal through the site. It is very important to break down barriers to attendance and to make the centre accessible to people throughout Carmarthenshire as this is a regional development.

This was met by wide agreement from the group.

SE went on to explain that the architects' proposal is to float a triangular roof over the centre, not dissimilar to features at the Eden Centre in Cornwall. This would cover a flat open-air piazza that could be used for open air events.

The theatre will have a fly tower for the scenery. The development features use of the Tinning House and it is planned to include two theatre spaces.

SE also pointed out that 'traditional' materials like brick can be used in modern way and that in a development of this size, compromises will be needed in terms of scale and the materials used. It was stressed that the building design is still at the 'work in progress' stage.

SE confirmed that the development would include two theatres, the larger of which would seat around 550 people. It was felt that this may be too small to be financially viable and that ticket price will be an important issue. SE stressed that the theatre spaces will be very flexible, both in terms of seating arrangements and in the programme they can accommodate.

This point was taken but it was felt that there was a danger that well-known performers would not come to Llanelli because the ticket prices would need to be too high in order to cover costs. It was also pointed out that the local pantomime currently sells out 6 performances at Theatr Elli and it would be important not to turn people away if the new venue had a smaller capacity.

Coaches and parking

A question was then raised about where coaches would be able to drop off. Some earlier sketches of the plans had been seen by the group which suggested the parking was some distance from the building. SE confirmed that the drop off point was now close to the entrances to the ground floor foyer of the theatre and the entrance to the Tinning Shed and illustrated the point using a plan of the site. Some concern was expressed about the access from coaches to the building needing to be as close as possible, particularly for use in bad weather.

The location of the disabled parking spaces was also questioned. SE explained that all such facilities at the centre will comply with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and that an access specialist will complete an audit of the plans when they are nearer completion, looking at the use of the building by disabled actors, technicians and staff as well as members of the public with disabilities.

There was great interest amongst the group in being involved in this process as there has been experience in the past of problems with consultation not being acted upon.

A question was asked about the appeal of the centre to young people and it was pointed out that it is important to hear the views of young disabled people.

SE explained that the programme at the venue will aim to offer a wide range of events and the centre will be open at all times of the day. CP

also mentioned that further consultation is taking place with young people's groups.

The needs of people with sensory disabilities were also raised. SE confirmed that the audit will look at this area, including issues such as lighting and signposting. The group emphasised that access goes beyond simply physical access and includes issues such as pricing and that the group represented all types of disability. This was the first opportunity for them to feed into the project. SE and CP stressed that the consultation needs to be an ongoing process. The group are keen to work with the access specialist and take an engaged role in the process.

The issue of car parking was raised further and concern expressed that there will be enough parking if several activities are going on at the same time. SE stated that there are plans for over 200 car spaces and coach parking, with separate staff parking. It was felt that this number of car parking spaces may not be sufficient, with the result that those with mobility impairment would not be encouraged to come directly from the town centre.

Public transport and sustainability

SE stated that the building will have a BREEAM rating for sustainable design. This includes issues to do with public transport as well as energy efficiency and the use of sustainable materials. It will aim to be a flagship for sustainability by the way it encourages the use of public transport and other alternatives to the use of the motor car. Although it is outside the architects' remit, this supports the idea of a rail halt to serve the site as it is very close to the railway. It will be possible to feedback to the group with more specific details at a later date.

It was pointed out that it is not possible at the moment for wheelchair users to use buses as they are not accessible. Also, the current timetables would not tie in with the end of performances at the centre.

The group felt that they would like the new building to follow the example of the Senedd in Cardiff Bay in terms of sustainable design and energy use.

SE replied that this is being looked at and what is affordable will be done within the BREEAM approach. The Lottery report will cover sustainability.

Materials and their sourcing were queried. SE responded that materials will be selected from the 'green book' that gives information on sustainable sourcing. The project will strive for the best possible use of materials.

It was agreed by the group that an 'iconic' building should not be roofed in imported slate.

Consultation and the needs of people with disabilities

A member of the group explained that he had been involved in consultation on the National Waterfront Museum in Swansea and had been extremely disappointed in the way that comments had been acted upon and was very keen to avoid the same situation with this project.

SE reiterated that it is very important that comments are listened to in developing this project.

A point was made that in working with people with disabilities it is important to remember that they have different needs – an elderly person with emphysema, for example, will have issues with mobility which are just as important as a wheelchair user.

Staff training and management of the venue

It was also stated that it is crucial to remember those with a sensory disability – around a quarter of the general population have a hearing impairment. Unfortunately, although many venues have loop systems, very often staff do not know how to use them, so appropriate training for staff is vital. It was felt that this should be part of the overall management system at the centre.

It was felt that the site itself is quite isolated and that a county-wide public transport strategy was needed, developed in cooperation with people with disabilities. Organisations in the private sector will be part and parcel of this process and conditions should be applied to make them look at the needs of people with disabilities.

SE suggested that it might be possible for the centre to work with bus companies to organise access to events at the centre.

There was a feeling within the group that there had been attempts at a dialogue with private bus companies for many years and the Carmarthenshire County Council (CCC) should be firm with private companies about providing accessible buses.

SE promised that these comments would be fed back to CCC.

It was felt that there is a huge demand from people with disabilities for private services but that the market is not recognised by commercial companies.

SE summarised the issues raised so far which the group wanted to hear more about at a further consultation meeting:

- Accessibility within the building
- Accessibility of all areas of the development by public transport – accessible buses
- Reaching the site by car
- How to reach the building itself
- Parking – what level of facilities will be available?
- Issues concerning sensory impairment

It was also stressed that ‘accessibility’ comprised issues such as the ticketing and pricing policy of the venue, access to information, the booking process and inclusivity for people of all ages.

Sustainability in the sense of a balance between attracting audiences and financial viability was also thought to be a key issue.

The group also felt very strongly about sustainability in the context of environmental impact and the use and sourcing of materials.

SE mentioned that energy use is being looked at and there are plans to include a wind turbine on the site. SE confirmed that the site is classed as ‘brownfield’ and a full environmental audit is therefore not required, but there are some environmental issues which are being examined.

The group also felt that the issue of flooding should be looked into and wanted a dialogue to be opened about this.

It was also stated that economic regeneration was an important issue in the project and that the group would like to see local businesses being involved and used.

Facilities for people with sight impairment

It was noted that not all people with a visual impairment use Braille and that a system based on laser beams which activate verbal warnings of steps and other hazards is very useful. The use of tactile materials is also very helpful as is consistency in signage, otherwise it is very difficult for a blind person to know where signs are located. It was agreed that the design and planning of the signage in the centre will be very important and the use of colour should also be carefully considered. Toilets in particular need to be clearly identified. It was also noted that guide dogs need to be catered for and that it is not practical for them to be separated from their owners as some venues try to do.

SE suggested that all these points should be examined in more detail during further consultation with the group.

It was pointed out that when the group are consulted about more finalised plans, details of how changes of levels will be dealt with in design terms will be a particular concern. Often the minimum recommendations in the DDA are minimal e.g it is often helpful to have ramps which rise by 1 in 20, making them easier for independent wheelchair users, instead of the 1 in 15 as recommended. It would be excellent if the building could exceed minimum requirements.

SE reiterated that these issues should be looked as part of a process during the access audit with the group's help.

The Tinning House

SE showed plans of the Tinning House and explained that it is a Grade II listed building. It retains the old ovens and the original brick work has been worn by time. The aim is to maintain the integrity of the interior. It has been mentioned in previous consultation sessions that much of the industrial heritage of the area has disappeared, so it is felt to be important to preserve what remains.

The Tinning House as currently being developed will be broadly divided into three areas:

- a café with direct access and also a link to the theatre

- a 'robust' gallery space (there will be another gallery in the main building)
- a 'heritage' and community area, including facilities for an art room

The first floor will be a mezzanine with community offices for organisations such as Foothold and the Menter Iaith.

Lifts and fire precautions

There will be a lift in the Tinning House, as in the building with the theatre.

It was pointed out that lifts need to be planned in such a way that they are independent and still useable during a fire.

SE added that the building needs to be designed with safe refuges in case of fire. It was agreed that evacuation plans need to be considered and the needs of the ambulance service taken into account e.g. in making the lift big enough for a stretcher.

It was noted that the group would like to see 20 – 30 wheelchair spaces within the main auditorium

It was felt that lifts were needed to make the whole of the building accessible and the Chichester Festival Theatre was quoted as a venue with a good 'feel' to it.

SE explained that the smaller auditorium will be 'in the round'.

Timescale

The deadline for the project was queried and SE explained that a submission will be made to the Lottery by the end of May.

One member of the group queried whether detailed information about the project would be available via the internet as he was keen to read any relevant documents and respond to them. CP promised to pass this query to CCC. [Done 13.3.07]

CP mentioned the public meetings planned for week beginning 19 March and it was noted that the Selwyn Samuel Centre is more accessible than Theatr Elli. CP to pass these comments to CCC. [Done 13.3.07]

There was a short discussion about links between the group and CCC. There is an Access Officer, Andrew Russ. It was also noted that there are issues of etiquette between groups for people with disabilities in different

areas of the county and the Llanelli group do not work closely with Disability Wales. It is important that information is disseminated effectively.

Model

It was noted that a model would be of great help in discussing the design and the stage which the designs have reached was queried. SE explained that the designs had progressed considerably and that the content of the centre had been based on an earlier feasibility study looking at demand and need. The centre would cater for the needs of the education sector by providing an editing suite in conjunction with Coleg Sir Gâr and Trinity College Tynopolis have also been involved in discussions.

Some members of the group had heard about 'Phase 2' of the project, which will be commercial development. Some concern was expressed about density of development and housing and levels of traffic if a hotel was built near the site. It was also felt that any commercial development should blend visually with the centre.

The group also wanted to know about cinema facilities. SE explained that films will be shown in the centre but probably less commercial films, as there are private operators in the area provide access to popular films. It will also be possible to use a large screen in the piazza to show things like major rugby games.

Worries were reiterated about traffic problems if the development becomes very big. The shopping development at Trostre is felt to cause a bottleneck and the group did not wish to see a similar situation at this site. Through traffic was felt to be a problem. It was also noted that Llanelli has no traffic enforcement after 4pm.

Arts Strategy

It was asked whether CCC's Arts Strategy was being taken into account in this project.

SE said that it informs the scheme in relating to the spread of facilities in the county and the hierarchy of venue size, which would give a balanced number of venues for different scales of events.

3. Consultation on other aspects of the project

CP asked the group about presenting the heritage area of the Tinning House.

It was felt that it is important to put the Tinning House in context and show why it's been kept when the rest of the Old Castle Works has been demolished. The group were not keen on interpretation based on touch screens. It was felt to be vital to convey the scale and size of the original machinery used at Old Castle Works and to convey the atmosphere. Big Pit was quoted as a good example of this.

The key thing the group wanted to see presented the history of the area, based on personal experiences e.g. by using recordings of reminiscences of original workers, and it was crucial that this was done with integrity.

It was felt that whatever is done should be to as high a standard as possible. There was also interest in using actor-interpreters so there is interaction with visitors.

The group liked the idea of working craftspeople and demonstrations; it was pointed out that Llanelli is famous for having made saucepans. It was also felt that the heritage element could be linked to the artistic programme e.g. by poetry and literature projects, oral history and music. The National Library was mentioned as a great resource for visual material.

One person had visited the Elan Valley where interpretation uses figures with faces projected on to them so that they appear to speak, which was felt to be very effective.

It was also suggested that a lecture series could be run or well-known people similar to the late Fred Dibnah invited to speak.

It was also pointed out that local history is now part of the school curriculum in Wales and so these facilities would be very attractive to schools.

The name

CP asked the group for reactions to the name 'The Works' and it was generally disliked. It was agreed that names for new venues often evolve and the idea of a competition to name the centre was thought to be a good one. It was also felt to be useful for the name to refer to where the venue is and that the final name would not necessarily be needed until closer to the centre opening. It was also felt to be important for the centre to have a name in Welsh.

Involvement with the centre

CP queried how the centre could be made relevant and useful to the group and how they could become involved in its day to day life. The 'Work Mates' scheme was mentioned as an example of possible links between the centre and the community.

It was felt that cost of tickets was crucial and that high prices should not be a barrier to attendance.

Charitable status for the centre was thought to be a good idea. Members of the group would like to see stakeholders involved in the management of the centre; a management committee or liaison officers on the staff to work with the community were also suggested. The group would like to have representation and want to see a facility they are able to use without hindrance.

It was felt that meeting rooms e.g in the Tinning House would be a great asset if they were flexible and accessible.

It was also noted that it would help if the restaurant was open at times which co-incided with when people wanted to use it (some existing local facilities shut very early). One member of the group attends meetings of around 20 – 25 carers who could want to meet for a meal after the meeting finished¹.

There is also a demand for suitable facilities to hold dinners of around 50-100 people and for accessible conference facilities for 100+ people e.g. the Disability Rights Conference. There is a shortage of suitable venues in west Wales and the venue could become a centre of excellence for accessible conferences. It was felt this could give the development really 'iconic' status - it could offer facilities for people with disabilities that nowhere else matches.

It was also noted that hotel facilities nearby would be an asset for conference trade.

Security was also raised as a key issue in terms of people feeling happy to use the building and it would be important for it to have a safe atmosphere after dark. This would impact on the way the centre is run.

¹ Further information supplied to Enfys Davies, CCC, by telephone subsequent to the meeting: there are 22,000 carers in Carmarthenshire and a very high percentage of those are in Llanelli. It is also helpful to carers if toilet facilities are provided which cater for their needs, as at the Senedd in Cardiff Bay. The excellence of similar facilities in England has been recognised by awards

Marketing methods

CP asked how the group would like to find out about what is on at the centre.

The group were happy to join mailing lists though it was noted that print should be available in all appropriate formats e.g. large print and audio.

Some people liked to receive email bulletins and also used the Llanelli Star and Carmarthen Journal to look for advertisements. These were felt to be more effective than the free press.

Local radio was also thought to be very important.

It was felt that the venue should make good use of its database of attenders and that smaller groups should be given support in advertising their events at a reasonable cost.