

Penrhos Farm

Typical Built Development in Powys, Visual Matters

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Viento Environmental Limited
www.viento-env.co.uk

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This report has been commissioned to review the visual nature of the application at Penrhos Farm in comparison with rural developments of a similar overall size within neighbouring parts of Powys. From the review of the buildings that exist and the application several points are worth noting:
 - a. There is a wide variety of rural buildings within this part of Powys; some traditional and some modern, which are at least partially visible from public highways and in the wider landscape.
 - b. Large buildings or series of large buildings within the rural landscape are a common feature, be that through floor space, height or a combination of design factors.
 - c. Mature vegetation and an undulating landform are also common features of this part of Powys, resulting in a characteristic of screening or partial screening of built form in views from many locations.
 - d. The built form at Penrhos Farm is intermittently and partially visible in a similar way to other rural buildings local to the site such as those at Ty Top, The Coppice and Maerdy Farm; which are each visible from a handful of locations as a noticeable feature, but overall are recurrently at least partially screened from view.
2. Therefore we would argue that the application building at Penrhos Farm is not out of keeping through its colour, size or design, but rather is typical within the range of rural development found locally.

INTRODUCTION

3. This report has been commissioned by Rebo UK Limited as part of a planning application at Penrhos Farm (change of use of land and buildings from agricultural to storage use, with ancillary business use, erection of a steel portal frame building (including demolition of agricultural buildings), associated access, fence and gate, hardstanding, and landscaping, and retention of haulage yard in haulage use).
4. Powys County Council (PCC) has previously stated that they consider the proposed development to be incongruous to the area.
5. A common definition of incongruous is '*unusual, not in keeping with or different from the surroundings*'. It is clear that PCC considers the proposed building (which has been built and is seeking retrospective permission) to be visually out of keeping with the local area, although PCC does not define in which way it considers the building to be out of keeping; be it colour, size, design, overall style etc.

6. Therefore, this report seeks to discuss this matter and illustrate that there are a range of styles of building not only within the landscape local to the site, but also within Powys as a whole. This report is provided as part of the 2021 planning application.
7. The report is illustrated by **Plates 1-12** and makes reference to **Figures LV3** and **LV4** from the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment which also forms part of the 2021 planning application.

DESCRIPTION OF THE DEVELOPMENT

8. The main visual elements of the proposal can be summarised as follows:
 - Built form – measuring 79.05m x 36.6m and 9.56m to ridge of roof, with an overall floor space of around 2,800sqm. The roof has two ridges and an eaves height of 7.0m. The building has four entrance bays on the eastern façade measuring approximately 4m in width and 5m in height and three standard sized door entries on the western façade. The roof of the building is grey in colour, with the south and west façade walls a mid-green colour and the north and east walls a dark grey/ blue colour. The colour of the building can be secured by planning condition.
 - Hardstanding – existing hardstanding areas have been utilised and extended slightly to the south, surrounding the building by a few metres to the west, south and also to the east.
 - Landscape enhancement proposals – a landscaping scheme is proposed in association with the development and some of this planting has already been implemented. These measures are proposed to aid in the integration of the building into the area as well as adding enhancements to local landscape fabric. They comprise:
 - Soil bunding to the southwest and south of the new building and hardstanding area with a double row of leylandii and a single row of semi-mature deciduous trees planted along the length of the bund. In addition, four semi mature birch trees have also been planted within the field south of the new building. (All of these works are already implemented).
 - Additional earthworks to extend and slightly increase the height of existing ground levels to the immediate south of the building (beyond the hardstanding area). These ground levels would be created through a series of engineered landforms as indicatively illustrated in **Figure LV4** of the LVIA (April 2021) and would provide some elevated landform onto which native woodland would be planted. These works can be secured by planning condition.

- A sizeable native woodland block wrapping around the southwestern and southern end of the Penrhos Farm site (as indicated in **Figure LV3** of the LVIA (April 2021)) totalling approximately 7,250sqm, linking with the existing Penrhos Coppice to the west. (Detailed planting plan to be agreed post permission, local native species include ash, elm, bird cherry, oak, hawthorn, hornbeam, hazel, rowan, sycamore as well as some honeysuckle, ivy and rose). This can be secured by planning condition.

9. The built development is situated within and adjacent to an existing farm complex. Part of the land over which the building is located was previously occupied by another agricultural building of a smaller footprint (but of a comparable height) and a small outbuilding.
10. The current farmyard comprises five other farm buildings including Penrhos farmhouse as well as the proposed building (which is seeking retrospective planning consent). This new building forms the western side of the farm complex, although six additional buildings are also located immediately north of Penrhos Farm, forming a haulage business. In total, thirteen large buildings are found in the immediate area incorporating Penrhos Farm and the associated haulage business, including the newly built development.
11. The landform of the site itself is flat, but then slopes down to the south beyond the built development and earth bund. The site is situated at approximately 110m AOD, and the grass field to the south then gently slopes down to approximately 95m – 100m AOD to the south where it meets the road approximately 75m away. To the north and northwest the landform gradually rises to a high point of 154m approximately 600m away. Therefore, it is a fair description to say that the built development (along with Penrhos Farm itself and the adjacent haulage yard) is located on the side of rising land as part of a wider valley landscape.

DESCRIPTION OF THE SURROUNDING AREA

12. As mentioned above, the local area broadly forms a valley landscape and the area is generally very well vegetated, particularly in the vicinity of Penrhos Farm where a number of woodlands are located.
13. This is a rural landscape with a number of farms located throughout the area local to the site. A number include some large and often visually notable buildings. These are discussed in more detail below.

Agricultural barn near Ty Top



Plate 1: Barn when viewed from local road north of Penrhos Farm. NGR 323495 317150.



Plate 2: Barn when viewed from local road to east. NGR 323833 317099.

14. The light grey roof colour and eaves of the Ty Top building are a noticeable feature when viewed from several directions. The building is situated at approximately 140m AOD, close to the brow of the ridgeline and so is higher than the majority of the local landform. In addition, the dark green sides to the building are often seen against a backdrop of the sky, creating further contrast and unusual setting. Local skylines are characteristically devoid of built form, which is usually on the valley side or within the valley floor, whereas this building stands out locally due to its elevation, position and colour, rather than its size which is approximately 285sqm.

Agricultural buildings at Oak Tree Piggery

15. A series of six buildings located adjacent to each other form the main set of farm buildings at Oak Tree Piggery and combined together these buildings cover a floorspace of approximately just over 3,000sqm, which is larger than the proposed building at Penrhos Farm. These existing buildings at the Piggery are not particularly visible within the local landscape, despite the floorspace that they occupy. They are located at approximately 125m AOD and some views of these buildings are across the roofline of the farm, where a mixture of built materials, shapes and colours are combined against a backdrop of trees. However, from some other areas of the local landscape these farm buildings are entirely screened, in a similar way to views from the north, west and east towards Penrhos Farm where landform and existing vegetation combine to regularly screen Penrhos Farm entirely.



Plate 3: View towards Oak Tree Piggery from NGR 322900 316750.

16. In this view the Piggery buildings are partially screened by the local landform and the 3,000sqm extent of the farm is not readily evident. Ty Top barn can also be seen breaking the skyline where the dark green sides of the building contrast with the light sky.

Maerdy Farm

17. Plates 4 and 5 below illustrate the incremental addition of built form at Maerdy Farm where the barns combine to cover a floorspace larger than the building at Penrhos Farm. These three visible barns in the foreground cover an area of approximately 3,600sqm, with a further barn located to the west and out of view (approximate floor space of a further 500sqm). In addition, another agricultural building was permitted under application 19/0159/AGR, although it is unclear whether this has been built and its dimensions are not available online on the Powys planning portal.
18. The Maerdy Farm buildings are a range of heights, materials, styles, designs and sizes. Some have open sides, one is wide with a low ridgeline and shallow eaves, and its neighbour is much taller in comparison. This creates a visual contrast that is somewhat jarring to the eye.



Plates 4 and 5: A series of large agricultural buildings at Maerdy Farm. NGR 326043 316875. Photographs taken in 2018 (Plate 4) and 2021 (Plate 5).

The Coppice/ Coppice Farm

19. Planning permission has been granted for three agricultural buildings at The Coppice since 2014. A new access track has also been added. In a similar way to the building at Penrhos Farm, the

built form at The Coppice is screened from views from the north by the local landform, although it is visible from the south. The style of the building seen here is similar to that at Penrhos Farm. The two agricultural barns visible in Plate 6 below total over 1,500sqm in floorspace.



Plate 6: Large agricultural buildings at Coppice Farm. NGR 325205 316468.

20. It is worthwhile noting the wealth of vegetation within the local landscape. Whilst individual buildings located within this landscape may be noticeable in immediate views, in general the layering of mature vegetation within views limits and softens any visibility of built form so that the majority of buildings are seen as partial elements, including Penrhos Farm.



Plate 7: View northeast towards Penrhos Farm from local road. NGR 322820 315585.

Other buildings in the wider area

Lower Leighton Farm, Leighton



Plate 8: Series of large structures at Lower Leighton Farm. NGR 324247 306443.

21. Lower Leighton Farm occupies a large site near Welshpool where a series of large buildings are situated on the valley side. However, through a set of earthworks and planting proposals, views of the buildings have been limited from several directions, although they are visible at close quarters. Again, a range of materials, styles and designs of building are in use here; with some open ended and partially open sided structures, some concrete sides etc.

22. Building B is the main building visible in Plate 8 above, which was permitted with a total floorspace of over 4,800sqm. In total, buildings A – E within the scheme were for a permitted floorspace of over 14,500sqm.

Wernllwyd, near Welshpool

23. The image below only illustrates a few of the large barns located on this site. In total the floorspace occupied by agricultural barns at this farm is approximately 14,000sqm. The largest barn is located on the west side of the farm and has a floorspace of over 7,000sqm.



Plate 9: Large barns at Wernllwyd. NGR 320501 302772.

Ystyn Colwyn Farm, Meifod

24. Six poultry buildings have been added to the existing farm complex at Ystyn Colwyn Farm in the last ten years. These six poultry buildings total over 16,000sqm in floorspace.
25. A further seven poultry units of similar size are located nearby at two local farms, totalling a similar floorspace area as the six at Ystyn Colwyn.
26. Given the wide valley landform of the area, each of these developments sits within an open landform and is visible across a wide area.



Plate 10: Some of the built form at Ystyn Colwyn Farm showing the range of building sizes, materials, colours and sizes used. NGR 319010 316500.



Plate 11: A further view of the buildings at Ystyn Colwyn Farm. NGR 318950 316200.

The Gaer near Forden



Plate 12: A number of large buildings form this farm complex, with a range of designs and heights. NGR 321020 299455.

27. In combination the agricultural buildings at this farm cover an area of over 13,000sqm, with the largest agricultural building on the southwestern side of the farm complex totalling a floorspace of over 9,000sqm.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

28. These images illustrate a small sample of the range of built form found within the rural landscape of Powys. These are all typical examples of the types of buildings located within a few kilometres of the Penrhos Farm site, but they also illustrate that there are many locations in the surrounding area where a group of large buildings are commonly found. In fact, dozens more examples could be provided from the local area around Arddleen, Guilsfield, Meifod, Welshpool, Middleton etc.
29. In reality, built form in the rural landscape of Powys is very diverse; building styles and designs develop and change to meet the evolving needs of local people over time. Trends in rural developments tend to result in the evolution of built form to adapt to specific development requirements and this can be seen across the area, for example, by the increased prevalence of poultry buildings over the last decade or so. The result is a diverse mix of building types and styles, where larger buildings are now more common as part of the general trend towards larger farm holdings.
30. The new built form at Penrhos Farm is a large structure. However, this report has illustrated that large buildings (floorplan size and/or height) are a common feature of not only the immediate locality of Penrhos and Sarnau but also across this part of rural Powys. This scale of building is found throughout the county in both rural and urban areas. As a result we would argue that the building is not incongruous as it is not unusual or out of keeping with the area, due to the reasons outlined above.