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£20.2M 'green' offices for Welsh Assembly Government complete at Llandudno Junction

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Award winning, international design practice Austin-Smith:Lord has completed the distinctive new 8,800m² regional office for the Welsh Assembly Government at Llandudno Junction, rated as the greenest public building in Wales.

Accommodating up to 650 staff, the new building, engineered to promote design and architecture in Wales, will be the Welsh Assembly Government's largest office outside of Cardiff. It will house various departments including the Departments for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning & Skills; Economy & Transport; Rural Affairs & Heritage; Health & Social Services; Social Justice & Local Government; Environment, Sustainability & Housing; People Places and Corporate Services; and some regional corporate teams such as communication and translation, as well as a public access area, known as Y Bont (The Bridge).

The initial concept design was produced by Aedas Architects.

Commanding a breathtaking view of the Conwy estuary and the peaks of Snowdonia and a landmark position from the town and approach roads, Austin-Smith:Lord's striking design incorporates a highly distinctive 'triple-prong' arrangement on three floors which radiates out of the hillside. As Austin-Smith:Lord's David Williams explains, "One of the challenges faced by Austin-Smith:Lord was to reconcile the modern form with the use of traditional materials in order to respect the heritage of the area whilst achieving the high quality design expectations. The building was completed over 16 months from detail design to completion, dovetailing with the Contractors Procurement Strategy."

Fundamental to the Welsh Assembly Government was the requirement for a reduced carbon footprint and an 'Excellent' BREEAM rating. This has been achieved by the incorporation of several sustainable technologies and a substantial part of the construction spend was committed to local suppliers and materials. The building achieved an Energy Performance Certificate rating 'A', exceeding the original 'B' rating expectation.

The exterior has been predominantly clad in local Natural Welsh Slate and Folded Copper. The polished Welsh Slate provides an extremely durable outer shell as well as a striking architectural feature and it is possibly the highest quantity of Welsh Slate employed using this method of rainscreen construction. The floor throughout the public spaces also features polished slate.

Natural ventilation has been introduced as a key component in the building's sustainable, low-carbon strategy and includes large glazed areas facing South West. Electronically controlled louvre windows have been used to prevent excessive solar gain.

The open-plan office areas display exposed concrete ceiling slabs, which provide passive cooling and negate the need for conventional air conditioning. This operates in conjunction with automatically opening high-level windows which allow air flow across the slab during the night to cool it down and provide cooling for the following day. The system is controlled from a weather station incorporating wind, rain and temperature sensors, some located within the ceiling slab to prevent over cooling of the offices. Ventilation is further enhanced in and adjacent to central atrium areas via high-level discharge stacks which draw air through adjacent offices, with automatic dampers regulating air flow.

The building has a fully automated BMS system which regulates and controls all the systems. The BMS uses feedback from carbon monoxide sensors, temperature sensors and the ceiling slab temperature sensors, as well as from meters located around the building, including gas and water meters. Every power and lighting circuit is separately metered to allow accurate energy usage monitoring and analysis.

An outdoor energy centre includes a biomass boiler (burning woodchips from a local supplier in Aberystwyth) to provide underfloor heating and hot water. Rain water from the roof is stored in underground tanks which is in turn used for grey water provision.

Integral to the design is the hard and soft landscaping, designed and implemented by Austin-Smith:Lord's Landscape Architects. In addition to the formal entrance area, car parking and immediate surroundings to the buildings, the design includes an ornamental pond designed to assist with the cooling of the building whilst also providing an aesthetic feature within the landscape. All surface water from the hard landscaping around the building is attenuated in the pond. The Ammonia Chillers (specified for their zero ozone depletion potential) transfer warm water to the pond via plate heat exchangers and receive cooled water back from the pond. The soft landscaping incorporates native hedgerows, trees and shrubs, and wildflower grassland - the plant species were specified to meet the Welsh Assembly Government's targets for encouraging bumble bees.

The new facility will give a boost to the local economy as further new positions will also be created. Officially handed over to the client on 20th May, the first staff will move into the building at the end of July 2010.

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