

Statws/Status:

Cyfrinachol / Confidential



**Adroddiad Adolygu Dylunio:
Design Review Report:**

4 December 2006

**Dyddiad Cyfarfod / Cyflwyno'r Deunydd:
Meeting Date / Material Submitted:**

27 November 2006

Lleoliad/Location:

Swansea City Centre

**Disgrifiad o'r Cynllun
Scheme Description:**

Mixed use

Cleient/Client:

CC Swansea; WAG [DIEN]

**Roland Lanchbury, Strategy Development
Phil Holmes, Economic & Strategic Development
Elfed Roberts, Urban Designer and Architect
Brian Graham, Head of Planning Services
Anthony OSullivan, Head of Transportation & Engineering
Huw Mowbray, Property Development Manager
Beth Winkley, City Centre Manager
Reena Owen, Director of Environment**

Observer: Lindsey Curtis, Urban Design Assistant

**Cynllunio:
Consultants:**

**Roger Tym & Partners, BDP
Donaldsons, Arup, Locum**

**Awdurdod Cynllunio:
Planning Authority:**

City & Council of Swansea

**Statws Cynllunio:
Planning Status:**

Pre-planning

Y Panel Adolygu Dylunio/Design Review Panel:

**John Punter [cadeirydd/chair]
Cindy Harris [swyddog/officer]
Wendy Richards**

**Roger Ayton
Kedrick Davies**

Cyflwyniad/Presentation

The Swansea City Centre strategic framework embraces the whole of the city centre from Alexandra Road in the North to the River Tawe in the east, and West Way and County Hall in the west. It looks forward to 2016 when some 50,000 sm of additional retail space might be feasible within the city centre, and to 2026 when 18,000 new jobs might be created within the city as a whole.

The context and need for this strategic framework document was illustrated with a number of statistics. Only 18% of jobs in the Swansea area are located in the city centre, where office rental values are very low compared to equivalent city centres. The overall quality, range and size of shops in the 90,500 sm of shopping is poor, and although the city is 18th in the UK in terms of floorspace it is 69th in terms of competitiveness. Less than 500 people live in the city centre [not including the marina], which again compares unfavourably with similar areas.

There is an emphasis in the document on learning from the best examples of urban renaissance across Europe, all of which have had a strategic framework to guide development. The project partnership – comprising Swansea City Centre partnership and WAG/DIEN as joint funders – have sought evidence-based regeneration proposals, with a focus on delivery, and recognised the potential problem of competing developments, such as SA1. The weaknesses [as well as the strengths] of the existing townscape have been identified – largely in terms of urban design and accessibility.

The common vision is for a vibrant, mixed use city centre, with a high quality boulevard providing connections to the waterfront, and the development of distinctive identities and complementary roles for different areas within the city centre.

The delivery plan will be based on public/private sector commitment, and implemented by a well structured and cross departmental delivery team. The question of whether to set up an Urban Regeneration Company is not yet resolved. The Council is in the fortunate position of owning the vast majority of city centre land. There will be a major launch of this document in March 2007. We were not told whether public consultation would precede or follow this launch.

Ymateb y Panel/Panel's Response

The Panel began by welcoming a strategic initiative on this scale. We explained that the concern of DCFW is to ensure that regeneration is conducted in such a way as to maximise the natural and built assets of the city, to carefully reconnect city and suburb, and to achieve a sustainable growth strategy, a high quality public realm and a high quality of architecture and landscape.

The Panel was informed that the Council intends to use this development framework as Supplementary Planning Guidance for the UDP, which is going to public inquiry next March. Although the UDP is not likely to be confirmed until the end of 2007, the project team do not want to delay progress on this. Development briefs for the identified separate areas will be produced.

The Panel noted that the ambitious vision statement was similar in content to that of many other cities, and we wondered what were the specific, distinctive Swansea attributes which

might be developed and marketed. The project team cited the waterfront area and the bay as major selling points, together with the university campus. The waterfront theme could be taken to include the beach, the river and the marina. The Panel considered that, when seeking examples and illustrations of best practice, reference should be made primarily to cities of similar size to Swansea. The Welshness of the city should not be neglected.

It is clear that the main focus of this framework document is retail led development within the St Davids / Quadrant area of the city centre. The Panel pointed out that the larger and more complex this development was, the longer the delivery time and the greater the inherent risks would be. The focus on delivering a flagship development such as this might pre-empt a more multi-layered and incremental approach. The opportunity identified in the Conservation Areas might be exploited to extend these designations, using them as a focus for detailed management of change and as an important balance to the aspiration for larger development projects. These areas of incremental and immediate change could offer the potential for early wins in the development programme.

While the project team appreciated this note of caution, they believed that they have achieved the right balance between ambition and deliverability. They reported that the main landowners involved were supportive of these proposals. We were told that the retail led approach was based on the advice of consultants and was in the context of new residential and office development coming forward in SA1, the waterfront and the enterprise park. Although retail-led, the project team confirmed that the development would be genuinely mixed use.

The Panel thought that the retail development would have the effect of shifting the centre of gravity to the west of the city, to the possible detriment of eastern areas such as Parc Tawe. We queried whether the retail development might not be better located in Parc Tawe itself. The project team emphasised that the priorities were to connect the city centre to the bay, while retaining public transport connections and cultural provision in the city centre. For these reasons they did not consider that Parc Tawe was an appropriate location for the main retail development.

Nevertheless, the Panel noted that historically there was a greater connection of the city with the river than with the bay. The development of the river edge as a part of the waterfront strategy would create more of an opportunity area in and around Parc Tawe. To reinforce this approach, New Cut Road should be realigned away from the riverside, and a direct vehicular linkage established from Parc Tawe and the river crossings to the Kingsway roundabout, which is a major nodal point within the city. New public spaces within the Parc should include complementary spaces on the waterfront. The Strand should be developed and maintained with active frontages and Green Dragon Lane should be continued into the centre of the area to establish new pedestrian connections.

However, the likely impact of the new Quadrant development on Parc Tawe should be borne in mind and the project team emphasised that the Parc is a complementary district, primarily for bulky retail goods. Nevertheless, the Panel thought that the prevailing form of big shed retail should be progressively diversified with office and residential development.

The Panel agreed with the importance placed on improving connections between the city and the bay, including the transformation of Oystermouth Road into a more civilised boulevard with much easier, more pleasant and direct crossing points for the pedestrian. We questioned whether the proposed Paxton Street crossover was deliverable, given the

position of the Tesco store, but we were told that Tesco were already considering remodelling both store and car parking. We also questioned whether it was feasible to move the Sainsbury supermarket on Quay Parade, and were told that it would compromise a key gateway development unless it is relocated. These major, valuable land uses and the need for their involvement in order to achieve the vision did cause the Panel some concern, particularly given the opinion of the project team that the right balance between ambition and deliverability had been achieved.

The Panel asked whether there was any proposal for a third river bridge, to deal with the large quantum of development proposed, and we were told that there were plans for a new bridge, but much further north.

The Panel considered that one of the main weaknesses of this document was the lack of any coherent sustainability strategy. This had already been identified in an environmental appraisal, and it was agreed that references to different aspects of sustainable development needed to be integrated into proposals at every level. We also encouraged the broadest possible interpretation of sustainability, to include issues of resource efficiency and low or zero carbon development. We thought there was huge potential in a development of this scale to pursue an innovative approach to minimising environmental impact and reducing carbon emissions, in the context of raised public expectations and increasingly stringent statutory standards.

The landscaping dimension is largely missing from the document, although it is implicit, and we thought that much more attention should be given to developing this aspect in conjunction with the remodelling of the foreshore and the river banks, and connecting back into the residential areas of the city. We also requested the team to consider and incorporate proposals relating to cycling; lighting; signage; public art; sustainable local materials of quality for paving and street furnishings; and ideas on the future management of new areas of public realm. With the large increase in population envisaged within the city centre, careful consideration will need to be given to complementary community facilities, such as schools and children's play areas. Swansea also has a diverse ethnic population and this element will also need to be considered and catered for

The Panel suggested that the Council might set an example by relocating its office space and employees into the city centre, and then demolishing the existing County Hall to make way for a more sympathetic waterfront development. While this might be possible in the future, we were told that it is not feasible within this timescale [of 15-20 years]. Rather, the political aim is to bring the city centre to the waterfront, and open up the centre of the building to public use, improving visual connectivity.

The Panel regretted that there had been little consideration of areas beyond the red line, and we considered that better pedestrian and transport linkages with surrounding communities were vital. The drive for change and diversification of the city requires a close and active relationship with adjacent communities, engaging their interest and enthusiasm with related initiatives for local food and healthy city programmes to strengthen local identity and ownership of the process of change.

We recommended that when the time came to draw up a brief for the retail development, a city-wide space syntax study should be commissioned to develop a pedestrian flow that was optimal for the regeneration of the whole city centre. The Panel had concerns about diagonal routes being overlaid on top of a strongly rectilinear grid, and continuing concerns

that pedestrian links across the marina had not been properly resolved. We also thought that Princess Way was being neglected, and the future of Kingsway and St Helens Road was receiving very little attention.

The Panel advised that development priorities should begin with key pieces of infrastructure and improved linkages, in order to progress city-wide regeneration starting with the crossings and containment of Oystermouth Road. There is a potential for SA1 to reinforce city centre development if the Wind Street/Somerset Place crossing of Oystermouth Road is improved.

We thought it was important that the forthcoming UDP reinforces the idea of the monocentric city with further retail and leisure development concentrated in the city centre. The Panel recognised that both SA1 and extensions to the Swansea enterprise park seriously threatened the regeneration of the city centre and the implementation of the strategic framework

Crynodeb/Summary

The Panel very much welcomed the opportunity to engage in an assessment of this hugely important framework document for Swansea city centre. We support the holistic, integrated, strategic approach, and the involvement and commitment of different departments within the authority to the framework's aspirations. In summary, we would make the following comments:

- We are cautious about the major retail led development, and think it will need a very tight brief to deliver the connections to the south and east that are sought. Its pedestrian circulation must benefit the city centre as a whole, and it must not turn its back on Oystermouth Road. It should create better pedestrian links with the Marina and Sandfields as well as with the County Hall Area.
- We are concerned that Parc Tawe and the eastern areas of the city be given the opportunity to maximise their development potential with much stronger direct links to the city centre through the Kingsway to Quay Parade, and into Oxford Street and Dragon Lane. The banks of the River Tawe need to be reclaimed for pedestrian and leisure use with appropriate development fronting them.
- We would like to see a coherent and comprehensive sustainability strategy which looks towards low or zero carbon developments, as well as a rich and diverse provision of green areas and landscaping
- Within such an ambitious and complex framework, it is important to prioritise particular pieces of public realm improvement and phases of development, and to ensure that these are translated into a series of development briefs with clear design objectives
- There is room in the framework for much more emphasis upon local distinctiveness and incremental improvements, both in the built and natural environments and in local cultural and social foci. An examination of how conservation areas might be extended and more listed buildings be designated would assist this and narrow the focus for redevelopment.
- The utility of the framework depends upon ensuring that its objectives are fully supported by the new UDP policies, and that its translation into SPG cross references these policies. The urban design dimension needs very close specification and further support in landscape, public realm and street treatment

documents that can be added later as elaborations of UDP policies/framework documents.

- Finally a new partnership vehicle is required between the Assembly Government, the County Council and the private sector to deliver coordinated change on this scale. The Commission favours an Urban Regeneration Company to achieve this, one which can also ensure that SA1 and other large scale, out of town centre developments do not continue to undermine the city centre as they have for the last twenty five years.

Diwedd/End

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