



DESIGN
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Design Review Report

Port Talbot Transport Hub

Meeting of 12th August 2015



Declarations of Interest

Panel members, observers and other relevant parties are required to declare **in advance** any interests they may have in relation to the Design Review Agenda items. Any such declarations are recorded here and in DCFW's central records.

Review Status

CONFIDENTIAL

Meeting date	12 th August 2015
Issue date	28 th August 2015
Scheme location	Port Talbot
Scheme description	Public realm & public transport
Scheme reference number	N85
Planning status	Pre-application

Declarations of Interest

None declared.

Consultations to Date

An outline of the VVP programme for Port Talbot was presented to the Design Commission for Wales on 22nd January 2015. From this, several projects were identified as those that could benefit from further engagement with the Commission. A workshop review revisited this project in more detail on 18th March 2015.

The Proposals

Network Rail has undertaken significant improvements to the train station in Port Talbot. The transport hub project proposes to improve connections from the train station to bus and taxi services and make a stronger pedestrian connection to the town centre in the north west and the regenerated harbour area to the south of the station. It is therefore an important public space as well as a transport hub.

Main Points

The Design Commission is fully supportive of this project. It has a clear strategic rationale in linking the improved station to other transport modes and improving pedestrian connections from the harbour to the town centre and, therefore, has significant regeneration potential. Understanding that students travelling to the new Swansea University campus by train would alight at Port Talbot and continue their journey by bus adds further importance to the project and will contribute to its success by increasing the number of people using the space and its facilities.

It is encouraging to hear that the works to the station have been coordinated with this scheme to enable the surrounding public realm works to be delivered as one project.

The appointment of urban designers and the collaboration between the urban designers and highway designers is to be commended as this is essential to the delivery of a successful design.

The proposals were well presented with a clear sequence of analysis, design development and proposals. The following comments relate to aspects that require some further consideration.

Edges

The wall alongside the railway to the south of the space should be considered as part of the overall design. This is likely to be a high wall and therefore a substantial structure, but it also forms part of the enclosure of the space so should be considered in conjunction with it. The footpath from the main part of the space and across the road to the station car park along part of this edge also requires further exploration and articulation.

Building frontages form strong edges on two of the remaining sides which should be active at ground floor and make use of the newly created public space. External lighting of these buildings would help to enhance their presence in the evening.

Robustness and maintenance

It is important that the design is robust to withstand daily use, maintenance and potential abuse.

Underground services need to be mapped to understand their location, how they might impact the design of the space and how future access requirements should be managed to ensure that surfaces are adequately replaced and not patched with tarmac.

The bus stand design currently causes some concern as they can often be the target of vandalism. Consideration should be given to whether a more standard off-the-shelf product should be used in conjunction with a bespoke canopy so that they can be easily replaced if damaged. A wholly bespoke design would need to be carefully detailed to reduce opportunities for damage and ensure replacements were available. Any cost saving from standardisation of the seating/shelter should be channelled into the design of the canopy which must be robust, elegant and practical. Minimising suitable locations for pigeons to perch should form part of the considerations around practicalities and the impact of the bend in the design of the canopy to accommodate coach pick up and drop off needs to be fully understood.

Although it is right that the future maintenance of soft landscaping in the space is considered at this stage to inform the design, the importance of the trees and planting to the success of the space should not be overlooked. The soft landscaping is visually important to soften what would otherwise be a very hard space and it will also have biodiversity and microclimatic benefits.

Identity and legibility

A new name for the space should be considered to give it a stronger identity. This could provide an opportunity to engage local groups or schools in the naming process. The identity and distinctiveness of the space needs to work through the design of the public realm, the signage and the branding, particularly relating to events to be held there.

The potential to rename the station itself to better link it to the town, such as Port Talbot Central, could also be explored.

The design team are giving consideration to the materials that could be used in the space to create a unique identity to enhance the sense of arrival into Port Talbot. Steel has a strong link to the main industry of the town but it will need to be integrated into the design in a deliberate but refined way.

Way finding and information signage need to be considered and integrated into the design at this stage.

Events

A programme of regular events linked to the local theatres as well as Christmas markets would help to animate the space and make use of it as an asset for the town. Trialling different event layouts could help to determine whether the design has the right balance of flexible space. If vehicles are to have access to the space for events the rigidity of the paving will need to be appropriate and pop up power may need to be integrated into the design. Programming of events will be essential to make the space work in the manner intended and should be curated by one organisation whether it is the Council, community or local businesses.

Cyclists

The different transport modes are well integrated in the proposed design but provision for cyclists needs to be set out. This includes cycle parking and determining where and how cyclists will move through the space.

Consultation

Opportunities for engaging the local community should be pursued and the naming of the space could be one way to do this. The community could be further engaged through pop up events or attractions in the space.

The owners of adjoining buildings should also be consulted to ensure that the space meets their needs. This should include ongoing communication with Gwalia who are undertaking the redevelopment of the Police Station site.

Given the shared space nature of the proposals, local access groups should also be engaged so that the proposals can be talked through and tested with them.

Conclusions

The Design Commission are encouraged by the progress that has been made on the design since the previous review. The regeneration value of the project has increased significantly now that this is being considered holistically as an important space for the town as well as a transport interchange and the highway impact on the space has reduced significantly.

The concept design is positive and addresses the needs of the space. Further work to refine the identity of the space and some practicalities will continue to improve it. Consideration should be given to whether the new layout can be tested using inexpensive barriers and temporary trees. This will help to ensure that the spaces work

and will start to change perceptions of the space and generate interest in utilising it as a public space for events.

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

Attendees

Local Authority:	David Griffiths, Head of Engineering Adrian Isaac, Highway Design Engineer Brian Biscoe, Senior Programme Manager Nicola Bulcraig, Strategic Development Officer
Urban/Architectural Designer:	Gareth Howell, The Urbanists Wendy Richards, The Urbanists
Design Review Panel:	
Chair	Alan Francis
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Panel	Jen Heal, Design Advisor, DCFW