

Design Review Report

Bridgend Town Centre Masterplan

DCFW Ref: N235

Meeting of 31st July 2020



Review Status

Meeting date
Issue date
Scheme location
Scheme description
Scheme reference number
Planning status

PUBLIC

31st July 2020
10th August 2020
Bridgend
Town Centre Masterplan
N235
Prior to adoption as SPG

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 and meeting Agenda items. Any such declarations are recorded here and in DCFW's central records.

Consultations to Date

This is the first time that the DCFW has been consulted on this masterplan.

The Proposals

Bridgend County Borough Council appointed BDP architects to prepare a masterplan for the historic town centre and its immediate surrounding areas. The total study area covered by the plan is approximately 100ha.

Ten key vision objectives for the plan are suggested and eight character areas are identified with a sketch urban design plan for each, together with suggestions for public realm, infrastructure and development projects in each area.

At the conclusion of the report all the initiatives are costed and their commercial viability is assessed. The masterplan project is at draft final report stage.

Main Points

DCFW would have welcomed earlier engagement in the masterplan development to have the opportunity to influence and add value to the scope of considerations, the questions being asked, and the approach being taken. However, the draft masterplan as presented is a comprehensive and well considered document that covers most of the aspects of the town centre that we would expect for a project of this nature. The panel appreciated the overview of the masterplan that was presented clearly and concisely whilst reflecting the significant body of work that has been undertaken.

The following key points were identified in the review and should be considered as the masterplan is finalised and as key projects are taken forward.

Perception of the Town Centre

A key challenge that needs to be addressed in the short and long term is the perception of the town centre both in terms of what it has to offer to attract investment and what it is like as a place to spend time.

Some immediate or short-term measures and 'meanwhile uses' could be implemented in the public realm, temporary structures or vacant buildings, particularly in relation to stimulating safe COVID 19 recovery of the town centre, to begin to address this. Coordination with the town centre manager and local enterprise will be important in this respect. Any interventions in the public realm should be considered in the context of the longer-term aspirations set out in the masterplan.

Further exploration of the identity of the town, both now and what it could be, is worth pursuing within the design team but also through engagement with a wide range of the population representing different ages. Understanding younger people's perceptions of the town as it is and their aspirations for the future should help to inform priorities. This will require a range of engagement techniques that seek to shift the dynamic of the conversations. Gaining local support and community involvement should be a key part of the engagement process.

A review of successful interventions in other town centres, or county towns that have managed to maintain or regain success would be helpful. Some examples to look at could include Margate, Folkstone, and Ty Pawb in Wrexham.

Key Projects

The masterplan rightly focuses on seeking to increase footfall in the town centre to help support a more diverse range of retail, community and business uses. The potential relocation of the college will help to make a significant contribution to this and should be highlighted as an early key project. Identifying two or three other projects that could be real catalysts for change will help to focus funding and resources in the immediate term.

Having a clear picture of land ownership is important for the implementation of the plan. There will be some areas that the local authority can directly influence, others where partnerships can be developed, and others where, for example, absentee landlords are hard to engage and therefore little can be done.

Twenty-Minute Town

A different way to address the town centre is to consider it as part of a network of twenty-minute neighbourhoods that serve the residential areas of the borough. The scope of influence of the town centre within a twenty-minute walking and cycling radius is substantial. Extending the scope of the masterplan out a little further to look at what residential areas this would serve would help to identify key active travel improvement requirements and could be used to establish local needs that may be met within the town centre.

An area that has risen to the fore, given the current COVID 19 situation, is the opportunity for town centres to accommodate work spaces that allow people to work closer to home yet provide all of the facilities and interaction with other people needed for health working. The transport hub is an appropriate location for this type of use and should provide good quality cycle parking, as well as good public transport connections.

Local Development Plan

There should be a symbiotic relationship between the LDP and the masterplan. Future consideration should be given to sites allocated within the LDP and their relationship with the town centre, but the masterplan should also inform the LDP. There must be a borough-

wide focus on ensuring that LDP policies and allocations support town centres to avoid further loss of retail and commercial use to out of town, car-centric developments.

Coordination

The long list of actions, partners and potential funding pots indicates that there is an important coordination role that requires adequate and dedicated resources within the local authority to capture the opportunities. Communication with potential funders and private developers, traders, the community and other town centre stakeholders will also be important in building relationships that can help to deliver future projects. Therefore, the masterplan must not be considered in isolation from town centre management.

Next Steps

The masterplan has identified some significant projects that DCFW would welcome further engagement with. The local authority should coordinate with DCFW to arrange further reviews at the early stages of project development for significant projects.

Comisiwn Dylunio Cymru Design Commission for Wales is the trading name of DCFW LIMITED, a Private Limited Company established under the Companies Act 1985 and 2006, Company No: 04391072 incorporated in England and Wales as a wholly owned subsidiary of the Welsh Government. Registered office: 4th Floor, Cambrian Buildings, Mount Stuart Square, Cardiff CF10 5FL T: 029 2045 1964 E connect@dcfw.org. The comment recorded in this report, arising from formal Design Review through our Design Review Service, is provided in the public interest for the consideration of local planning authorities as a material consideration, and other users of the Design Review Service. It is not and should not be considered 'advice' and no third party is bound or required to act upon it. The Design Review Service is delivered in line with DCFW's published protocols, code of conduct and complaints procedure, which should be read and considered by users of the service.

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

Attendees

Client:	Nicola Lewis, Bridgend CBC Julian Thomas, Bridgend CBC
Design team:	Shruthri Guruswamy, BDP Martin Jones, BDP
Planning consultant:	Phil Baxter, Asbri Planning
Design Review Panel:	
Chair:	Cora Kwiatkowski
Lead Panellist:	Steve Smith Kedrick Davies Matt Thomas Carole-Anne Davies, Chief Executive, DCFW Jen Heal, Design Advisor, DCFW Efa Lois, Place Advisor, DCFW