

Design Review Report

Strand Arches and River Tawe, Swansea

DCFW Ref: 304

Meeting of 28th September 2023



Review Status

Meeting date
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PUBLIC

28th September 2023
11th October 2023
Mixed use and connectivity
The Strand and River Tawe, Swansea
N304
Pre-application

Key Points

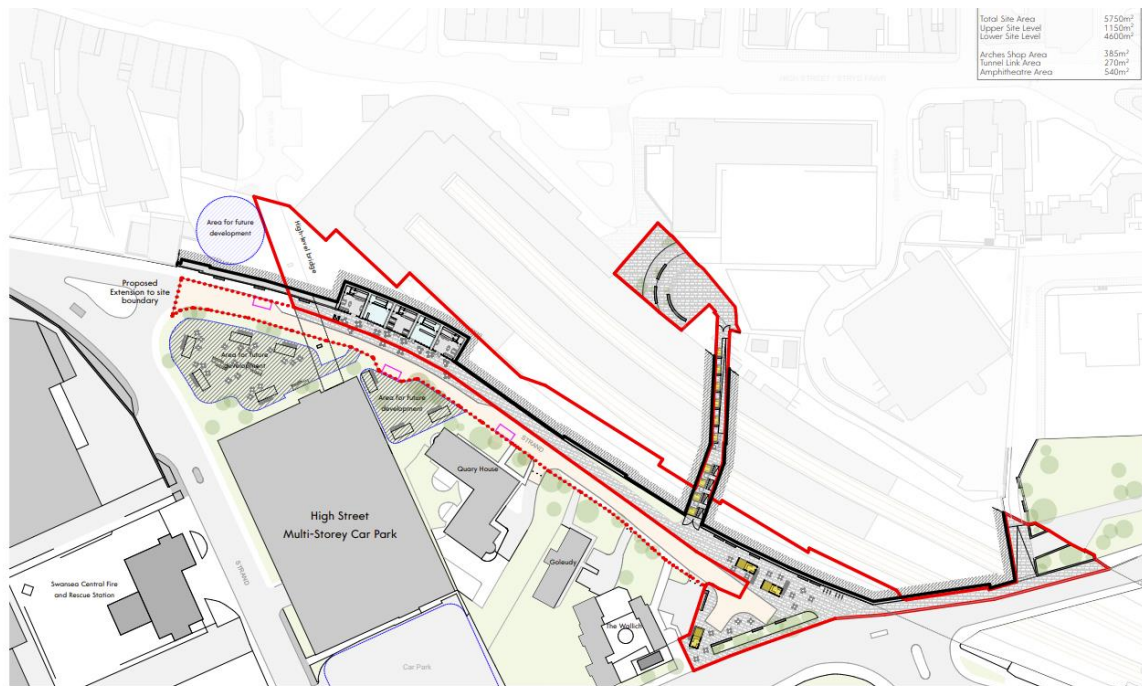
- We support the aims of providing better connectivity and improving safety in this area.
 - Further, deeper and wider urban design analysis is necessary to inform the proposals. In particular this should include a better understanding of where people are going to and from at different times of the day/year.
 - The number of connections should be reconsidered. It may be better to create one or two really good ones that will be busy than to dilute the impact over three, even if longer.
 - Greater consideration should be given to the existing multistorey car park and how this can be used to traverse the levels and move between the site and the river.
 - Connectivity to and the accessibility of the pontoons is key to their use and success but details on this are currently lacking.
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Consultations to Date

This was the first review of proposals for the Strand Arches and River Tawe. The review formed part of a wider review day looking at all of the projects that make up Swansea's Levelling Up Funded proposals. Stakeholder engagement has been undertaken.

The Proposal

The proposals relate to the redevelopment of part of the Strand, including the arches under the railway, to improve connectivity to Swansea Station from the North East of the City Centre and seeks to enhance connectivity to the copperworks site (which is being redeveloped under a separate but related project). Proposed pontoons will provide water taxi opportunities along the River Tawe which in turn will allow members of the public access to the copperworks site along the water course.



Strand Lower Ground Floor Plan

Context

This project is divided into three separate sites along the River Tawe that relate to the Swansea's historic copperwork industry. The Morfa Pontoon and the New Cut pontoons are located on the banks of the River Tawe and the Strand Arches are sited below and around Swansea Station.

Main Points

Analysis

The plans that zoom out from the site were helpful for understanding the context and how this will be changing over time with the introduction of further student accommodation and other development. Further analysis at this scale is needed with conclusions drawn to inform the design.

A Space Syntax analysis would be helpful to aid understanding of how surrounding streets are currently used and the influence of the proposals. Flows of people will vary throughout the day and the year, especially when the students are away. Further analysis of this and the impact on how well each of the routes and spaces will be used is needed.

Routes and safety

The aim of improving the safety of pedestrians and cyclists in this area is supported as the current routes and spaces do not feel safe and attract antisocial behaviour. Proposals for three routes to connect the Strand with the High Street level are currently being developed.

The Design Commission has concerns that even with the proposed lighting, signage and activation proposals, there may not be sufficient footfall and activity within and around all these routes to make them safe and successful. The middle connection, utilising the existing but closed up tunnel, seems particularly challenging as it is long and winding which presents safety challenges.

Following the analysis process outlined above, a prioritisation process should be undertaken to determine which link(s) is most important and whether they should all be pursued or whether the focus should be narrowed down to one or two.

Level change

A robust solution is needed for the level change from the station down to the arches. There are potential risks associated with the proposed lift connection including maintenance, feelings of safety, and what happens if/when it is out of action. All alternatives should be explored including a ramp, to build in future resilience.

The existing multistorey car park may present an alternative solution by utilising and improving the existing higher-level connection and lift. It would be helpful to explore best practice precedents of multi-storey car park refurbishment and reuse.

Arches

The feasibility of opening up the arches is still under investigation. While the reuse of this space would be positive, there are other opportunities for promoting activity at this lower level including temporary installations. Whatever approach is taken, the curation and management of the commercial spaces is critical to success. This may be with the council, a private partner or by establishing a trust. Opportunities for start-up businesses should be maximised and a churn of occupiers could be helpful in maintaining interest.

The history of the area should inform the character and identity of the development but there is scope for contemporary interventions.

Pontoons

The pontoons were presented as being intermediate stops on planned improvements in connectivity by water between the marina area and the copperworks site(s). This is to be welcomed. However, more consideration is needed as to how people will get to and from the intermediate pontoon site in particular and what they will do once they get there. This should include car and bike parking as well as supporting uses located adjacent to the pontoons.

A wider narrative for the use of the river is needed to inform what these points of connection will be, who will be using them and what roll they will need to perform. The nature of the use of the pontoons is not yet clear such as whether it will be for leisure use or enable day-to-day connectivity. All options should be explored, and their use maximised. This should consider viability of the proposals and need case, and if the intermediate stop could be phased for delivery once patronage levels and general footfall in the area increase into the future.

Wider connectivity

Active travel routes beyond the site should be considered including along the Strand and across to the riverside. There is an opportunity to utilise s106 contributions from nearby student residential development to help deliver this.

Phasing

This area is in a period of change that may last for many years. In some respects, the links to the Strand will be put in before the destination is fully formed. A plan showing the short-, medium- and long-term picture would indicate how the proposals fit into a bigger picture. This includes the arches themselves, the triangle of land which is occupied by the car park and the onward link to the river and proposed pontoon.

Future change to the triangle of land adjacent to the arches should start with an exploration of how the existing buildings, structures and occupiers can be worked with. Significant improvements and new uses could be brought to the multistorey car park and there could be opportunities to work with the hostel to provide new uses in this location.

Engagement and benefits

The whole project should be informed by community engagement and the benefits for local residents (including students) should be explicit. More opportunities to link to existing communities should be taken to promote use and enable them to benefit from the project, particularly the pontoons.

Precedents and references

Further exploration of more comparable precedents would be helpful to inform the design.

Possible examples mentioned in the review include:

- Southwark railway arches
- The work of the Ouseburn Valley Trust, Newcastle
- Café H, Huggard Centre, Cardiff
- Chris Dyson Architects: Heritage and Modernity book

Next Steps

- A review of the core objectives relating to this particular funded package of connectivity interventions would be helpful, in light of some of the additional survey, land use and contextual analysis work suggested above.
- It may well be that once a more nuanced understanding of day and nighttime movements is established a clearer set of design interventions will be evident. In parallel further, more detailed liaison with Network Rail on the assets likely to be affected would be advisable.
- Specialist accessibility consultant input is advised given the nature of the spaces being proposed for re-opening and some of the potential user groups affected.
- The Design Commission would welcome the opportunity to assist in re-appraising the Strand interventions at a future Design Review to ensure best long-term outcomes in this challenging area of urban townscape.

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

Attendees

Design Team:	Ben Parish, GWPA Ashley Davies, GWPA
Project Manager:	Chris von Terch, Coreus
Planning Consultant:	Will Mulvany, Wardell Armstrong
Local Authority:	Elliott Williams, City & County of Swansea David Owen, City & County of Swansea Stephen Smith, City & County of Swansea

DCFW Design Review Panel

Chair:	Jamie Brewster
Panel:	Simon Power (Lead Panellist) Toby Adam Steven Smith Mark Hallet Carole-Anne Davies, Chief Executive Jen Heal, Deputy Chief Executive, DCFW Max Hampton, Design Advisor, DCFW
Observers:	Luke Williams, TfW Hayley Kemp, City & County of Swansea Jonathan Green, Cadw

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.

- Mark Hallett is a Director of Pobl who are in partnership with Urban Splash but are not involved in this project.
- Steven Smith of Swansea Council is also a Design Review Panellist but was present today on behalf of Swansea.
- Ian Carter, Director of DCFW Ltd is seconded to Urban Splash who are retained by Swansea City Council. This declaration is made for completeness only and Ian was not present at the meeting.