

Design Review Report

Hafod Morfa Copperworks,
Swansea

DCFW Ref: 155

Meeting of 28th September 2023



Review Status

Meeting date
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Scheme location

Scheme reference number
Planning status

Public

28th September 2023
11th October 2023
Restoration of historic buildings
Former Hafod Morfa Copperworks,
Swansea
N155
Pre-planning

Key Points

- The masterplan material presented lacked rigour. The development of the masterplan needs to be accelerated to provide a framework for the development of the site.
- A Design Review specifically on the masterplan is needed to explore the strategic issue in more detail.
- The masterplan should consider how the site can be integrated within the city and whether it can be a catalyst to the creation of a more urban, mixed-use neighbourhood.
- The masterplan needs to consider the scenario that Skyline does not go ahead.
- The proposed developments should focus on the essential work needed to make the buildings sound and provide flexibility to enable uses for the buildings to come forward.
- The use of the Rolling Mill as an open storage museum would be an asset for the site.
- Different options for the V&S Engine House should be explored.
- The reinstatement of the bridges and reinterpretation of the former canal needs to be considered and presented in the context of the wider proposals for the site.
- Involving local people is needed to inform how the site develops and to identify different uses for the restored buildings.

Consultations to Date

The Design Commission has previously engaged with Swansea Council and Urban Splash to discuss the overall vision for the site.

There was a Design Review in 2017 for the conversion of a building on the site into a distillery and visitor centre, which is now open. There was a Design Review in January 2023 for Skyline; a cable car with a base location within the Hafod Morfa Copperworks site.

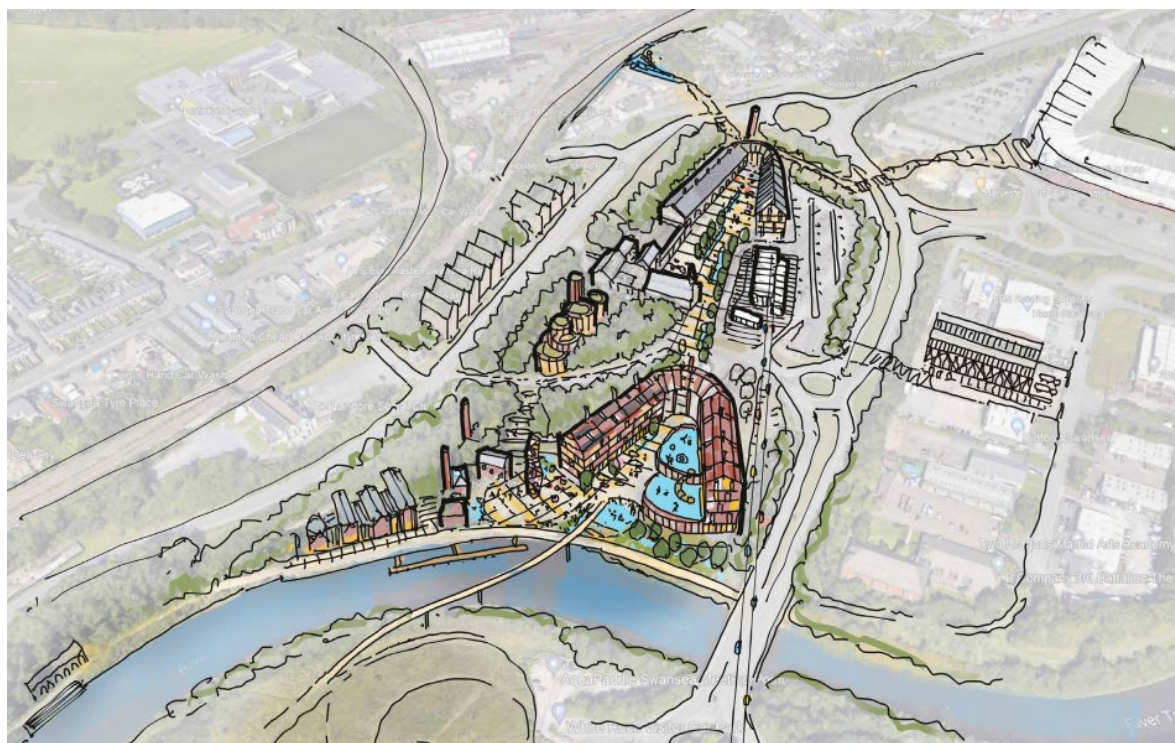
Swansea Council and Urban Splash have engaged with identified stakeholders, including Friends of Hafod Morfa Copperworks, but not yet the wider public.

The Proposal

The proposal is for the restoration of historic buildings and structures on the former Hafod Morfa Copperworks site. The proposal includes:

- Reinstating the bridges that used to go over the former Morfa Canal and extending an existing heritage trail along the former canal.
- Adapting the former Rolling Mill building to create a flexible space capable of accommodating a food market and events.
- Rebuilding the V&S Engine House as a heritage attraction, providing the opportunity to house an engine and have a short railway line as a visitor attraction.

The proposals form part of a wider plan to redevelop the site, over time, as a leisure destination. The intention is to use the Levelling Up Funding secured to restore heritage assets and use these to attract new uses to the area and create an anchor for visitors. A masterplan is being developed for the whole site.



Emerging Masterplan

Context

The site was historically the home of the Hafod Morfa Copperworks.

The site is currently used as a park and ride facility. Penderyn Whisky Visitor Centre and Distillery has recently opened, and Swansea Museum uses the Rolling Mill building for storage. Much of the site is derelict, with some historic buildings remaining.

To the south of the site is the River Tawe. The site is otherwise surrounded by a modern highway network. Swansea City Football Club's stadium is located to the north, with out-of-town industrial and business uses to the east and west.

Planning permission has been granted for a cable car, Skyline, which would have its base station located within the site. Skyline would require the removal of the park and ride facility and the provision of a considerable number of car parking spaces for users of the cable car.

There is the possibility of a new train station being built near the site.

Main Points

Masterplan

It is recognised that the ideas for the masterplan presented in the Design Review are work in progress. However, the information presented was quite superficial and lacked rigour. This strategic picture is essential to the success of the specific projects that this review focused on, and how they come together to create a place. The work on the masterplan needs to be accelerated to create a framework for the development of the site.

The development of the masterplan needs to be informed by greater contextual analysis, landscape strategy, business planning, and the development of a stronger narrative. The masterplan requires a separate Design Review to consider the strategic view in more detail.

The suggestion was that the intention is for the site to be solely a visitor attraction. However, we encourage you to consider how the site could be a more integrated part of the city. A greater mix of uses, including residential, could generate activity throughout the day and week, and help create more of a place.

How people travel to and from the site will be crucial to its success, and there is a danger the proposals will create a car dependant, out-of-town destination that is dominated by car parking. Every effort is needed to encourage people to walk, cycle and use public transport. We support the intention to improve active travel links, but recognition is needed that visitors are more likely to be travelling from further away and alternatives to the car are needed. The creation of a nearby train station would be a significant asset which, with a good site layout and public realm improvements, would help reduce the need to travel by car. The pontoon also provides the opportunity for a water taxi which, if affordable, could be another alternative to the car for visitors and local people.

The site's existing use and context needs further consideration. Is any aspect of the park and ride facility still viable and could this form part of the phasing of the development of the site? The car parking provision should be considered in the context of the needs of the nearby sports stadium. Consideration should also be given to whether there is a potential new use for the park and ride reception building.

The site is surrounded by busy roads that make the site quite isolated and are a deterrent to people walking and cycling. The surrounding area has pockets of out-of-town industrial and business uses that are car-based and could benefit from redevelopment. These issues need to be explored to understand the future travel demands, the likelihood of a new train station being built, the needs of the surrounding businesses, and whether the development of this site could form the catalyst for the creation of a more urban, higher-density, mixed-use neighbourhood. Overall, the site should be considered as part of a wider masterplan for the whole area.

Whether or not Skyline goes ahead will significantly affect the development of the site, particularly given the predicted visitor numbers and associated car parking requirements. The masterplan should be developed based on the scenarios of Skyline going ahead or not.

A clear constraints plan is needed to inform the developing masterplan and to aid presentation. This should include a 'time-map' of current and future development.

The site's history means that archaeology will be important. The design team should identify hot spots which are likely to be of greatest interest and use these to prioritise archaeological investigations.

Buildings

The proposals for the Rolling Mill are being developed without end users in mind. There is the risk that the proposed interventions could result in unnecessary changes to a historic building for uses that do not come forward. The focus should be on the essential work to make the building sound and safeguard the building fabric, whilst leaving its future use flexible.

The Rolling Mill is currently used by Swansea Museum for storage. With the proposed extension to the museum only able to accommodate 10% of what is currently stored on the Copperworks site, could the Rolling Mill building continue to be used as storage but opened to the public? There are good examples of open storage museums that are very successful. A second Swansea Museum could be an asset for the site, even if this was only in the short term.

The V&S Engine House is in a state of disrepair. We do not disagree with the proposal to rebuild the building based on its original design. However, we encourage the design team to first explore different options. Is demolition or rebuilding the only options as suggested? Is housing an engine in the building, with a short railway line, the best use of the building?

The reinstatement of the bridges and reinterpretation of the former canal as a heritage trail could add interest to the area and provide a link to the site's history. Further consideration is needed of how these interventions relate to wider proposals for the site and what, for example, a heritage trail would connect to.

The Heartlands Trust, Cornwall, is a potentially useful precedent to draw upon for this development.

Overall, we encourage any intervention to focus on enabling uses for the buildings to come forward.

Involvement

Engagement with local people is needed to inform how the site develops. Different uses for the restored buildings could be better informed if identified and brought forward by local people at the earliest stages.

Next Steps

The Design Commission would be content to offer the opportunity for further Review of the masterplan at key stages and we urge the team and Council to plan ahead for this.

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

Attendees

Client/Developer:	Mark Latham, Urban Splash
Design Team:	Freddie Jackson, Egret West Ben Parish, GWPA Ashley Davies, GWPA
Project manager:	Chris von Tersch, 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:	Steven Smith (Lead Panellist) Simon Power Toby Adam Mark Hallet Carole-Anne Davies, Chief Executive, DCFW Jen Heal, Deputy Chief Executive, DCFW Max Hampton, Design Advisor, DCFW
Observer/s:	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.

This proposal was reviewed as one of three during a full day with Swansea and the following declaration stood for the entire day:

- 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.