



Report of the Cabinet Member for Investment, Regeneration & Tourism

Cabinet – 16 September 2021

Swansea City Centre Repurposing Strategy

Purpose:	This report presents the Swansea City Centre Repurposing Strategy, which provides analysis of the current retail and leisure outlook and a strategy for the consolidation and, where required, repurposing of retail for other beneficial uses. This report seeks authorisation to pursue the strategy in accordance with the accompanying action plan in order to identify appropriate delivery options, funding sources and commence consultation on the proposed interventions.
Policy Framework:	Swansea Local Development Plan (LDP) 2010-2025, Swansea Central Area Regeneration Framework (SCARF) 2016, Regenerating our City for Well Being and Wildlife (2020), Corporate Priority Creating a Vibrant and Viable City and Economy Council constitution FPR's
Consultation:	Access to Services, Finance, Legal, Planning
Recommendation(s):	It is recommended that Cabinet: 1) Approves the Swansea City Centre Repurposing Strategy as attached at Appendix 1: Swansea City Centre Retail & Leisure Review and Repurposing Strategy. 2) Approves in principle the proposed interventions outlined in the Swansea City Centre Repurposing Strategy and at paragraphs 7-9 of this report and delegates authority to the Director of Place to progress the Action Plan to identify the most suitable delivery route. Further Cabinet approval is required prior to implementation of any of the proposed interventions. 3) Approves the virement of £500k funding currently allocated for work to Oxford St to the wider repurposing action outlined within the report and that any further budget requirements are set out for separate and

future decisions in line with the council constitution and FPR rules and supported by the appropriate business case.

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1. Introduction and background: Swansea – a city already being transformed

- 1.1 The global economic downturn as a result of Covid-19, and the longer term structural change in the retail sector, has heavily impacted Swansea's city centre. In recent years changing consumer habits and the growing influence of online shopping had already been driving a rethink of the role and character of city centres as retail destinations. The recent loss of high street anchors such as Debenhams and Topshop underlines the speed at which the contraction of the traditional retail offer is now occurring across the UK.
- 1.2 Fortunately, Swansea is expected to benefit from £1 billion in investment with a series of planned major private sector developments and Government-backed projects such as the City Deal.
- 1.3 The city centre has recently undergone significant development and is currently benefitting from unprecedented levels of investment from both the public and private sectors.
- 1.4 As a result of this major investment, Swansea is regarded as being among the best-placed cities in the UK to attract further jobs and investment as it emerges from the pandemic.
- 1.5 The Council is at the forefront of many of these developments and has committed significant investment into a series of projects and improvements. It has the second highest capital programme in Wales and recently announced a £20 million recovery programme specifically designed to support businesses and communities recover from the pandemic.
- 1.6 The council has also brought together partners and investors to help deliver its vision to reshape the city centre.
- 1.7 As a result, there is multi-million pound investment in new office and work space, leisure and entertainment, homes and accommodation, better transport links, public realm improvements and increased greenery in the city centre.
- 1.8 These major investments and projects that are either recently completed, under way or planned include:
 - **Copr Bay Phase One** This £135m investment includes the Swansea Arena, the landmark bridge over Oystermouth Road, 1.1-acre coastal

park, new apartments, hundreds of new car parking spaces, and space for leisure and hospitality businesses. Construction is due for completion later this year

- **Kingsway** The £12m transformation has created a greener, more pleasant environment to live, work and visit. The has included new public areas, landscaped parkland, cycle routes, a two-way single lane vehicle route, and wide pedestrian walkways
- **Wind Street** Due for completion later this year, the £3m scheme will create a family-friendly destinations. Includes new paving, seating and greenery, with dedicated outdoor spaces for hospitality dining areas and better accessibility.
- **Swansea Market** Improvements package of more than £400,000. The work includes new public toilets and a multi-purpose communal area, free public Wi-Fi, new interactive LED signs and improved entrances.
- **71/72 Kingsway** New offices to provide space for 600 jobs in the tech, digital and creative sectors. Set for completion in early 2023 and worth £32.6m a year to Swansea's economy once operational, work on the five-storey development will soon start. A new link between The Kingsway and Oxford Street also forms part of the scheme.
- **Mariner Street** The £39.8m student accommodation development opposite the railway station is almost complete. The building will be home to hundreds of students and includes ground floor commercial space.
- **Digital infrastructure programme** The £55m Swansea Bay City Deal scheme will help the council introduce full-fibre connectivity in the city centre, business parks and across the region.
- **Coppergate** The £22m student accommodation development on Kingsway is 310-bed scheme along with communal spaces, central courtyard and commercial space
- **Orchard House** The £6m development of new homes, office spaces and commercial units led by Pobl Group supports the council's strategy to encourage more people living and working in the city centre
- **Living Building** The forthcoming, multi-million pound development on Kingsway is led by Hacer Developments, and includes an educational facility, residential apartments, shops, offices and a courtyard. It will also feature living walls and roofs along with rooftop solar panels, battery storage, and gardens
- **Albert Hall** The £8 million restoration and refurbishment of the historic Albert Hall by Loft Co will create an 800-capacity music and entertainment venue, along with dedicated new spaces for lifestyle businesses and offices
- **Castle Square** Regeneration scheme to raise its quality and make it more active, distinctive and vibrant. It will be a modern, functional and well-maintained public space where people will want to spend quality time.
- **Former BHS building** to become a multi-purpose community hub in the city centre, providing services including a library and agile accommodation for organisations in a welcoming and easily-accessible environment.

- **Kings Buildings** Being given new life by a private developer with council assistance. Work is under way and it will feature new apartments and modernised commercial units.
 - **Palace Theatre** Bringing the historic building back into use as a new home to tech, start-up and creative businesses. The vision for the grade two listed building includes modern flexible workspaces.
- 1.9 This large scale regeneration programme, will see the transformation of Swansea's post-war retail core. As highlighted above Copr Bay will deliver a new focal point for the city, delivering a landmark arena and a critical link to the waterfront from the city. In addition, The Kingsway infrastructure project has provided the setting for further private investments of a mixed use nature and 71/72 The Kingsway will seek to establish a much needed office presence and generate footfall from the west end of Oxford Street. The refurbishment projects of Castle Square and Wind Street will bolster the food and beverage offer and create more attractive areas during the day and evening. The recent purchase and proposed redevelopment of the former BHS store, as a community hub and central library, offer further opportunities for footfall and linkages between the Grand theatre and Castle Square; which itself becomes a central node between the station and its neighbouring cultural venues including the Art School, Glynn Vivian Art Gallery and High St studios and Galleries, with the new arena and Coastal Park.
- 1.10 On a lesser although connected scale, the recent investments of recovery funding in the Grand theatre to create a new digital and cultural hub, with workspace and a new foyer and catering/ café offer, provide a complementary cultural axis to the development of the Palace as a tech workspace and events space;
- 1.11 These interventions highlight the Council's success in leading the drive for positive change for Swansea City Centre and its key gateways.
- 1.12 The economic shocks of Covid-19 and Brexit, and the problems faced in the retail sector risk slowing the momentum generated by this public sector investment to regenerate and rejuvenate the Central Area. The likely loss of more high retailers and shrinking of the traditional retail core, could see the demise of the traditional retail circuit and further impact The Quadrant Centre.
- 1.13 In acknowledgment of the need to rapidly intervene and manage the contraction of the retail sector in cities, Swansea Council commissioned Rivington Hark and BDP to review the current retail and leisure offer. The conclusions and insights drawn from the review has informed a refreshed high-level city wide masterplan, and a strategy on how to maximise the existing retail core, and address the changing role of the city centre. A shortlist of potential interventions addressing properties, public realm and policy were developed for further consideration, supported by an action plan for implementation. For the full report please see 'Swansea City Centre Retail & Leisure Review and Repurposing Strategy' (Appendix 1 – ; referred to Swansea City Centre Repurposing Strategy)

1.14 The study focused on the geographic area indicated in the project brief (see Swansea City Centre Repurposing Strategy, p.6). This includes a masterplan boundary and a more detailed study area around Swansea Market, St. Mary's, Quadrant and Oxford Street. Inevitably the study has extended beyond this boundary and has also considered key locations within the wider Swansea Central Area, as defined in the Swansea Local Development Plan (LDP) and Swansea Central Area Regeneration Framework (SCARF), plus also other 'opportunity areas' from the Shaping Swansea initiative.

2. Current State Review and Analysis

2.1 The commission conducted a macro review of the central area, which included a policy review, examination of key transport and parking factors, an existing retail and leisure occupier audit, stakeholder interviews and SWOT analysis. Please see the section 2 of the Swansea City Centre Repurposing Strategy and the following appendices for the current state review and detailed findings:

- **Strategy Appendix A** - Movement and Transport

2.2 Notable conclusions and findings from the review include:

- There is a need for a wider residential offer in the city centre, with a focus on intergenerational living.
- Despite two quality universities there is a lack of educational facilities in the city centre.
- Swansea has a strong leisure and cultural offer but leisure and entertainment facilities are located outside of the central core and dispersed in the Central Area without a clear circuit linking them.
- There is lack of quality office space available.
- There is a lack of "grown up" F&B in the core.
- Declining retail footfall and retail vacancy is a growing problem.
- Committed initiatives are major positives.
- There is a need to instil a sense of pride and a sense of ownership in the city.
- Swansea suffers from poor perception of the city centre with visitors and poor first impressions.
- Many of these concerns have been identified previously and some are already being addressed through existing actions. Additional opportunities via the current economic recovery plan are also taking shape, but it is clear the Council will need to go further in terms of its repurposing ambitions, through simultaneously completing previous commitments and embracing new ones.

3. Draft updated masterplan

3.1 The BDP review of current policy frameworks and development strategies for the Swansea Central Area recommends that the Swansea Central Area Regeneration Framework (SCARF) be updated to reflect the changing context and revised masterplan for the area produced by the consultant

team. The existing SCARF was approved by Members in 2016 and has proved to be a useful strategy document to inform decision making and the formation of LDP policies. However the existing document does not have formal SPG status and BDP have highlighted there are a number of aspects of the framework that need to be changed to align with the new priorities for regeneration. It is important that the new SCARF should be subject to a process of consultation and be adopted by the Council as Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) to inform decisions on planning applications.

- 3.2 The BDP team have developed a draft masterplan vision that updates the existing SCARF's spatial framework, structured around a Retail Leisure Led Mixed Used Centre and a series of Complementary Areas. The draft masterplan recognises and builds upon the significant impacts of the current developments, such as Copr Bay, upcoming programmes, and promotes a dynamic approach to future investment and developments.
- 3.3 BDP's refreshed masterplan proposes to consolidate the Central Area into a Lifestyle Quarter with a greater mix of uses, particularly within the central core of St. David's/Quadrant. The retail circuit is retained and strengthened by consolidating the offer and introducing complementary uses to draw in footfall. A key aim is improving the integration of the city centre with Swansea's residential neighbourhoods and wider infrastructure of cultural and leisure destinations, venues, green spaces and waterfronts, and identifying a 'heart' of the City Centre that celebrates Swansea's distinctiveness and urban legacy.
- 3.4 Four complementary themes update the vision for the city centre's development and regeneration:
 - **City Centre Mix:** Reconfigure the current mix and distribution of uses to incorporate flexible and diverse uses for a mixed economy city core (retail, employment, food and drink, leisure, education, community, and housing).
 - **Urban Culture:** Facilitating events-led tourism and provision of an inclusive, accessible and flexible cultural offer, through linking a series of multi-functional open spaces (existing and proposed), cultural and historical points of interest, and leisure attractions of the city.
 - **Green Core:** Capitalise on the existing network of open and green and blue spaces to create a healthy environment that is also instrumental in mitigating the effects of climate change.
 - **Accessible and Connected:** Creating a 15 minute city of interconnected laneways which are safe, accessible, walkable, and interactive through high-quality placemaking and data-driven digital infrastructure.

Please see for section 4 of the Swansea City Centre Repurposing Strategy for the full masterplan, and section 6.3 for the proposed next steps for reviewing the SCARF.

4. Strategic Objectives

4.1 The proposed refreshed masterplan establishes a spatial framework to guide the City Centre's repurposing strategy and its associated interventions. This is underpinned by four supporting strategic objectives that establish set criteria to assess, in first instance, the impact of any proposed intervention. These complement the policy aims and strategic objectives of the Swansea LDP and the SCARF, and reinforce the environmental, social and wellbeing themes set out at both national and local level. The Strategic Objectives are listed below and further detail can be found section 4.3 of Swansea City Centre Repurposing Strategy:

- 1. Create a Vibrant and Sustainable City Centre Core**
- 2. Change Perceptions and Make Swansea A Destination**
- 3. Enable New Living and Working Opportunities In The City Centre**
- 4. Promote a Healthy, Inclusive And Connected Liveable City**

5. The Quadrant Centre

5.1 The Quadrant Centre is a key component of the rejuvenation of Swansea City Centre. Its success helps to maintain Swansea as a retailing destination whilst its demise would have significant negative ramifications. It traditionally provides the core fashion anchor for the City. The threats the Centre faces are similar to those throughout the UK and the scheme needs to evolve to meet changing consumer needs.

5.2 The review of the retail offer, included an in-depth analysis of The Quadrant shopping centre, owing to the Council's interest in the asset and its importance within the retail circuit.

5.3 **Proposed Business Plan** - Based on the analysis of The Quadrant's current and predicted performance Rivington Hark have developed a high-level business plan for The Quadrant that seeks to stabilise the asset, secure its long-term sustainability, and make the maximum contribution to the wider 'Shaping Swansea' ambitions. The key recommendations focus upon the reconfiguration and improved connections to Swansea Market. The proposals encompass several of the interventions presented below, including Debenhams and St Mary's & Quadrant Entrance interventions.

5.4 This report recommends adopting the development principles for The Quadrant Centre set out in the Swansea City Centre Repurposing Strategy, and allowing officers to progress the interventions outlined in the business plan. Currently no additional funding is required. Further Cabinet reports will be submitted once the consultation and further development of the interventions has been completed and funding requirements are fully understood.

6. Interventions Overview

6.1 Following the analysis exercise, SWOT and development of revised strategic objectives for city centre, described in the previous sections of

this report, the consultants presented an initial selection of potential interventions. The long list of the interventions can be found in section 5 of the Swansea City Centre Repurposing Strategy.

- 6.2 The strategy and interventions were developed by Rivington Hark and BDP, informed by site visits and engagement sessions with a wide range of stakeholders, including Council officers. Please see section 5 of the Swansea City Centre Repurposing Strategy for the full methodology of the intervention identification and selection process.
- 6.3 From the long list of intervention, Rivington Hark and BDP developed a short list of interventions, which have been developed in more detail, including high level costing and concept designs. Whilst all the interventions identified will have positive impacts on the city, the short list were appraised as requiring prioritisation, thus have been selected for further development in the short term. The next sections provide a high level summary for the shortlisted interventions.
- 6.4 This report seeks the approval to progress the identified shortlisted interventions. The next stage will look to identify the most suitable delivery route, for example inclusion in the Shaping Swansea initiative or private sector delivery; seek funding opportunities and consult relevant stakeholders and owners (if required). For each intervention, a further Cabinet report will be presented on the business case and if required, request funding.

7. Short list Interventions – Buildings

Below provides a high-level summary of the shortlisted interventions supported by a brief explanation of the proposed intervention:

- 7.1 **Debenhams** - Until their corporate collapse at the end of 2020 Debenhams, had been the anchor department store within the Quadrant Shopping Centre for the last 42 years. Its closure, together with the loss of the corresponding jobs is the largest single event to disrupt the city centre retail.
 - Retain and improve the unit as a retail asset and refurbish the external elevations
 - Car Park - Consideration be given to a refurbishment of the Quadrant car park.
- 7.1.1 Alternative proposals considered for the Debenhams store, such as repurposing for cultural or residential uses, were considered as part of this process. The study determined that the transformation of the Debenhams into alternative uses could be considered in the longer term, however to secure Swansea's retail circuit and its role as a regional centre, the report recommends that the unit should be recommissioned to an active retail unit to deliver a quality retail experience and the quantum of retail necessary to increase and sustain the footfall and spend required to make the Quadrant and the retail core viable.

- 7.2 **St Mary's & Quadrant Entrance** - The Quadrant entrance and St Mary's sit at heart of the city centre. The changes to movement in and around the city that will be introduced by Copr Bay and proposals for both Castle Square and Wind Street mean that this location will become an important junction between Copr Bay, the Quadrant, Castle Square, the new Hub and Oxford Street and a key focus of the consolidated retail circuit.
- Potential reinstatement of Orange Street.
 - Introduction of a new Street Food Market that links both the current market and the Quadrant shopping centre.
 - Realignment of building line to visually line up with St Mary's Church.
 - Public realm and highway improvements around St Mary's.
- 7.3 **Primark** - Primark are an important retail anchor and occupy a highly prominent location within the central area.
- Work with owners to upgrade the façade and other potential improvements.
- 7.4 **Swansea Market** - Swansea Market is a well-established and much-loved feature of the city centre housed in a dramatic structure that is currently only fully visible once inside the building and has a limited presence on the street scene.
- The Union Street and Oxford Street entrances are significantly increased in size and prominence.
 - Assumption that one of the major entrances and interface with the Quadrant are addressed by the St Mary's & Quadrant Entrance intervention.
- 7.5 **263-265 Oxford Street and 8 Portland Street** – the 'Next' block occupies a highly prominent position in the heart of the retail circuit.
- Support the current developer to amalgamate the buildings to create a commercial ground floor capable of being let to a single major retailer or subdivided, potentially for high quality local independents.
 - The upper parts would provide new office accommodation or high quality residential units.

8. Short list Interventions – Public Realm

- 8.1 **Oxford Street / Portland Place Junction** - Animate a key junction along the core retail circuit and support proposed improvements to the Market entrance:
- Creation of a Junction Play area, with existing hardscape marked for creative play and creative use.
 - Playful modular furniture to define the space and provide a seating area.
 - Potential use as an outdoor extension of the market, offering space for further food sale kiosks or pop up shops during festivals.
- 8.2 **Marina Pocket Square** - Creation of high quality waterfront squares and parklets by upgrading of the three existing pocket squares located along the Marina area to deliver flexible, high quality space that has a visual

connection with the sea and nearby beach while offering a comfortable place to sit, spend time and socialise.

- 8.3 **The 'Lanes'** - upgrade the three existing lanes connecting the city centre to Wind Street. The proposed intervention is to deploy cost effective high impact tactical urbanism principally with the use of feature lighting and art to transform these spaces.
- 8.4 **Entrance Gateway**– Enhance key gateways, including the train station, the Parc Tawe car park facing the road bridge and from the west on Oystermouth Road near Tesco and the Civic Centre with public art, landscape interventions or impactful signage.
- 8.5 **Spring Clean**- A proposed solution to build on the current interventions in the public realm to bring forward a package of coordinated interventions to deal with specific issues such as the visual impact of commercial bins, cleanliness of streets around night time economy hotspots, or maintenance of trees and vegetation. Also address buildings with poor visual amenity that detracting from the general aesthetics of the city centre through targeted funding, particularly buildings of architectural merit but have fallen into a poor state of repair.
- 8.6 The funding for the commencement of these short term interventions is already in place via a capital allocation of £500k for Oxford Street although Authorisation to “vire” funding from the Oxford street budget will be undertaken in line with the recommendations of this report.

9. **Short list Interventions – Strategy and Policy**

As recommended by BDP as part of the policy review:

- 9.1 **Update the existing SCARF (2016) and adopt a new SCARF as SPG** – the consultants consider the current SCARF is in need of renewal so that decision makers can have a stronger policy basis and up to date planning framework to respond to current and future development proposals and planning applications within the designated Swansea Central Area. This work will require a commission for consultancy support to provide the necessary expertise and resourcing to complete in a timely manner in order to inform the regeneration process.
- 9.2 **Develop a Public Realm Strategy** - the consultants recommend undertaking a bespoke piece of work considering the public realm strategy, hierarchy of spaces and an events and curation programme throughout the year. This approach was set out in the previous Swansea Central Arts Strategy and work to drive the principles forward is currently underway with the Councils Cultural Services team. Additional investment and resources may be required to complete in a timely manner and in order to tie in the full recommendations for destination signage, creative space, public arts and events, as per the Economic Recovery Plan and Repurposing recommendations. This will enable an integrated approach to inform the regeneration process.

10. Action Plan and Implementation

- 10.1 If approval is received, it will be necessary to identify appropriate funding, resources and delivery approaches for each of the interventions, in order to ensure that each of these are able to be progressed and that the regeneration priorities are delivered in a timely manner.
- 10.2 It is recommended a holistic approach to delivery and funding is adopted to enable maximum impact to be realised. The interventions should not be seen in isolation, instead the suite of proposals interlinking with existing and forthcoming projects delivering an accumulative effect to transform the central area's physical, social, and economic condition.
- 10.3 As outlined above, this report seeks authorisation to initiate progress on the shortlist interventions. The action plan details the specific next steps, but broadly it relates to further refinement of the scope of the interventions, engagement with owners (where required) and stakeholders. Delivery options will be assessed to ensure viability and efficient use of any grant funding obtained.
- 10.4 Other than the activities referred to in section 8 above once delivery options have been considered further reports and any financial implications will be presented to Cabinet.

11. Integrated Assessment Implications

- 11.1 The Council is subject to the Equality Act (Public Sector Equality Duty and the socio-economic duty), the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure, and must in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:
- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Acts.
 - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - Deliver better outcomes for those people who experience socio-economic disadvantage
 - Consider opportunities for people to use the Welsh language
 - Treat the Welsh language no less favourably than English.
 - Ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.
- 11.1.1 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2005 mandates that public bodies in Wales must carry out sustainable development. Sustainable development means the process of improving the economic, social, environmental, and cultural well-being of Wales by taking action, in accordance with the sustainable development principle, aimed at achieving the 'well-being goals.'

- 11.1.2 Our Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) process ensures we have paid due regard to the above. It also takes into account other key issues and priorities, such as poverty and social exclusion, community cohesion, careers, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and Welsh language.
- 11.2 The Integrated Impact Assessment process ensures that due regard has been paid to the above.
- 11.3 In order to comply with the relevant equality regulations, an Integrated Impact Assessment Screening Form has been completed. The Screening Form is attached as Appendix 2.
- 11.4 This report asks for permission to further develop the interventions in accordance to Swansea City Centre Repurposing. At this stage there will be not be any impacts whether positive or negative on any protected characteristic group as the interventions will be only be progressed in design, funding, and resource terms. Further cabinet reports will be submitted to authorise the delivery of any of the interventions in due course.
- 11.5 As part of the next stage proceeding with the further development of the interventions the impacts of each intervention will be considered and assessed, and a specific IIA process will begin.

12. Financial implications

- 12.1 As outlined above the approval of this report does not commit the council to additional funding obligations but does “repurpose” £500k of existing funding within the approved Capital Programme and seek to utilise some of the recovery fund moneys set aside to aid economic and retail recovery. Any additional funding requests would be dealt with via the usual cabinet reports in line with the council constitution.

13. Legal implications

- 13.1 There are no legal implications associated with this report.

Background Papers: None

Appendices:

Appendix 1 [Swansea city centre repurposing strategy - Swansea](#)

Link to Swansea City Centre Retail & Leisure Review and Repurposing Strategy:

https://www.swansea.gov.uk/media/2914/Swansea-city-centre-repurposing-strategy/pdf/Swansea_city_centre_repurposing_strategy.pdf?m=1630936546370

Link to Appendix A: Movement and Transport -
[https://www.swansea.gov.uk/media/2915/Swansea-city-centre-repurposing-strategy-appendix-1---movement-and-transport/pdf/Swansea city centre repurposing strategy - appendix 1 - movement and transport.pdf?m=1630936574800](https://www.swansea.gov.uk/media/2915/Swansea-city-centre-repurposing-strategy-appendix-1---movement-and-transport/pdf/Swansea%20city%20centre%20repurposing%20strategy%20-%20appendix%201%20-%20movement%20and%20transport.pdf?m=1630936574800)

Appendix 2 Integrated Impact Assessment Screening Form