



**Castle Square Swansea
Appraisal
January 2017**

Introduction

This report was prepared to explore the scope to alter Castle Square in order to make it a more attractive and vibrant space at the heart of Swansea. The brief was to:

- Explore scope to adapt the existing Castle Square public realm in encourage increased use, fun and relaxation (not complete redesign)
- Investigate scope to accommodate restaurant units and pitches for food kiosk to introduce activity within the space.

This will inform future potential grant funding bids for the public realm works and a selection brief for potential restaurant developers .

This report provides an analysis of the space and exploration of precedents which forms a robust framework for the proposals.

Note that this report does not benefit from topographical survey or service information.



“We want Castle Square to be a bustling, visually attractive, green and relaxing place where people can meet friends or visitors, have a meal or enjoy a top quality public event.”

(Leader of Swansea Castle)

“Cultures and climates differ all over the world, but people are the same. They’ll gather in public if you give them a good place to do it “

(Jan Gehl)

Policy Context

Swansea Central Area Regeneration Framework (2016)

The Framework was adopted by City and County of Swansea in February 2016. This indicates how consideration should be given to enhancing and refreshing the Square, and reconfiguring it to allow it to better integrate adjacent areas such as the space around the Castle and Princess Way.



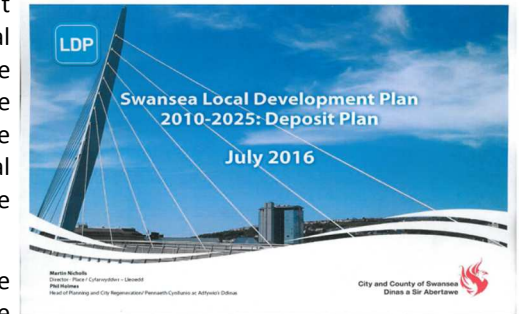
It recognises that there is an opportunity to fundamentally change the environment of the Square to one which is more useable, supports activity and interest and responds positively to the setting of the Castle. As part of the Vision for the Central Area the creation of a 'Green Artery' and Green Infrastructure are key themes. The Framework highlights the importance of creating a network of high quality spaces forming 'stepping stones' that link together existing and proposed areas of activity.

Swansea Unitary Development Plan (2008)

Policies EV1 Design, indicates that new development shall accord with a range of specified objectives of good design, **Policy EV3 Accessibility** –sets out requirements for meeting criteria relating to access for all, high quality public realm for a range of users, **Policy EV4 Public Realm** where development impacts on the public realm designs should ensure that schemes integrate with areas to produce spaces and sequences that result in quality townscape and building frontages that actively engage with the public, are of a human scale and provide effective surveillance resulting in spaces that are 'people friendly', and provide attractive detail through the use of high quality durable materials **Policy EV5 Art** requires the provision of public works of art or other features to enhance the identity and interest of major new development or refurbishment schemes will be supported. **Policy EV6** seeks to protect, preserve and enhance Scheduled Ancient Monuments and their settings, **Policy CC5**– The design of all new development schemes will be required to make a positive contribution to enhancing the City centre's environment. A programme of improvements will be implemented and where appropriate developer contributions will be sought.

Swansea Local Development Plan: Deposit Plan (2016)

The Swansea Local Development Deposit Plan (LDP) Policy SD J: Swansea Central Area makes specific reference also to the enhancement and reconfiguration of the Square. The LDP also highlights how Place Making is a cornerstone of the national planning agenda and sustainable development objectives.



Policy PS2 is of relevance to the consideration of future options for the Square and states that development must enhance the quality of places, and respond positively to aspects of local context and character that contribute towards a sense of place. The policy also highlights how the design, layout and orientation of spaces, must provide for an attractive, legible and safe environment and ensure no significant adverse impacts would be caused to people's amenity.

The City and County of Swansea Open Space Assessment Report was presented to Cabinet in January 2017 and provides a framework for well located sport, recreation and leisure facilities. The outputs from this Assessment has directly informed the preparation of the Swansea Local Development Deposit Plan policies by identifying specific surpluses or deficiencies in open space provision. The study concludes that in areas of limited open space, the creation of new open space is encouraged and that existing spaces are retained and improved where possible. As an area of public realm, the Square fulfils an important role in the City Centre for incidental amenity and potentially activity, events, recreation and play.

Movement

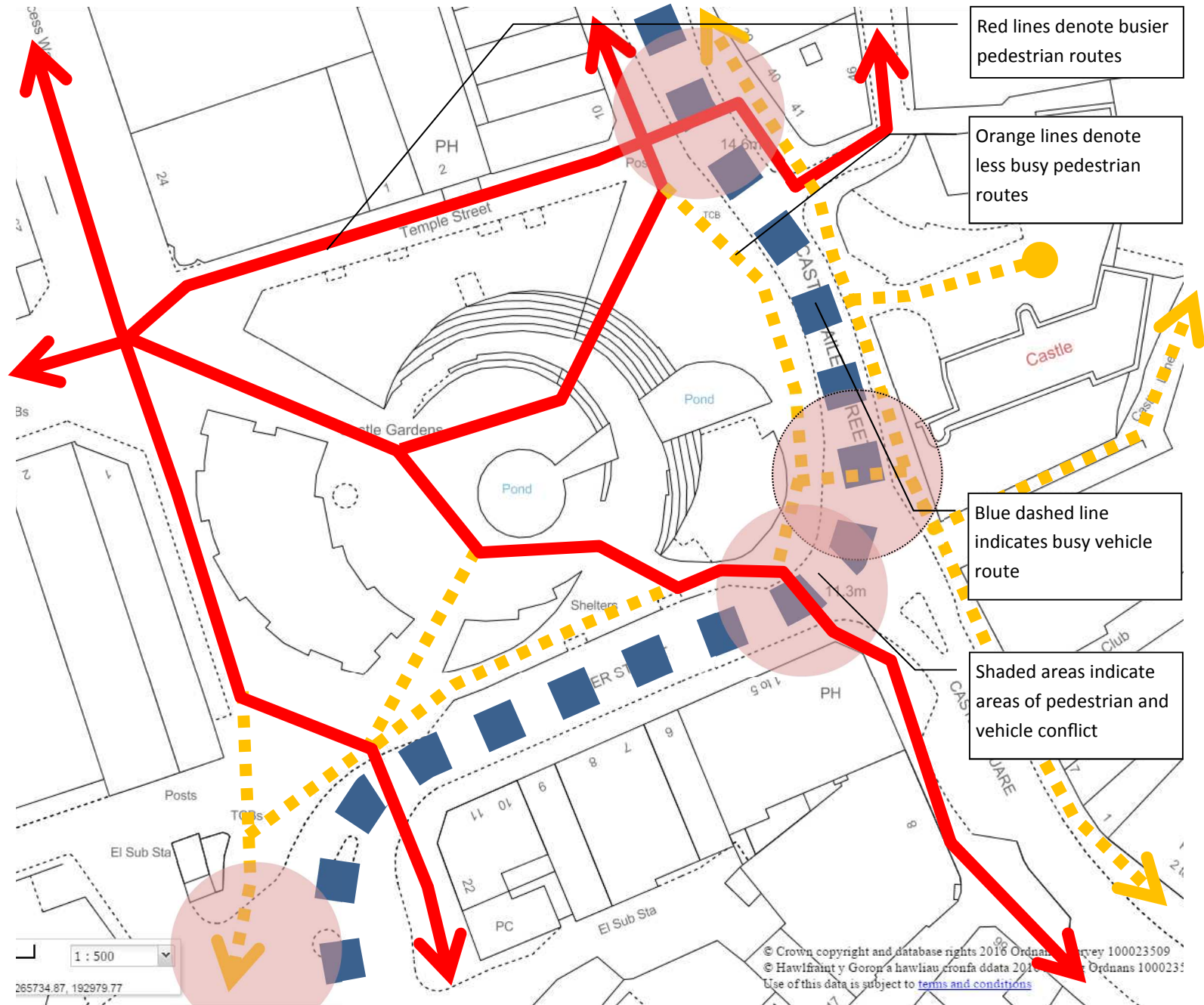
Castle Square is a nodal space within the Central Area that performs an important linking function for pedestrians. There is a level difference of approximately 4m falling east to west which limits access for some through the space.

The southern and eastern sides of the space (Caer Street and Castle Bailey Street) are busy route for vehicles with up to 1 bus every 5 minutes heading north.

The plan opposite shows the pedestrian routes through the space, the approximate intensity of the pedestrian movement and the barriers to movement. It is clear that the current design of the space does not cater for unobstructed pedestrian movement and the integration beyond the space is poor in areas. The busy vehicle routes sever Castle Square from Swansea Castle and separate the active frontage to the south on Caer Street from the main space.

The southern side of Castle Square also provides bus stops and evening taxi ranks.

Any restaurant units/ kiosks must not block these pedestrian routes and the adaptation of the space should improve the provision for pedestrians.



Civic Space

Castle Square is Swansea's Civic Space; it is the focal point for events, celebrations and protests. It does not have a corresponding Civic Building but it does have a big screen which is a legacy of the 2012 London Olympics and this is used as the focal point for 'fan zone' events.

Day to day, the space is used for informal sitting especially south facing amphitheatre steps as indicated in the plan. The low walls are also well used for informal sitting. The 9 benches see a lesser level of use. The pie chart gives an indication of how Castle Square is used for sitting on a sunny dry afternoon (note that there is no sitting on the grass).

The space has limited appeal to families and young children. Whilst the fountain adds amination and background sound it is segregated from the public realm and appears dated.

The space needs to work as a destination year round not just for events and this may require more intensive day to day management of the space for example to hire out deck chairs etc.



Greening

Castle Square contains 22 trees which provide visual softening and a sense of enclosure to the large space. Many of these trees pre-date the Castle Square scheme and are a remnant of the earlier Castle Gardens. These trees have now got to the stage that they are blocking key views and would benefit from selective removal and crown raising.

Approximately 1/3 of Castle Square is grass but it is considered by users to be a hard space not a 'green' space, because the grass is elevated above the ground level and encased by walls. Therefore the grass areas are very rarely used because they are not very visible nor accessible. People prefer to sit on the steps and walls rather than the grass.

A key change to alter the use and perception of Castle Square will be to provide grass areas at ground level that are accessible and allow for loose chairs for sitting on the grass.

The potential restaurant pavilions could conflict with the existing trees, so the objective should be to maintain the greening though selective thinning and new planting should ensure no net loss of trees or useable greenspace.

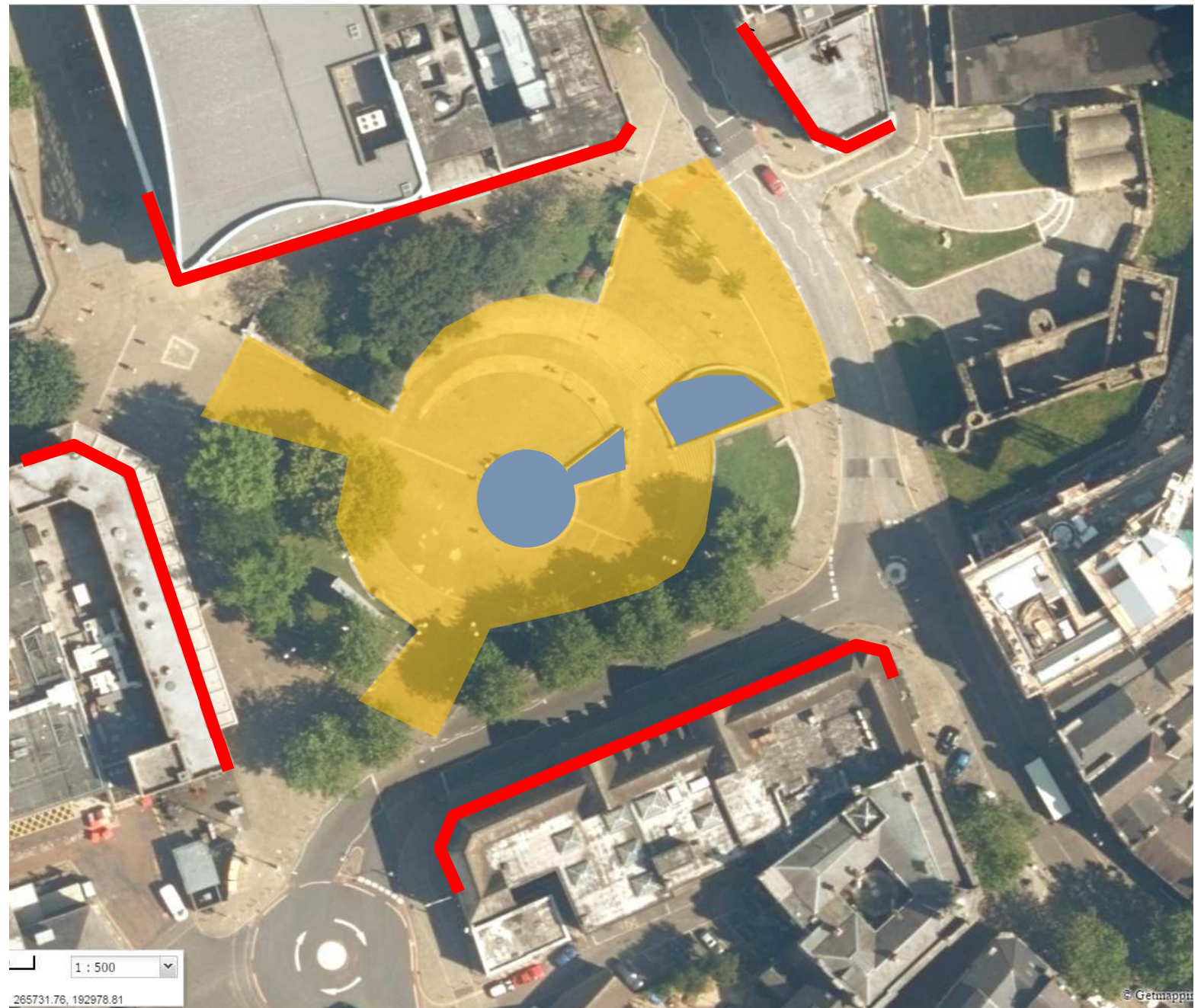


Edges and active frontages

Castle Square is the largest public space within the in Swansea at 85m x 100m. It is of a similar scale to Leicester Square, London.

It is broken down into a central space separated from movement routes on all sides by planting areas, level changes and roads. As a result there is no 'active frontage' directly onto Castle Square. This means that the space often feels lacking activity when there are vibrant uses including cafes/ pubs and restaurants on the edges. Therefore there is a need/ opportunity to introduce commercial activity into the square in the form of restaurant pavilions/ food kiosks with external seating to significantly increase the feeling of vitality.

There are key views to the square along the approach streets especially Oxford Street and view from the square that give the location a distinct sense of place. These contextual views include the dramatic juxtaposition between the medieval Swansea Castle and the modern BT tower, plus the view to St Marys Square and the tower of the church which is being lost to over mature trees.



Integration of Castle Square with St Mary's Square

Castle Square and St Marys Square are significant areas of public space in the City Centre ,but at present they are separated by highway infrastructure (important though it is), a lack of building frontage (the corner site of the electricity sub-station) and a general clutter of street items that have accumulated over time.

The recommended future roles of both spaces are better integrated , but to be successful both spaces need to work together in a manner which they do not at present. The area has a strategic infrastructure role, particularly for bus services, taxis and Blue Badge parking. However, these *movement* functions are compromising the *place* functions, particularly at the junction of Princess Way, St. Mary's Square and Caer Street.

To date, this compromise has been acceptable, because the role of the area has been to service Oxford Street, yet with the centre of gravity in Swansea changing, the environment between Castle Square and St. Mary's Square is going to become a much more prominent part of the City with higher footfall. For this reason the use and management of space should be adapted to place a higher priority on *place over movement*. If possible, some of the movement functions could be relocated, or at least more sensitively integrated.

Enhance the relationship between Castle Square and St.Mary's Square by: considering a more compact roundabout on Princess Way / Caer Street reducing street clutter screening the electricity sub-station .



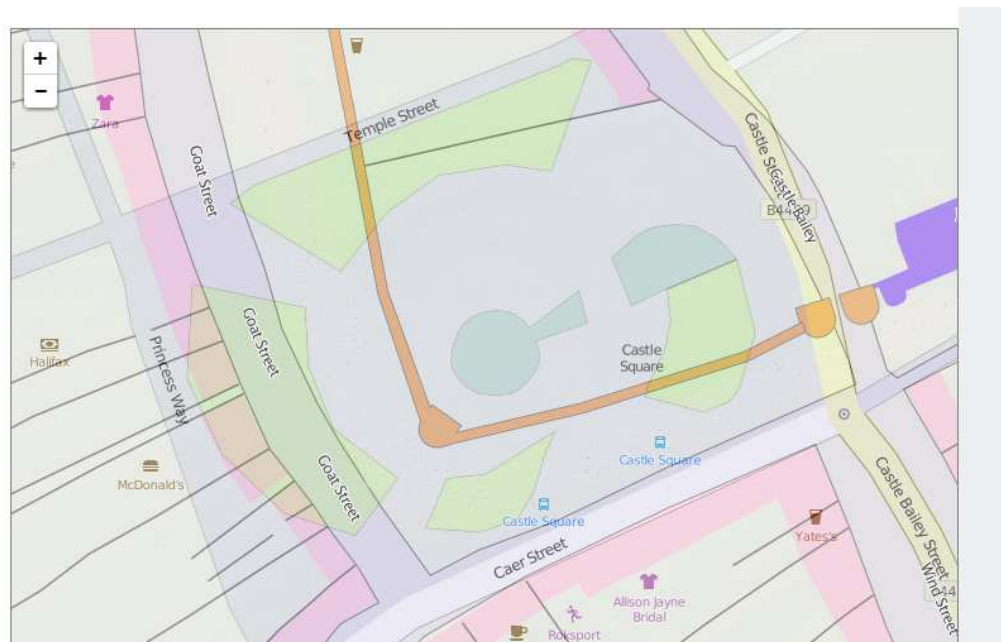
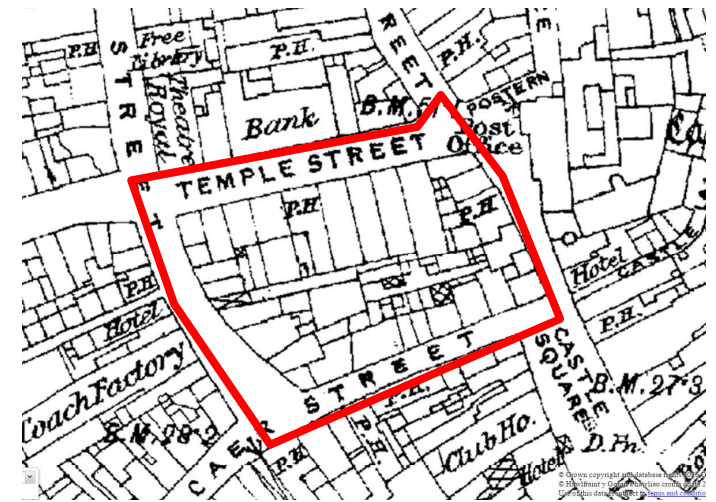
Heritage

Castle Square falls predominantly within the Wind Street Conservation Area where the 'preserve or enhance' test prevails. It also forms the setting for Swansea Castle which is a grade I listed building and ancient monument.

However the space itself is modern and was first laid out in the post war period as Castle Gardens. Prior to WWII this area was an urban block of Victorian buildings bounded by streets.

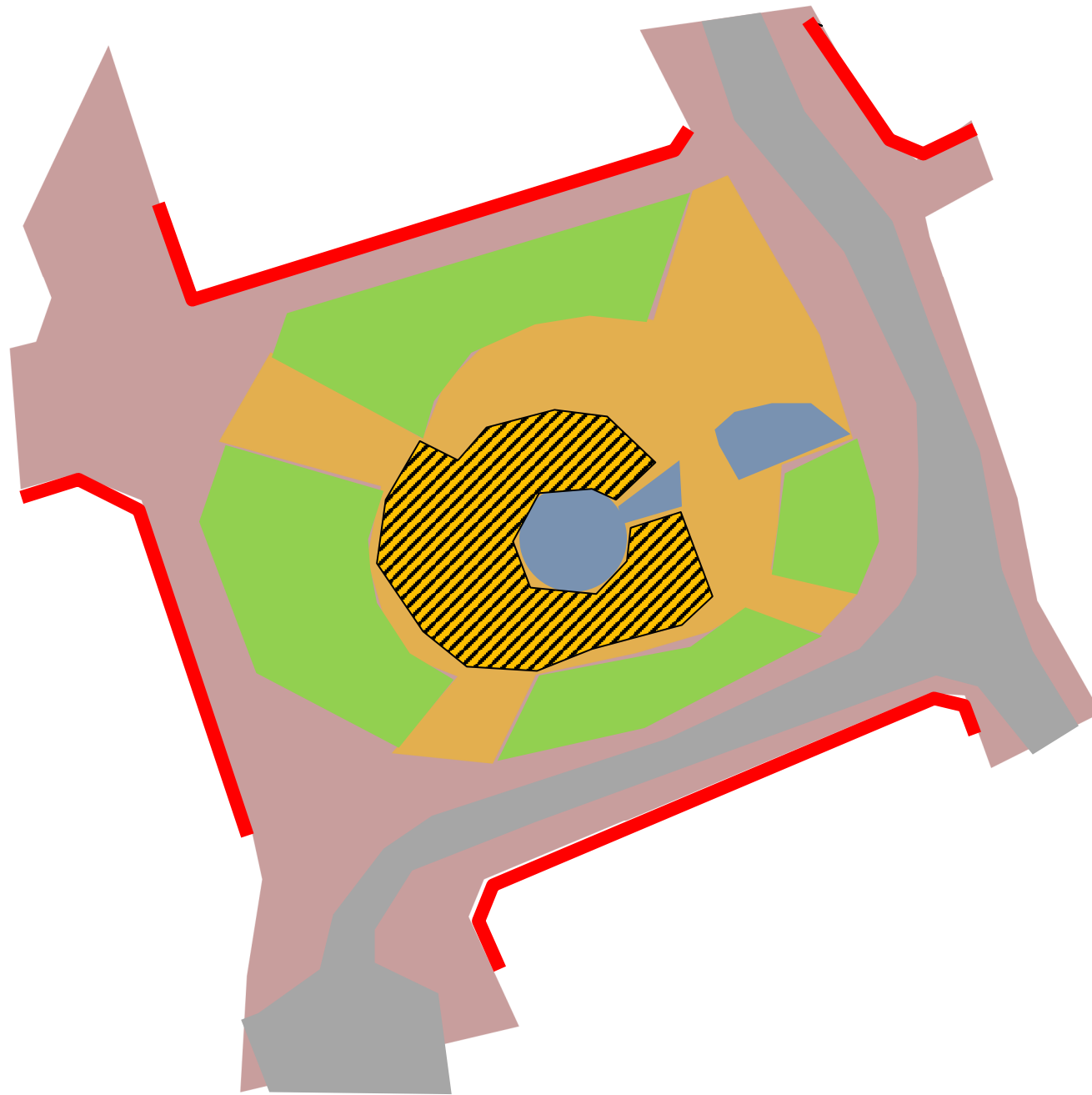
Castle Square sits at the heart of the medieval city and a large part of the space lies within the castle courtyard but there is very little to celebrate this fact. The modern surfaces include various bands and shapes but none relate to the historic features.

Therefore there is a significant quality test for any new development but this does not mean that traditional designs are required. In fact as a modern space, any new structures should be contemporary yet sensitive to the heritage and amendments to the surfaces can highlight and celebrate the lost castle walls.



Castle Square summary of analysis

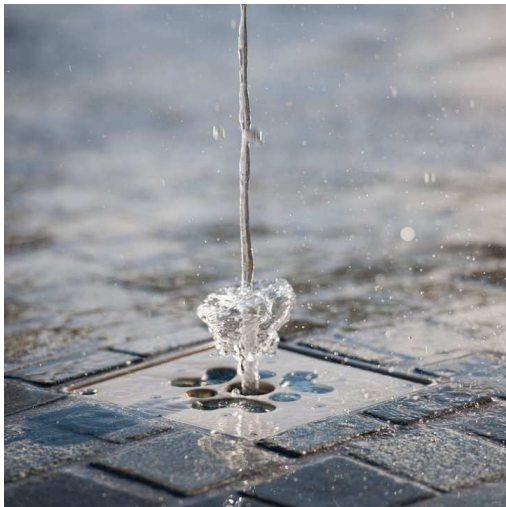
This simplified diagram of Castle Square demonstrates how the space is 'zoned' and the 'Civic' area is effectively an island disconnected from the active frontage edges. It also shows that the greenery area and events are a relatively minor elements of this key space. This contrasts with contemporary Civic Spaces such as Centenary Square in Bradford. Whilst this is clearly a larger space it is multi functional (as opposed to zoned) which means that the areas are larger and overlapping.



Precedents for jet fountains and shallow splash pools

Many cities including Nottingham, Bradford, Bristol, Manchester are designing focal water features as jets within very shallow dished areas as part of multi functional civic spaces.

This allows for play and events use of the space. When the jets are switched off the space is dry and effectively level. This approach with dished surface and water jets could be used to replace the lower pool with raised wall and fountains in Castle Square. It could attract more people to the space, would allow the pedestrian routes through the space to be unobstructed and would offer greater flexible space for events. This could be combined with a circular paving feature to maintain the focal point.



Precedents for kiosk and grass for sitting

The brief requires space for at least one food kiosk of approximately 2.5m x 6.0m.

Currently there is a significant growth in street food as an event within the public realm. The street food kiosks can be a temporary public art feature and standard units should be resisted. Usually little or no internal seating at a food pitch and instead informal seating and bins are provided nearby. This creates activity within the space. The food pitch could be managed to rotate the vendors to provide a regular variety of food experiences.



Precedents for restaurant pavilions

Given the civic nature of the space and the constraints, it may be difficult to accommodate two units and many of the best examples (left) are smaller scale café pods. Therefore the restaurant pavilions should be bespoke to the space or perhaps one unit should be considered instead of two.

The opportunity is to create 'jewel' type pavilion structures that are sculptural features within the space. The challenge is to avoid 'back' elevations to pavilion buildings that are public on all sides.

Within Castle Square. Irrespective of the detailed design, there are a number of fundamental requirements for the restaurant units:

- Any new units should complement the civic use of the space in terms of public seating and events.
- Any new units should have 'active frontages' on all public elevations
- They should be of contemporary appearance and could be offered as a design competition
- They should include a terrace at ground floor level that is accessed through the restaurant, plus possibly space at first floor and roof terrace to minimise the footprint and add scale.



Case Study: Sister Cities Park,

“Visitors to downtown Philadelphia should take notice of the new [Sister Cities Park](#) and cafe. Not only is it the perfect spot for a locally-sourced lunch in between touring the downtown museums, it's also a great spot for kids to play. The renovated park is managed by the [City Center District](#), whose goal for the park was to create a space for visitors, children, residents and business people to use”.



Case Study: Centenary Square, Bradford

The six-acre City Park in Bradford is the realisation of an ambition for a major tourist attraction and events space showpiece “park in the city” .

It is a significant space (similar in size to two football pitches) , and is neither a traditional green space nor a traditional city square, but combines elements of both. The centrepiece is the Mirror Pool Plaza designed to act as an interactive play resource and an events space.

The whole park has a circular orientation and the Mirror Pool provides a central focus. With the fountains or steam vents in action there is usually something to look at even on a cold day. On warm days the Mirror Pool is typically brimming with children, young people and parents splashing about amongst the fountains.

The management of the space borrows some ideas from Victorian public parks, particularly the presence of dedicated park keeping staff and the importance of ‘designing in’ natural surveillance to discourage unacceptable behaviour and foster self-regulation.

Like other large, central public spaces, City Park is often used as a place for individual or group meetings in a casual and informal context. The local authority has deliberately sought to hold events that would appeal to a broad audience and these are free to access.

