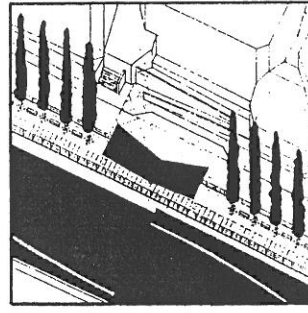
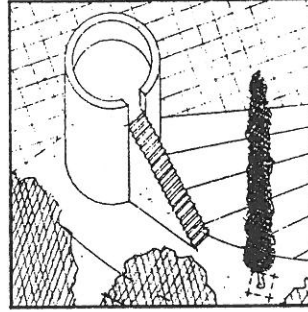
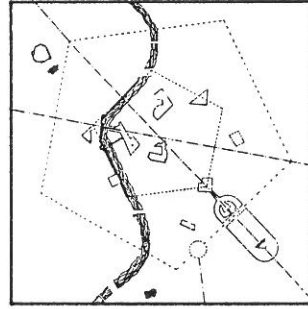
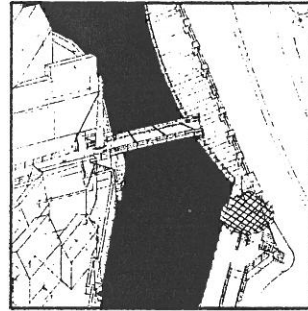
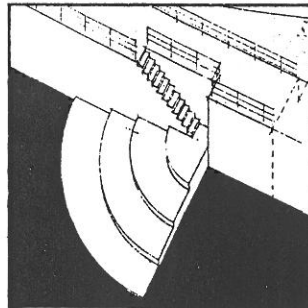


O V E A R U P & P A R T N E R S • C A M L I N L O N S D A L E

# Executive Summary



B R I D G E N D  
T O W N C E N T R E S T U D Y

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Introduction

Bridgend town centre is clearly not achieving its potential. It is a sub-regional centre favourably located some 30km from both Cardiff and Swansea but town centre facilities have failed to keep pace with the expansion of its residential population. The causes have been analysed in this Study and recommendations made on the basis of a strategy to improve the town's competitiveness.

The centre is currently suffering from problems common to many medium sized towns today - increased traffic makes shopping within the town centre unpleasant whilst provision of out of town alternatives attracts custom. As a crucial first step towards resolving the situation a new road scheme is currently under construction. The Bridgend Cross Valley Link (BCVL) will complete an inner relief road, remove the majority of through traffic movements and provide the opportunity for significant environmental improvements.

Taking advantage of the removal of traffic a primary physical objective is to identify the distinctive pattern of the town and reinforce the intimacy of the square and the street, making the centre an attractive place for pedestrians to circulate and congregate. This is a prerequisite for the development of social and cultural activity within the central area which at present is clearly missing.

By adopting a broad, responsive and collaborative approach to design, future proposals emerge from a true meeting of minds among those who plan, manage and ultimately use the town centre. Consultation meetings have therefore been held in Bridgend where the design and management of the town centre was open to criticism and discussion.

### Assessment of the Town Centre

#### *Its Character*

Town centres serve many junctions for those who inhabit either the town or its rural and suburban surroundings. A healthy town will display diversity in the culture, institutions, commercial activities and open spaces it supports. Bridgend's town centre is struggling to achieve a high quality of provision of the various facets of town life - places of recreation, education and entertainment are lacking and very few people live within the centre.

The potential for Bridgend to reintroduce or regenerate missing or failing aspects of town life is clearly present. In so doing it must be remembered that the town centre is a 'place of assembly' and must be made fit for that purpose.

The topography of the town is very distinctive and is closely linked to its origins and evolution. Of particular significance are the River Ogmore, the railway and the modern highways which largely demarcate the town centre. Partly as a result, the central core pattern of pre-twentieth century streets and squares is remarkably intact - any approach to revitalising the centre should regard this as a great asset.

Other notable features are the small area of streets and squares at the bottom of Newcastle Hill, the area of monolithic buildings to the southeast of the core and the series of buildings of public importance alongside the river. All need to play their part in the revitalising of the town.

### *Town Centre Activities*

The Study has reviewed the current characteristics of, and future opportunities for, shopping, working and living in the town centre. It has also considered entertainment, leisure and cultural activities.

A comprehensive assessment of the retail situation has been carried out embracing data on existing floorspace and trends, the conclusions from surveys of both shoppers and retailers, and an analysis of the catchment area. It is concluded that other than for bookshops, and arts and crafts shops, there are no major deficiencies in types of outlet. However, there is a clear lack of higher quality shops in the centre. Also, other than the Living Store, there is no major national variety or department store within the centre. If such a store could be attracted to the town it could anchor any new retail development scheme. However, this is unlikely to happen without major environmental and traffic related improvements and a general upgrading of the image of the town centre.

Bridgend has a substantial catchment population. However, there is significant leakage of expenditure to competing retail centres, particularly Cardiff and Swansea. Clawing back some of this expenditure would sustain a major new retail development.

A particular factor that emerged from the surveys was that shoppers currently combine food and non-food shopping and the loss of one of the major edge of town food retailers would be likely to have a detrimental effect on trade in the town centre. The principal improvements sought by shoppers and retailers alike relate to accessibility, congestion, pedestrianisation and car parking. Upgrading of the environment and the provision of additional retailers are also considered to be important aims.

The demand for office space in the Bridgend area is related primarily to local professional firms, satellite offices for financial services and local government and former public utilities. All these sectors are represented in the town centre to some degree.

Rental levels are currently low and new development by the private sector is unlikely to be viable. Nevertheless there may be prospects for some modest office development in the future primarily for local professional firms seeking expansion.

There is little evidence of people living in the town centre at present. Whilst there is only limited scope to incorporate new residential property within the area, residents could be encouraged by the conversion and utilisation of space above shops. Various constraints exist - however, these can be overcome in the majority of cases if a common purpose is shared by the parties involved. In particular the issues of parking, or non car-ownership conditions need to be addressed.

There are few existing leisure, entertainment and community facilities in the town centre other than a basic level of provision. In addition there are no major visitor attractions and no

quality hotels with conference facilities though there may be demand for this type of facility. Cultural activities have always contributed to the character and vitality of our towns, expressing what is particular to a place or its inhabitants. Such activities are at present lacking in Bridgend.

### *Movement*

Bridgend is currently characterised by the congestion caused by through traffic forced to pass through the town centre. This, combined with the narrow footways in many of the streets, results in poor environmental conditions to the detriment of the viability of the centre. Relief is at hand through the construction of the Cross Valley Link road; when this is completed the flows through the centre will be significantly reduced even without further traffic control measures being taken.

A particular issue in Bridgend is the high number of licenced hackney carriages within the area which results in significant volumes of taxis within the town centre. Whilst at present these contribute to the congestion on town centre streets, they perform an important role within the transport hierarchy and appropriate facilities will be required in any future traffic regime.

Brewers and other operators run bus services to and from the town centre with the dominant movement being in the Coity Road direction. They currently suffer from delays due to the general level of congestion.

Wyndham Street currently serves as a terminus following the demise of the former bus station off Market Street. However a small new bus station has been provided as part of the redevelopment of the site, with access off Quarella Road - this should be operational by the time the BCVL is completed. Access will then be available from the new road by means of a 'left-in/left-out' junction so that routes for buses to and from the north and west will be available without the need to enter the town centre.

The railway station provides good connections to Swansea, Cardiff and London as well as more local destinations. However its location some 300 metres from the bus station discourages convenient interchange between the two forms of public transport.

No specific provision is currently made for cyclists in Bridgend. However proposals are being developed as part of the National Cycle Network strategy.

The town centre is served by both surface and multi-storey public car parks located primarily to the south and east. In addition various private car parks, particularly Tesco's, allow users to visit other locations in the town. A small number of limited-waiting on-street spaces are also provided.

Surveys show that there is considerable variation in the use of the car parks, with those nearest the centre - namely The Rhiw multi-storey and Brackla Street surface car parks - being most popular. It is also apparent that surface parking is, in general, more popular than multi-storey. A particular feature is the fact that the Brackla multi-storey car parks are underused due to their remoteness from the centre - they primarily serve the Brackla Centre with few users also visiting other locations.

The surveys also indicated a significant demand for parking by Orange Badge holders, both on and off-street.

It is concluded from the surveys and assessment of demand that the future total number of off-street parking spaces should be of a similar order to that available before the BCVL works. However, any new parking provision should be located to the north of the centre so as to be more convenient for the large proportion of traffic approaching from that direction.

### Development Potential of Key Sites

An examination has been carried out of the development potential of the town centre. Opportunities for retail development are considered to be limited. Only one area appears to offer some scope for major additions to retail floorspace - to the south of The Rhiw around Nolton Street. Other areas, in particular Market Street/Wyndham Street, have potential for incremental upgrading of retail floorspace in association with environmental improvements.

Other sites, located away from the core area, are not considered suitable for retail development and scope for other town centre uses has been explored. Four potential town centre development sites have thus been identified for preliminary commercial appraisal - Elders Yard, Nolton Street, BT Site, and Allotment Gardens.

*Elders Yard* is constrained by existing rights of access and the presence of listed buildings. The site lends itself to refurbishment and, consequently comprehensive development is not practicable or realistically achievable. Preliminary appraisal of a scheme based on refurbishment of existing buildings for ground floor retail and first floor office use suggests that public subsidy would be required.

The *Nolton Street* site is located adjacent to the core shopping area, the Rhiw Centre and the Living Store and benefits from existing retail development proposals by a key land owner. The site offers the opportunity to extend the retail core and attract a major department store. However the costs of land acquisition and existing trading concerns limit the scope for comprehensive development. A possible way forward would be smaller scale piecemeal development of separate parcels of land and refurbishment of the Living Store. Whatever course is taken, some public subsidy is likely to be required.

The location of the *BT Site* outside the commercial core and slightly remote from the town centre does not lend itself to providing a logical extension to the prime retail facilities. Other users such as office, commercial leisure or civic leisure might be more appropriate but demand is low. There are major uncertainties about the availability and cost of acquiring this site. Were BT to be offered alternative premises elsewhere, or to move voluntarily, the costs of bringing the site into alternative use are likely to be extremely high and would require strong public and political support.

The *Allotment Gardens* site, including as it does the council depot, workshops and multi-storey car parks offers potential for a mixture of uses comprising social housing, leisure and car park. Relocation of the depot and workshops and demolition of the multi-storey car park would provide a large site suitable for such users and provide the opportunity to link into other environmental improvements proposed for the town centre. As land owner the Council

has a key role in bringing about development of this site. Assuming minimal land assembly costs no public subsidy should be required.

### **Future Direction**

It is concluded that Bridgend town centre is in a typical spiral of decline - it is struggling to achieve a higher quality of provision of various aspects of town life, and some are almost totally absent. There is a need to revive a sense of pride in the town, to improve the environment for users and to thereby restore confidence and encourage investment.

Two major keys to a strategy of improvement are seen to be the relationship of the town to its river and the removal of barriers between parts of the town centre, which inhibit cohesion and expansion. These issues need to be addressed as a priority in conjunction with measures to restore the balance between pedestrians and vehicles and the encouragement of development of key sites.

In addition to these physical aims it is important not to forget the human dimension and the need for the provision and co-ordination of cultural activities. The development of a cultural policy is essential if Bridgend is to fully establish a recognisable identity.

### **Recommended Strategy**

A broad strategy for the town centre has been drawn up embracing new development proposals, management of traffic, environmental improvements and a positive approach to cultural issues.

#### *New Development*

The most suitable area for the expansion of the prime retail facilities is to the south-east of the Rhiw Centre. Development of this site on Nolton Street is therefore seen as an important element of the strategy - it not only increases the area of shopping but helps to link the Brackla Centre to the core. Development of Elders Yard for small scale shops, restaurants and offices, and the incorporation of environmental improvements will make a significant contribution to upgrading the town centre.

Though there are major uncertainties about cost and acquisition, the BT Site is ideally located for a mixed development scheme and will contribute to the linkage between the existing core and the expansion of the town centre to the south-east.

The peripheral Allotment Gardens site should be developed for housing, leisure or community uses and will complement other environmental improvements within the centre.

#### *Enhancing the Town Centre*

The intention of the strategy is to enhance and animate the network of spaces within the existing centre. To achieve this the penetration of traffic is minimised where practical and appropriate whilst retaining some access for servicing, disabled motorists, taxis and limited on-street parking. A design concept has been developed to discourage speed throughout the area and create a safer and more pleasant environment for pedestrians. The proposed

philosophy is to ensure that the character of each street is appropriate to the role which it is playing, so that motorists and pedestrians can readily understand the situation. A hierarchy of four street types has therefore been developed, ranging from full vehicular access to complete prohibition.

The strategy includes full pedestrianisation, except for service access at specified times, of Adare Street, Dunraven Place (north) and sections of Elder Street. Nolton Street, Derwen Road, Market Street (west), Dunraven Place (south) and Queen Street will remain open to traffic though with appropriate treatment to discourage excessive speed. These will allow access to the town centre - northbound along Derwen Road, southbound along Dunraven Place - without encouraging through traffic or recirculation within the centre.

Other streets, notably Caroline Street and Wyndham Street, will be closed to traffic during main shopping hours but open during the evenings to encourage better use of the town centre after hours.

Some limited on-street parking is proposed on Derwen Road and taxi ranks and disabled parking spaces will be provided where appropriate.

The above proposals support the concept of new squares and pedestrian connections, in particular a pedestrian spine route through the centre linking with the Brackla Street area. Important 'squares' which it is proposed should be developed to return life and interest to the centre are Dunraven Place, with a new dignified platform for the cenotaph, 'Caroline Square', the geometric and circulatory hub of the extended town centre and 'Nolton Circus', a landmark at the southern approach.

Elders Yard should be developed as an intimate environment primarily for pedestrians, and other open spaces are proposed at Market Street/Quarella Road, the north end of Derwen road and at the railway station.

### *Embracing the River*

This requires bold contemporary civic architecture and engineering on a grand scale to enter the realm of the flood defences and the major highways in order to mark the edge of the town centre and to celebrate the river as an intrinsic part of Bridgend.

The most potent symbol of the revitalisation of the town centre is a new contemporary footbridge rising from Dunraven Place and alighting on a long platform at the western side of the river. This will overlook the new road towards the bottom of Newcastle Hill and afford views of the river both upstream and downstream. It is proposed that the river itself be significantly improved to make it an interesting feature of the town. The river bed will be extensively articulated to give rise to weirs, pools and cascades and access down to the water will be provided for recreational purposes wherever possible.

A cantilevered causeway overlooking the river is proposed along Angel Street with a square formed opposite the entrance to the council offices providing a formal setting and a place for civic ceremony.

It is also proposed that the abutments and parapets of the new Water Street Bridge are enhanced to form a dignified bridge into the town, and that an intimate square be provided at the 'Angel' public house.

### *Extending the Town Centre*

In conjunction with the release of development sites, it is proposed that the public realm be extended as a catalyst for the expansion of the town centre to its optimum size. The new 'quarter' of the town centre is marked by proposed 'Town Gardens' in the Brackla Street/Cheapside area. These will contain the existing police station and a new pavilion for varied social or recreational uses. The gardens will also contain a gathering place, or theatre, the only completely new place of public assembly within the centre.

A ground pedestrian ramp is proposed between Caroline Square and the Town Gardens. This will form both a physical and symbolic connection between the old and new parts of the town centre and assist the success of the new development.

### *A Cultural Strategy*

A need has been identified for a venue to house cultural activity. However, in order to be sustainable it must be supported by sound policy ideas. The real opportunity in Bridgend is to bring about a new sense of citizenship through cultural activity. Contrary to local belief, the area as a whole is not culturally devoid of life but there is as a need to focus some of the existing cultural activities within the town centre.

The totality of a culture is more than the arts. It is the whole of the lived experience of a place including everyday life as well as fringe cultures. Bridgend's culture needs to be evident at street level in as many forms as possible and in ways which actively involve the local people as consumers, audience and participants.

A cultural policy should be developed drawing on existing expertise and specialist agencies. Partnerships should be developed with important local businesses and sponsorship sought for artistic projects and events. An arts venue should be provided to host a wide range of activities and a public art strategy developed to identify opportunities for artistic contribution to the redevelopment of the town centre.

Finally live events should be encouraged within the town centre as an effective way of bringing people into the town.

### *Town Centre Management*

The improvements proposed for the town centre will only be fully successful if well maintained and managed. To this end it is recommended that serious consideration be given to town centre management for Bridgend, the form and resources available to be subject to discussions between the various interested parties.



## Implementation

Four major factors will influence the implementation of the recommended strategy - the BCVL contract, the relationship between the various components, land assembly and the availability of finance. In particular the traffic management measures and subsequent highway treatments will have to await the removal of through traffic by the new road.

A possible phasing programme has been drawn up for the proposed works which are broken down into discrete elements. These reflect the need to monitor the traffic situation following the opening of the BCVL and then introduce new traffic management measures prior to carrying out environmental works. Improvements to the river could be carried out in parallel with this, but it is likely that the development of areas off the highway would come later following land assembly.

The suggested phasing is only intended to be indicative at this stage - actual implementation would have to be refined by more detailed investigation and development of the individual components.

Preliminary estimates indicate likely capital works costs of £7-8m with the funding gap in respect of the development sites a further £3m plus. Various possible sources of public finance which might be available include Strategic Development Scheme Grants, European Regional Development Fund, WDA, Wales Tourist Board, Cadw and the Environment Agency. The issue of funding is addressed in greater detail in a complementary funding report.