

PORTHCAWL GRAND PAVILION  
PAFILIWN Y GRAND PORTHCAWL

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL  
& AWEN CULTURAL TRUST  
DESIGN & ACCESS STATEMENT  
AUGUST 2023



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## I.0 INTRODUCTION

### I.1 BACKGROUND & VISION

Porthcawl Grand Pavilion is a much-loved building within its community and region, embodying the great cultural and social heritage of Porthcawl. Grade II Listed, it is a nationally significant example of Art Deco sea-front architecture.

However, despite this significance, the Grand Pavilion is at a tipping-point. Following many years of piecemeal maintenance and patch-repair, its condition is deteriorating and, without intervention, at risk of further decline. Exacerbated by the austerity of the pandemic, the Grand Pavilion was closed for over twelve months, it's long-term disuse highlighting the importance of this major redevelopment in forging a sustainable future that offsets the continual maintenance liability associated with a C20 Grade II Listed ferro-crete structure in a seafront climate.

Bridgend County Borough Council and Awen Cultural Trust have demonstrated long-term commitment to this redevelopment, commissioning multi-disciplinary feasibility studies led by specialist conservation architects, Purcell, in 2016, 2019 and 2021, responding to changes in the local and global climate and economy.

This design report represents the distillation of these studies, presenting a developed RIBA Stage 3 proposal for the major redevelopment of Porthcawl Grand Pavilion, informed by a comprehensive team of multi-disciplinary design consultants. The proposals respond to three key objectives:

1. Effecting the beneficial and essential repair of the building to safeguard its future without detriment to its appearance, character and heritage significance
2. Enhancing the existing facilities to enable the Grand Pavilion to perform its original function as a performance venue more efficiently
3. The provision of additional facilities to enable the Pavilion to serve the contemporary needs of its community



Porthcawl Grand Pavilion mid-late C20 ©The Llynfi Collection

## I.2 PROJECT TEAM

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## 2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

### 2.1 SITE LOCATION

The Grand Pavilion is located in Porthcawl, a coastal town and community in the county borough of Bridgend, South Wales. Situated prominently at the centre of Porthcawl's sea-front Esplanade, the Grand Pavilion is orientated on a roughly north-south axis, with its southern principal elevation facing south and capturing striking views across the Bristol Channel. In front of the Pavilion is a broad pavement and on the opposite side of the Esplanade is a broad sea-front promenade.

On the west side of the site is Esplanade Avenue, a traditional residential street of gabled Victorian houses. Behind the Grand Pavilion and at a lower level are two areas of hard surfacing, either side of the pavilion and its fly tower. The car park is approached from Esplanade Avenue via a ramp on the site's west side. The boundary wall is built in mortared rubble stone with a random rubble topping course. This wall pre-dates the construction of the Grand Pavilion.

The east side of the site is bordered by Mary Street, with a modern development of shops and apartments on the opposite corner which replaced the former Esplanade Hotel. The boundary wall along the site's east side is built in mortared rubble stone with a random rubble topping course. The rear of the site is immediately adjacent to a four-storey block of flats.

- Site
- Promenade



## 2.2 HERITAGE VALUE

### Architectural Heritage

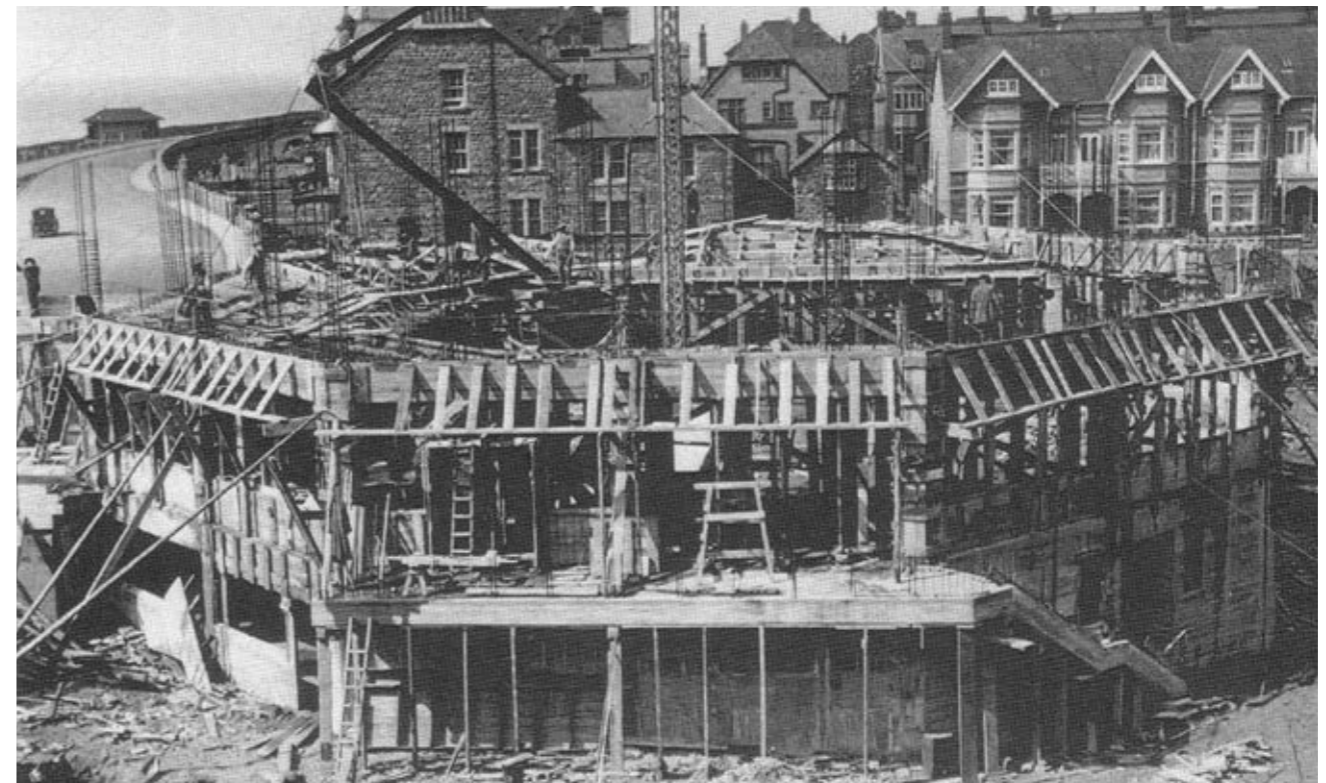
The Grand Pavilion is of national importance, becoming Grade II Listed in 1998. Completed in 1932, it is an early example of ferrous concrete construction, undertaken under the direct supervision of Mouchel, a pioneer of this then-very-innovative form of construction. Sponsored by Russell Mabley, elected Porthcawl's chief citizen in 1931, it is understood to have cost £25,000, and is constructed in a striking Art Deco style, characterised by its graceful curving form, elegant dome, crisp, moulded details, and de-materialised, rendered elevations.

Originally conceived as a Palm Court, with adjacent Winter Gardens and paired loggias from which to take the bracing airs of Porthcawl, the building appears to have evolved quickly – perhaps even during its construction – to become a theatre space, with its main auditorium located below the central octagonal dome, and a fly tower and dressing rooms to the north. The Winter Gardens appear to have been under-utilised and were later resurfaced to provide a tennis court to the east, and vehicular parking to the west, whilst the loggias were infilled in the 1990s to provide staff offices, and a public café.

Nevertheless, despite these later changes, the Grand Pavilion remains a fine and substantially-intact example of Art Deco sea-front architecture in Wales. The interior of the main auditorium is particularly fine and, in its design and use, offers considerable insight into Porthcawl's evolution from industrial coal port to coastal resort, the importance of music and dance as a temporary relief from the undoubted poverty and hardship of the Great Depression, and the Grand Pavilion's continued significance as the focus of social and cultural events in Porthcawl.



Grand Pavilion under Construction in 1931



Grand Pavilion under Construction in 1931



## Social Value

The Grand Pavilion, being completed in 1932, played a significant role in C20th social history in South Wales, having contributed to the temporary relief and wellbeing of visitors not only during the Great Depression, but throughout the peak periods of mining in the Welsh Valleys.

A particularly renowned example of the Grand Pavilion's cultural outreach during these periods was in 1957 when, at the Porthcawl Miners' Eisteddfod, the famous American singer and Civil Rights Activist Paul Robeson was intended to perform in person, however due to a US travel ban the performance was secretly arranged via a two-way transatlantic telephone link, where Robeson thrilled a capacity audience.

The setting of the Grand Pavilion, being so prominent on the popular seafront Esplanade, contributes greatly to Porthcawl's public realm. The Grand Pavilion is very much a focal point of the Town's seafront activity both with local residents and tourists. It is a key element of Porthcawl's coastal frontage, with its community cafe, cultural offer and areas of outdoor seating with sea views. The Grand Pavilion continues to host a wide-ranging programme of arts and cultural performances, from local events such as Porthcawl's weekly park run, through to hosting the annual, nationally recognised Porthcawl Elvis festival.



Postcard from Y Llynfi Collection



Postcard from Y Llynfi Collection

## 3.0 DEVELOPING THE BRIEF

### 3.1 UNDERSTANDING THE NEED

#### Awen Cultural Trust Briefing Workshop

The Grand Pavilion has evolved continually since its completion in 1932, and whilst later modifications and sub-division were well-intended to achieve greater storage, create additional internal space or circulation, they have served to congest the movement of people and alter the building's historic circulation sequence.

Through a series of collaborative workshops with Awen Cultural Trust, the design team worked to establish the range of operational constraints and opportunities presented by the building in its current form, along with the pro's and con's of the existing programme of events and catering offer.

The Grand Pavilion was divided into four key existing spaces, with pro's and con's established for each.

#### STAFF OFFICES

- undersized & over capacity
- lack of break-out space
- consumes highly valuable sea-front space
- low suspended ceilings are oppressive
- natural daylight & views
- proximity to front of house

#### AUDITORIUM

- setting out chairs is hugely time & staff intensive
- ventilation, cooling and fresh air circulation is very poor
- poor sightlines from balcony
- not intimate for smaller performances
- bar to one side congests space during intervals
- art deco style, character & historic significance
- great for larger performances, weddings, events

#### 'STAGE DOOR'

- low ceiling height and lack of daylight limits its usability
- decoration is dated
- required for additional bar service for auditorium capacity audiences

#### CAFE

- offer is simplistic
- during large events, the cafe becomes compromised with audiences at intervals
- small & congested servery
- sea-front views spectacular & drive footfall
- used flexibly by the community (art classes etc)

## Public & Stakeholder Consultation

Held at the Grand Pavilion, this consultation was both an open and invited event aimed at engaging the local community, key user groups and the local council.

The event consisted of presentation boards illustrating the condition of the existing building, its heritage significance and the proposed methodology for its considered and comprehensive repair. Visitors to the consultation were invited to complete the questionnaire adjacent and overleaf, indicating their preference / support for particular new uses if the Grand Pavilion is to be repaired and refurbished to ensure its future sustainability.

Circa 40 people attended the consultation and, combined with the adjacent table, the feedback confirms:

Strong support for:

- Cinema
- Function Rooms
- Flexible rooms for hire
- Smaller, more intimate performance space
- Rehearsal rooms for youth theatres / schools / community groups
- Increased toilet provision
- A new library for Porthcawl

Modest support for:

- Spaces for small businesses
- Increased bar provision

No substantial disagreement with any of the statements



| If the Grand Pavilion is repaired and refurbished to ensure its future operational sustainability, what new uses would you like to see? | Stongly Disagree | Disagree | Slightly Agree | Agree | Stongly Agree |
|---|------------------|----------|----------------|-------|---------------|
| Cinema  |                  | 2        | 1              | 8     | 4             |
| A new library for Porthcawl   | 1                |          | 4              | 5     | 6             |
| Function Rooms  |                  |          | 5              | 8     | 2             |
| Smaller, more intimate performance space  |                  | 1        | 1              | 5     | 8             |
| Space for small businesses to work from   | 1                | 3        | 6              | 4     | 1             |
| New flexible rooms for hire   | 1                |          | 4              | 8     | 2             |
| <b>To provide a better venue, what does the Grand Pavilion need?</b>  |                  |          |                |       |               |
| Increased bar provision   |                  | 1        | 7              | 4     | 3             |
| Rehearsal rooms for youth theatres / dance schools / community groups   |                  |          | 2              | 3     | 10            |
| Increased toilet provision  |                  |          | 2              | 7     | 6             |

## Public & Stakeholder Consultation

Furthering the previous table, the questionnaire also included more open, leading questions aimed at capturing the personal and diverse needs of the Grand Pavilion's regular user groups.

From these responses, we gained a more detailed understanding of the Grand Pavilions operations, both its successful attributes and shortcomings, along with the varied needs of its multiple user groups. This information was recorded, summarised and ultimately consolidated into a spatial brief.

### What do you like about the Grand Pavilion currently?

- 'seafront location'
- 'history and heritage'
- 'character'
- 'fabulous panto's'
- 'sense of community'
- 'hub'
- 'great value'
- 'great dance floor'
- 'external aesthetic'
- 'range of activities'
- 'memories'

### What do you not like about the Grand Pavilion currently?

- 'needs a clear vision'
- 'poor acoustics'
- 'congested'
- 'lots of stairs'
- 'needs more toilets'
- 'stage door is soul-less'
- 'no baby changing'
- 'poor access from street'
- 'the building's condition'
- 'disabled access'
- 'no obvious front door'

### What works well at the Grand Pavilion currently?

- 'fantastic location'
- 'main theatre spaces'
- 'great cafe space'
- 'excellent staff'
- 'range of events'
- 'pantomimes'
- 'atmosphere'
- 'the shows'
- 'well attended'

### What works not-so-well at the Grand Pavilion currently?

- 'needs a future vision'
- 'no rehearsal space'
- 'lack of daytime use for locals'
- 'the building is self-limiting'
- 'terrible access'
- 'lack of toilets'
- 'disabled access'



### 3.3 LEGISLATION, POLICY AND GUIDANCE

Due to the Grade II listed status of the Grand Pavilion, the following planning legislation, policy and guidance have been considered when developing proposals:

- Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act (1990)
- Planning Policy Wales Edition 10 (December 2018), specifically section 6.1: The Historic Environment
- Technical Advice Note 24: The Historic Environment (May 2017)
- Conservation Principles for the sustainable management of the historic environment in Wales (2011).

The local planning authority is Bridgend County Borough Council. The Replacement Local Development Plan (Deposit Plan 2018-2033), for which consultation ended in July 2021, includes policies for the Porthcawl Waterfront Regeneration Site area with the aim of revitalising the town as a premier seaside resort.

Objective 1d: To realise the potential of Porthcawl as a premier seaside and tourist destination by prioritising the regeneration of its waterfront and investing in key infrastructure. This will also improve the attractiveness of the town as a place to live and work, whilst enhancing the vibrancy of the Town Centre.

Policy PLA1: Porthcawl Waterfront, Porthcawl Regeneration Growth Area.

With regard to listed buildings:

Policy DNP10 seeks to ensure that, where a development proposal affects a listed building or its setting, special regard must be had to the desirability of preserving the building, or its setting, or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses. This is a primary material consideration and statutory requirement. Applications must be fully justified by means of a Heritage Impact Assessment and Statement in accordance with National Planning Policy and Guidance.

Policy DNP10 1) states that 'development proposals affecting listed buildings and their settings will only be permitted where (amongst other criteria) the sensitive alteration and/or extension to a listed building or its curtilage can be justified as being desirable or necessary and ensures that the special architectural character or historic interest is preserved.'

### 3.4 PRE-APPLICATION ADVICE AND CONSULTATION

During the development of the design proposals, the design team has engaged with the following, with feedback incorporated into the proposals:

- CADW
- Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) Conservation
- BCBC Planning Stakeholders
- BCBC Building Control
- Awen Cultural Trust Technical Theatre Team
- Awen Cultural Trust Catering Team
- The Theatres Trust
- 20th Century Society Wales (C20 Cymru)
- Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales (RCAHMW)
- Community User Groups

## CADW and BCBC Conservation Consultation



On 16th March 2022 an on-site heritage consultation was held with Cadw and BCBC Conservation, attendees included:

|                |                   |
|----------------|-------------------|
| Jonathan Green | <i>Cadw</i>       |
| Moira Lucas    | BCBC Conservation |

## CADW & BCBC Feedback

The ambition and approach of the emerging design was received positively by Cadw, with a discussion centred around specific requirements for Listed Building Consent and items for further investigation.

The following specific points were discussed:

- Establish the detailed principles of the concrete repairs holistically across the building, informed by concrete testing and repairs specialists
- In principle, the proposal for an insulated metal over-roof in powder-coated zinc or terne-coated stainless steel was confirmed as an acceptable treatment
- It was noted that shingled metal tiles may not be the most visually appropriate dome covering, and a ribbed solution should be explored to maintain the design intent of the original dome
- The proposal for discrete, integrated ramped access to allow a reinstated central historic entrance was agreed, subject to detail
- The principle of the set back, highly glazed roof lights were agreed in principle, with explorations to be made on visual sight lines and ensuring the roofscape can be subservient to the central dome
- All services should be designed with sufficient acoustic attenuation or enclosures where in close proximity to residential buildings
- The principle of carefully cutting away defective concrete behind the principal front facade was agreed in principle, subject to detail and justification
- The provision of solar PVs to the roofs of the rooftop pavilions was agreed, if flush fitting and integrated with the roof finish
- The principle of upgrading the existing fabric to achieve AECB retrofit was agreed in principle, subject to details and ensuring the upgrades can be demonstrated to not conflict or compromise heritage and character

## Theatres Trust Consultation



On April 25th 2022, a virtual consultation was held with the Theatres Trust, attendees included:

|                |                                  |
|----------------|----------------------------------|
| Claire Appleby | <i>Architecture Adviser</i>      |
| Tom Clarke     | <i>National Planning Adviser</i> |
| Tom Stickland  | <i>Theatres Adviser</i>          |

## Theatres Trust Feedback

The Theatres Trust are a statutory consultee and this consultation workshop was intended to discuss the overall ambition of the scheme, but also the operational opportunities of constraints associated with the site, the proposals and the proposed theatre and performance use.

The following specific points were discussed:

- The building has a strong formal identity and symmetry, so care should be taken over the design of the rooftop pavilions, the Mary St façade and the new chair store/servery interventions within the auditorium in response.
- Consider the external landscape strategy for the western car park to provide a pleasant environment for the staff offices and to clearly demarcate the lower ground floor entrance
- The scheme provides a series of flexible spaces at many different scales. Ensure the business plan and facilities mix enables the operational sustainability of each of these spaces



## C20 Cymru & RCAHMW Consultation



On May 18th 2022, a virtual consultation was held with C20 Cymru and the Royal Commission on Ancient Historic Monuments in Wales (RCAHMW), attendees included:

|                |                           |
|----------------|---------------------------|
| Elaine Davey   | <i>C20 Cymru</i>          |
| Bethan Scorey  | <i>C20 Cymru</i>          |
| Susan Fielding | <i>C20 Cymru / RCAHMW</i> |

## C20 Cymru & RCAHMW Feedback

The Grand Pavilion is a significant example of C20 Art Deco seafront architecture and the early use of ferro-crete in Wales. This consultation with C20 Cymru and RCAHMW was fruitful and engaging, focused around the specific history of the building and how to sensitively alter, extend and respond to the Art Deco style.

The following feedback was obtained and has been incorporated into the proposals:

- Whilst the front elevation is the formal, seafront elevation, given the scale of the redevelopment due consideration should also be given to the back and side elevations in relation to the hierarchy of the dome
- Ensure as site investigations and opening up works are undertaken, a written scheme of building recording is undertaken to document hidden heritage
- Ensure a comprehensive photographic record of the building is undertaken prior to commencing any works, particularly demolition works
- Consider holding community workshops or events designed to capture photos and memories of the building and its social value, forming part of the Grand Pavilion's heritage interpretation
- Art Deco seafront architecture in early-mid C20 was very innovative, highly futuristic at that time. Consider what elements of the Art Deco language and principles might inform the elevational design of the new extensions.

## BCBC Planning & Building Control Consultation



On May 19th 2022 an on-site consultation workshop was held with BCBC Planning Stakeholders, attendees included:

|               |  |
|---------------|--|
| Rhodri Davies | <i>Director of Planning &amp; Building Control</i> |
| Leigh Tuck    | <i>BCBC Highways</i>                               |
| Moira Lucas   | <i>BCBC Conservation</i>                           |
| Stan Evans    | <i>BCBC Building Control</i>                       |

## BCBC Planning & Building Control Feedback

Generally feedback on the holistic scheme was very positive, ensuring the beneficial repair of the listed building, whilst facilitating, through considered extension and remodelling, the continued sustainable use of the building.

The following specific points were discussed:

- In principle, the proposal for an insulated metal over-roof in powder-coated zinc or terne-coated stainless steel would be an acceptable treatment, subject to advice from CADW.
- Any modifications to the existing retaining walls to the east and west would require compliance with BCBC Highways specification
- The provision of a drop-off point should be considered
- EV charging points should be provided to the car park
- Sufficient bicycle parking should be allowed for, in compliance with the Welsh Government Active Travel Act
- The new ramp to the front elevation will require compliance with BCBC Highways specification
- A Transport Statement will be required in support of the proposals prior to submitting for Planning
- A Phase 1 bat survey should be undertaken in support of the proposals, prior to submitting for Planning
- Formant Acoustics to liaise with Environmental Health Officer to agree proposed approach to acoustic break-out
- Ensure due consideration is given to the fire strategy prior to planning, including escape widths, travel distances, occupancies and compartmentation
- In the elevational and roof design, consider ways of improving the visual amenity for onlooking residents
- Consider green roofs for visual amenity and sustainable drainage / attenuation