

Culture, Communications, Welsh Language, Sport, and International Relations Committee
National Contemporary Art Gallery – Anchor site proposal

24.08.2023

1. Overview and Background

- 1.1. The National Contemporary Art Gallery represents an exciting and significant project for Wales. Establishing an anchor hub and investing in the expansion of the regional sites will contribute significantly to Wales' economy and cultural milieu. This proposal presents the opportunity to establish a national gallery focused on modern and contemporary art, akin to the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art and Irish Museum of Modern Art. This achievement would bring Wales in line with the other nations of the United Kingdom, offering a platform for national expression and cultural exploration, as observed in other countries.
- 1.2. Swansea Council, in partnership with Urban Splash, submitted a proposal for the Civic Centre to be considered for the National Contemporary Art Gallery anchor hub in March 2023. The bid set out a vision for the gallery, an architectural design, governance structure, its role within the cultural landscape, and an approach to delivery of the capital programme and its ongoing operation. The bid team comprised of:
 - Swansea Council Cultural Services
 - Swansea Council Physical Regeneration and Development Team
 - Urban Splash - Strategic regeneration partner
<https://www.urbansplash.co.uk/>
 - Counterculture - Cultural business and strategic planning consultants
<https://www.counterculturellp.com/>
 - Coffey - Architects
<https://www.coffeyarchitects.com/>
 - Gardiner & Theobald - Cost consultants
<https://www.gardiner.com/>
- 1.3. Swansea Council appointed Urban Splash as its long-term strategic development partner across seven major strategic development sites in 2021, including the 23-acre seafront Civic Centre site, included in the bid. Urban Splash are a pioneering private sector developer with a 30-year track record of transformational urban projects and the creative reuse of existing structures.

- 1.4. In alignment with Swansea Council's corporate well-being objectives, as defined in its Corporate Plan 2023/2024 <https://www.swansea.gov.uk/corporateimprovementplan>, its Asset Management Plan and associated Accommodation Strategy sees the relocation of functions currently housed at the Civic Centre to more accessible and fit-for-purpose locations within the city centre by 2025/6. The vacation of the building will allow for the redevelopment of the site.
- 1.5. Swansea's Glynn Vivian is one of 9 regional galleries that form a national network of galleries across Wales that will provide increased access to the national collection and bring contemporary art closer to communities. The network of galleries will work closely with Amgueddfa Cymru and National Library Wales to curate exhibitions and displays using the national collection alongside and as part of the Glynn Vivian's own programmes and projects.
- 1.6. The commitment is being made possible through a collaboration between the Arts Council of Wales, Amgueddfa Cymru and the National Library of Wales. The three partners have been working with different venues which are being considered as part of the dispersed network of galleries across Wales.
- 1.7. Nine venues across Wales have been shortlisted to be members of the network of galleries, these will be places where people can view the national collection closer to their homes. Each of the venues are now undergoing a more detailed assessment.
- 1.8. Wales, and Swansea has the opportunity to gain international recognition as a destination for modern and contemporary art. By siting the anchor hub at the Civic Centre and establishing Glynn Vivian as a regional site within the same location, a critical mass is achieved, drawing in both local and national visitors and providing the necessary infrastructure and skills base. The collaborative impact of the anchor hub and Glynn Vivian can function as a powerful catalyst, nurturing the growth and prominence of Wales' cultural sector.

2. National Contemporary Art Gallery Anchor Hub – Site and Architecture

- 2.1. Swansea Council and Urban Splash's submission for the National Contemporary Art Gallery anchor hub sees the gallery occupy the repurposed Civic Centre and a new-build 'art-box,' delivering an accessible and sustainable destination of a scale and quality fitting of a national gallery.
- 2.2. The modernist architecture of the Civic Centre and its physical attributes provides a fitting environment for the celebration of Welsh and Modern art in all mediums, scale, and formats. The Civic Centre is a striking example of Modernism and 20th century brutalism, designed by J Webb and CW Quick, West Glamorgan County Architects, and identified by the Twentieth Century Society as a building of architectural significance. The building's location on the seafront, facing out into Swansea Bay, and adjacent to Oystermouth Road, a key arterial highway, makes it one of Swansea's most visible and well-known buildings.
- 2.3. Urban Splash and Swansea Council's stage 1 proposal satisfies all essential and desirable criteria defined by the 'Anchor Site Draft Criteria' provided by Welsh Government, Culture Division.

- 2.4. The gallery will occupy the eastern and central wings of the Civic Centre, utilising the existing imposing 12m-high atrium as the entrance space, the council chamber repurposed as an auditorium, and rooftop canteen reimagined as a restaurant. The two wings on Oystermouth Road provide linear gallery spaces, with accommodation for community and education rooms at ground level linked to the entrance areas. Art handling, storage, and back of house functions sit in the lower ground and basement sections.
- 2.5. A new build 'Art Box' will be inserted between the two existing wings of the building on the Oystermouth Road side. The efficient Art Box provides adaptable large floorplate display spaces that can be configured and subdivided to suit a range of exhibitions, events, and layouts, and easily redeployed or partially closed off during exhibition changeover.
- 2.6. Combining the adaptive reuse of the existing structure with the incorporation of new build components will ensure the greatest adaptability in meeting and exceeding the specified spatial requirements. Single gallery spaces will allow for large-scale installations and the hosting of significant exhibitions. The design provides efficient circulation and service strategies. This solution can meet the changing operational and curatorial needs while providing visitors with an engaging experience.
- 2.7. The design includes spaces with varying ceiling heights, with the minimum height of 6m achieved throughout the gallery. There are several display spaces with a generous 10m ceiling height, specifically tailored for displaying large sculptures and monumental works of art. Lower height areas cater to other forms of art presentation, such as digital or community-focused art, ensuring a comprehensive and inclusive approach to the gallery's programming. A sculpture garden, exploiting the landscape features, delivers spaces for innovative and immersive exhibitions.
- 2.8. The design proposals deliver facilities to accommodate major digital installations and new media forms, such as those found in the Blavatnik, by providing areas of significant size with clear structural spans. Designed with blackout capabilities, allowing for the customisation of lighting conditions to suit the specific requirements of digital installations and other exhibitions with unique spatial and lighting needs. This adaptability ensures that the gallery remains at the forefront of cutting-edge artistic expression, catering to a diverse range of creative mediums.
- 2.9. Artists will be welcomed into the gallery in studio spaces for 'Artists in Residence'. Designed to accommodate a rotational, non-permanent residency programme, these versatile studio spaces provide an inspiring environment for artists to develop and showcase their work. By offering these studio spaces, the gallery will enrich the visitor experience through direct engagement with artists and their creative processes.
- 2.10. The gallery design includes spaces for café, retail, and other income-generating activities that can operate independently of gallery hours, enhancing revenue generation potential and making it a destination for both cultural and social activities. A ground floor sea facing café and retail space, plus roof top restaurant, outside of the secure line, present commercially viable operations that function as attractors in their own right.
- 2.11. Versatile and adaptable learning and engagement spaces will be able to accommodate a range of activities, including workshops, lectures, and interactive programmes tailored to various age groups and interests. The proximity to the gallery

spaces enables seamless integration of the exhibitions into the educational programming, creating an accessible immersive learning experience.

2.12. Centrally located, high quality community spaces will cater to a diverse range of activities and events. This approach aims to create a vibrant cultural hub that is not only a destination for art enthusiasts but also a gathering place for people to connect and collaborate.

2.13. The aim is for the project to achieve Net Zero status, positioning it as an exemplar in terms of sustainability and environmental responsibility. The reuse and refurbishment of the existing building is a sustainable solution in terms of embodied and operational carbon. State-of-the-art retrofit technologies will be employed, as appropriate, to ensure optimal performance of the building. The new build elements will meet the highest standards in terms of embodied, operational, and life cycle carbon emissions.

2.14. The gallery design adopts the principle of accessibility for all, providing seamless access throughout the building. The design incorporates a clear and legible layout and specialist spaces, such as sensory rooms and 'changing spaces', ensuring all visitors can comfortably and safely navigate and experience the venue.

2.15. The National Contemporary Art Gallery will form a significant part of wider plans to transform the Civic Centre and surrounding area into a vibrant new City Waterfront district, reconnecting Swansea with its city beach and south facing bay. The existing building will be the centrepiece of a large-scale mixed-use complex. The gallery will both contribute to and benefit from this lively mix of uses, helping to drive additional footfall to the site, and draw extra visitors into the gallery who may have come to the waterfront for other reasons.

2.16. The Civic Centre's city centre location aligns with Welsh Government's "Town Centre First" initiative and benefits from excellent transport connections.

2.17. The gallery design proposal can accommodate significant annual footfall, meeting the essential target of 750,000 visitors per annum and aiming for the desired level of one million visitors per annum, with the potential for further expansion as required. The site's scale exceeds the current city venues' capacity, which ranges from 75,000 to 200,000 visitors per annum, demonstrating the gallery's potential for attracting larger audiences.

3. National Contemporary Art Gallery Anchor Hub– Governance, Funding, Operational, and Programming Models

3.1. The proposal submitted, as requested by the Stage 1 bid invitation, outlines a suggested funding and governance models, informed by specialist advice, and analysing the following (associated report is included as an appendix to the bid):

- A full review of comparable galleries' programme, scale, governance and funding
- Artists' needs
- Visitor and community needs
- Requirements of the further and higher education sector
- Visitor number modelling and associated market penetration
- Projected income sources across a range of visit scenarios
- Relevant national, regional, and organisational strategies and policies

- 3.2. The recommendation is for the National Contemporary Art Gallery to be funded and staffed through a newly established national organisation, arms-length from government with independent governance, decision-making, fundraising, and income generation powers but substantially funded, both for capital and revenue purposes, through government subsidy. This model is in line with models seen at comparable national and major galleries.
- 3.3. Swansea Council together with Urban Splash would work closely with the organisation to deliver the project.
- 3.4. The submission includes a draft staffing structure with the necessary expertise to deliver the exhibition programme, collections displays and liaison with the national collection and the satellite galleries.
- 3.5. The proposal presents a high-level cost appraisal relating to initial and on-going costs of delivering the anchor site, covering:
- Capital project costs.
 - Ongoing annual revenue/operating costs.
 - Pre-opening organisational development and activity costs: there is a requirement to develop organisational capacity over a period of years before opening to manage the development, plan the opening programme, and ensure operational readiness.
- 3.6. Under a joint venture or partnership with Amgueddfa Cymru and National Library Wales, the new gallery will curate and present a programme that enables it to become a pivotal venue for exhibitions and displays from the permanent national collections of Amgueddfa Cymru, National Library Wales and the regional galleries. The bid outlines a full and costed suggested exhibition framework and timetable developed through analysis of proposed gallery objectives, and exhibition programmes of comparable organisations.
- 3.7. Digital programmes and digital access would be fundamental tenets at the core of any programme or operating models which form part of the National Contemporary Art Gallery. Whilst the Civic Centre offers more than adequate space and with investment the correct conditions to care for collections in the traditional sense re security, conservation, environmental controls it also provides an excellent space for the public to engage digitally with the collection via Celf Ar Cyd and other collection management systems.
- 3.8. The gallery will work to the National Museum Directors' Council Principles for Lending and Borrowing including the expectation that they will meet the standards for environment and security set out in the Government Indemnity Scheme Guidelines for Non-national institutions or as agreed with the lending organisation. The Council's Cultural Services and its partners are responsible for managing and curating the Glynn Vivian Art Gallery; Dylan Thomas Exhibition; Swansea Museum; West Glamorgan Archives and the National Waterfront Museum, all of which have MA Accreditation and are networked to their respective peers internationally. Glynn Vivian, alongside Mostyn and Artes Mundi are the only three galleries that are part of the PlusTate Network in Wales, which supports excellence in its contemporary exhibition and learning programmes. The process for coordinating and facilitating touring exhibitions and exchange is well known and applied regularly, ensuring loans from national and international collections and vice versa. With appropriate modification around environmental controls, security measures for display and storage, this would be a world class gallery space. The lower ground floor of the Civic Centre, currently used by Central

Library as a distribution facility for 17 libraries, provide for excellent access and loading bay facilities for receiving and distributing artworks. A list of potential national and international exhibition partnerships is included in the bid.

4. Merits of the Proposed Model - 8-10 regional sites and an anchor hub

4.1. Swansea Council recognises the merits of the proposed model of regional sites and an anchor hub. Appropriate capital and revenue funding models, and resource development, will be required to ensure long-term sustainability and vibrancy of the regional sites, the anchor hub, and the existing national and local cultural institutions and networks. The Anchor hub situated at the Civic Centre, and the Glynn Vivian as a regional site, has the potential to significantly contribute to Wales' modern and contemporary art sector. Their combined efforts, in a single destination, could serve as a powerful catalyst, boosting the growth and prominence of this artistic field.

The merits include:

4.2. Revealing the national collections to new audiences by enabling access for the widest and most diverse audiences through the larger scale central hub and local sites. An anchor hub will be able to display collections that are currently in storage due to display and capacity limitations.

4.3. Providing Wales with a gallery possessing the scale of requisite infrastructure to further enable participation in the international art world through commissions, collaborations, and touring exhibitions.

4.4. Creating a focal point for modern and contemporary Welsh art and artists to celebrate Welsh culture and identity today. Working in tandem with the 8-10 regional sites and the national partner institutions, the anchor hub would be a platform to explore and debate what contemporary Wales: what are its roots, what it feels to be Welsh today, what does future Wales look like.

4.5. Establishing a hub for the Welsh visual arts sector, providing a landmark, world class, curatorial, administrative, logistic centre for the proposed regional model. Therefore, future proofing the production of and engagement with art and heritage collections in the age of digital culture and climate change.

4.6. Contribute towards significant skill and talent development:

4.6.1. Give opportunities for gallery staff to develop their practice and experience in new areas of research and skills, including in curation, collections, and exhibition management, within an internationally significant gallery context.

4.6.2. The anchor hub would be a major resource to the further and higher arts education system. The project has the potential to engage with a range of educational institutions, regionally and nationally, enabling students and staff to benefit from talent and professional development opportunities, including the ability to learn in 'real time' in the gallery space.

4.7. Function as cornerstone of the urban regeneration and a key strategic element in the delivery of a stronger visitor and cultural economy.

4.7.1. The anchor hub would be an asset and attractor of national and international scale. Located at the Civic Centre within in a vibrant urban seafront destination, the hub would act as a crucial catalyst for further growth in Wales second city and the

wider regional economy by attracting a new wave of investment, visitors, and sustainable development.

- 4.7.2. Swansea's regeneration programme secures its role as the regional capital of South-West Wales, facilitating growth of the wider regional and national economies. Last year saw the delivery of its first major scheme, Copr Bay, with a landmark 3,500 seat arena, coastal park, and new homes. Next year will see number of new developments opening, including the City Deal-enabled tech-focused workspace at 71/72 The Kingsway, the Council's Community Hub, plus a revitalised Palace Theatre. The historical Hafod Morfa Copperworks benefits from newly opened the Penderyn Distillery and Visitor Centre and the recently announced £29 million Levelling up bid for the Lower Swansea Valley. Swansea Council is working with Urban Splash to bring forward other sites including Swansea Central and riverside St. Thomas. New infrastructure will reconnect Swansea's urban core to its beach; 'Ffordd I'r Mor' with link Swansea Central, Copr Bay and the City Waterfront via traffic free active travel route. These strategic largescale schemes look to deliver growth in jobs, values, and private investment, building the city's ability to sustain viable development.
- 4.7.3. The National Contemporary Gallery Anchor Hub and Glynn Vivian regional site would be key attractors and facilitators within a wider cultural network. Enhancing Swansea's existing gallery network by attracting visitors to the city who will also be interested in the wider visual arts offer in Swansea. The city's record of hosting major events and attractions, such as the Wales Airshow, BBC Proms in the Park, and concerts featuring world-renowned artists, demonstrates its capacity to market, manage, and sustain its cultural portfolio.

End.