

RYDE ESPLANADE AND INTERCHANGE PLAN WALKABOUT
24TH APRIL 2019

Walking Group:

Cathy Foulkes, Zoe Thompson, Cllr Phil Jordan, Cllr Michael Lilley, Jenny Ward, Abi Wheeler, Stella Davis.

*Additional walking group on 22nd May with Ryde Town Council: Cllr Jordan Cllr Lilley, Cllr Critchley, Cllr Axford, Cllr Conyers, Cllr Adams, Town Clerks Saskia Blackmore, Ady White. In addition Chris Simmons and wheelchair user Gary Axford were in attendance.

Aim:

To consider the Western Garden and interchange area, identifying improvements and opportunities for future regeneration.

Initial Thoughts:

Two very obvious issues were raised, firstly the general appearance of the interchange area, and secondly, problems with ease of access for pedestrians (and on occasion drivers), with traffic taking priority throughout the whole area.

This report will detail the discussions and feedback from the group, and generate the key priority improvements for the area.

Views and Vistas: Western Gardens.



The group agreed that the views from the Western Garden area were pleasing, and a significant part of the town, but the area is not maximised and lacks in regards to public realm.

The green amounts to a good area, which could be utilised as a multi-purpose small scale arts, entertainment, leisure space.

Various suggestions have been outlined in previous consultations, A speigeltent, fountain feature, appropriate sculpture, bandstand etc

Any feature would need to compliment the heritage from both the town and that of the reflected views of the historic pier.

There is seen to be opportunity for rapid 'uplift' of this area. For example, the current seating is situated in front of a large flowerbed, completely restricting the view of the seafront.



If more significant redevelopment of the area is likely to be delayed, then consideration should be given as to the purpose, and position of street furniture, flowerbeds etc to make the area more practical and welcoming.

If more significant restructuring was possible in this area the consideration should be given to re-locating the café and toilet block to the far side of the green

The recent refurbishment of the café is welcomed, and demonstrates how the commercial offering can be significantly improved with investment however visually, this block restricts

visibility to the entrance of the pier, which if opened up could help to increase the use of the area, with it becoming an extension of the interchange.

Thought could also be given to improved access to the beach area here.

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The Western Gardens area is highly visible from Union St, a draw to the seafront, and equally, a great standing point to view the town, however there is a feeling of disconnect between the spaces. This could be dealt with through strong, more imaginative landscaping, street furniture, street art etc

Views and Vistas: Interchange.

Visually the interchange area of the bus and rail stations are very poor. They look rundown and bleak in appearance.

This area is vast, and is primarily that of concrete. The way the buildings have been configured mean that there are no views of the sea or sky line. The roadway is particularly dominant due to its size with the addition of the taxi rank further widening the area.



The train station is a mix of old and new, with some of the original heritage features, such as iron work obscured due to the low ceiling height of the buildings. This makes the station very dark and unwelcoming. It is reminiscent of an underground street subway.



The unwelcoming feel of the station means that commuters and visitors are unlikely to spend any time in this area. Giving thought to opening up the station through redesign would not only allow for better lighting, increased feeling of safety, but also

increase opportunity with people seeing it as a space where they can comfortably wait and spend time. This would allow for a more extensive and an upgrading in the commercial opportunity, for example a more diverse range of refreshments, gifts as well as items that would appeal to regular commuters.

Interestingly in the public consultations carried out by ARC in 2018, community feeling was that although this area is named 'the gateway' to Ryde, it is considered with much more value as a destination and as part of the town as a whole. This is likely to be why there is such strong feeling as to the visual and heritage aspects of the interchange area, rather than just practicality as a transport link.

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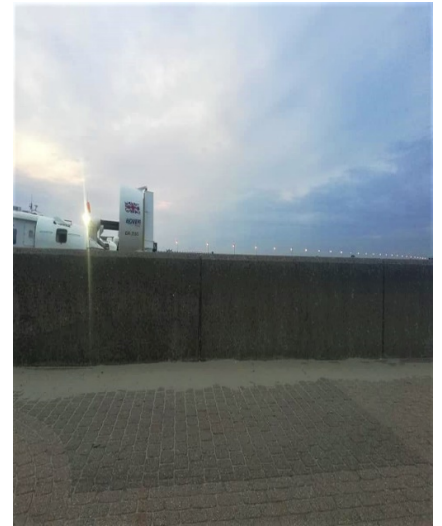
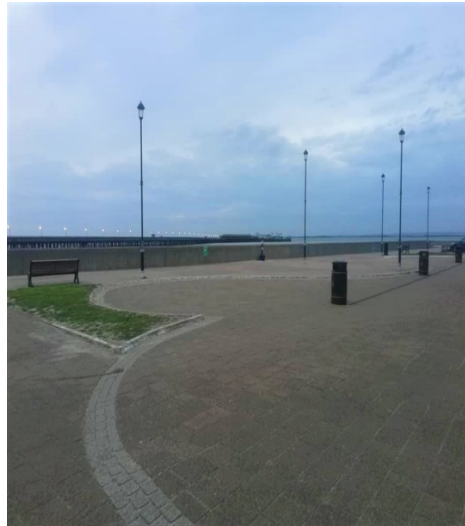
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On exiting the station area, you're faced with a variety of basic flowerbeds and street furniture. It appears that this large area is poorly throughout with little real value, other than having the potential for an increase in antisocial behaviour, as it becomes a 'hangout' spot, whilst visitors and commuters quickly pass through.

Moving eastwards of the bus station, there is a considerable walk to reach the hovercraft. Public can access the hover travel terminal via the bridge (if able). The bridge offers the first views of the sea within the whole area. Tourists will often stand at the top of the bridge steps to take in the view and observe the hovercrafts. It seems a shame that this is the best and only vantage point for this. Some thought should be given as to how this view and the draw of the only commercial hovercraft can be promoted.

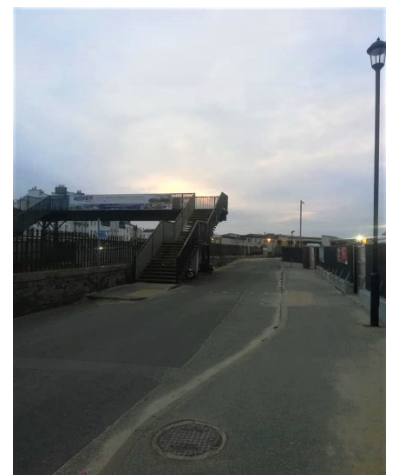
In the Hovertravel area, we once again see a vast amount of space, including a significant car park area, and further additional taxi parking much of which appears to be under utilised. There is no character given to this area at all. Lots of concrete!

Even around the sea wall area to the west of the ice rink, there could be potential for viewing points and the first opportunity in many meters to actually walk with a sea view. But the public realm is very poor, and uninspiring, and is obviously blighted by the derelict ice rink building.



This whole area, continuing eastwards is dedicated to parking. This further limits enjoyment of the area for the public as it means natural footfall is more naturally redirected back up to the road and away from the sea views.

Consideration must be given to the first impression for visitors as they come off the Hover.



All customers exit the Hover in this direction, yet there is no signage, no indication as to where they are in relation to bus/train station which may be required for onward journeys, or where the beach/town areas are. Giving a generally bleak 'welcome'.

Accessibility – Western Gardens & Pier

Although Western Gardens may not technically be classed within the interchange area, it was felt that if an aim was to increase footfall both to and from the interchange, then Western Gardens must be considered within any planning.

A greater natural footfall from the town to the interchange would be helpful, and Western Gardens is what will bridge that space.

Currently the end of Union St, around Western Gardens, is dominated by traffic. It can be particularly difficult to cross from the left-hand footpath of Union St.

Consideration must be given to ways in which the pedestrians can take priority to oncoming traffic around the junction and the roundabout. Widening pathways, increasing crossing opportunities and traffic calming measures would improve this whole area. Taking inspiration from redevelopment of areas such as Oxford Circus – London, where significant expansion of pedestrian walkways have been used to manage high footfall & traffic areas, could be useful.



Pedestrians are currently required to cross from Western Gardens into the bus/train station to then enter the pier. Traffic takes full priority in this area, with cars entering the pier, car drop offs, and parked cars all in this very small area. Footpaths are very small, and the pier entry designed in a chicane gateway style, which is particularly hard to navigate with luggage, pushchairs, wheelchairs etc



This whole area is difficult to navigate, it encourages traffic into the town and up the pier due to there being no drop off area, and can result in traffic congestion onto the main road at busy periods waiting for the barriers. It is often observed that cars who do use this as a drop off point reverse back into oncoming traffic when turning is not possible.

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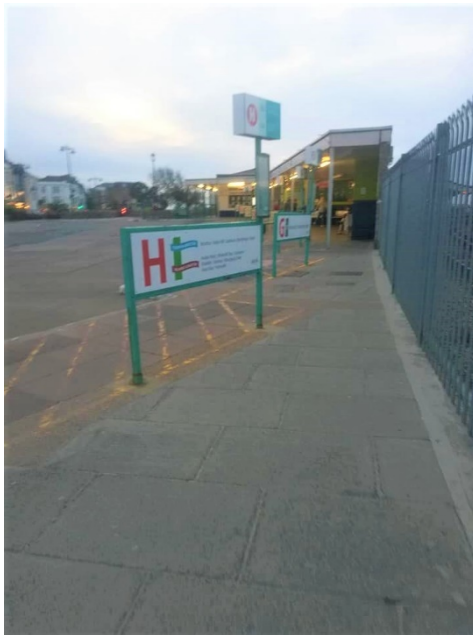
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A direct route to the pier entrance could be achieved from Western Gardens if redesign was achieved with the toilet/café block being re-located.



It was also noted that despite the history and heritage of the pier, other than a small blue plaque, there is no notification/visitor information at this end of the pier to celebrate this.

The bus station area would benefit from full redesign. Buses are not required to be held at this bus station for any length of time, and so bus stop sections, running parallel, would reduce the amount of space required, allowing for wider walkways. Currently when public are queuing for a bus, the full width of the walkway is taken up. This is uncomfortable and congested when people are required to walk through this way to reach the Hover Travel terminal from the station. For a high footfall area, the pedestrian pathways were seen to be inadequate.



Toilet facilities are restricted to a disabled toilet within the ticket office opening time. Or using the toilets on Western Gardens requiring travellers to go back out of the interchange area.

Should an individual be unable to navigate the stepped bridge across to the Hover Travel terminal, they are required to walk several more meters around the full length of the extensive car park, and then back on themselves to the ticket office. This is not clearly marked, and adds considerable time onto someone's journey, despite the terminals all being in close proximity (as the crow flies!).

This is particularly disappointing and unwelcoming for visitors and commuters' makes travelling with a disability, young children, luggage difficult – which for a 'gateway to the island' is unacceptable.

Consideration could be given as to more direct routes for passengers from the bus station/train station and Hover travel areas.

An option would be to look at establishing a level crossing between the existing platform that allows for footfall directly onto the hover travel site. This would require co-operation and thought to the existing trains. A discussion was had about the possibility of having shuttle carriages between Ryde Station and Pier Head, then an onward train from Ryde station through. It could be that the old carriages are kept for this shuttle service, given they are a 'tourist experience' in themselves. It was also mentioned that this could help to ensure revenue on this stretch of rail line, as currently due to the short duration it can be easy for commuters to travel without a ticket at busy periods

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Alternatively, an accessible bridge/lift direct from the train platform across to the Hover travel area. Making the transfer between transport much easier and quicker

Reducing the footprint of the bus station area would not only improve commuter/travel experience, but also allow for better provision for those wishing to bypass the interchange but walk a more natural/direct coastal path route.

For those who have no choice but to access Hover Travel via the long route, because of no access over the step bridge consideration must be given to the drop curbs, and paving layout.

Currently those requiring a dropped curb have to cross the road turn left down the opposite pavement then use the drop curb to cross back.



The natural walk way if someone was travelling from the bus station to hover travel, means that you are taken a significant distance away from the ticket office, to then have to turn back.

The area around Hover Travel is vast, with parking for coaches, cars and more taxi spaces. This could be reduced, and landscaped to make it more appealing and fitting for a coastal area.

Because the dominant feature is concrete and parking, a coastal path walking route is lost, which results in a division between the town, area and the esplanade. Ideally having an interchange area which fits more seamlessly between the two would not only help accessibility and the visual appearance of the area, but also help to increase footfall.

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CONCLUSIONS:

The following are seen as priorities:

SHORT TERM:

- Assess and re-locate seating/raised flower beds etc in Western Gardens area to ensure appropriate and making the most of the space. – IWC/RTC
- Update signage – Bus station – IWC/RTC
- Include appropriate/helpful signage at Hover Travel Exit – Hover Travel/IWC/RTC
- Increase understanding of heritage (pier/hover etc) with information boards.
- Electric Bike hub/Bike station at bus/rail station.
- Regular discussions with travel operators to ensure a joined up and consistent approach to future development, regenerating and projects. RTC/IWC/SWR/HT/WL/SV

LONGER TERM:

- Increase accessibility and pedestrian priority from Union St to Western Gardens through restructure of footpaths and road ways.
- Relocation of Western Garden Café and Toilets to allow for clear sight and potential access to pier entrance.
- Safe vehicle drop off zone for Wight Link, Bus and Rail passengers.
- Bus Station reformatted with standing buses removed in favour of sheltered bus stops (as was done in Newport several years ago).
- The two lanes for standing taxis consolidated to 1 and a call down system insisted upon.
- Train Station buildings stripped back to expose ironwork, reinstatement of railing, with heritage enhancement being paramount
- New, upgraded space created at bus/rail station allowing for improved commercial opportunities.
- Consistency between Western Gardens/Interchange and seafront – incorporating interactive public realm/art/café/stalls/children friendly design
- Create a level walkway between platforms, creating a direct link to Hover Travel – or alternatively a DDA bridge/lift/walkway.
- Inclusion of DDA & Public Convenience within the interchange bus/rail station.
- Create a better commuter/travel experience with digital signage at town entry roads/interchange concourse identifying parking provision/fastcat and train times etc

All stakeholder groups must work together in achieving an interchange area which is visually appealing, reflecting the heritage of the town and the coastal area, as well as providing a comfortable, accessible travel hub.

Please note that the Ice Rink and the 'wet end' of the pier were not considered within this discussion, however must be taken into consideration if improvements to the area are to be achieved successfully.

Documentation from previous consultations can be used for reference:

ARC:Ryde Public Consultation - 2018

IOW Chamber of Commerce: Ryde Mater Plan – 2015

Atkins: Ryde Public Realm Strategy 2004

Ryde Town Council Position Statement: 2018