

# BRISTOL HARBOUR PLACE SHAPING STRATEGY

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## PLACE PLAN: BALTIC WHARF

February 2025





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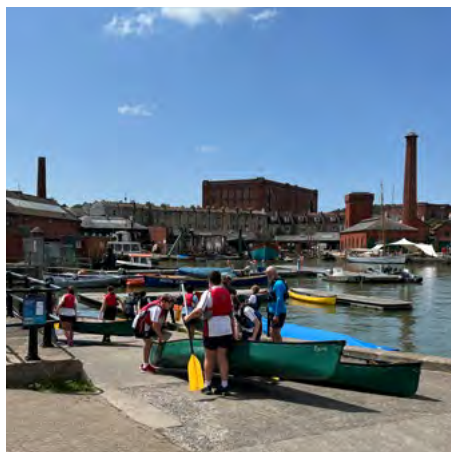
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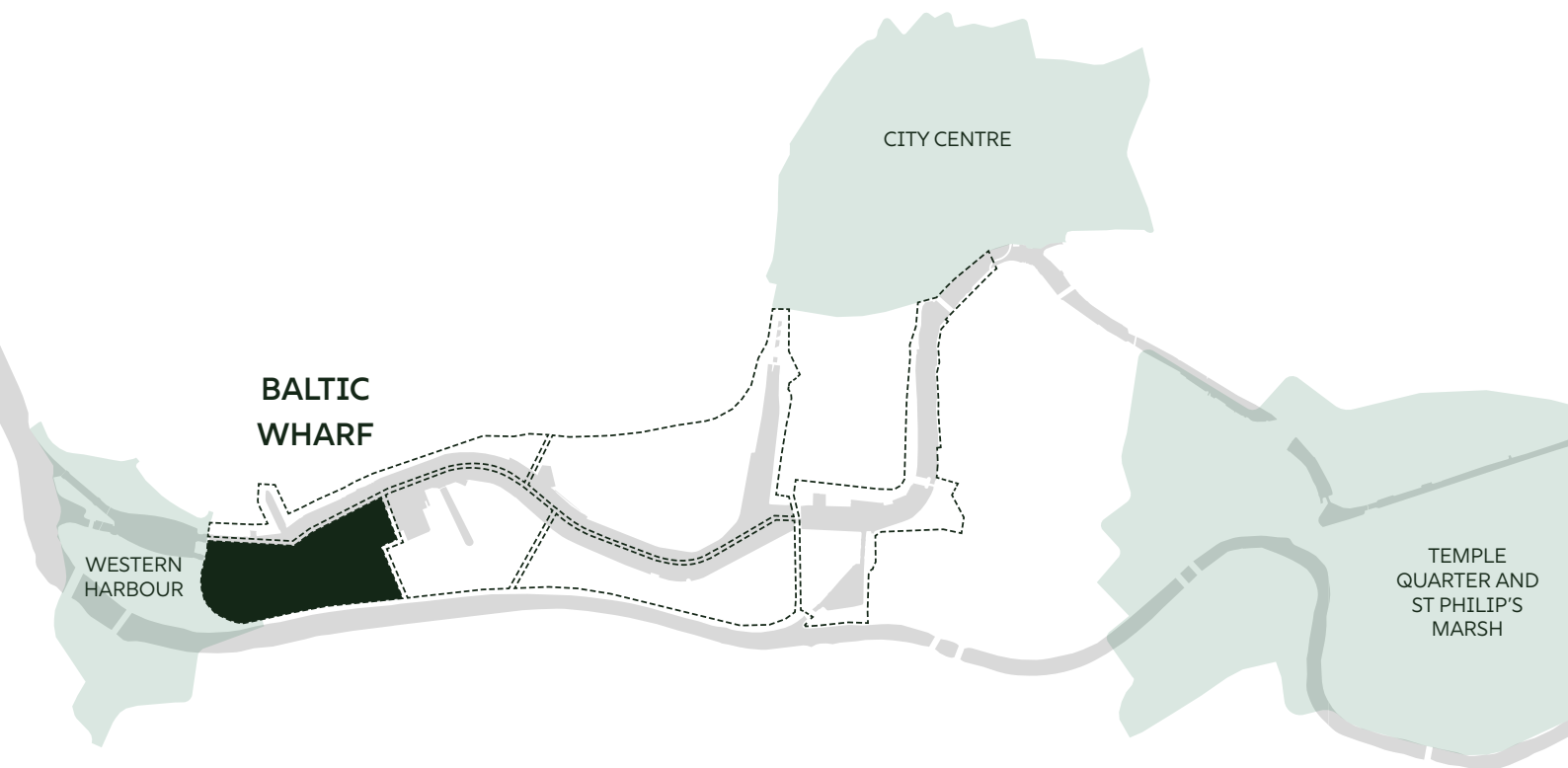
# BALTIC WHARF TODAY

Where the floating harbour connects with Cumberland Basin and the Avon beyond, this place carries strong associations with the harbour's industrial and maritime history, and is home to Underfall Yard, the Harbour Office, The Cottage Inn, the Nova Scotia, and multiple maritime clubs, societies and valued organisations. The water here is heavily programmed with leisure and youth uses which provide significant social value in the area. Much of the land to the east is currently occupied by the Baltic Wharf Caravan and Motorhome Club.

'The harbour gives a sense of being close to the Avon Gorge and by extension the green spaces and countryside outside the city - that's why its one of my favourite places'



*Photographs of Baltic Wharf today (Source: DK-CM)*



## SUMMARY OF ENGAGEMENT

Baltic Wharf is recognised for its working boatyards and workshops in Underfall Yard, the bustling and diverse range of water activity happening on the harbour, and the open views across the harbour to the River Avon valley and Clifton. A number of charitable organisations were highlighted for their contribution to the Baltic Wharf area, these include All Aboard, Underfall Cafe and Visitor Centre, and the Sea Cadets. Two key opportunities were repeatedly raised: a shared watersports centre to teach skills and safeguard the harbour as a water leisure destination; and a controlled swimming facility within the harbour (following the success of the harbour swimming pilot in 2023).

Whilst a well-loved area, people felt that Baltic Wharf is disconnected from the rest of the Harbour and the city due to poor public transport connections and pedestrian / cycle routes. Bordered by a main road, the current Quayside Walkway around Avon Crescent and Merchant's Road is not deemed welcoming or safe for pedestrians and cyclists. People working within the water leisure organisations that activate the area had concerns about the future of their businesses due to short leases, poor building conditions and increasing prices for rent and utilities. Businesses complained about the recently introduced Clean Air Zone as it makes it difficult for staff and customers to access the area. The recent temporary closure of Vauxhall Bridge is also contributing to growing concerns about the area's accessibility.

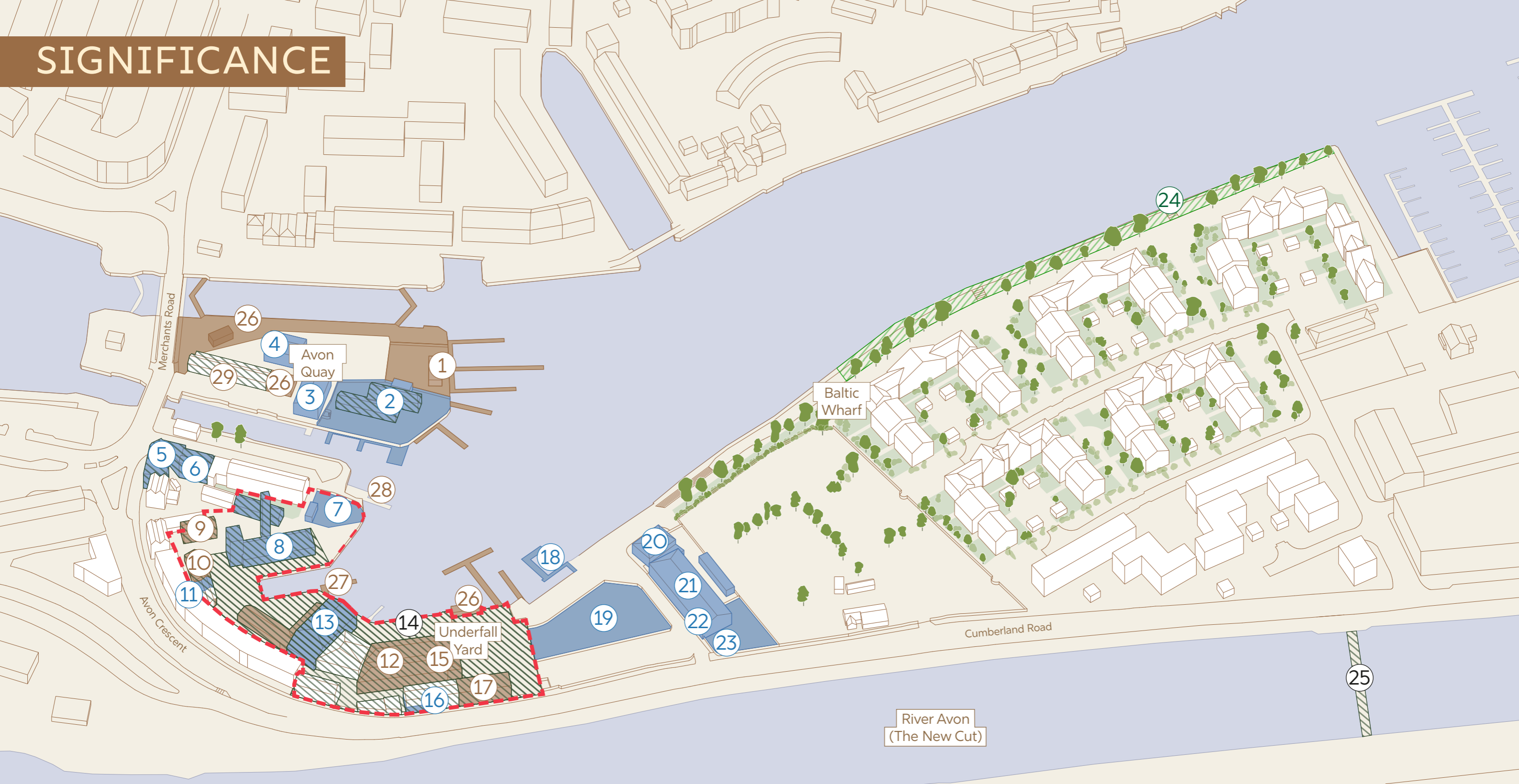
I LOVE BEING BY THE WATER. MAKES A CHANGE FROM DAILY LIFE, THE COLOURS, THE BOATS.

Places that take you away from the buzz of the city (lido, St John Wesley room)


More initiatives to swim + better water quality.

UNDER FALL YARD - WORKING MUSEUM  
↳ BEING ABLE TO SEE A WORKING INDUSTRY

# SIGNIFICANCE



## Key

-  Heritage significance
-  Maritime significance
-  Social / cultural significance
-  Ecological significance

- ① Channel Yacht Sales
- ② Bristol Sea Cadets
- ③ All Aboard Boat Workshop
- ④ Urban Pursuit
- ⑤ The Chef's Table
- ⑥ Nova Scotia
- ⑦ Avon Scout County Sailing Section
- ⑧ Underfall Yard Visitor Centre & Cafe

- ⑨ Offshore Marine Management
- ⑩ Ship Shape Boat Building & Traditional Rigging
- ⑪ Adventurous Activity Company
- ⑫ Historic workshops and forges
- ⑬ Main boat-building shed, currently awaiting reconstruction following the fire
- ⑭ Operational/boat storage
- ⑮ Harbour Masters Office

- ⑯ Changing Facilities
- ⑰ Bristol Maritime Academy
- ⑱ Public Slipway
- ⑲ Underfall Yard City Docks Boat Storage
- ⑳ The Cottage Inn
- ㉑ AllAboard Watersports - Facility & Boat Storage
- ㉒ Bristol Canoe Club

- ㉓ Baltic Wharf Sailing Club - Boat Storage
- ㉔ Avenue of Mature Trees
- ㉕ Vauxhall Bridge
- ㉖ Harbour Operations
- ㉗ Patent Slip
- ㉘ Nova Scotia Slipway
- ㉙ Dock Cottages

# CHALLENGES



## Key

||||| Inactive frontages

- ① Narrow bridge with little space for pedestrians and cyclists
- ② Avon Quay not inviting, no quayside walkway and pinch point access off bridge
- ③ Many water-based charitable organisations are operating out of buildings that restrict their activity offer and are on short leases which discourages investment
- ④ Many charitable organisations premises are only in use at certain times of the day and week
- ⑤ No pedestrian crossing from Nova Scotia Place to Cumberland Basin
- ⑥ Pedestrian access between Underfall Yard and Nova Scotia Place only possible when Underfall Yard is open
- ⑦ Nova Scotia slipway use is limited to hand-launched vessels
- ⑧ Only partial public access to the dock edge as part is used for dingy storage
- ⑨ When Underfall Yard is closed, pedestrians must use the less obvious Avon Crescent route instead
- ⑩ Narrow pedestrian pavement along Avon Crescent
- ⑪ Limited dockside facilities for changing, storage and cycle parking restricts the capacity of organisations activity
- ⑫ Use of a single slipway by multiple water organisations and the public can cause congestion at busy times
- ⑬ Road around boat storage has inefficient layout and obstructs the connection between the public realm and the water
- ⑭ The Underfall Boat Storage is inefficiently arranged
- ⑮ Limited evening and Sunday bus services along Cumberland Road
- ⑯ Sloped harbour edge restricts access to water
- ⑰ Lack of signage to explain zones for fishing and other water activities
- ⑱ Limited seating options along the Baltic Wharf public realm

# SIGNIFICANCE

## MARITIME

Baltic Wharf is a thriving site of harbour-related maritime industry and is the centre of the operational harbour with critical infrastructure located nearby, notably the sluices. Ensuring harbour operations and activities are safely undertaken is a key priority for the Harbour Master Office. Baltic Wharf concentrates a host of water-based businesses and maritime manufacturers forming the industrial maritime backbone of Bristol.

## HERITAGE

Baltic Wharf holds strong association with Bristol Harbour's wider heritage story. Underfall Yard, a well-loved hub of harbour operations, is a significant site in Bristol's industrial heritage and the location of key maritime industries and craft embodying the wider harbour story. The Underfall Yard Trust manages the Underfall Yard, and lets space in its range of buildings and spaces to traditional boat builders and riggers and other maritime businesses including training organisations and watersports organisations and clubs. The Trust also operates a haul-up slip for vessels requiring hull inspections and maintenance. It fulfils its educational objectives with programmes for schools and community groups and a permanent interpretative display in a visitor centre and café. North of Underfall Yard are the Old Dock Cottages, forming part of a notable surviving group of workers' housing, and the Bristol Sea Cadets on Avon Quay.

## BIODIVERSITY

Baltic Wharf is close to the biodiversity associated with the New Cut and the harbour railway.

## SOCIAL / CULTURAL

Due to good water access, water quality and the width of the harbour in Baltic Wharf, water sports are popular in this area. There are numerous charitable and commercial organisations that work within the water leisure sector including All Aboard, Urban Pursuit and Baltic Wharf Sailing Club. These organisations have various facilities in Underfall Yard with buildings for teaching, changing and activities, providing significant social value. A few independent food and drink venues are located around Baltic Wharf including the Underfall Yard Visitor Cafe; The Chef's Table, and two pubs, The Cottage Inn and Nova Scotia.

# CHALLENGES

## PUBLIC REALM

The public realm in the vicinity of Underfall Yard is fairly utilitarian, reflecting the working character of this part of the harbour. Whilst a walk through Underfall Yard is a highlight for many people visiting the harbour, the detour when it is closed along Avon Crescent is poorly sign-posted, and is undermined by narrow pavements. The character of the public realm changes significantly adjacent to the 1980s housing at Baltic Wharf. Whilst the quayside path is wide and accessible, the gently sloping water's edge is not accessible - with sharp rocks acting as a deterrent. The Avon Quay area is not very welcoming to the public, with gates, narrow access ways and quayside parking detracting from what otherwise would be an exceptional place to enjoy views down the harbour.

## TRANSPORT

Baltic Wharf suffers from a lack of evening and Sunday services along Cumberland Road. Whilst there is a Metrobus close by (next to A-bond), the pedestrian path to it can feel isolated and intimidating, particularly after dark.

## WATERSPORTS

A rich variety of watersports activity – marshalled and organised by different clubs and small companies – has evolved in a piecemeal, ad hoc fashion over a long period of time. This includes rowing, sailing, stand-up paddleboarding, canoeing, kayak and – more recently – open water swimming. While there is much to admire about the water-borne activation of Bristol Harbour, this piecemeal evolution has resulted in much duplication and overlap, with heightened complexity around water use scheduling, management inefficiencies, and investment diluted across a number of different facilities. Some of the buildings used by water and charitable organisations are in a poor condition and lacking in adequate facilities. Coupled with restricted investment and funding opportunities due to short leases, the quality and capacity of buildings is limiting water activity.

# BALTIC WHARF TOMORROW

## Vision

Baltic Wharf will be consolidated as Bristol's watersports and waterside leisure hub. Underfall Yard and Avon Quay will together form a rejuvenated hub of operations and the harbour's public life, with a stronger role as a vital place to access harbour-related industries and crafts, explore the story of the harbour and enjoy leisure time. Youth and leisure services will be opened up to wider audiences through enhanced and shared amenities and access points, and supported by a public realm that promotes appropriate access to the water. With an increased residential population and more commercial space to complement what's already there, the area will be a lively mixed-use neighbourhood with the harbour at its heart, and a stepping stone to Western Harbour beyond.

# Key Moves

- A strategic approach to watersports provision including consolidation and sharing of amenities, spatial and storage rationalisation, in order to boost access, maintain leisure uses and unlock space for new programmes, making Baltic Wharf a watersports hub for Bristol and the wider region.
- Vital, attractive spaces and buildings at Avon Quay enhanced as part of a more substantial public offer.
- Underfall Yard retained and enhanced as a unique space of maritime industry, industrial heritage and fabrication.
- Coherent approach to public realm, especially where it threads through existing buildings and spaces, in order to ensure that the spaces and places of Baltic Wharf are easily and naturally accessible to all.
- Clear connections to emerging development at Western Harbour.
- Greater permeability across the waterspace.
- Work to ensure water quality is maintained and enhanced, throughout the harbour but especially at these western stretches, reflecting their focus on leisure uses.



*Photograph towards Avon Quay and of Baltic Wharf (Source: DK-CM)*

# AREAS OF CHANGE



A gateway to Western Harbour, offering dining and other public uses in the midst of Underfall's rich heritage

Swimming in the harbour for both strong swimmers and beginners

A new shared hub for watersports offering exemplar facilities, enhanced storage and collective facilities, with connections across the Floating Harbour

## Key

- Building for potential change
- Area for potential change
- Site allocated to future development (Bristol Local Plan)
- Waterspace change (refer to Waterspace Plan)

## Place Specific Interventions

- BW  
C1 BWC1: Baltic Wharf Watersports Centre (Bristol Watersports Network)
- BW  
C2 BWC2: Avon Quay
- BW  
C3 BWC3: Caravan Park Redevelopment

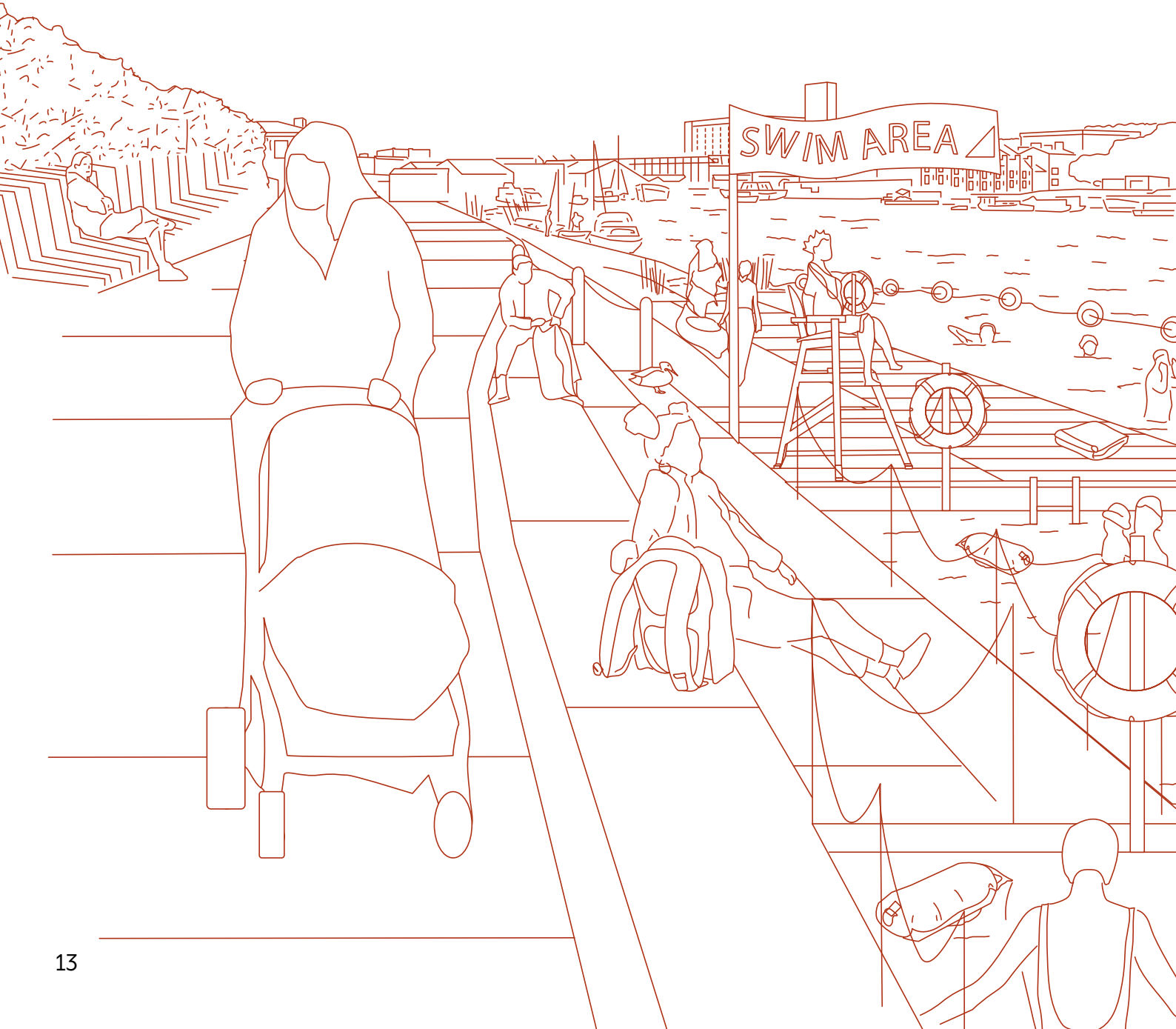
## Waterspace Interventions (refer to Waterspace Plan)

- BW  
W1 BWW1: Harbour Swimming
- BW  
W2 BWW2: Avon Quay Ferry Landing
- BW  
W3 BWW3: Cottage Inn Slipway

# Areas of Change Interventions

Supporting the growth in water-activity in the Floating Harbour and longer-term in Cumberland Basin with a new watersports centre at Baltic Wharf and a more accessible quayside. Avon Quay could emerge as a more prominent destination on the harbour with the completion of Western Harbour. The proposed redevelopment of the Caravan Park for new housing, will provide new commercial uses at ground level that can support the vibrancy of the area.

*Could the water's edge at Baltic Wharf be redesigned, replacing the slope of jagged rocks with generous steps for people to safely view the watersports, including the newly introduced swimming? Could there be more planting incorporated into the water's edge to support nature and provide a sustainable urban drainage system?*



### **BWC1: Baltic Wharf Watersports Centre**

As the heart of the Bristol Watersports Network, a new watersports centre in Baltic Wharf would make Bristol an exemplar urban watersports location with satellite watersports locations proposed at Mardyke Wharf, Phoenix Wharf and Totterdown Basin. Work already undertaken by stakeholders in the Harbour – and ample precedent from other urban waterfronts (e.g. Salford, Cardiff, Plymouth, London) – all points to the need for consolidated facilities that can house multiple organisations and activities, including complementary commercial uses. Given the high number of active organisations in Bristol’s harbour, and the dispersed locations they currently operate from, it is unlikely that all would want to share a single facility, and further work is needed to understand the ideal combination of activities in any identified site(s). Design to consider operational requirements in this area e.g. vehicle access for deliveries, slipway and Underfall Yard.



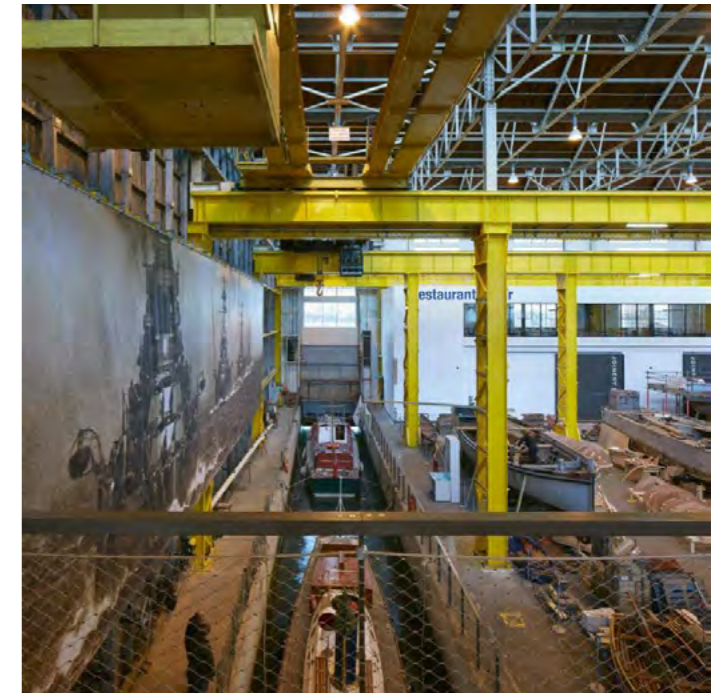
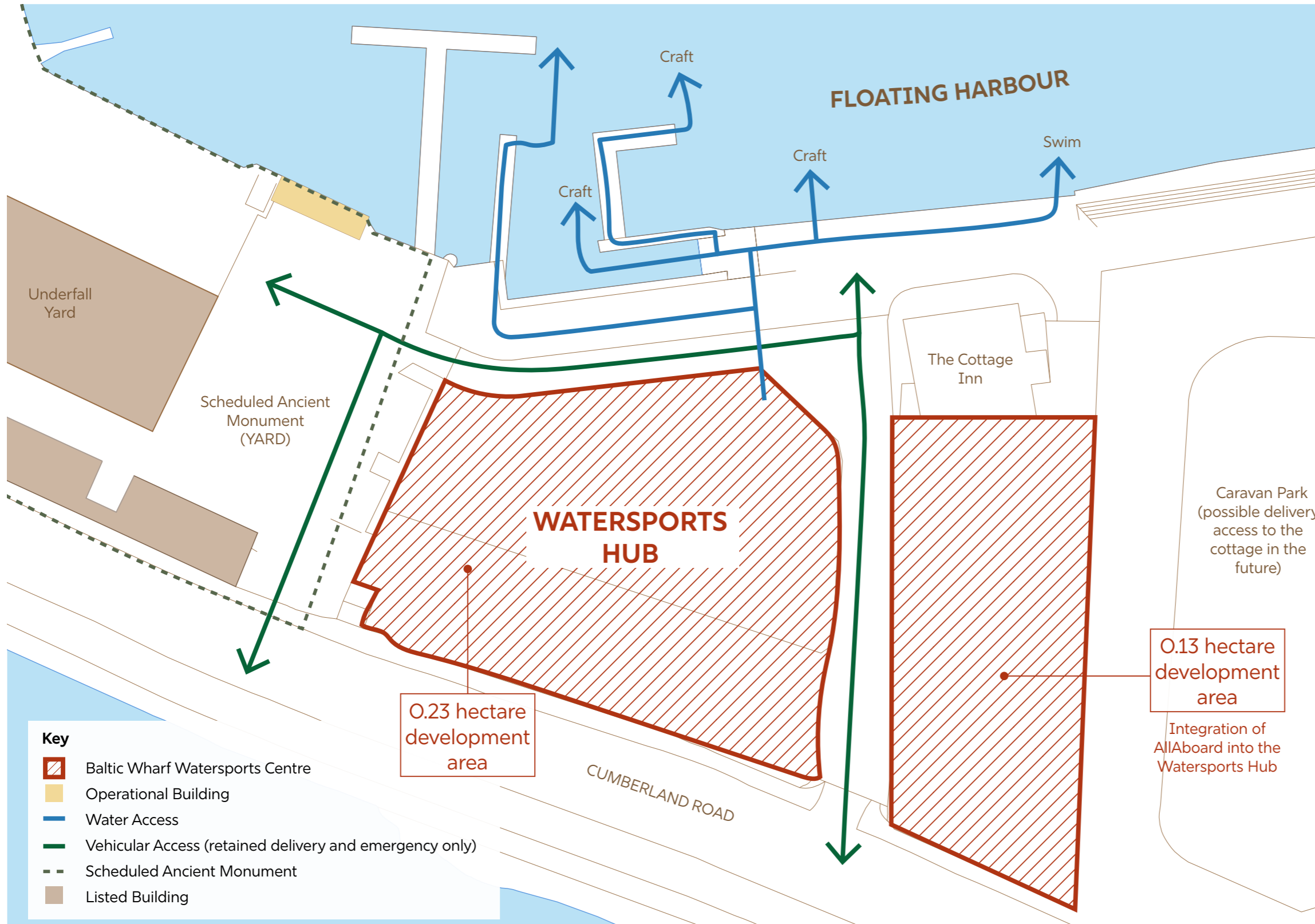
*BWC1: The Welsh Water Centre at Llandegfedd (Source: Hall + Bednarczyk)*



*BWC1: Waller Creek Boathouse, Austin, combines storage and technical spaces with office and leisure. (Source: Waller Creek Boathouse)*

**BWC1: Baltic Wharf Watersports Centre (cont.)**

Exploring how a new hub for watersports at Baltic Wharf could unlock land and create newly accessible watersports provision.



BWC2: Boathouse 4 in Portsmouth was refurbished to provide boat-building facilities and visitor facilities/galleries in the same envelope. (Source: Walters & Cohen architects)



BWC1: Community Rowing Boathouse boat storage, Boston. (Source: Anmahian Winton Architects)



*BWC2: Granville Island, since the late 1970s, has emerged as a vital public offer in the city of Vancouver, occupying former industrial waterside spaces and structures. (Source: Granville Island)*

**BWC2: Avon Quay**

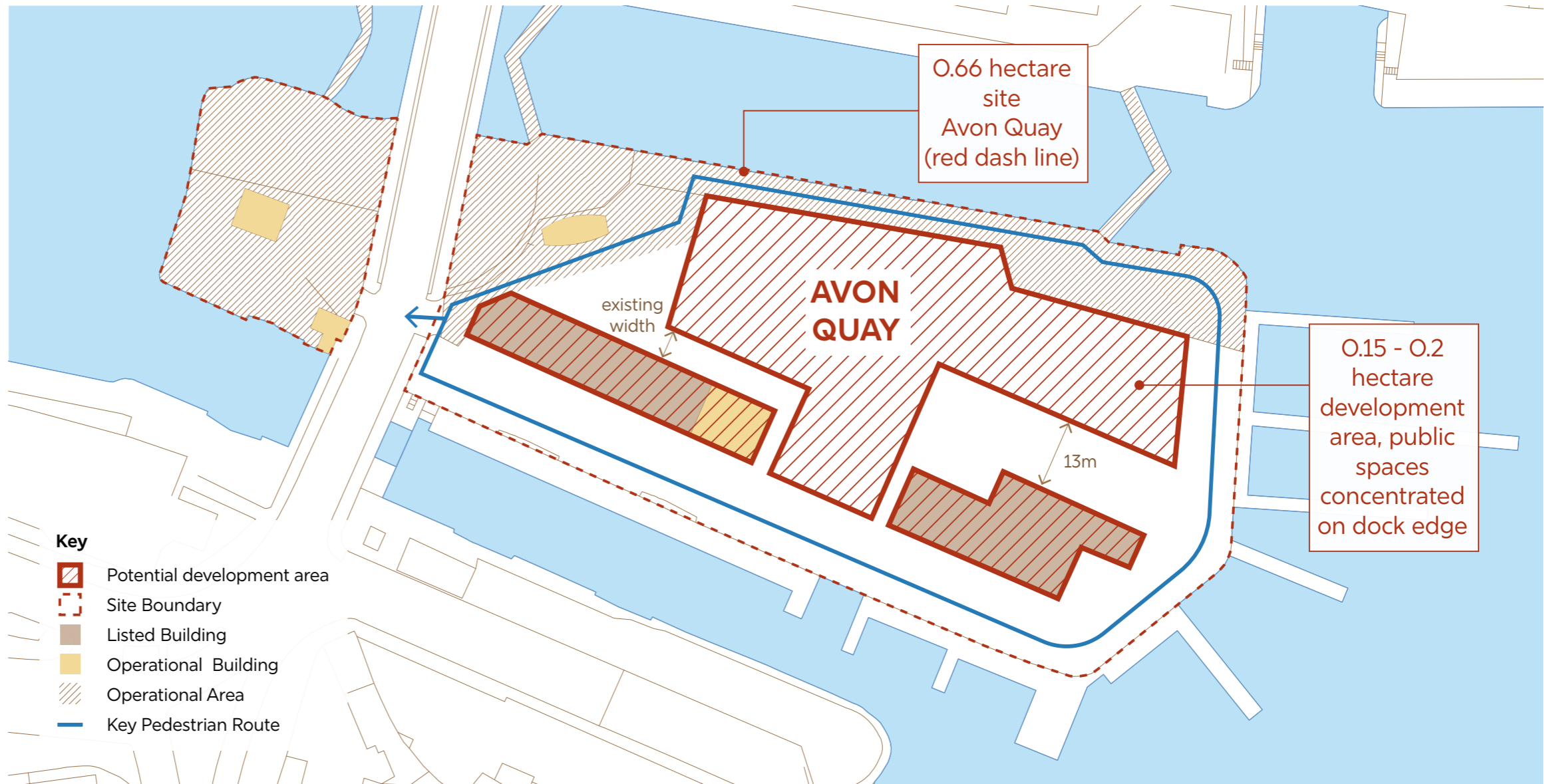
There is a longer term potential opportunity to re-imagine Avon Quay as a new destination in the harbour with commercial and leisure uses alongside existing charitable organisations. Avon Quay enjoys a prime waterfront location, and some of the best views and vistas across the Harbour. With the future development of Western Harbour, the importance of this site will grow. Opportunities exist for both the retrofit of existing buildings and the sensitive insertion of new buildings, whilst at the same time retaining the gritty industrial character which makes this place unique. Critical dock engineering infrastructure and lock gate access to be protected and retained.

**BWC2: Avon Quay (cont.)**

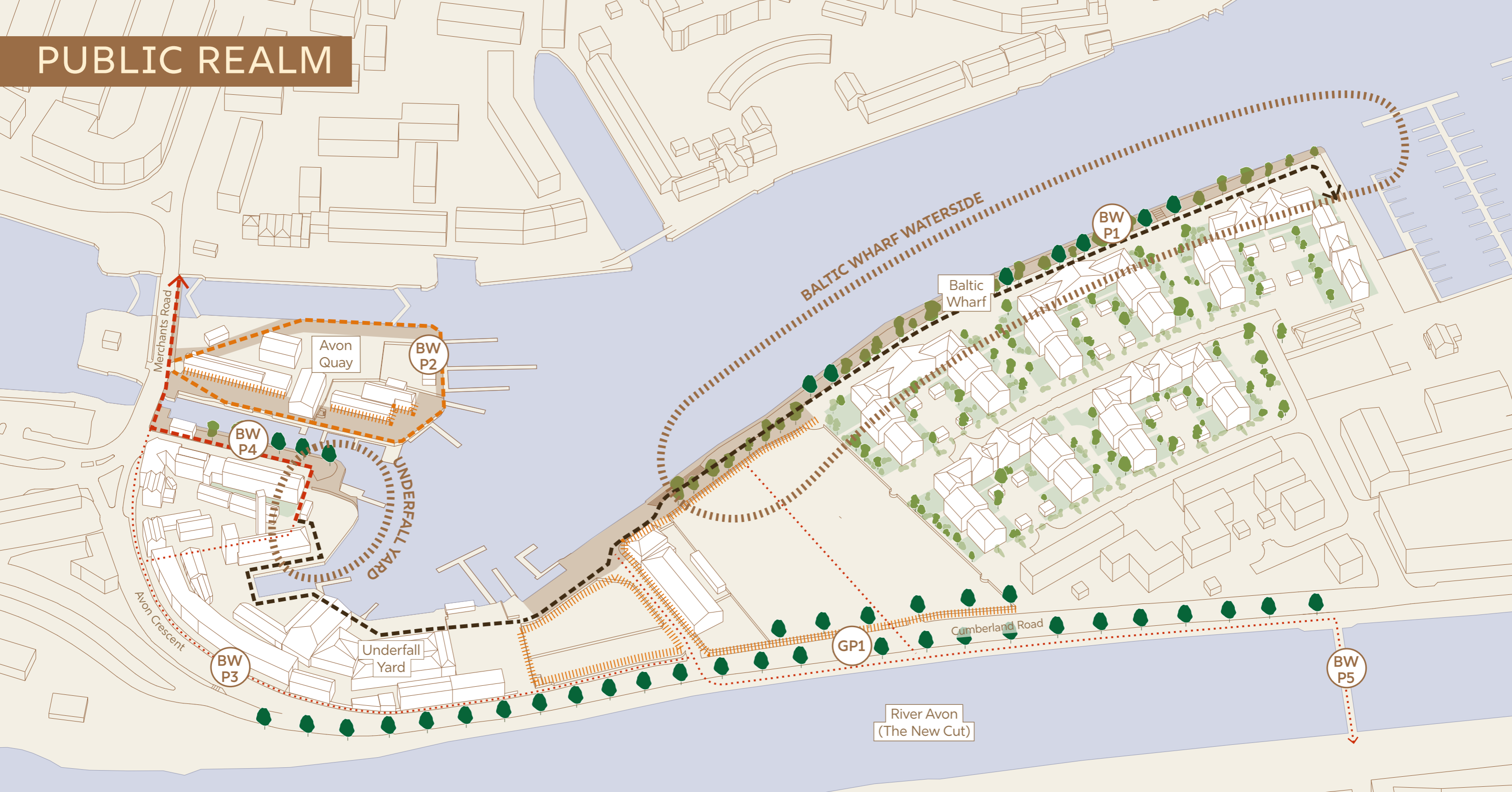
Exploring opportunities for new development at Avon Quay that is sensitive to historic fabric and supports harbour operations - with new development made possible by club consolidation at Baltic Wharf.

**BWC3: Caravan Park Redevelopment**

Planning permission secured (2024) for mixed use, housing-led development. Plans for the site also include a ground floor retail / commercial space which will activate the waterfront in this area and could neatly complement adjacent water sport and leisure uses. Site expected to contribute to the upgrade of the public realm in the wider area.



# PUBLIC REALM



## Key

- Priority for public realm improvement
- Existing greening
- Enhanced greening
- Active frontages
- Key public spaces

## Place Specific Interventions

- BW  
P1 BWP1: Baltic Wharf Harbour Edge
- BW  
P2 BWP2: Avon Quay Walkway
- BW  
P3 BWP3: Avon Crescent Walkway
- BW  
P4 BWP4: Nova Scotia Place Walkway
- BW  
P5 BWP5: Vauxhall Bridge

## Overarching Interventions

- GP1 GP1: Cumberland Road Tree Planting

# Public Realm Interventions

Public realm in Baltic Wharf is improved to provide a welcoming, safe and characterful Quayside Walkway along Baltic Wharf, Underfall Yard and Avon Quay. This includes remodelling the harbourside to provide inclusive water access and places to dwell; introducing greening; and activating the harbourside with play spaces. Improving connections to the wider harbour for pedestrians and cyclists with widened pavements and separate bike lanes allows greater access into the western gateway of Bristol Harbour.

*What if Baltic Wharf could be transformed into a world class urban watersports location with a centralised Watersports centre? Could this improve connection and access to the water for the local community and as part of a wider tourist offer?*



## PLACE-SPECIFIC INTERVENTIONS

### **BWP1: Baltic Wharf Harbour Edge**

Remodelled harbour edges along Baltic Wharf to provide space for inclusive water access, relaxation and increased biodiversity such as dock pollution mitigation. Opportunity to include infographics about different watersports e.g. rules, facts, techniques, equipment; and enhance this water edge as an art/ sculpture trail.

### **BWP2: Avon Quay Walkway**

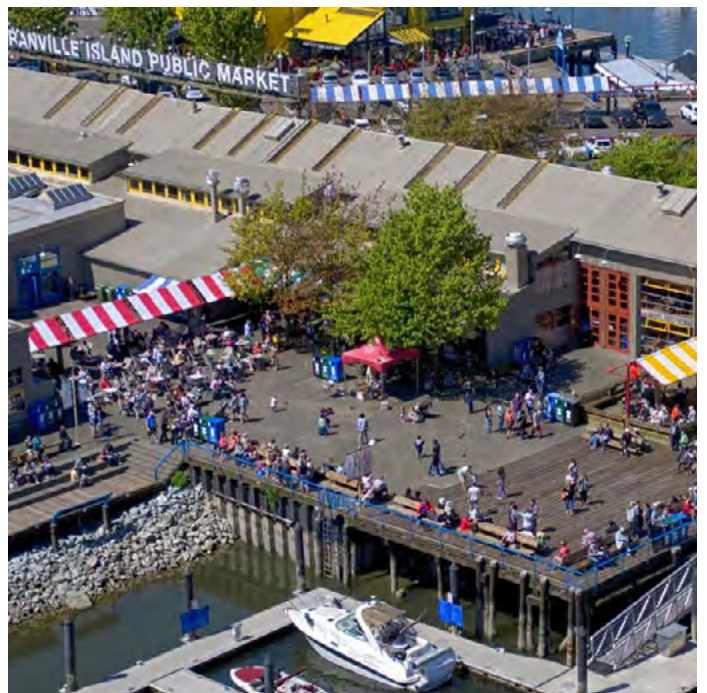
Public realm improvements to Avon Quay to open up the quayside edge, providing spaces to enjoy the view down the harbour and create a more welcoming entrance from Junction Lock Bridge. Critical dock engineering infrastructure and lock gate access to be protected and retained.

### **BWP3: Avon Crescent Walkway**

Improved pedestrian and cycle routes along Avon Crescent and Merchant's Road / Junction Swing Bridge. Pavement widened with separated bike lanes to improve western gateway into the harbour and Baltic Wharf / underfall yard. Clear wayfinding to indicate the primary Quayside Walkway route through Underfall Yard, as well as the secondary route around Avon Crescent during Underfall Yard closures. A starting point for exploration to the west of Bristol towards Strawberry Path, Leigh Woods, Ashton Court and The Arboretum.



*BWP1: Chicago River Walk. (Source: Sasaki/Ross Barney Architects)*



*BWP2 / BWP5: Revitalised public realm in former dockside space at Granville Island, Vancouver. (Source: Granville Island)*

#### **BWP4: Nova Scotia Place Walkway**

Improved Quayside walkway between Underfall Yard Visitor Centre and Cafe, and Nova Scotia Place. Improved harbourside area of public realm for greening and play. Opportunity for collaboration between cultural organisations to create play space focused around the science, history, art and nature that makes Bristol unique.

#### **BWP5: Vauxhall Bridge**

More welcoming entrance and route to Baltic Wharf from the south (Southville / Bedminster) via Vauxhall Bridge with new opportunities being explored to access the Chocolate Path at a midway point.

### **OVERARCHING INTERVENTIONS**

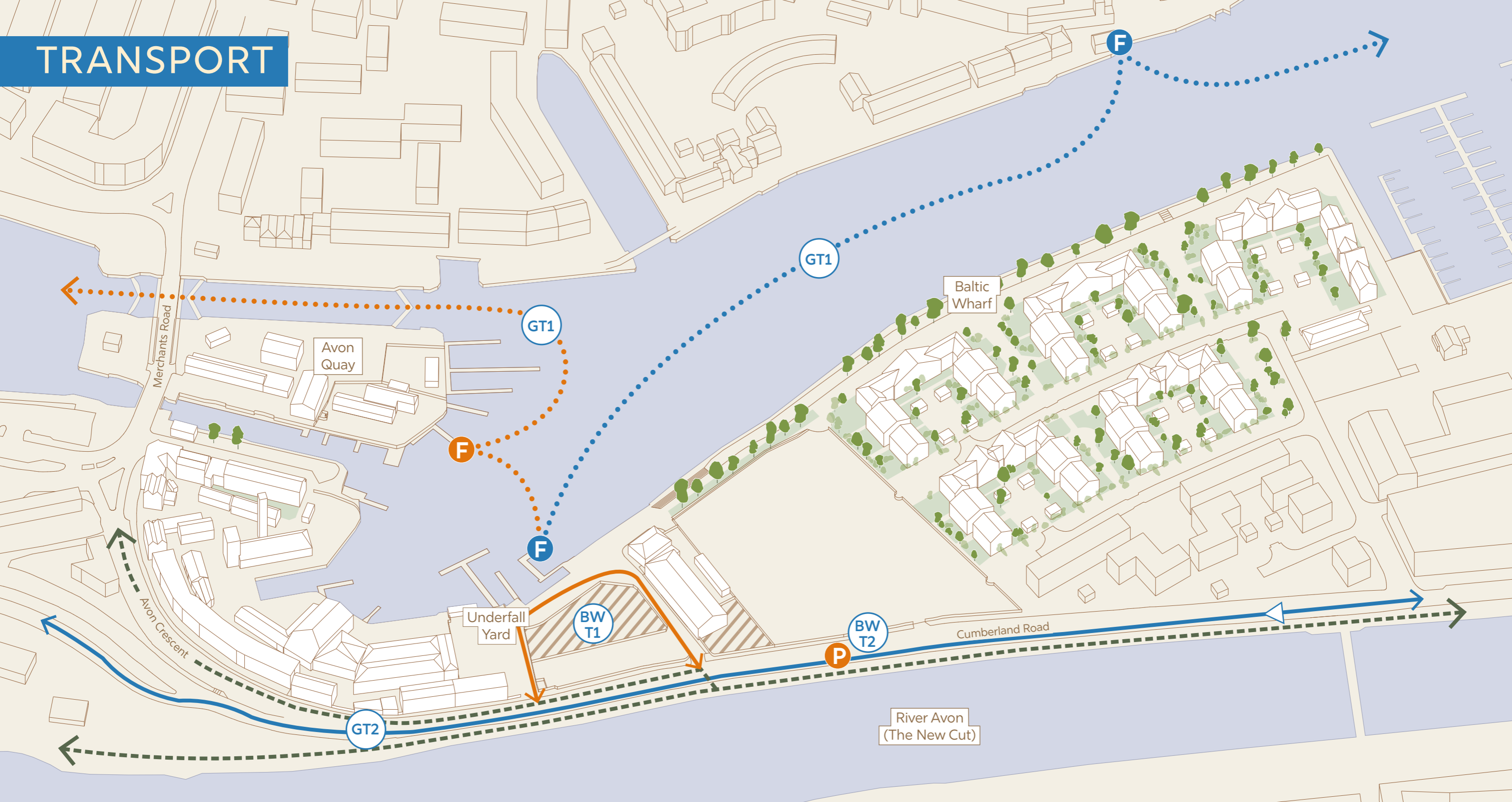
#### **GP1: Cumberland Road Tree Planting**

Avenue tree planting along the length of Cumberland Road where possible to deliver biodiversity net gain and provide shade along key pedestrian routes. Tree planting should be considered in line with the plans for the Bristol Avon Flood Strategy flood defences.

Existing public realm and Quayside Walkway  
at Baltic Wharf (source: DK-CM)



# TRANSPORT



## Key

- Existing Bus stop
- Existing Ferry landing
- Improved Bus service
- Improved Ferry service

- Cycle route
- Opportunity for more efficient land use
- Coach Parking
- New/Reinstated Ferry landing
- New Ferry service
- Restricted Vehicle Access

## Place Specific Interventions

- BWT1: Boat Storage
- BWT2: Coach Parking

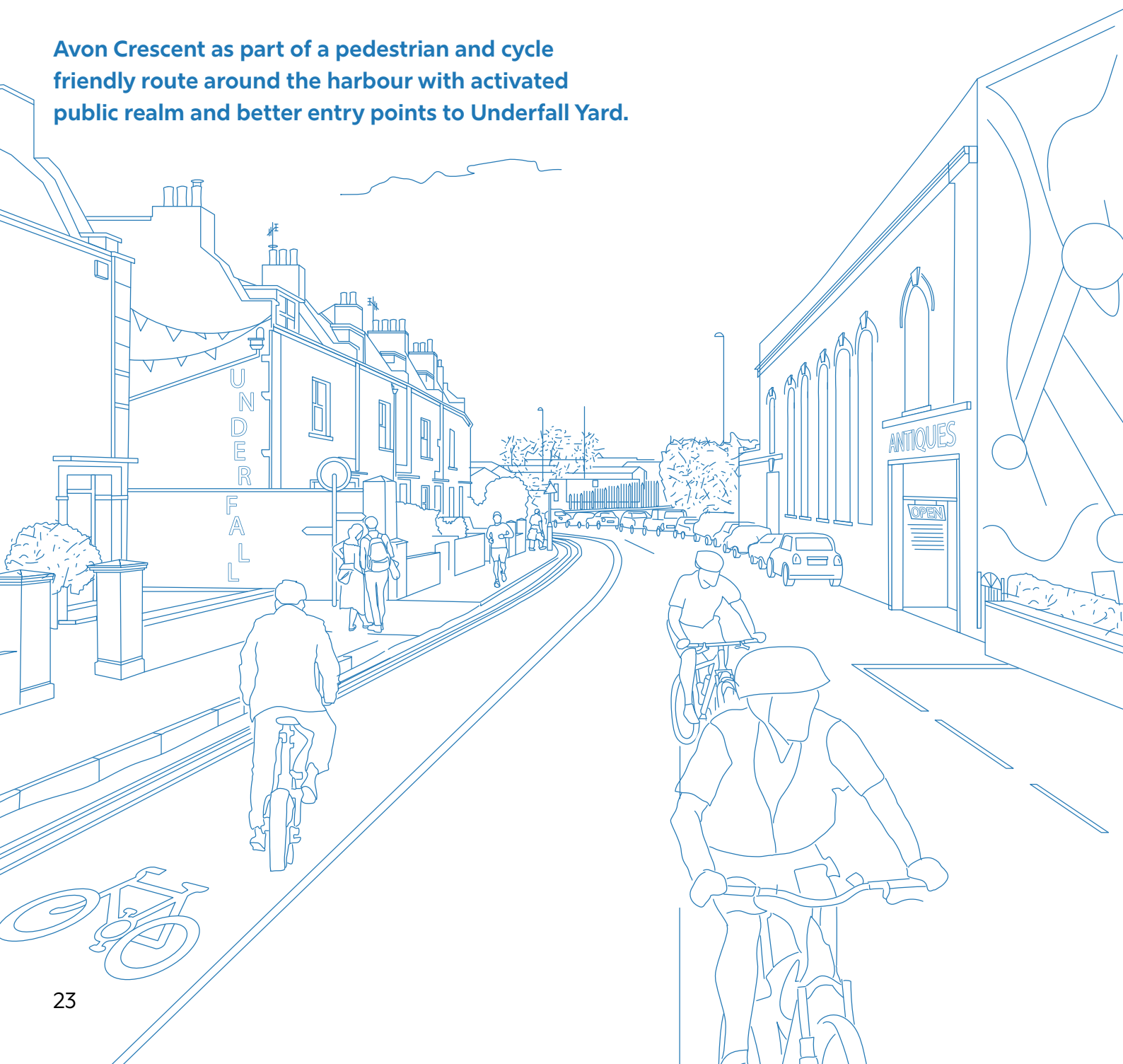
## Overarching Interventions

- GT1: Enhanced Ferry Provision
- GT2: Enhanced Metrobus Provision

# Transport Interventions

The major transport interventions in this area will be shaped and delivered long-term through the Western Harbour project. In the short term, improvements are required to the Metrobus service along Cumberland Road to provide evening and Sunday services to support businesses in the Baltic Wharf area, together with improvements to the ferry service.

**Avon Crescent as part of a pedestrian and cycle friendly route around the harbour with activated public realm and better entry points to Underfall Yard.**



## PLACE-SPECIFIC INTERVENTIONS

### **BWT1: Boat Storage**

Rationalised boat storage in City Docks boat yard and the Baltic Wharf Sailing Club to free-up harbourside sites for new opportunities e.g. City Docks boat yard and Sailing club site as watersports centre.

### **BWT2: Coach Parking**

Opportunities for expanding coach parking along Cumberland Road should be explored, with a view to facilitating future development in the vicinity of the SSGB and M Shed.

## OVERARCHING INTERVENTIONS

### **GT1: Enhanced Ferry Provision**

An enhanced and consolidated ferry service with additional capacity and extended services being provided. Route to zig zag along harbour to better connect north and south. Improvements to ferry landing locations including accessibility, seating, signage and safety. Opportunity to extend ferry services beyond the floating harbour to serve the Western Harbour and the Feeder Canal. Improved public transport needed to support the increase in residential population from development in Baltic Wharf and the adjacent Western Harbour. Longer term opportunity to provide commuter service to Baltic Wharf.

### **GT2: Enhanced Metrobus Provision**

Enhanced Metrobus service along Cumberland Road with service expanded to Sundays and evenings. Improved public transport needed to support existing businesses and an increased residential population from development in Baltic Wharf and the adjacent Western Harbour. s106 contributions will be sought from any developments coming forward in Baltic Wharf towards this.

This document is part of the Harbour Place Shaping Strategy (HPSS) prepared by DK-CM for Bristol City Council, 2023-24.

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