

# BRISTOL HARBOUR PLACE SHAPING STRATEGY

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## PLACE PLAN: CITY & BACKS

February 2025





# CONTENTS

<b>CITY &amp; BACKS TODAY</b>	<b>04</b>
→ Summary of Engagement	
→ Significance	
→ Challenges	
<b>CITY &amp; BACKS TOMORROW</b>	<b>10</b>
→ Vision	
→ Key Moves	
→ Areas of Change	
→ Public Realm	
→ Transport	

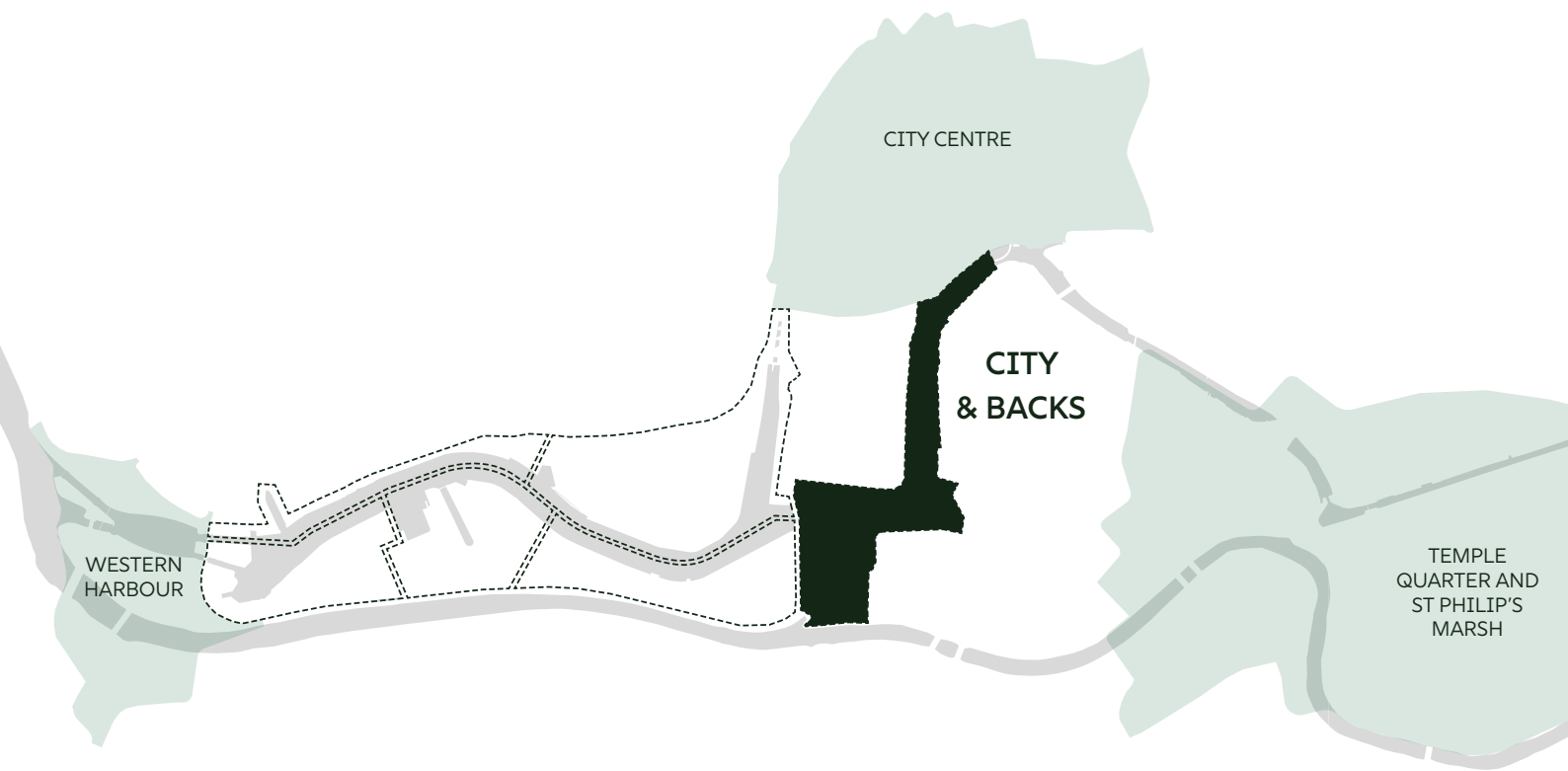
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# CITY & BACKS TODAY

Moving from west to east, public activity with a strong relationship to the harbour generally decreases, with the quayside at The Grove dominated by car parking and Merchants Quay and Bathurst Basin being primarily residential areas. The waterspace becomes narrower and more enclosed by buildings, and also more integrated with the wider city. It is defined and framed by a series of spaces, for example Welsh Back and Redcliffe Back, where urban districts intersect with the harbour. Also included as part of this sequence is Bristol Bridge, the historical centre of the city.



*Photographs of City & Backs today (Source: DK-CM)*



## SUMMARY OF ENGAGEMENT

The City and Backs area is recognised for its distinct series of public spaces and major focal points like the Bristol Bridge, bringing the harbour and the city together. People enjoy the numerous food and drink venues with harbour views and alfresco eating such as the Ostrich Inn and Riverstation. Whilst contributing to the harbour's rich social and cultural offering, the lack of signage, affordable local amenities, toilets and accessible walkways for visitors creates an incoherent public realm. Public space is currently dominated by car parking, exposing notable deficiencies in green open

and play space. The Grove Car Park, especially, is highlighted as an opportunity in the heart of the city to provide a space to dwell and engage in a new harbour provision of activities. Boater facilities at Bathurst Basin are noted by users as poor.







'I think the area along Merchant's Quay seems like a really nice place, where there are lots of nice pubs and walks but it doesn't feel over saturated'

# SIGNIFICANCE



## Key

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

- |   |                            |
|---|----------------------------|
| ① Princes Pantry                                    | ⑧ Bristol General Hospital |
| ② Hand Crane at Dock                                | ⑨ The Ostrich              |
| ③ Pot Shop  | ⑩ Thekla                   |
| ④ Mud Dock  | ⑪ Redcliffe Wharf pontoon  |
| ⑤ Grove Moorings                                    | ⑫ River Station            |
| ⑥ Robinson's Warehouse                              | ⑬ Hole In The Wall Bristol |
| ⑦ John Sebastian Lightship<br>(Cabot Cruising Club) | ⑭ Harbour House            |

- |   |                      |
|---|----------------------|
| ⑮ Benjamin Perry Boathouse                  | ⑳ Redcliffe Quay     |
| ⑯ Site of outstanding biodiversity interest | ㉑ Adelina Yard       |
| ⑰ The Custom House                          | ㉒ Kings Street       |
| ⑱ Floating Harbour Studios & Films          | ㉓ Three Brothers     |
| ㉔ The Glassboat                             | ㉕ St Nicholas Church |
| ㉖ Redcliffe Railway Tunnel and Cutting      |                      |

# CHALLENGES



## Key

- ① Car park dominates waterside space and interrupts Quayside Walkway
- ② Car park dominate waterside space and interrupts Quayside Walkway
- ③ Limited green space and lack of playspace
- ④ Quayside Walkway diverted around beer garden
- ⑤ Incoherent public realm with poor surfacing, parking and ad hoc uses
- ⑥ Stability of cliff walls a concern and limitation on quayside activity
- ⑦ Waterside businesses and spill out space limit access to Quayside Walkway
- ⑧ Underutilised waterfront dominated by parking
- ⑨ Narrow pavement and cobbles along Welsh Back create poor and inaccessible surface for pedestrians and wheeling
- ⑩ Underutilised public realm
- ⑪ Piecemeal access to the waterspace, especially at Redcliffe Quay
- ⑫ Private ownership along waterside limits / interrupts quayside walkway
- ⑬ Pedestrian and cycle path with heavy footfall

# SIGNIFICANCE

## HERITAGE

The City and Backs area has multiple notable heritage buildings, reflecting its central location. This includes Bristol General Hospital; a grade listed healthcare facility opened in 1832, grade II listed Robinson's Warehouse and the Customs House.

The 'place' is adjacent, at its northernmost point, to the historic 'heart' of the city, located just north of Bristol Bridge between the historic rivers Frome and Avon. The bridge itself is a significant landmark.

## MARITIME

The quayside immediately adjacent to Prince Street Bridge is significant operationally. There are also several mooring sites for boaters including Redcliffe Wharf, Redcliffe Quay, The Grove, Bathurst Basin, Merchants Quay and Welsh Back. Grove moorings historically located ships of trade and the 'Great Crane of Bristol', erected in 1735.

## BIODIVERSITY

There are two sites of biodiversity interest in the City and Backs area. The first is located in Redcliffe Wharf near the Redcliffe Caves and the surrounding vegetation that envelopes the site. The second site is Bathurst Basin, a quiet tree lined 'marina' like space to the south of the harbour. Note that the areas of biodiversity significance may have changed since the 2009 survey.

## SOCIAL / CULTURAL

Located near the heart of the city there are a generous number of waterside food and drink venues; some of which are moored on the water in the City and Back's area. This includes cafe/bar Mud Dock; Princes Pantry; and the Hole in the Wall, a country gastropub, all well-loved and used by locals and visitors. The Thekla floating venue has been a landmark venue for many and recently celebrated 40 years at Mud Dock, and nearby the John Sebastian lightship provides a floating clubhouse to the Cabot Cruising Club. The area also benefits from cultural and arts producers including a pottery and production facilities.

# CHALLENGES

## PUBLIC REALM

The public realm in and around the City and Backs area is quite incoherent with poor surfacing and ad hoc uses. Due to private ownership alongside the waterside, development is limited and interrupts the quayside walkway that is already underutilised. The new housing development in the Redcliffe Wharf area, for example, will affect the extent of public activity around the Redcliffe Caves quayside. Piecemeal access to the water also impacts local and visitor connection to the harbour especially at Redcliffe Quay. Surfacing issues arise along the Welsh Back due to the narrow pavement and cobblestones creating accessibility concerns for pedestrians and wheelchair users. The public realm also lacks green and play space, both which would significantly enhance the social and environmental value of the quayside.

## CAR PARKING

Car parking dominates the harbourside space along Bathurst Basin and the Grove car park, interrupting the Quayside walkway contributing to the ad hoc public realm.

# CITY & BACKS TOMORROW

## Vision

As an increasingly vibrant part of the harbour, with an enhanced public realm, this area will become a place that visitors more regularly explore. New mixed use developments will provide new destinations and points of interest around the harbour. A coherent and welcoming public realm will invite people to the water's edge and host an array of activities and programmes appropriate to the city centre. Existing hubs of public life and activity will be consolidated and expanded. At key locations, for example at Bristol Bridge, significant public realm interventions will have brought the water and the city much closer together and created a new public waterside.

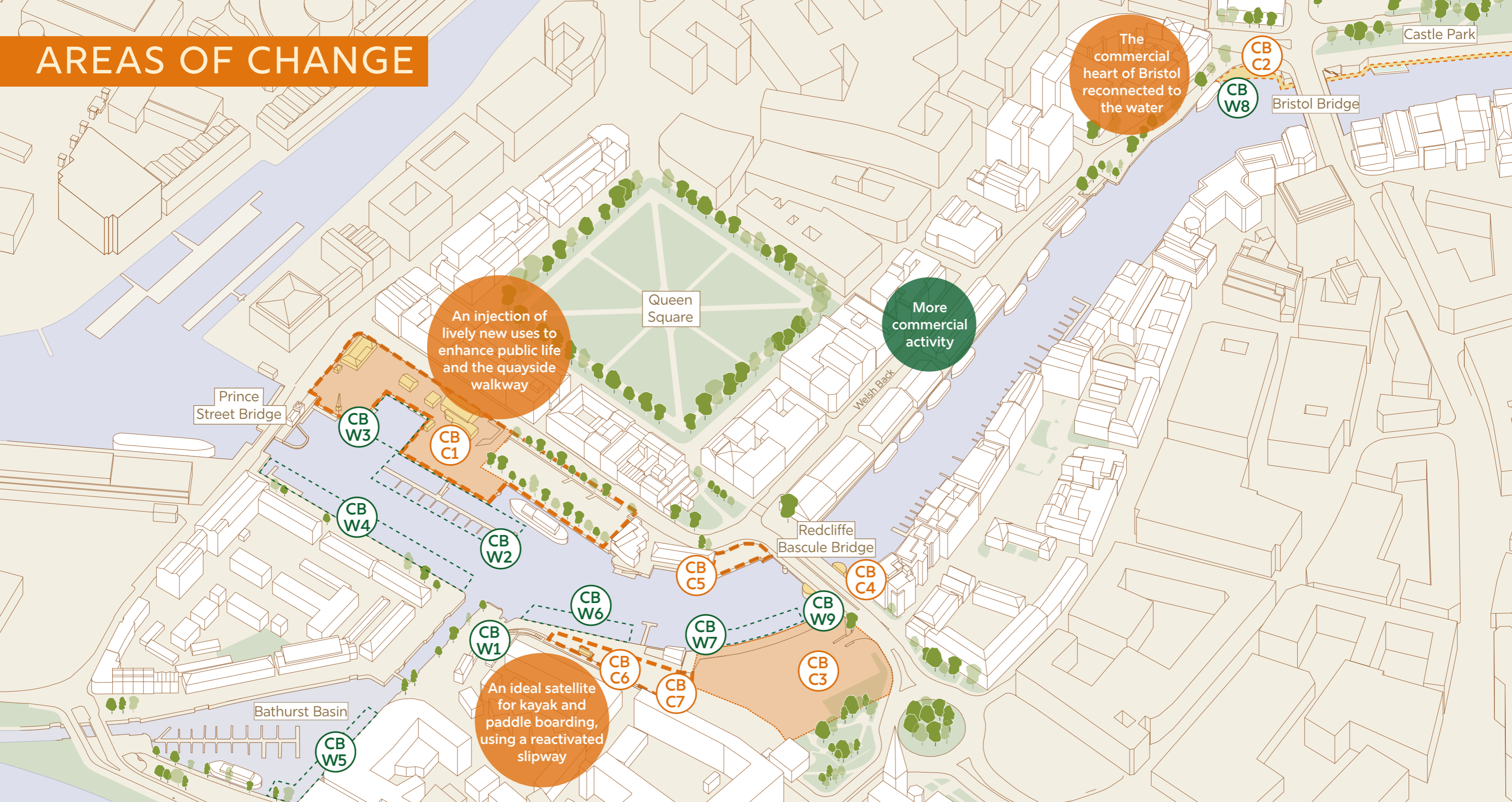


*Photographs of Bathurst Basin and Redcliffe Back (Source: DK-CM)*

## Key Moves

- Principle of a publicly-accessible water edge, whilst not realistic throughout the place, should be followed wherever possible and supported by activation proposals.
- The Grove/Mud Dock, whilst successful as a car park, would benefit from intensification of other public and commercial uses reflecting its location in the city and harbour, and adjacency to key routes and spaces.

# AREAS OF CHANGE



## 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

- CBC1: The Grove
- CBC2: Castle Park Waterside and Walkway
- CBC3: Redcliffe Wharf
- CBC4: Redcliffe Bascule Bridge
- CBC5: Harbour House
- CBC6: Phoenix Wharf (Bristol Watersports Network)
- CBC7: Redcliffe Caves

## Waterspace Interventions (refer to Waterspace Plan)

- CBW1: Ostrich Slipway
- CBW2: The Grove Live / Leisure / Ferry Moorings
- CBW3: The Grove Commercial Moorings
- CBW4: Merchant's Quay Live / Leisure Moorings
- CBW5: Bathurst Basin Commercial Moorings
- CBW6: Phoenix Wharf Live / Leisure Moorings
- CBW7: Redcliffe Wharf Live / Leisure Moorings
- CBW8: Castle Park Walkway Commercial Mooring
- CBW9: Potential New Secure Moorings

# Areas of Change Interventions

The Grove mixed-use development would support the wider ambitions to provide a diverse workspace; sheltered walkway; mooring improvements and commercial live/leisure facilities. The public realm and ground floor units of Redcliffe Wharf's housing development can also be activated to support surrounding activity. This includes paddlesports equipment for water activities, secured from an accessible storage along Redcliffe Wharf. The underutilised Harbour house site and disused buildings located on and around the Redcliffe Bascule's bridge junction present opportunities to renovate for commercial and social use.

*Could The Grove be flourish as a lively waterfront destination? By rationalising car parking, could space be freed up for commercial activities and create an enhanced public realm?*



### CBC1: The Grove

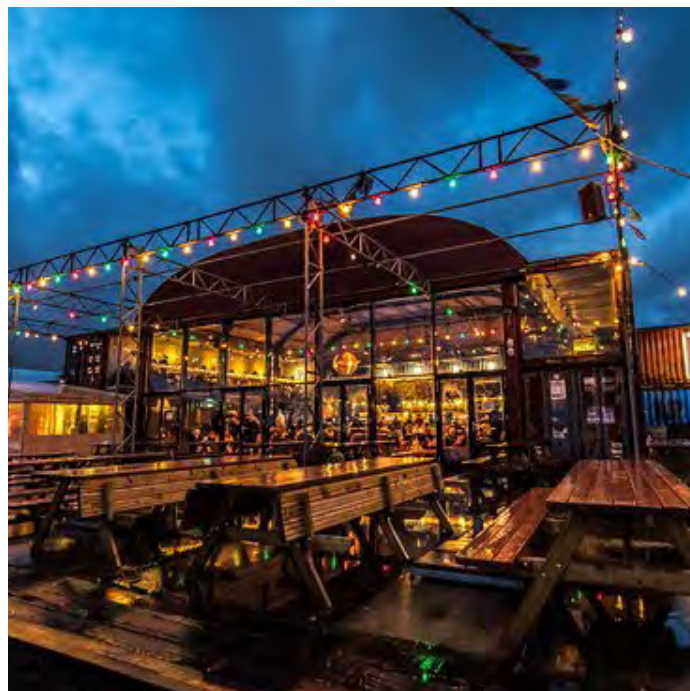
The western end of The Grove has been allocated for development within the Local Plan and currently forms part of Goram Homes' pipeline (Goram Homes is the council's housing company). The site would be considered appropriate for a number of city centre uses, including housing.

The Grove is currently a car park which generates important income for the harbour. Any redevelopment of the site would need to replace any parking income that is foregone to allow the Harbour Authority to release the site for development. Any new development will need to respect the historical context of the harbour and proximity to Queen Square. There is also the possibility of commercial spaces cafes, restaurants and shops to further activate this part of the harbourside

In the short-term, opportunities exist to better plan the car parking, freeing up space which could be used by meanwhile uses that could enrich the public and commercial life of the harbour that take advantage of the site's waterside location on the harbour's principal pedestrian crossing point.

Improvements to public transport and active travel routes may also benefit future development opportunities, reinforcing a long-term trend toward more sustainable travel choices.

A new mixed-use development has the opportunity to bring life to the Mud Dock inlet to create a year-round destination and enhance the quayside as a welcoming walkway and space to dwell. Further work is required to understand whether the operational space next to Prince Street Bridge (and used for lifting boats out of the harbour in an emergency) could be relocated to a less valuable site.



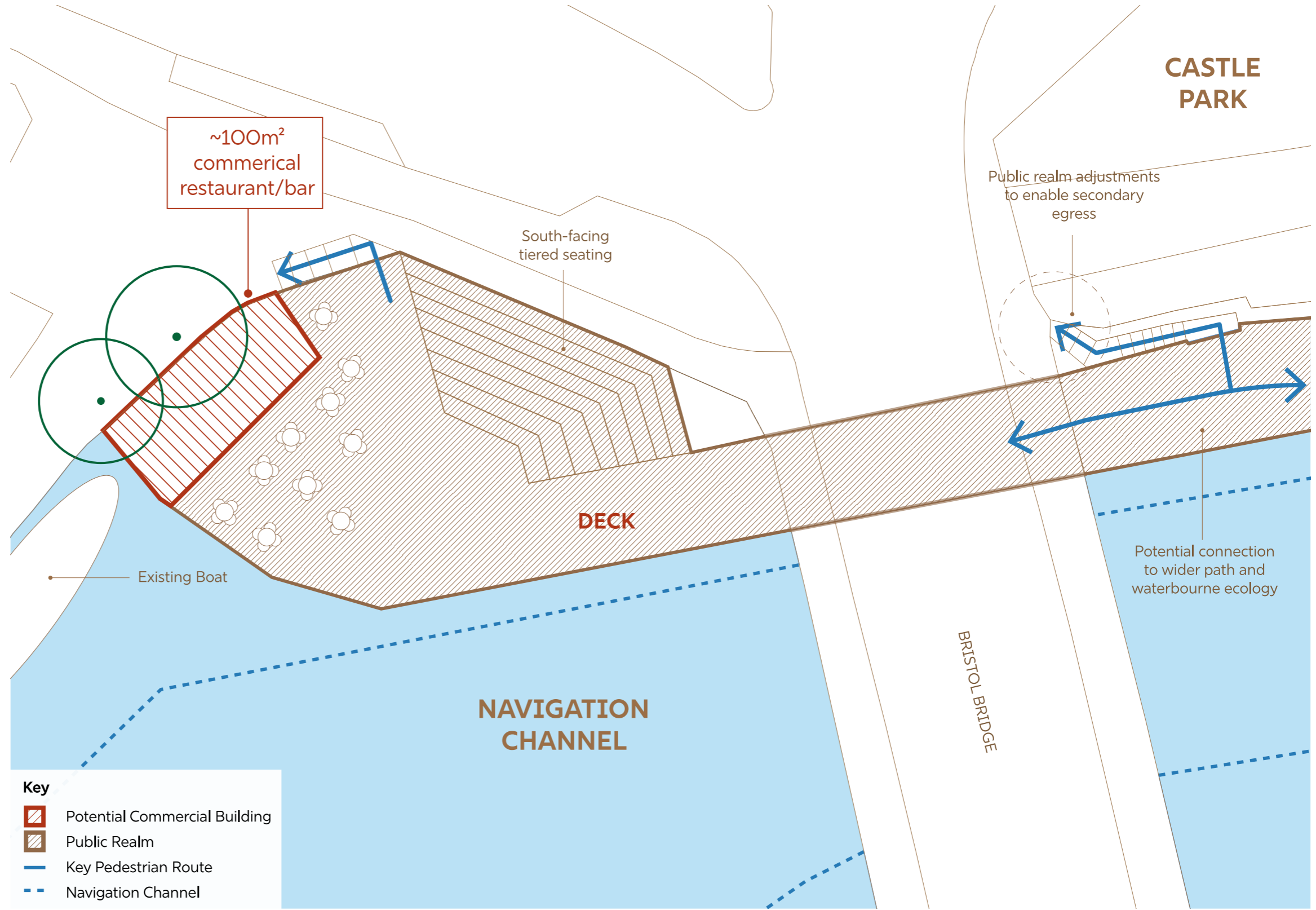
*CBC1 / CBC3: PLLEK, Amsterdam is a 'temporary; dockside restaurant and events space. (Source: Pllek)*



*CBC1 / CBC3: The Cargo projects by Alex French Architects has been a very successful 'meanwhile' injection of independent food culture and retail into Wapping Wharf. (Source: Umberslade)*

**CBC2: Castle Park Waterside and Walkway**

New waterside public realm for the city centre capitalising upon regeneration in the adjacent Castle Park and City Centre and creating a better connection to the Floating Harbour. Water-level boardwalk structure to provide free space for the public to spend time, sit, and play on the water level. Access provided from the junction of Baldwin Street and Welsh Back, as well as along the Castle Park Walkway - a new pedestrian route at water level, linking Castle Park Waterside to the Castle Park ferry landing along the perimeter of the Castle Park wall. Walkway to have controlled access points at each end and passive surveillance from Castle Park above. Opportunity for new ancillary commercial opportunities along the perimeter of the boardwalk structure and alongside Castle Park wall as well as educational and greening opportunities e.g. floating classroom on the Ballast Seed Barge, information about the historic wall and how it was used. Activity to focus on family, community, educational and cultural activities.



CBC2: Coal Drops Yard waterside amphitheatre and walkway, Kings Cross. (Source: CRT)

**CBC2: Castle Park Waterside and Walkway (cont.)**

Bringing Castle Park and the historic city centre back into contact with the water, through a south-facing sundeck and restaurant facility, also providing a safe city centre water ingress for users of the Bristol Watersports Network.

### **CBC3: Redcliffe Wharf**

Site allocated for mixed use, housing-led redevelopment, as per the consented scheme. Inclusion of associated new moorings and active ground floor uses. Whilst the priority remains the development of this site, opportunities exist to introduce meanwhile uses pending development. Meanwhile uses could enrich the public and commercial life of the harbour and take advantage of the site's waterside location

### **CBC4: Redcliffe Bascule Bridge**

Two disused buildings located on the bridge to be renovated for commercial use e.g. cafe or repair/hire shop or as shop windows for activities around Bristol's harbour- these spaces have seen temporary public uses in recent years and it is desirable to see more permanent uses in their place. Depending on the location of ferry moorings, these units could be used as a ferry office.

### **CBC5: Harbour House**

Opportunity to use the underutilised site on the junction of Redcliffe Bascule Bridge and The Grove for commercial activities that animate the harbour, whilst retaining access to the moorings in this location.

### **CBC6: Phoenix Wharf (Bristol Watersports Network)**

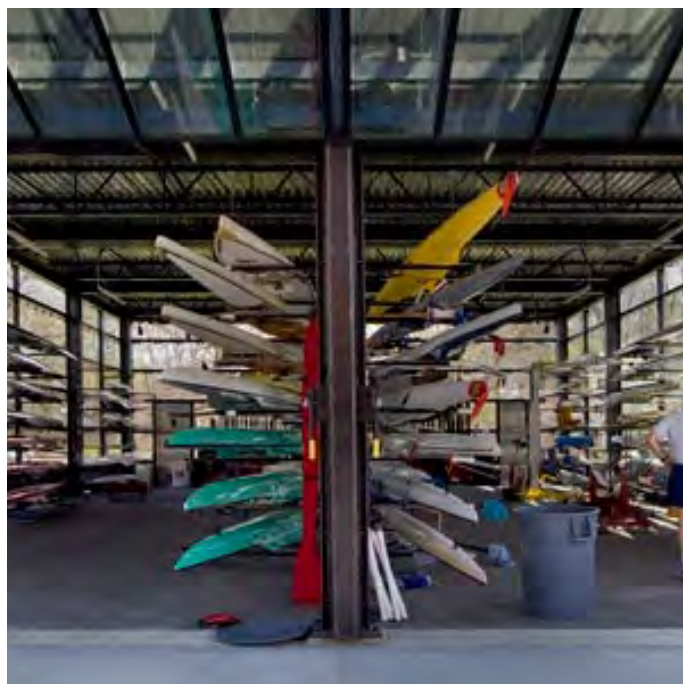
Utilised as part of the Bristol Watersports Network by creating a satellite watersports location with a focus on paddle sports. Provision of secure and accessible paddle equipment store and hire facilities located along Phoenix Wharf in proximity to the reopened slipway for near the Ostrich pub. Opportunity to relocate and utilise the City of Bristol Rowing Club boat house building from the Marina once development has completed for the new combined boat and club house.

### **CBC7: Redcliffe Caves**

Opportunity to use the caves more actively for a range of commercial uses and events.



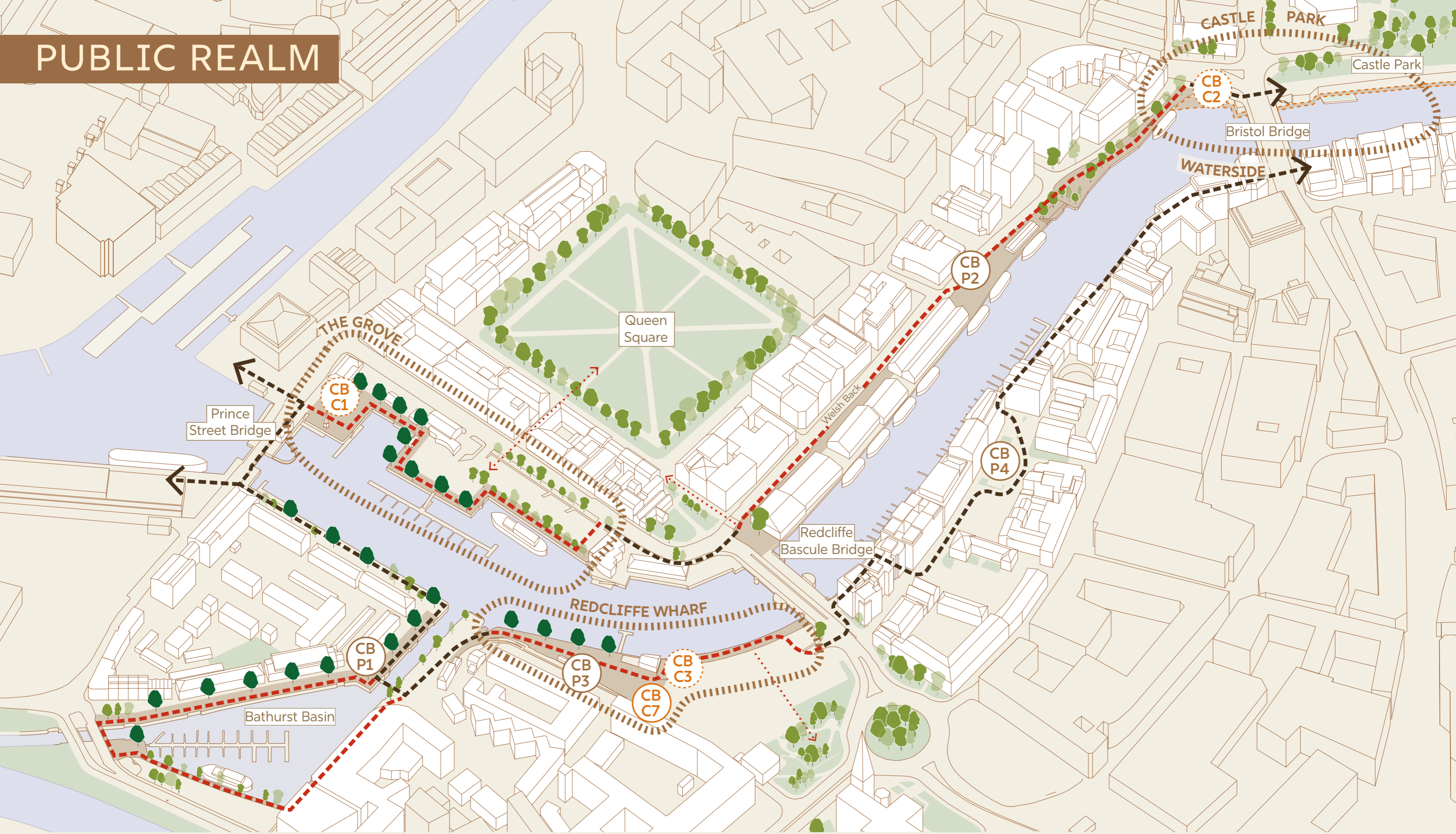
*CBC3: Riverside space with a changing programme of meanwhile uses in Paris. (Source: Paris Plage)*



*CBC6: Community Rowing Boathouse boat storage, Boston, by Anmahian Winton Architects. (Source: Arch Daily)*



# PUBLIC REALM



## Key

- Priority for public realm improvement
- Existing greening
- Enhanced greening
- Key public paces
- Existing Quayside Walkway
- Existing Quayside Walkway (priority for improvement)
- Improved secondary routes

## Place Specific Interventions

- CB  
P1 CBP1: Bathurst Basin Walkway
- CB  
P2 CBP2: Welsh Back Walkway
- CB  
P3 CBP3: Phoenix Wharf Walkway
- CB  
C7 CBC7: Redcliffe Caves

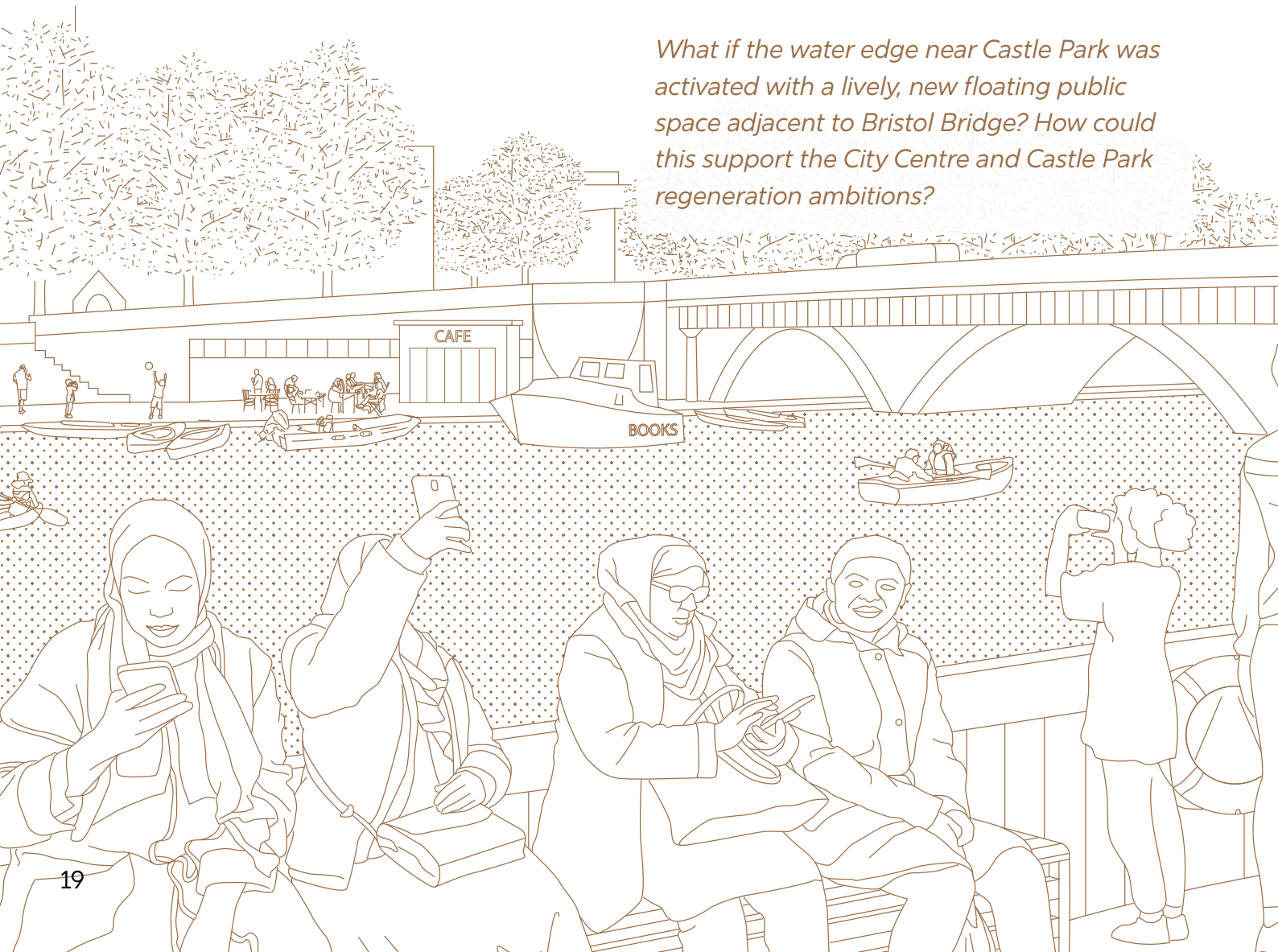
## Related Areas of Change projects

- CM  
C1 CBC1: The Grove
- CM  
C2 CBC2: Castle Park Waterside and Walkway
- CM  
C3 CBC3: Redcliffe

# Public Realm Interventions

Public realm in the City and Backs will be improved to provide a clearer, generous and permeable Quayside walkway along the Grove, Bathurst Basin, the Welsh Back and Redcliffe Wharf. With harbour operations still retained, historic buildings can be celebrated such as Mud Dock with improved signage, routes and well distributed seating for pedestrians. Planting and greening along the wider quayside would also improve biodiversity net gain and create more permanent community space to dwell and play. Enhancing the generous public space around the Welsh Back ferry landing and a new floating public space, adjacent to Bristol Bridge, would also increase accessibility to the water edge.

*What if the water edge near Castle Park was activated with a lively, new floating public space adjacent to Bristol Bridge? How could this support the City Centre and Castle Park regeneration ambitions?*



### **CBP1: Bathurst Basin Walkway**

Bathurst Parade, Trin Mills, and Merchant's Quay improved with planting, seating and more generous walkways. Obstacles to continuous quayside walkway removed. Planting to provide shade and improve biodiversity net gain. Consideration of neighbouring residential uses taken into consideration when designing public realm and areas to dwell. Preserve and enhance views of the historic Redcliffe railway tunnel and the railway cutting to celebrate the history of the Harbour railway and the pivotal role it played in Bristol's industrial past.

### **CBP2: Welsh Back Walkway**

Improved surfacing, lighting, wider pavements, wayfinding and permeability to the water. More generous public space around Welsh Back ferry landing and new floating public space adjacent to Bristol Bridge. Improved connection to Castle Park and Broadmead regeneration projects.

### **CBP3: Phoenix Wharf Walkway**

Sensitively create an accessible route through the existing characterful cobbled area and redefine the public realm around The Ostrich pub to remove interruptions to Quayside Walkway. Retain the areas existing rich biodiversity, where possible adding to this. Provide an improved welcome to Redcliffe Caves. Opportunity to create meanwhile or more permanent community green spaces that provide space for dwelling, play and temporary activities. Opportunity for waterside space to extend commercial mooring activity.

### **CBP4: Redcliffe Back signage**

This relatively underused route from Redcliffe Wharf to Bristol Bridge on this Eastern side of the harbour needs improved signage, to encourage greater use of this pleasant car free route.



*CBP2: Projects elsewhere in Bristol city centre have demonstrated that historic sett surfaces can be retained whilst significantly boosting accessibility. (Source: DK-CM)*










*CBP1 / CMP3: Domino Park, a pedestrian-priority waterside at Williamsburg with plenty of opportunities for sitting and reclining. (Source: Two Trees Management)*

# TRANSPORT








## Key



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

-  Cycle route
-  Opportunity for more efficient land use
-  New/Reinstated Ferry landing

## Place Specific Interventions

-  CBT1: Parking (The Grove)
-  CBT2: Parking (Bathurst Basin)
-  CBT3: Parking (Phoenix Wharf)
-  CBT4: King Street Bridge
-  WWT3: Prince Street Bridge (refer to Wapping Wharf Place Plan)

## Overarching Interventions

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



# Transport Interventions

The strategic move required is rationalised parking in and around the City and Backs area. This includes a rationalised harbourside parking layout in the Grove and the consolidation of parking around Bathurst Basin and the west side of Redcliffe Wharf. This involves allocating space for parking set back from the water edge for a generous Quayside Walkway. Freeing up public space enables diverse meanwhile uses and public events to be supported.

## PLACE-SPECIFIC INTERVENTIONS

### CBT1: Parking (The Grove)

Rationalised layout of harbourside parking to allow more generous Quayside Walkway along the water's edge and to free-up space for diverse meanwhile and event space. Opportunities for road space reallocation if Prince Street Bridge is closed to traffic, subject to further feasibility work to understand wider impacts on the highway network.

### CBT2: Parking (Bathurst Basin)

Consolidation of parking set back from the water's edge to create an enhanced Quayside Walkway.

### CBT3: Parking (Phoenix Wharf)

Consolidation of parking set back from the water's edge to allocate space for more beneficial public uses.

### CBT4: King Street Bridge

There has been a long-standing aspiration to create a new bridge link connecting King Street with Redcliffe Quay. This aspiration remains although less of a priority now Bristol Bridge and Bascule Bridge are more cycle and pedestrian friendly. Responsibility for the future management and maintenance will need to be agreed between Bristol City Council and the Harbour Authority.

## OVERARCHING INTERVENTIONS

### GT1: Enhanced Ferry Provision

An enhanced and consolidated leisure 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.

### GT2: Enhanced Metrobus Provision

Enhanced Metrobus service along Cumberland Road with service expanded to Sundays and evenings. Explore opportunity for creating a new bus stop. s106 contributions will be sought from any developments coming forward in City & Backs 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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