

Marsh Street Arches & Garden Project

The Arches Feasibility Study

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The Arches : Feasibility Study

Executive Summary

This study examines the nature & proposals for derelict railway owned arches in central Barrow-in-Furness.

The community developed plans over a period of years & have formed a CIC and driven forward an initial scheme for a community garden which is now being completed. Funding has come from Westlakes Renaissance via the Borough Council. A subsequent tranche of capital & revenue funding has been won from the Heritage Lottery, with a further grant also to come from Cumbria Waste Management Environment Trust, bringing the total of grant aid to £0.25m+.

The CIC has broad community representation across all sectors, and has built up a good relationship with the Arches freeholder Spacia (Network Rail) which is intended to transfer into a formal relationship, with the CIC being granted a lease on the Arches.

The Arches have a number of different potential values & significance; historical, social & economic.

Historically they remain a very large artefact representing the major phase of Barrow's growth, and the local based Furness Railway

Socially they offer an unparalleled opportunity for a great variety of their activity both temporary and permanent. The creation of the garden and the programmes based on it have been the starting point to this new potential to move from dereliction to usefulness.

Economically the possibilities of variety of activity in the Arches mean that there can be cross support from chargeable (rent, sales etc) to non chargeable (garden maintenance/community development initiatives).

This combination offers a particularly vibrant mix of activity, which is already evidenced by the garden site becoming the most visited construction site in Barrow

Finally the study plots the strong basis for including the currently derelict area to the north in the entire scheme to broaden both the activity base (fitness/easy access/grow your own), but also to create more natural habitats through planting to improve habitat diversity and rail corridor visual quality. The opportunity created by the purchase by BBC and planned demolition of 188 Marsh Street will add another important dimension access to both the existing garden and refurbished Arches

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a. *Introduction*

The study brief indicated that Marsh Street Arches and Gardens Committee (now a Community Interest Company) *“needs to gather information which will enable the current Management Committee to assess the feasibility of developing a number of redundant railway arches. It is hoped that the arches will be redeveloped in order to provide a number of activities and events for local people, businesses and visitors and will also enable the committee to generate income to ensure that project remains sustainable.*

“The Marsh Street Arches and Gardens project has the aim of developing an area of derelict land located to the South of Greengate Bridge and the arches directly below the bridge. The land and buildings proposed for development have been derelict for almost 30 years and until a recent clean up, had been used as an area for fly tipping, arson, under age drinking and drug abuse. The land on which the site is situated is owned by Barrow Borough Council and is situated in the Central Ward of Barrow-in-Furness, an area which is densely populated but with very little open green space.

“In addition to the physical regeneration of the area the project also has the aim of developing the skills, knowledge and qualifications of local people through involvement in each stage of the process including consultation, research, design, planning, construction, delivery of services and evaluation of the project. The full involvement of local people in the process will not only provide the best opportunity for long term sustainability of the project but will also help with the wider social and economic regeneration of the area, providing people with skills and confidence to start new projects, access training or further education or find employment either within the project or elsewhere.

“Funding to complete the garden phase of the project has been secured plus additional funding to help develop the skills of committee members and local people. Discussions have taken place with Spacia (the current owners of the railway arches) and they have intimated their support of the project which would involve providing a lease for the use of the arches over a specific period, i.e. 25 years.”

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- 1.1 The Feasibility Study aims to investigate a number of aspects of the Arches and their environs.
- a. The history, physical character, and significance of the Arches and the entire bridge structure.
 - b. The current stage of project development.
 - c. Potential uses of the Arches, refurbishment principles, phasing and costings.
 - d. Potential further project developments.
 - e. The business case.

1.2 *Authorship and status of the document, and acknowledgement*

This study has been prepared by Hugh Massey of Hugh Massey Architects, Planning and Landscape Consultants, having been commissioned by Marsh Street Arches and Garden Committee.

The outcomes of study have been the result of research but significantly continuing dialogue between the Author and the principal players in the commissioning organisation, and the very many stakeholders in the project.

It is invidious to single out individuals but I would like to record my thanks particularly to Graham Bromley CIC Secretary of the Management Committee, the Management Committee themselves, current and former Development Workers Graham Robinson and Neil Doherty, Barrow Borough Council Regeneration Officer Val Holden and her colleagues, and the very many people who have contributed to an understanding of the project.

1.3 *The Arches – the study area*

Plan 1.3 illustrates the location and extent of the arches themselves, and current uses. For the purposes of this study we have looked at three principal zones

- 1.3.1 The Arches
- 1.3.2 The current garden project
- 1.3.3 The potential further land

1.4 *Ownership and tenure*

Current land ownership and tenure is also illustrated on plan 1.3 as far as is currently known.

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2.0 *Description*

2.1 *Introduction*

The Arches owe their origin to the third station to be built by the Furness Railway (whose headquarters were in Barrow), which we believe came into operation in 1882, in order to maintain the Greengate route into Barrow (which is recorded as being one of the two main routes leading into the village of Barrow in 1843).

The bridge structure comprises four main sections

- 2.1.1 The retaining wall to create the high level roadway at both the north and south ends of the structure
- 2.1.2 The Railway bridge, originally over three or four lines, now reduced to two.
- 2.1.3 The Railway arches 5no with a smaller arch under the steps down from the footway to Marsh Street.
- 2.1.4 Marsh Street Bridge, where the upper roadway is supported over Marsh Street

2.2 *Chronology of the site to present day*

- 1882 Bridge brought into use
- 1950s Land at north and south sides of bridge owned by Barrow Borough Council and used as coal siding/storage yard for school boiler room supplies
- 1970s Part of yard sold off to Housing Association (originally Bradford & Northern HA now Accent HA), southern area landlocked, land and arches become unused and derelict
- 2001 Local residents start to promote the notion of providing community garden in vicinity to provide much needed green space in densely built central ward

2.3 *Description of site*

The Arches act in a number of ways which, although perhaps obvious, give the site its specific character.

- 1 They carry a major vehicular and pedestrian thoroughfare into central Barrow.
- 2 They provide support to bridges over the railway and a road.
- 3 They form sheltered space, previously used as workshop space.
- 4 They provide a route way from the (new) garden to land to the North.
- 5 They are at once a conduit, but also a barrier.
- 6 They form a very significant physical artefact in the local area

2.4 *Description of landscape and setting*

The Arches divide two sites, one to the north derelict, and to the south restored as a community garden. Back lanes terminate against them. Access from the upper level road is by steps on either side.

The railway lines which form the eastern edge of the site were the boundary of the first major phase of development of Barrow and enclose to the west the original high density 'by-law' housing constructed in the last quarter of the 19th century.

The derelict northern site has a small amount of colonising vegetation, which was replicated on the south side until the recent garden construction. As well as creating new formal and informal landscape an untouched 'natural' habitat was left in a perimeter strip to two sides of the new garden. This as well as roosts for bats in the vicinity of one of the arches has provided habitats for slow worm, snails, and other species which have survived and prospered and are treated as important components of the site ecology.

3.0 *Assessment of Significance*

The Arches and the structure they form a part of clearly have a great physical significance through their scale, use and visual impact. Because of the varying functions of the overall structure it is not easily seen as a single object. I have described the variety of practical functions the structure provides; what I would like to demonstrate is that the structure represents, along with a number of other buildings and structures in Barrow, an important testimony of engineering ambition, town planning and Victorian multi-functionalism.

The engineering design of the Arches themselves is not groundbreaking in itself, the original shallow brick arches between cast iron beams in the bridge section are familiar parts of the tool kit of both railway and fire proof mill construction in North West England. The overall range of elements, however, is more than usually complex in a single structure, and represents the best and least disturbed element of Furness Railway civil engineering in Barrow.

That completeness is important and relevant to the concept of significance. Hence local significance is considerable and because of the relatively small scale of the Furness railway the whole artefact represents an important part in the extant elements of the undertaking.

The consideration of significance is particularly relevant and timely for a number of reasons:

- a. The garden project represents a first stage of regeneration of the immediate site, but also poses the question as to the future use of the Arches.
- b. The HLF grant aid awarded to the garden scheme has as one of its main parameters interpretation and raised understanding of the historical and social context of the neighbourhood.
- c. The site to the north is derelict and vacant and future development in this vicinity could have the risk of compromising the setting or potential of the structure.

These elements combine to present an important opportunity to consider the potential of the overall structure, especially the Arches.

We would suggest that a response to these opportunities is to devise a number of strategic pointers for the future of the overall structure.

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- 3.1. Local/statutory listing – Include the structure in the local/national list of historically significant structures.
- 3.2. Work with all stakeholders on implementing maintenance/refurbishment measures consistent with status (e.g. painting schemes for bridge ironwork, street furniture, street lighting).
- 3.3. Improve access to Arches for maintenance/servicing (vehicular/pedestrian).
- 3.4. Safeguard and improve landscape setting.
- 3.5. Work with all stakeholders on interpretation of history/structure/wildlife and provide on site signage etc.
- 3.6. Encourage and support CIC initiatives on developing community and other use of derelict arches.

4.0 ***Conservation Issues and Principle***

4.1 *Ownership and tenure*

Ownership responsibilities for the overall bridge/arch structure are not totally straightforward.

In respect of the Arches themselves the situation is Network Rail (Spacia) own and have the ultimate responsibility for the competence of the structure. Arches are listed on a national database and Engineering inspections made every six years. The Arches in question have been maintained by Network Rail. It should be noted that access to four arches can only be facilitated over other land ownerships (Barrow Borough Council). The remaining arches can be accessed from public highways

The remainder of the Greengate structure consists of a bridge over the railway and a bridge over Marsh Street. Our understanding is that the Cumbria County Council (the Highway Authority) has responsibility for the road surface, street lighting, etc. In the case of the railway bridge there has been supplementary (20th century) isolated support installed to prop the bridge deck and in the case of the Marsh Street road bridge the original cast iron/shallow bridge arch structure has been partially replaced with pre-cast units under the actual road surface.

4.2 *Current condition*

Detailed visual examination has been made of the external elevations of the Arch structures as far as they are exposed. There is currently a proposal from Barrow Borough Council to purchase and demolish 188 Marsh Street to create a new pedestrian access to the Garden area and the demolition of this property may reveal more information on the bridge/arch structure. Previous demolition on the other side of Marsh Street has revealed the rods/pattress plates retaining the embankment area of the overall structure.

The main issues from our examination of the arches are as follows

- 1 Water seepage out from the arch structure above piers, which although very typical of arches in general, indicates an inadequacy in the road/pavement drainage systems. This feature is common to both sides of the arches.
- 2 Brick deterioration. A common feature of certain Victorian local brickworks in Barrow was the poor weathering characteristics of their bricks. Face erosion due to soft clay has resulted in a great number of houses being rendered or having a new brick skin built. The date of this structure (1885) corresponds to a period of rapid house building and the structure, especially in the parapet walls, provides a good example of such deterioration. The option to render would not be appropriate or functional so our initial suggestion for remedial measures would be the conservation response of repointing with a cement/lime mortar of matching density and porosity to the bricks themselves.
- 3 Drainage and services. Whereas at some time there appears to have been functional surface water drainage within the arches as well as other service routeways the functioning of these is now in doubt. A programme of full investigation (rodding/pressure jetting/dye tracing) will be required to establish their functional usefulness. Similarly it would be prudent to remove redundant surface fixed wiring and other accretions, with the caveat that potential roosting sites for the bat colony should be avoided.
- 4 Vegetable growth. As well as the green vegetable growth as a result of long term water seepage, there is a significant amount of vegetable growth at plinth level at the bottom of the parapet to the outside faces of the structure. Because of height considerations and proximity to the active railway removal would need to be very carefully organised. This pattern is not untypical of this type of structure elsewhere but the particular soft character of the brickwork at this location suggests that the need for periodic removal (and making good of localised pointing) should be a priority.
- 5 Surface condition of cast iron structures. Because of access limitations close examination of the railway bridge has not been possible however it is clear that both structures would benefit visually from recoating and the longevity of new coatings as well as their appearance will require careful consideration.

4.3 *Tenure proposals*

Extensive discussion and negotiation has been undertaken between the CIC, ourselves and Network Rail (Spacia). Their portfolio manager Nick Hurst has been most helpful in this regard.

The outline proposals to be considered by the parties are as follows

- 1 That the CIC (who will be leaseholders of the Garden) will also enter into a lease of a term in excess of 25 years to be responsible for the total number of arches. Terms remain to be agreed but it is hoped that the terms will reflect discussions already held and subsequent correspondence (appendix

4.4 *Understanding*

Barrow has six wards in the top 10% on the national Index of Multiple Deprivation – a broad indicator of areas of social exclusion – and as such receives Neighbourhood Renewal funding (NRF). Through the NRF linked Community Empowerment Fund, Barrow's strong voluntary sector is supported by the Furness Community Network that feeds into the Local Strategic Partnership in its behalf. Whilst the local renewal strategy itself centres on key issues such as Housing, Employment, Education and Crime, feedback from [Community Action Furness] and the Furness Community Network indicates a particular rise in local interest in the direction of regeneration and the broader Historic Environment's role. This evidence is further supported by consistent local press coverage on heritage issues, the museum celebrating Barrow's ship building heritage and a number of renewal-linked Participatory Appraisals/Outreach projects taking place in the immediate area and across the peninsula.

Additionally it is worth noting that the contribution of cultural assets and policy to regeneration is increasingly high in the DCMS agenda – as indicated by the draft document 'Guidance on integrating cultural and community strategies'. This argues that improving the quality of life for local people, inclusive approaches and public consultation-driven strategies are good practice, and that their integration can lead to beneficial spin-offs. For example enhanced employability may result from a programme aimed at diverting young people from anti-social behaviour, or wider community and democratic engagement structures may rise from projects that improve the local environment.

(Furness Abbey, Cumbria: Conservation Statement, p29-30)

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4.5 Access and facilities: Disability access

Access to the Arches is currently from the back lanes to the rear of Marsh Street with access from Greengate via steps down.

It is intended that the proposed demolition 188 Marsh Street will allow improved access to the garden site. It is also intended that all access and routeways within the site will be accessible and in compliance with DDA guidelines. Currently the Arches themselves are empty, and secured with palisade fencing or in the case of the Archways accessed from the Marsh Street back lane (north side) with timber doors.

4.7 Protecting the Structure – *designation*

As has been pointed out in 3.1 we believe that as an initial step to establishing significance in the public perception, to both protecting the integrity of the structure that consideration be given to adding the structure to the local/national list on historical structures.

4.8 Landscape and Ecology

The work undertaken on the southern (garden) project site points up the importance of working with the existing natural populations. Colonies of bats, slow worms, snails etc as well as pre-existing flora have been protected and enhanced by the project and the inclusion of a 1m wide strip of existing undisturbed ground cover and management protection of these areas has been immensely rewarding in terms of visitor interest and population safeguarding.

5.00 ***The Business Case***

- 5.1 The draft business plan drafted by Neil Doherty with the project amply demonstrates a number of key features of the project.
- a Firstly he makes a convincing case for the need for the project in terms of indices of deprivation in central ward along with the results of a 2007 crime perception survey
 - b Secondly he outlines a series of other initiatives including questionnaires, public meeting, 'planning for real' and community presentations which reflect both the perceived need and enthusiasm for community driven initiatives in the Arches and garden areas.
 - c Thirdly he illustrates the extensive network of interest and stakeholders that have been approached and become engaged in the progress of the project. This support has created a community of interest which is very notable in our experience in its extent and enthusiasm and support and covers a full range of agencies.
 - d Fourthly he has related the project back to a full range of both local and national economic & social initiatives and strategies.
- 5.2 The draft business plan also outlines a number of uses/users
- e Multi purpose Arch – community based uses including
 - Breakfast and after school clubs
 - Community media space
 - Over 55 club
 - Community café
 - Training facilities
 - f Young persons Arch
 - Facilities for young people between 16-18
 - g Arts space
 - Visual and performing arts
 - h Sports and physical health
 - j Commercial unit – preferably a social enterprise
 - k All ages project; involving young and older people (recycling)

5.3 *The Business Case – a development strategy*

Neil's work amply demonstrated the range of potential uses for the Arches. Our research confirms a variety of informal expressions of interest in use and rental potential of the Arches. What will be required is a degree of certainty for the parties to further commit. This we believe can best be afforded by an incremental approach, refurbishing 2 arches to different levels of specification in order to demonstrate potential and provide lettable space

The initial design consideration gives a total area over 6 arches of 990m². We anticipate 2 levels of internal fit, which we have visited & discussed with Spacia. By reference to their standard specifications which they will require as property owner, it is anticipated that initial development both for refurbishing all the arches would be in the range £0.5m – £0.75m net.

It should be noted that this would provide at the lower range a basic shell with services & w.c.s etc. whereas top range better finishes, glazed screens, full services installation etc.

What is suggested that although the CIC would be the head leasee of all 6 Arches with a term in excess of 25 years, & take the responsibility for management and the development of the Arches. The CIC would themselves seek funds for an initial pilot scheme for Arches A & B but would then act either as co-ordinator of sub leasees or project sponsors for progressive development of the remaining Arches. The aim here being to be responsive to Community initiatives as they develop, and 'bite size' developments posing lower risks to the CIC

A phased programme would:

a. Undertake a first "pilot project" which would refurbish 2 arches and bring in services etc. to ultimately serve all the Arches. The initial Arches (A&B) would serve in the first instance the current & projected work of the CIC in the development of activities related to the existing garden area. This would have the benefit of a relatively smaller start up cost, would establish a replicatable concept which in turn would be visible and understandable to other groups who could then partner the CIC in development of further arches.

The aim would be to lessen the risk by developing a smaller sharper focus in the first instance while at the same time proving the deliverability of the concept.

b. In considering phasing we are also mindful of the development of the north side site with a range of outdoor facilities. i.e. multi-sport games court, fitness trail together with disabled access growing facilities and service area/vehicle access to the Arches. Development of these facilities might closely relate to the development of 1 or more further arches.

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c. The phased 'pilot project' approach could be accelerated with expressions of firm, funded interest from other groups. We believe however that a realistic assessment of the funding environment points to a progressive, multi agency approach closely managed & brokered by the CIC.

5.2 Anticipated Costs

Total area of arches 6 No. x c165m² each = 990m²

Basic upgrade

(Warehouse Standard)

Internal linings to Spacia Specifications
new slab damp proof course
Power Installation (Electricity Supply)
Lighting/Power Installation
Accessible WC, WHB, drainage etc.
Gable enclosure, brickwork/blockwork
Roller shutter doors

Anticipated Cost/Arch £82,500.00

Standard upgrade

Suitable for
Office/other
Community uses

Basic upgrade elements
+ Glazed gables + door
+ Improved wall finish, Carpeting
+ improved lighting & heating installation
+ mechanical ventilation

Anticipated cost/Arch £123,750.00

Costs exclude VAT, all professional & other fees

5.3 Anticipated rental incomes

165m² *basic upgrade standard* = 1776sqf @ £ 5.00 /sqf/pa
= **£11,544.60pa**

165m² at *standard upgrade standard* = 1776sqf @ 7.50/sqf/pa
= **£13,320.00pa**

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5.4 Initial Pilot Scheme

It is proposed that an initial pilot phase of work comprising Arches A & B be considered.

This would include the following elements:-

1. 2nd Arches refurbishment 1 basic upgrade standard & 1 to standard upgrade
Standard say £200K
2. New hard landscaping & improvements to front & rear £20K
3. Provision of services to remainder of Arches for subsequent phase £10k
4. Security works to remaining Arches £10k
- 5 Fees (B. Regs/Planning/Architects) £20k

Hence total expenditure (excluding VAT) would be **£260k**

Anticipated rental value say **£24kpa**

5.5 Initial Pilot Scheme Organisation

Given the imperative to *rehouse a range of community initiatives & activities apart from the CIC base from 40 Arthur Street before demolition* of that property an amended pilot scheme (phase 1) could include;

- 1 Establish overall leasing framework for all Arches with Spacia, with planned progressive upgrading of all Arches (seek legal costs from BBC)
- 2 Provide replacement Community Space including CIC office/meeting space in Arch A. Access from Back Lane in first instance then on demolition from 188 Marsh Street space as well. (Anticipated Project cost £100K +VAT, Fees etc, facility budget £4Kpa)
- 3 Establish 50% FTE Development Worker post ((£24k incl oncosts/pro rated) (3 year fixed contract)
- 4 Development Worker to service Community Space/CIC/OGS scheme & manage/develop Arches in association with CIC Board/Architect etc