

SILICA

Design Statement

Big Lamp Corner Phase 2
Weston-super-Mare



Wolfgang and Heron
Conran & Partners
Price and Myers
Gravity Design



Background and Context

Silica forms part of the Civic Pride initiative for Weston-super-Mare. It is the first of a small number of key priority arts initiatives identified within the public art strategy, one of six complementary studies commissioned by North Somerset Council (NSC) to inform 'Connecting Spaces, Places and People' (CSPP) the strategic urban design framework for the regeneration of Weston-super-Mare town centre and seafront.

The subsequent public realm improvement programme, the Weston Civic Pride Initiative (WCPI) aims to enhance a number of priority streets and open spaces as part of a co-ordinated strategy to attract significant inward investment and regeneration. The work sits within a broader framework that is being developed for the town as part of a much wider visioning exercise to give direction to the economic regeneration of Weston over the next twenty years.

The work at Big Lamp Corner is the first of 11 major public realm improvements. The first phase of the project, undertaken in 2004, included infrastructure changes to accommodate public transport, and to significantly upgrade paving, lighting, and seating. The resultant public space was identified within CSPP as a pivotal location for public art, lighting and pedestrian information. In order to achieve these aspirations a Phase 2 brief was developed for an artist-led design team to address all three aspects through the creation of an iconic and functional sculpture.

The criteria for this commission were to create:

- ◆ a major artwork to be sited at Big Lamp Corner - a piece that defines the space and has sufficient visual presence and scale to be the most prominent feature of the square when viewed from the Promenade end of Regent Street.
- ◆ A work that in a contemporary way became a new "Big Lamp"
- ◆ A structure that should incorporate and house the information access point within the signage strategy.
- ◆ A structure that should address the lighting needs and opportunities offered by the space and the lighting strategy.
- ◆ The commission should seek to draw people into the space from the Seafront and the High Street, and act as a focal point in a key identified 'hub' location.

Maintenance, public realm safety and robustness as well as quality of design and manufacture were essential ingredients in the commission brief and criteria



Design Philosophy

The inspiration for this sculpture comes from its context. The artist lead design team are inspired by the idea of Big Lamp Corner's history and the more elemental presence of the sea and beach. The unifying element to both of these notions is Silica. *Silica* makes reference to glass, sand and light. The design team has used this idea to create a new sculptural form, which will act as a symbolic and practical landmark for the residents and visitors of Weston Super Mare. Like an ancient spire Big Lamp Corner has a new orientation marker subtly picking up on its context and location.

Silica acts as a beacon of light making real and imagined links to the sea and promenade and the commercial hub of the town.

The expression of light, glass and sand are expressed in the reaching form of silica. The natural and organic qualities of sand and glass are embedded in sculptural form.

As one looks higher up the structure one sees the fibre optic lighting embedded into reconstituted stone culminating at the tip where there is an explosion of light and colour.

The elegant and natural form of the sculpture harmoniously celebrates its context and surroundings whilst embracing the present and future through simple contemporary technology

Materials and Lighting

Silica is a 26m tapering spiral comprising

- Light but strong GRC (silica infused) reconstituted stone
- Stainless steel rings slightly twisted as in the Fibonacci forms to support additional lighting elements
- Fibre optic lighting at a high level to give the beacon effect and embedded in blown glass prisms, refracting and reflecting ambient light, twinkling in the day reacting to ambient light conditions – the natural quality of daylight in Weston. These change colour by simple programming to create narrative and meaning such as marking special occasions, the rise and fall of the tides
- LEDs up the sculpture to enhance the lighting effect
- Internal lighting to ensure a well lit bus shelter and kiosk areas



Structure, form and integrated functions

The form and structure have been designed to combine the functional elements of bus shelter / kiosk / public information / big lamp within integrated seamless sculptural and artistic expression. In addition the location of Silica makes it convenient to house the existing electricity feeder pillars within the base of the structure.

The foundations for the structure will be a simple 4 metre by 4 metre x 2 metre (deep) cast concrete pad, with integrally set threaded bar which will locate into the base of the galvanized steel drum. The drum will come prefabricated with doors and window opening. On the outside of the drum will be pre-welded locating lugs for the GRC panels to fix to. The majority of work will be done in the factory in order to minimising disruption to Big Lamp Corner during installation. This also means that risk is reduced to on site working.

Working with Price and Myers 3D Structural Engineering has ensured structural loadings are calculated at the start of the design process to integrate with the sculptural aesthetic. Essential structural processes are logically and efficiently transferred to a range of works at different scales. This enables quick and easy fabrication through close working with local fabricators. A very high quality of craftsmanship leads to efficient installations.

Bus shelter and passenger facilities

The bus shelter is protected from winds by a curved glass portion, and is contained within a cut out segment in the base of the structure. The available space will seat 4 people and additional seating is provided alongside to provide extra capacity for passengers. Bus timetables will be adhered to the door to the kiosk and electricity housing and has been designed to house standard printed format with in built flexibility to accommodate future information technologies such as real time electronic displays.

Retail kiosk

The structure contains space for a kiosk suitable for a range of retail uses, in accordance with the design brief. This is will be approximately 11sq.m with an internal height of 2.5 metres. The kiosk will contain services, a serving hatch facing on to the public space, and potential storage within the upper parts of the base drum. Depending on occupier space alongside the kiosk could be used for display of goods. In addition to the specific planning approval there will be a need for a street trading licence in order to establish an active use.



Public Information

The design brief called for integration with the developing pedestrian signage system, and the provision of transport information at this prominent junction within the town centre. As a response, the design includes a programmable LED information panel that will create a band of moving text above the bus shelter. This will provide scope to provide real-time messages connected with events, news and entertainment as well as standard time, tide and temperature information.

Accessibility

Silica has been designed to be accessible and inclusive. The following issues have been addressed in the design:

- The structure is located to allow for the anticipated numbers of people who will use the buses and extra space required for disabled people including wheelchair users.
- The structure is located so that it sits within a designed context with regard to the citing of street furniture and the removal of unnecessary street clutter, such as the electricity feeder pillars to be located within the structure.
- The structure contrasts visually with the pavement at pedestrian height.
- Routes to and from the buses are free from obstacles.
- A mix of seating is provided including seats with arm/back rests and the seating is designed for the best use of the wider public space.
- Tourist information will comply with DDA requirements and space has been created within and outside the structure to ensure that information can be available a variety of formats.
- The work will include an interpretation board about the commission designed to be accessible for those disabled people with sensory impairments.



Sustainability

Silica has been designed for a long-term design lifespan and is intended to be a feature of the Weston townscape for many years to come. In order to achieve this it is important that the functional elements of the structure are adaptable to new technological innovation. The presence of the power supplies contained within the structure, and the modular and component approach to the design of the base, allow a degree of flexibility that should allow for change without harming the integrity and aesthetic qualities of the overall work.

The lighting components included in the design designed to illuminate the structure rather than floodlight it. Both the LED and optic fibre technologies are considered to have low energy consumption by current standards. The way in which light will be directed at the structure will seek to minimise any adverse levels of light pollution.

Maintenance

Whilst the design of *Silica* has given full consideration to the long term management and maintenance of the structure, the inclusion of elements such as the kiosk and public information facility increase the potential for generating income to help maintain the work in a good condition.

The prominent location, existing CCTV coverage and the ongoing functional uses of the structure will increase passive surveillance, which should help to deter anti-social behaviour and abuse. The structure is a contained shell with no dark corners or recesses, and presents a form designed not to trap litter or stain, and is very difficult to climb and consequently damage.

Evidence from the artist's previous work, "Angel" kiosk in Islington, shows that a round design with no flat planes deters graffiti. However anti-graffiti solution will be applied to the surface making the removal of marks and stains easy with either hot soapy water or in extreme cases thinners, without any detriment to the surface.

The use of fibre optics means only 1 bulb to replace and LED's renewal on a 5-year basis. Access for both LED replacement and any intermittent high level cleaning and will be by cherry picker.

The stainless steel rings have tiny indentations, which will prevent pigeons & seagulls landing and perching on them.



Commissioning procurement process

The artist lead design team brief (see Appendix 1) requested the integration of a number of functional elements within the sculptural lighting proposal, including the bus shelter with appropriate seating, a kiosk and information point. All these elements are integral to the overall design.

The commissioning panel, officers and public art consultants insisted on a procurement process that was transparent and open. An international competition was arranged. This focussed on attracting the highest quality submissions. Uniquely the requirement for artist lead teams incorporating an artist, an architect, structural engineers and lighting consultants proved to be attractive to 65 entries from nationally and internationally significant artists and design professionals.

Five teams were short listed by the selection panel. They were each paid £7,500 to research and design outline proposals within the given brief. They also underwent a further 'test' against the project rationale at a half way stage in their concept designs. At this stage a presentation was made to the selection panel and to an open invitation of stakeholders from the town. At both these sessions questions were put to the teams, and the opportunity to discuss issues ranging from town themes, the function of the proposals, use of materials, issues of vandalism and maintenance were discussed.

The stakeholders group included residents and retailers, and other key representatives such as the Police, CCTV, the Weston Arts Festival, and others, from the Town.

The Selection Panel agreed unanimously to appoint artists Wolfgang Buttress and Fiona Heron, with Architects Conran and Partners, structural engineers Price and Myers and lighting consultants Gravity Design. Their proposal matched all the criteria: they have a sound and impressive track record, proposed an exciting solution to the new 'Big Lamp' lighting requirement, proposed an integrated structure including the functional elements, could answer queries on maintenance and structure, budget and programme. In short they fully answered the project needs from the overall Civic Pride vision, the site specific requirements outlined in the project brief and the commissioning criteria.

Selection Criteria

A number of technical and aesthetic requirements made up the matrix against which the Selection Panel could chose the winning team (see Appendix 2), the criteria agreed by the Selection Panel and used in their assessment of the five competing short listed design team proposals.



Selection Panel Members

Appendix 3 lists the 13 Selection Panel members who were drawn from a wide range of interest groups and Town and Council representatives. Three of these (Clare Morris, Rosemarie Dowie and Joanne Hills) were volunteers elected from the open stakeholders meeting held to debate the five proposals.

Local community involvement

Work will begin in September 2005 with children from Heron Moor School and students from the Foundation Degree course at Weston College to develop a community engagement strategy about design in the public realm. A local community artist, Liz Milner, will lead this project. It will involve the young people devising their own research and developing workshops with local people, leading to an exhibition of work. Part of the aim of this community strategy is to increase an understanding and awareness of design in the public realm, and how artists, other design professionals and creative local people can contribute positively to a regeneration programme in a town.

Funding

The overall project cost for BLC Phase 2 is £350,000. This covers all aspects of the project including the competition stage, art consultants, schools / community development programme, the commissioning process and the commission, stakeholder consultation, exhibition, and ongoing publicity.

The budget is set out in the WCPI Bid and the total funding is made up from the following partners:

RDA - £165,000 (47%)
SRB (Weston Regeneration Partnership) - £98,500 (28%);
Weston Tourism - £34,500 (10%);
NSC capital - £20,000 (6%);
Town Council - £17,000 (5%);
NSC costed officer time - £15,000 (4%);

The actual commission, covering detailed design, manufacture and implementation has a target budget of £280,000. This has been made available to the artist team to deliver *Silica*.



Project programming

The programme is extremely tight for a project of this scale, originality and complexity. That said the artist lead design team has committed to keeping to the schedule. The project programme outlined below:

March 2005	Advertise for expressions of interest from Artist-led design teams
29 April 2005	Shortlisting of 5 Competition teams
06 June 2005	Interim design review and stakeholder meeting
24 June 2005	Commissioning panel
28 June 2005	Winning Design Team informed
14 July 2005	Feedback and Full Officer's Briefing Session including feedback from Selection Panel
04 Aug 2005	Interim Design Development meeting
23 Aug 2005	Design review with Stakeholders
end Aug 2005	Complete Design development for Planning Submission
28-29 Sept 2005	Public Exhibition of competition proposals in the Winter Gardens
Sept-Nov 2005	Planning Permission / detailed design development 'at risk' in tandem with planning process
end Nov 2005	Commission Go Ahead (on assumption planning approval is given)
Dec-March 2006	Manufacture
end March 2006	Installation on site

Contact

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