

Friday 22 March 2024

Sunderland Pavilion plans unveiled

KEEL Square is set to welcome a show-stopping new focal point, featuring a giant immersive screen – thought to be one of the largest of its kind in the UK.

Sunderland Pavilion, a contemporary exhibition and immersive space that will provide a centrepiece for Expo Sunderland – a series of inspiring and exciting events taking place to 2026 – will stand in place of the large digital screen currently located at the heart of the transforming public square.

The Pavilion - a temporary transparent structure, set in a metal frame - will open to visitors in the summer, providing flexible space that will host exhibitions and showcase local talent and innovation, a viewing platform to allow people to watch the city's new Culture House take shape, and areas for large installations and displays.

Developed by Sunderland City Council, the upper deck of the building will feature a spectacular 10m x 5m screen, with two 5m x 5m screen 'wings'. The screen aims to inspire and delight, with a range of stunning visual displays some that will appear 3D due to the translucent material it is made from. It has been supported with funding from the Department for Science Innovation and Technology (DSIT) 5G Innovation Regions (5GIR) grant, thanks to a bid from the local authority that centred around the city's digital capabilities.

The Pavilion has been designed to respond to surrounding architecture, while introducing a high-quality and visually striking temporary space. Sunderland-based Building Design Northern (BDN) has designed the building, which integrates the giant screen that has the capability to live stream content from anywhere in the world using special cameras that will give an immersive 3D feeling.

The council led a bid to secure funding that will enable the purchase of the screen, which it hopes to use to demonstrate Sunderland's smart city capabilities, including tapping into its 5G network, which is accessible from Keel Square.

Councillor Kevin Johnston, portfolio holder for dynamic city, said Sunderland Pavilion represents an opportunity to engage residents and visitors in a new and exciting way.

He said: "The structure itself will contain amazing displays and interactive exhibitions that really capture the imagination of people who visit, while the monolithic scale of the screen that stands above it will allow us to create really exciting content that will appear to be floating in the air above the house.

“We want to showcase pioneering innovative concepts for the future home in Sunderland in a building that pushes boundaries and sparks imagination. This fits brilliantly into our plans for Expo, which will bring many thousands of people to our transforming Riverside Sunderland, to experience the incredible level of change in this part of the city, as well as informing the content of Culture House, which will open its doors in 2025.”

The Pavilion is large enough to house a full-sized vehicle, with stunning CGIs showing an electric Nissan car parked in a large transparent space on the ground floor. The structure stands a stone’s throw from the location of Culture House, currently under construction and set to spark imagination and foster innovation when it opens, with immersive, interactive and digitally powered exhibitions and spaces that will appeal to all.

Richard Marsden, managing director of architecture, civil and structural engineering firm BDN, said: “It’s been great to shape these exciting plans with the team at the council and to think creatively about the art of the possible within Sunderland Pavilion.

“To have the opportunity to design a space that will be enjoyed by local families - including my own - and visitors to Sunderland is something we’re really proud to support, as a business that is based, and investing, in the city.”

The funding for the giant digital screen on the building forms part of The Department for Science Innovation and Technology (DSIT) ‘5G Innovation Regions (5GIR)’ £37M grant, of which the seven North East local authorities (LA7) successfully bid to receive over £3.7million to support this and three other 5G and advanced wireless connectivity projects across the North East. These activities support 5G and advanced wireless connectivity as key components of the regional digital strategy to build on the key strengths of the region.

The four projects are:

- 5G-enabled port operations
- Connected Intelligent Transport Systems
- 5G-Enabled event production and 360° live broadcasting
- Advanced wireless sensor technology on farms

The North East’s inaugural 5GIR project aims to drive innovation and unlock opportunities for economic growth through making use of world-class digital infrastructure.