

Railway Station Character Area Townscape Analysis & Design Guidance

**Evidence Document
Draft v.5**

**Urban Design Team
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Part A: Townscape Analysis

1. Introduction: The Central Development Area (CDA) and Character Areas

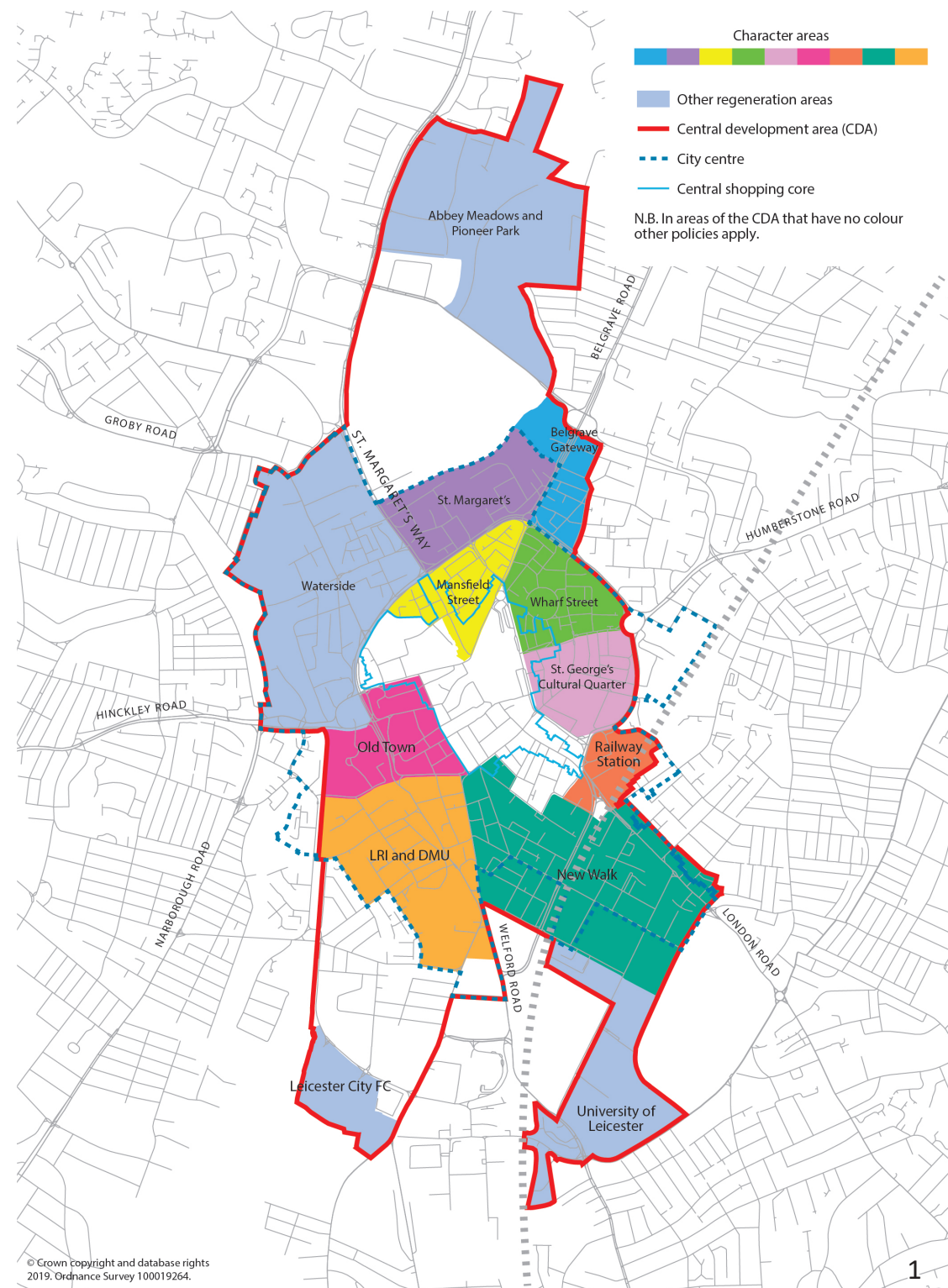
The regeneration of Leicester is a key theme of Leicester's development plan. In considering the central area of Leicester, areas have been identified which have distinctive characters and context, identity, opportunities and challenges and therefore different development objectives. These areas will also make a very important contribution to addressing the city's future housing needs.

Much of the development activity needed to enable restructuring of the economy will occur in the area within and around the City Centre, within the Central Development Area (CDA). Leicester's future economic prosperity will depend on making sure that it has the right appeal to a skilled and mobile workforce as well as being an attractive place to live and work. The quality of life, environment, housing, jobs and the cultural, leisure and retail offer of the city and central area in particular, will play a major role in this. The aim of the Central Development Area is to enable the City Council to direct, optimise and encourage investment, whilst managing development appropriately within a local context, so that they deliver high quality development, which in turn creates certainty and developer confidence.

The City Council has divided the Central Development Area (CDA) into 13 distinct areas, including 9 Character Areas and 4 other Regeneration Areas to recognise the individual context of each area and for future policy to be based on the area's defining characteristics.

There are 9 Character Areas :-

1. Railway Station;
2. Mansfield Street;
3. St. Margaret's;
4. Wharf Street;
5. Belgrave Gateway;
6. LRI and DMU;
7. St. Georges Cultural Quarter;
8. Old Town;
9. New Walk, and



Four Other Regeneration Areas:-

- Abbey Meadows and Pioneer Park;
- Waterside;
- Leicester City Football Club;
- University of Leicester.

Policy Basis:

The revised NPPF (February 2019) in paragraphs 124 – 126 under Section 12. Achieving Well-designed Places states the importance of plans creating a clear design vision and expectations, at an early stage, tailored to the context and an areas defining characteristics. This will support the creation of high quality buildings and spaces and give applicants some certainty on what is likely to be acceptable. This is being achieved currently through the Waterside SPD which was adopted in 2015 which is successfully promoting and delivering regeneration, which, in turn, creates certainty and developer confidence.

The 9 Character Areas have been comprehensively assessed by the City Council. A detailed 'Townscape Analysis and Design Guidance' evidence document has been prepared for each character area to respond to the requirements of the NPPF, build on the success of the Waterside SPD, and develop policies and clear guidance for development that is tailored to the circumstances and context of each character area.

It is expected that in time this guidance will be adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance, including proposed building heights, which will also focus on directing and prioritising pro-active interventions which may include public realm, transport, heritage, streetscapes etc. and objectives and townscape guidance specific to each character area.

12. Achieving well-designed places

124. The creation of high quality buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities. Being clear about design expectations, and how these will be tested, is essential for achieving this. So too is effective engagement between applicants, communities, local planning authorities and other interests throughout the process.

125. Plans should, at the most appropriate level, set out a clear design vision and expectations, so that applicants have as much certainty as possible about what is likely to be acceptable. Design policies should be developed with local communities so they reflect local aspirations, and are grounded in an understanding and evaluation of each area's defining characteristics. Neighbourhood plans can play an important role in identifying the special qualities of each area and explaining how this should be reflected in development.

126. To provide maximum clarity about design expectations at an early stage, plans or supplementary planning documents should use visual tools such as design guides and codes. These provide a framework for creating distinctive places, with a consistent and high quality standard of design. However their level of detail and degree of prescription should be tailored to the circumstances in each place, and should allow a suitable degree of variety where this would be justified.

Extract from the NPPF (February 2019): Paragraphs 124 - 126

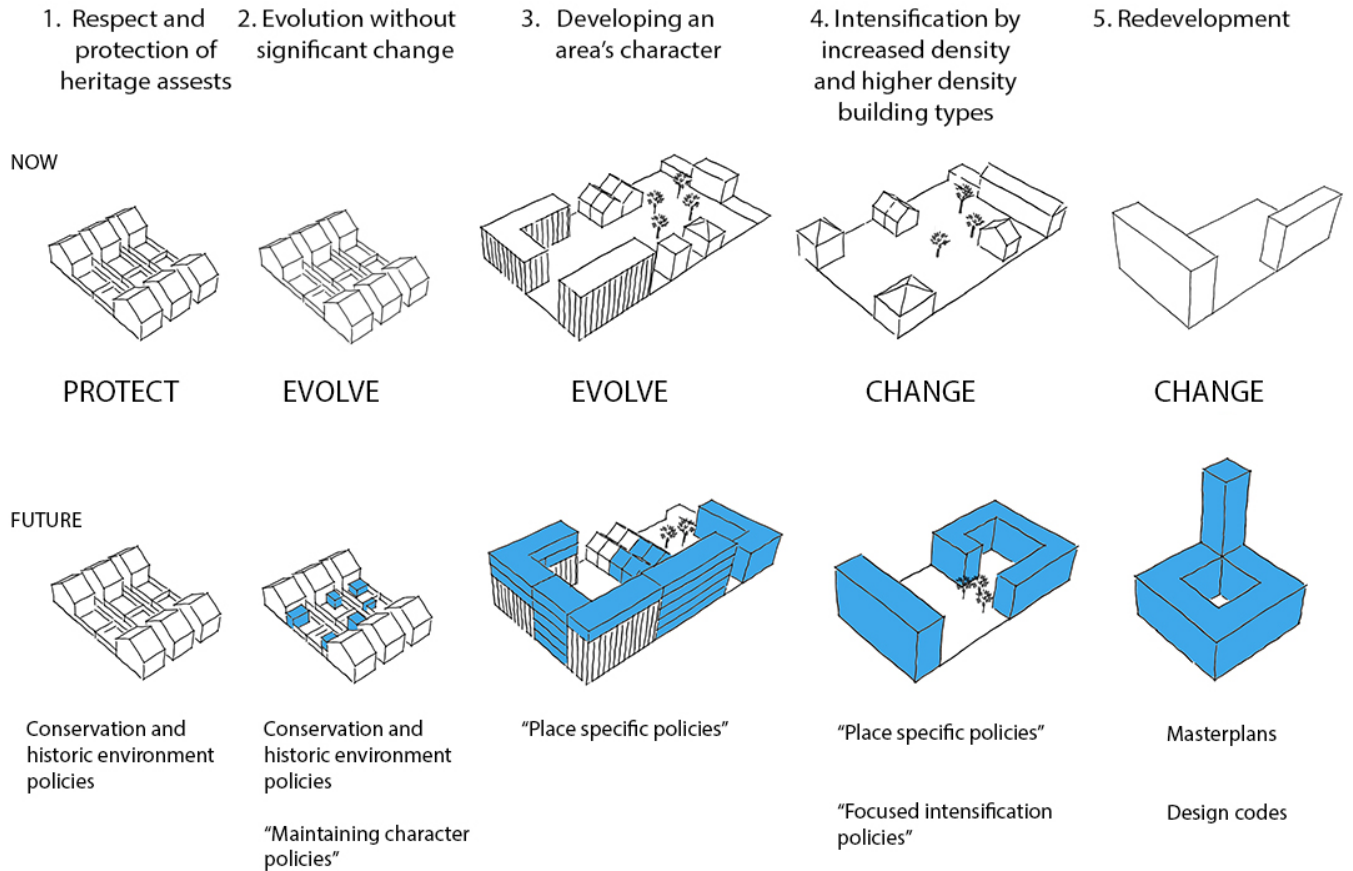
Townscape Character Management:

To inform and guide policy it is helpful to understand the level and scope of change the distinct character areas are likely to undergo during the plan period and beyond. Some character areas will be predominantly heritage assets, with few development opportunities and require protection to conserve their very distinct character. Others may undergo significant residential growth and intensification and require guidance to manage this growth cohesively and comprehensively, also considering the need for new infrastructure as residential neighbourhoods grow.

The Townscape Management Options used by the London Borough of Croydon in their Local Plan 2018 outlines five options to categorise and understand this level of change and how it will be managed through planning policy.

1. Respect and protection of heritage assets
2. Evolution without significant change
3. Developing an area's character
4. Intensification by increased density and higher density building types
5. Redevelopment

The Townscape Analysis and Design Guidance for each character area will establish the relevant Townscape Management Option(s) attributed to that area to develop policies and clear guidance for development that is tailored to the circumstances and context of each character area.

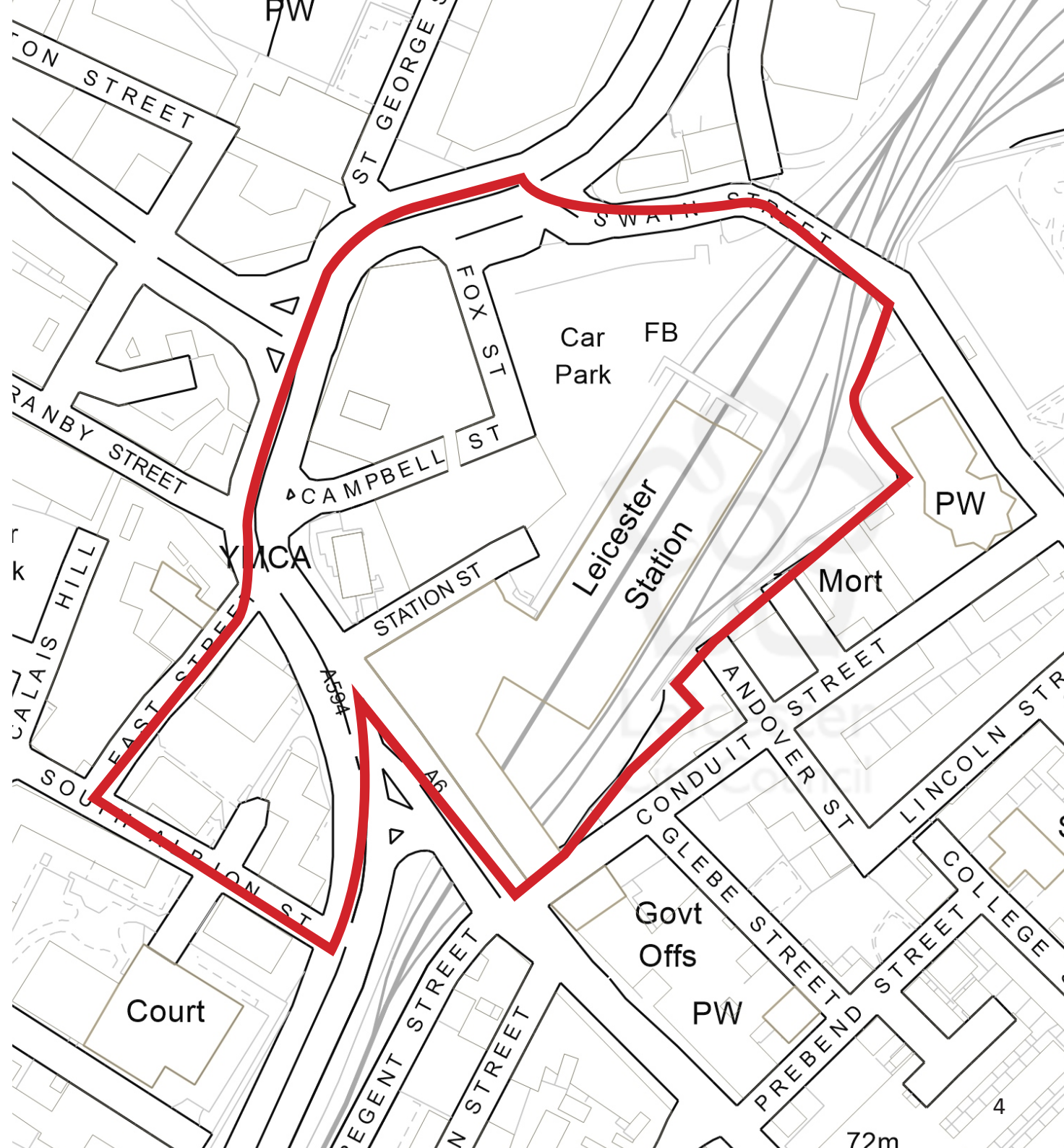


Reference: Local Plan 2018, London Borough of Croydon

Railway Station Character Area

The Railway Station Character Area is located to the east of the city centre, it's predominant function is as the location of the city's railway station with the addition of some residential, commercial and office uses. The station itself caters for around 17,000 passengers a day - or 5.4 million a year. There is therefore great need to ensure that this character area acts as a gateway into the city and provides connectivity into the city centre and beyond.

Leicester City Council recognises the opportunities and challenges within the Railway Station Character Area. We have therefore undertaken this townscape analysis to guide a cohesive and comprehensive approach to development. There is significant opportunity to transform the public realm surrounding the station and provide additional high quality office buildings.



2. History of the area

Historic maps are shown below the figure ground of present day development. The heritage assets are highlighted showing their relationship to the historic plans.

Much of the history of this character area is based on the railway and the station. Before the railway line and the first station were built much of the area was predominantly fields and open space.

1828: The plan shows London Road as the most prominent street, identified in green, as it remains today. Either side of the land that is now the station is Northampton Street, which no longer exists, and Conduit Street which still exists.

1844: The Midlands Railway Act (1836) led to the building in 1840 of Leicester's first mainland railway station on Campbell Street, as can be seen on the plan (identified in red) with an image on page 8. This connected Leicester to Derby, Nottingham and Rugby, and later provided direct access to London.

1903-04: This plan shows much of the character area built out by the beginning of the 20th century. The station was surrounded by terraced housing to the south, along Conduit Street. The remaining buildings in the area are related to the function of the station. In June 1892 the new booking office (identified in blue) and parcel office (identified in red) opened, moving the entire ticket operation from Campbell Street to the London Road Port Cochere. The new station building was completed in 1895.

1950s/60s: Much of the morphology of the character area remained the same into the mid-late 20th century. There was the addition of the new sorting office located on Campbell Street as identified in red. St Georges Tower was constructed in 1960.

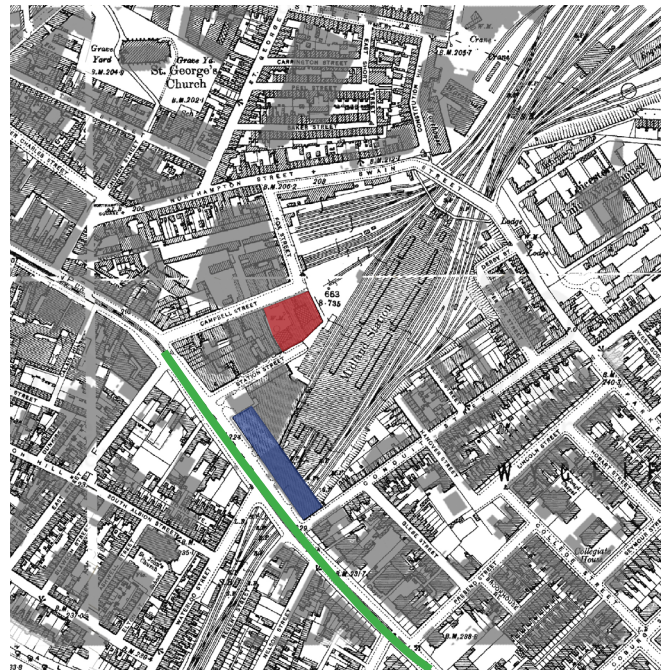
1970s: There was some slum housing located on Conduit Street, and in a slum clearance plan dated from June 1974 parts of Conduit Street are identified as having a confirmed clearance order at that time. Elizabeth House was constructed in 1976.



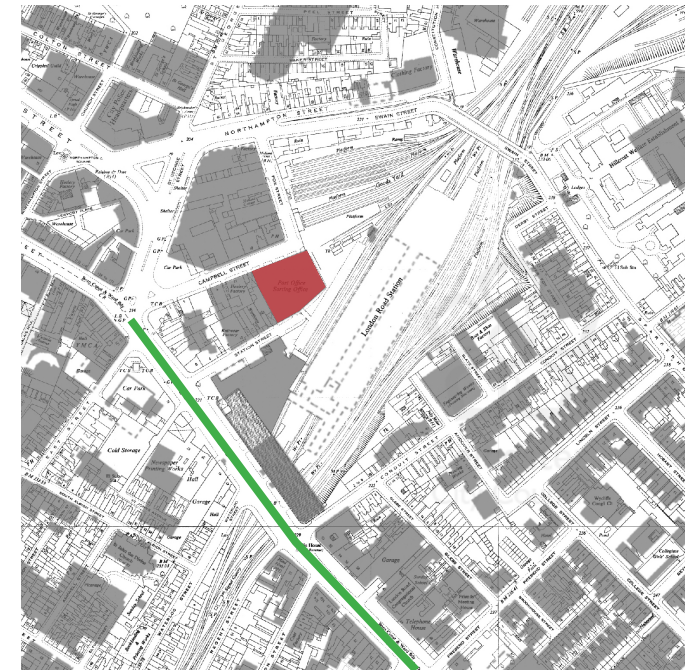
1828



1844



1903-04



Late 1950s

3. Heritage and Townscape Assets

The Porte Cochere, shown in images A & B on the following page, is of Grade II listed status. The only two other recognised heritage asset in the character area are the locally listed Swain Street road bridge over the railway line and the Grade II listed gate to the former Midland Railway Station.

There are two key views into and out of the character area. The first is the view along Granby Street looking towards the station. As a key route from the city centre to the station, the tower of the Porte Cochere acts an important landmark. There is also the view from the station towards the top of Granby Street, where there are two Grade II listed buildings that frame the entrance to the street, which is beneficial for wayfinding towards the city centre.



3. Heritage and Townscape Assets

Additional buildings which make a positive contribution, but are not locally listed, are identified. This reflects their importance as part of the townscape of the character area and as such there is a general presumption against the demolition of these buildings. The images show key views within the character area, as identified in the diagram.

The former sorting office built in the late 1940s/early 50s identified in image C has a strong building line, is well proportioned and offers a positive contribution to the townscape of the area, although active frontages are limited. Additionally, the Parcel Yard building directly adjacent to the station building shown in image D also provides an active frontage and makes a positive contribution to the area.



4. Key Views

As an area with a number of tall buildings and with potential for some tall development, it is important that city wide views are considered to understand the broader impact of tall development in this character area. These views are taken from significant open space and parks within the city. As the images show tall development would be visible from these spaces. These views are a selection and a thorough views analysis would be required.



Boating Lake Abbey Park



Nelson Mandela Park



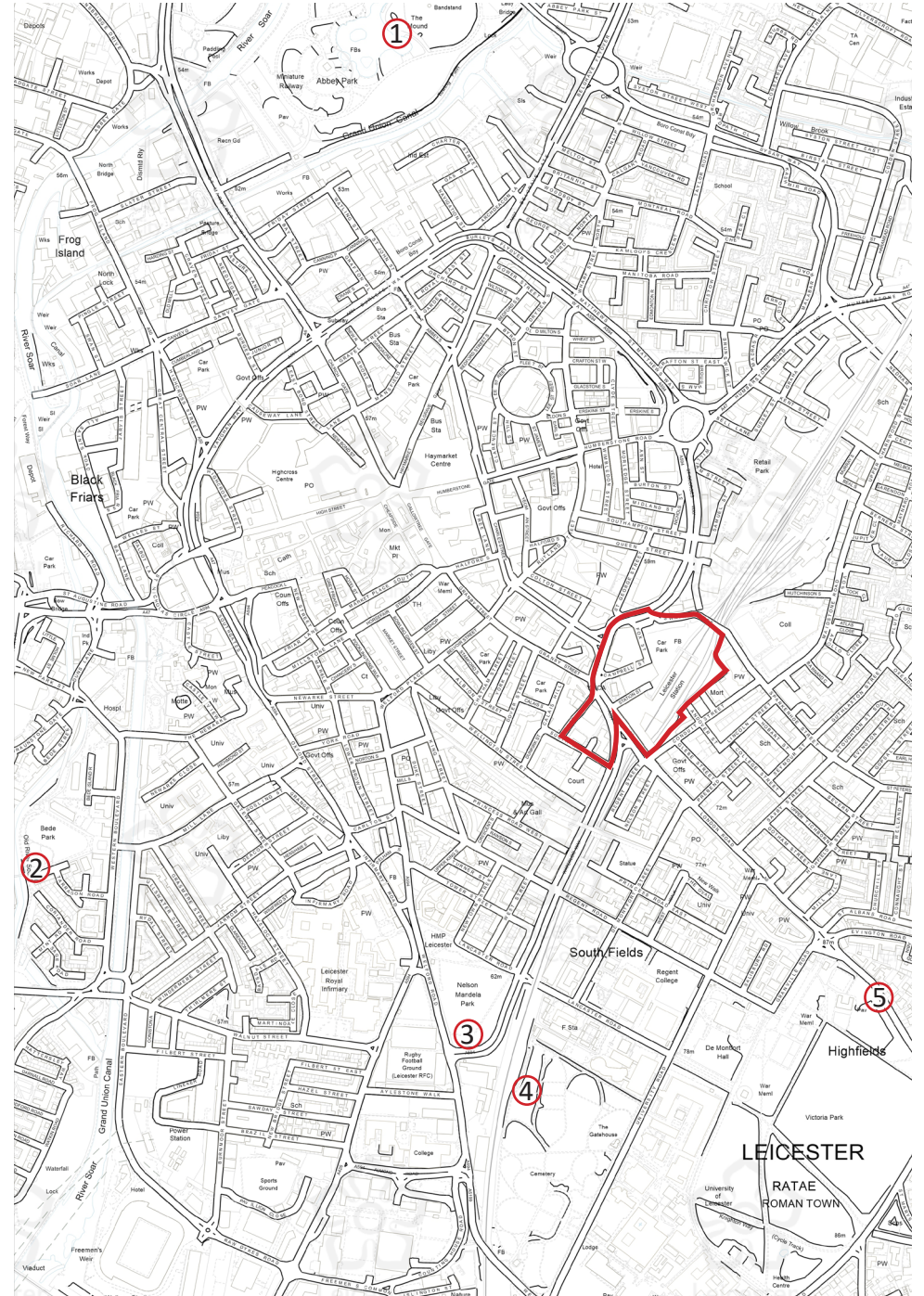
Welford Road Cemetery



Bede Park



London Road



5. Streets and Spaces

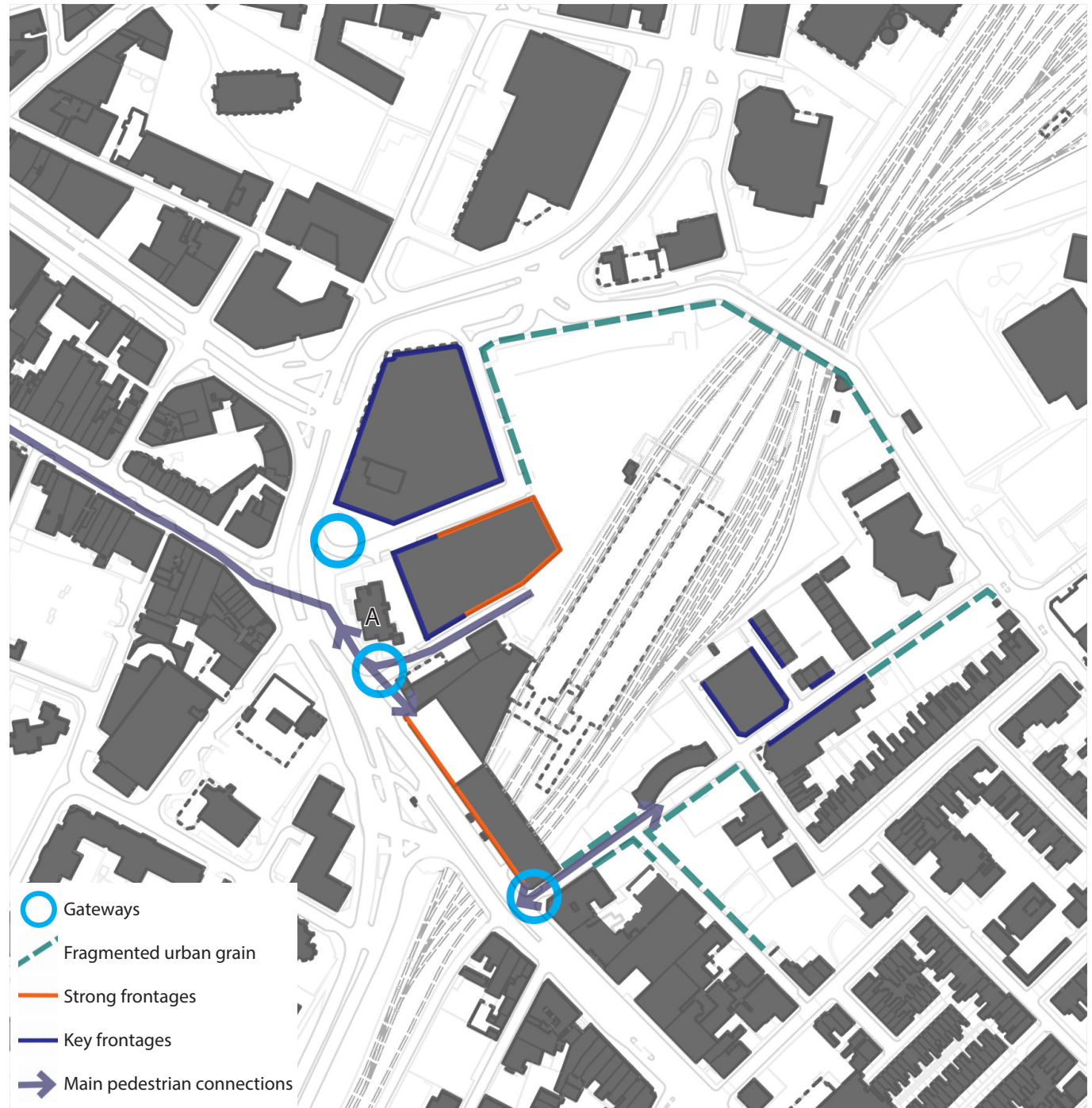
Successful places have well enclosed, active and connected streets, well defined perimeter blocks and well designed public spaces. Strong frontages, local markers, nodes, gateways and public spaces are elements of the townscape that together contribute to the familiarity of a place, making it easily understandable to find your way. They also contribute to the character of a place, its story, its distinctiveness, which forges a sense of belonging and pride.

Fragmented urban grain identifies locations where perimeter blocks have been lost over time to the detriment of the townscape. Strong frontages are those frontages where both the building line and the building are important to the townscape. Key frontages are those which provide a well defined edge to streets and spaces and so the building line is important but not the building.

As one of the most prominent gateways into the city the Railway Station Character Area experiences a lot of footfall. The corner to Station Street is one of the main pedestrian gateways into and out of the character area. Vehicle access into the station drop-off and pick-up is via Conduit Street, and is one of the main vehicle gateways in the character area.

Given the limited route options and the strong station frontage to London Road, which acts as a landmark, the character area appears quite legible. There have been issues with London Road acting as a barrier to pedestrian permeability. Work is, however, being undertaken to improve the public realm and make pedestrian, cycle and bus movement easier and safer.

Many of the buildings within the character area offer a perimeter block with the exception of Elizabeth House (A), which is a larger tower to London Road at 15 storeys high. Should the site be developed these frontages should be maintained. Parts of the character area, particularly along Conduit Street are fragmented. Development here should look to repair the building line. The listed Porte Cochere of the station offers a strong frontage to London Road.



6. Existing Building Heights and Planning History

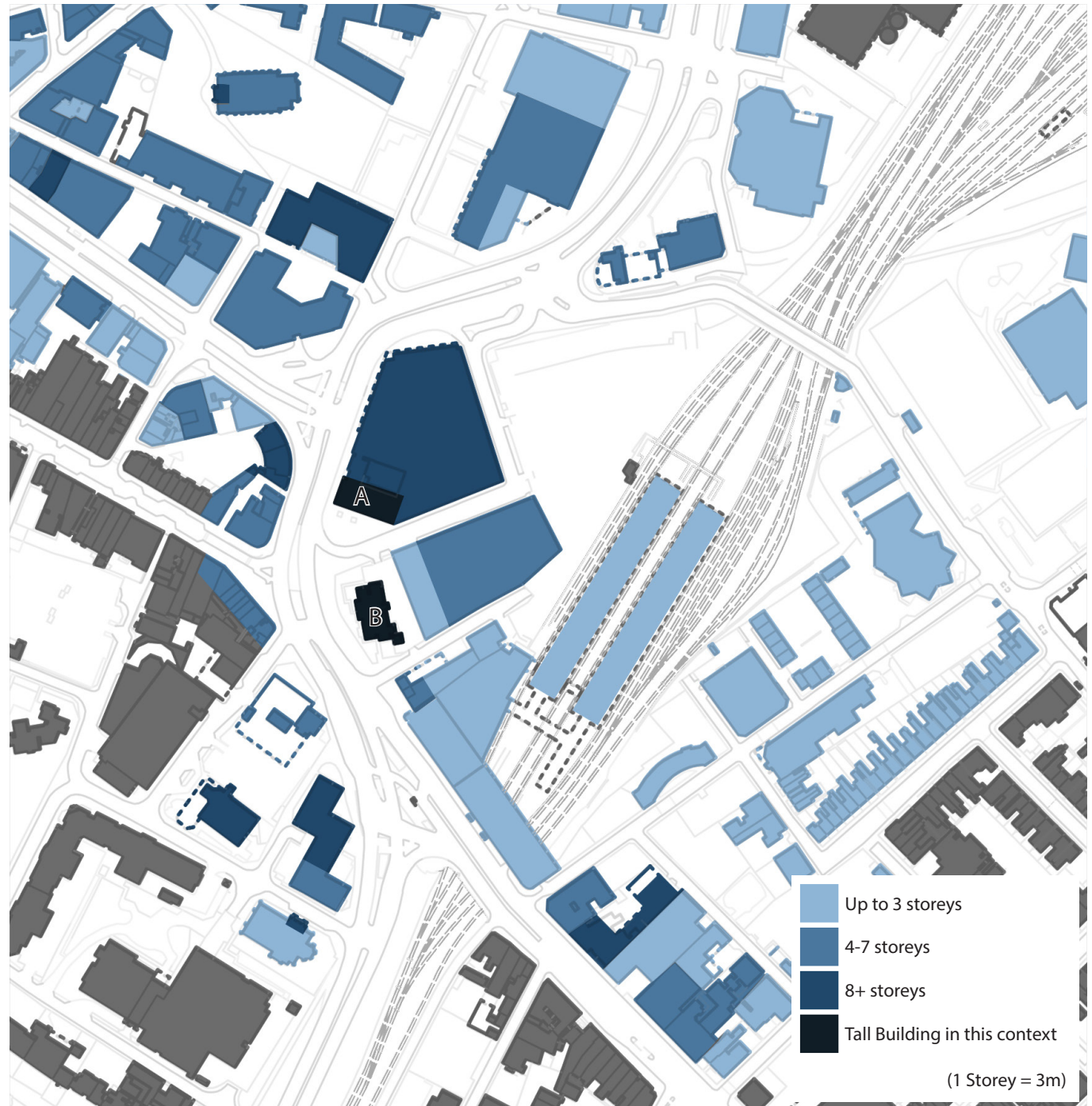
Context:

The heights shown are based on 1 storey at 3m. Given the variety of storey heights that is possible within a character area it was necessary to calibrate across the city centre. Therefore, a heritage asset of 4 storeys may be shown as 5 or 6 storeys to reflect the higher floor to ceiling heights and there may be differences between residential and commercial uses.

Much of the Railway Station character area is above the average ambient height of the city, with the exception of the station itself. Both St. Georges Tower (A), equivalent to 27 storeys, and Elizabeth House (B), equivalent to 15 storeys, would be considered tall buildings within their context and super tall within the Leicester context.

Planning History:

There has been some interest in office development for the area. There are no recent approvals for major residential developments.



7. Transport Network / Movement

Cycling routes are taken from the Leicester Cycling Map and includes cycling infrastructure relevant to the city centre; on road cycle lanes, off road routes, bus lanes where cycling is permitted, pedestrian streets and recommended on road routes. Future cycling infrastructure guaranteed to be delivered is also identified. Bus routes are taken from bus operators information in Leicester.

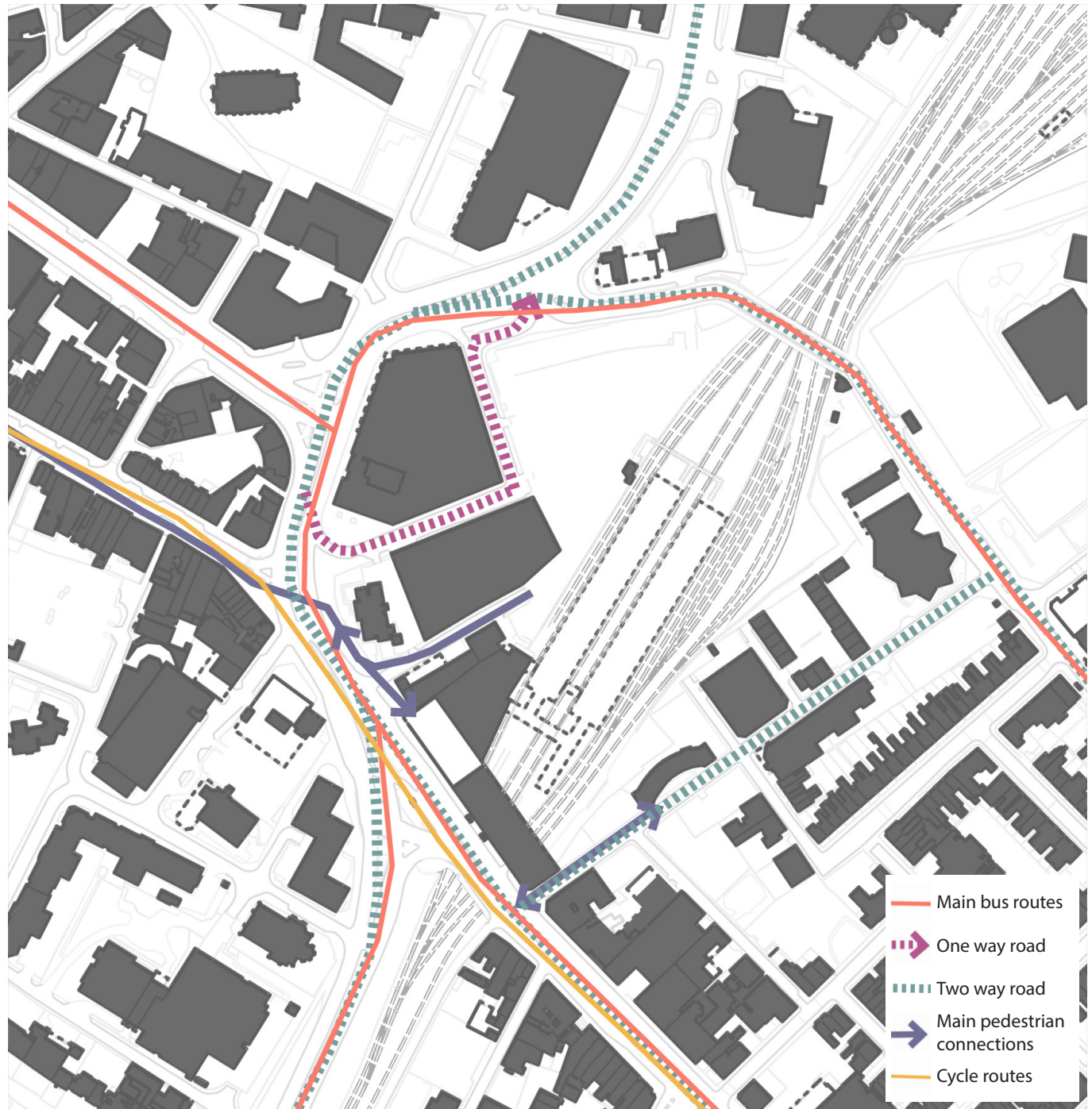
The main pedestrian connections are identified through a combination of local knowledge, observation, previous research undertaken by Leicester City Council and Space Syntax™ online information.

The Railway Station Character Area is surrounded by a number of major roads with St. Georges Way to the north-west and London Road to the south. There are many bus routes running along the perimeter of the character area. There is limited vehicle movement within the area given that much of the area is constrained by the requirements of the railway. There is a national cycle route that runs along Granby Street up to London Road.

The connection between the station and the city centre via Granby Street is a key pedestrian routes. This represents the main route to and from the station for pedestrians. London Road acts as a barrier to pedestrian movement along this route. Improvements through Connecting Leicester in 2009 removed the underpass and built the super crossing that now exists. There are still, however, poor pedestrian connections between the station and the Cultural Quarter of the city.

A challenge for the station area is the movement of taxis and vehicles entering and leaving the Port Cochere of the station from and onto London Road. There are also conflicts arising through many different requirements for different users in a very small area. Alternative solutions are being considered by the City Council.

The recent London Road Connecting Leicester improvements have improved pedestrian and cycle connections along London Road and from the station towards the city centre.



8. Active Frontages

Active frontages are important to creating successful places. They are street frontages where there is an active visual engagement between those in the street and those on the ground floor of buildings. This quality is enhanced where the front façade of buildings, including the main entrance faces and opens towards the street. They are important to creating activity and vitality within an area and a sense of safety with well overlooked streets. Blank frontages provide no active visual engagement between those in the street and those on the ground floor of buildings. Frontages of existing buildings could have blocked up or screened windows and doors for various reasons.

Opportunities for reversing these changes and opening up façades have been identified as providing potential active frontages. The frequency of doors also assist in establishing the likely level of activity and interaction within a street.

There are some parts of the character area which have a very active frontage, for example the Port Cochere to London Road. There are others, however, which do not, making some parts of the character area feel quite unsafe. Elizabeth House (A) and the former Sorting Office (B) both offer inactive frontages to Campbell Street and Fox Street, which is a main route into and out of the station car park. The former sorting office is currently vacant, and the ground floor to St. Georges Heights to Campbell and Fox Street is servicing and parking access.



8. Active Frontages



9. Land Uses

Ground floor:

Given the limited size of the Railway Station Character Area and the dominant function being the trainline and associated activities there is little variety in land uses here.

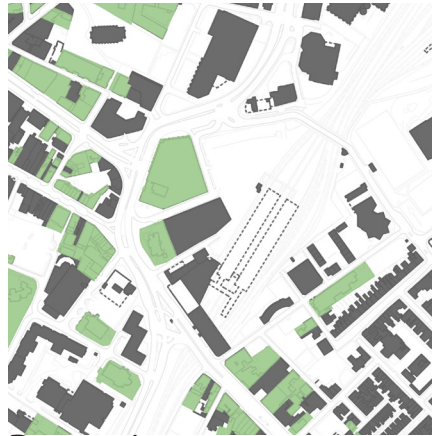
At ground floor the railway station falls as transport, the former sorting office and the rear of 1 St. Georges Way both parking. There is some retail to part of the station building and 1 St. Georges Way; however, much of the other ground floor uses are related to the residential function of the building or leisure activity.

Above Ground floor level the uses are predominantly domestic/residential or office units. Elizabeth House is a residential block. Whilst much of the ground floor use of the three blocks to the south-west is car parking the above ground floor use is predominantly office space.

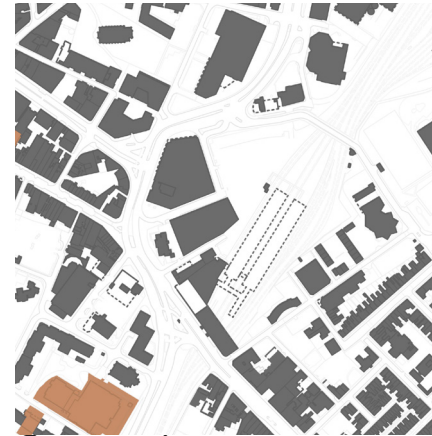


9. Land Uses

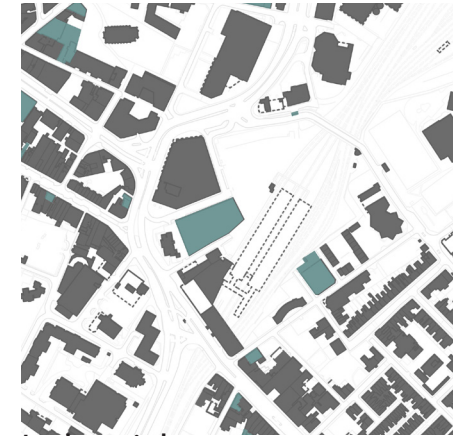
(Includes above ground distribution)



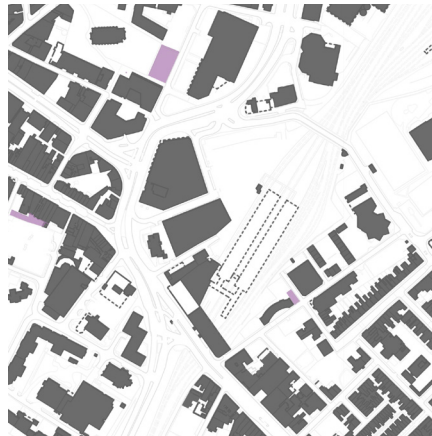
Domestic



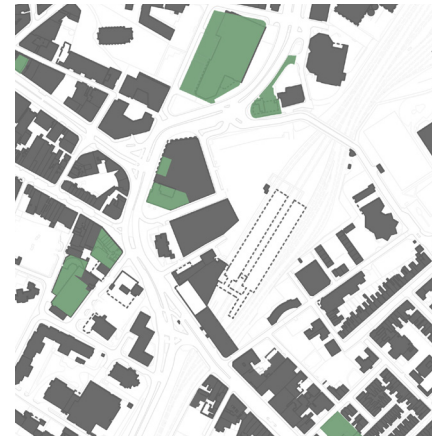
Community



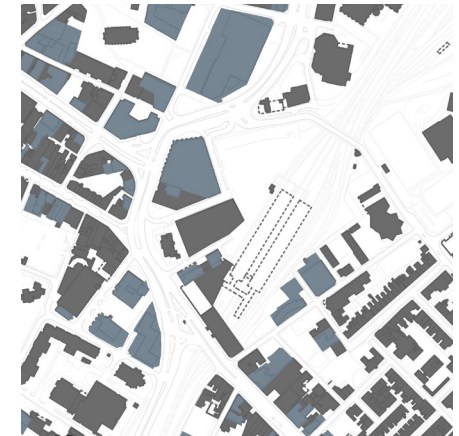
Industrial



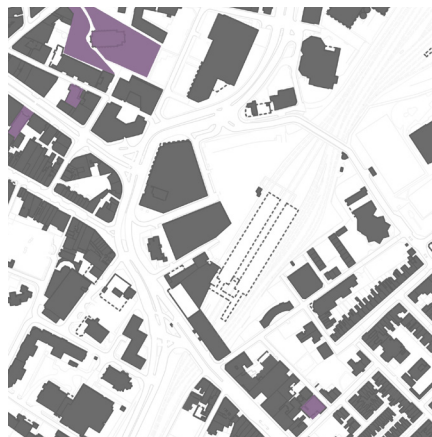
Land



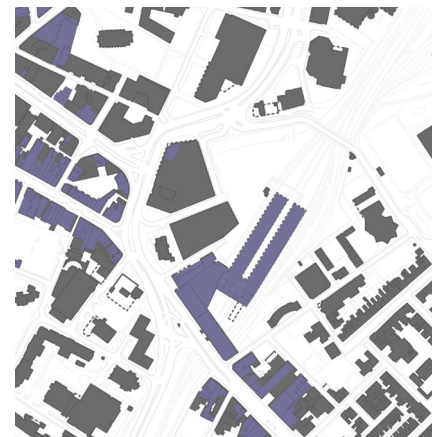
Leisure and hotel



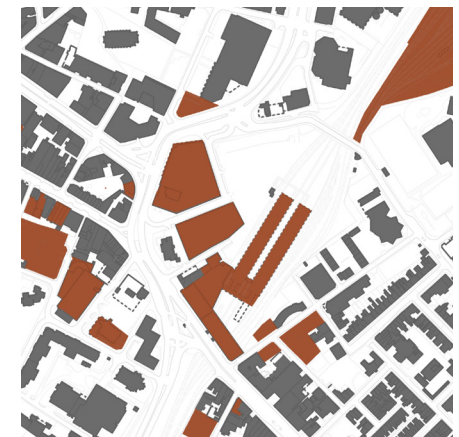
Office



Places of Worship



Retail, pubs and cafés



Parking and transport

10. Connecting Leicester Improvements

Connecting Leicester is a vision to create and provide a connected, safe and family friendly city centre. The City Mayor is committed to creating a thriving heart of the city that takes away barriers and greatly improves the connections between key places within the city, including the 'hidden gems' as part of Leicester's story, and shopping, leisure, heritage, housing and transport facilities. Connecting Leicester is a series of key projects bringing together special buildings and places, reducing the dominance of roads and helping to create an attractive, pedestrian friendly environment.

The Transforming Cities Fund (TCF) is a Government fund with the aim of driving up productivity and spread prosperity through investment in public and sustainable transport in some of the largest English city regions between 2019 and 2023. The Fund is focused on intra-city connectivity, making it quicker and easier for people to get around and access jobs in some of England's biggest cities. The Council's TCF bid has progressed to the next stage to develop packages of proposals to support growth and prosperity and meet the Council's objectives regarding improvements, for example, to public transport, cycling, air quality. Potential schemes are highlighted.

There are significant Connecting Leicester schemes proposed around the station, mostly focused along London Road. As part of the wider Connecting Leicester programmes, works are underway to create a safer and more attractive route for cyclists and pedestrians on London Road.

The outbound bus lane between Conduit Street and Evington Road has now been permanently removed. New cycle lanes will be installed on both sides of the road. A raised kerb alongside the main road will also feature to offer more protection to cyclists and help prevent illegal parking on the cycle lanes.



10. Connecting Leicester Improvements

Images 1, 2 & 3 show the outside of the station before the Connecting Leicester works took place. There were challenges with this layout, with conflicts between cyclists, buses, cars and pedestrians. There had been accidents in the past which it is hoped will be avoided in the new layout.

Images 4, 5 & 6 show the scheme being undertaken, with clear delineation between road users, pedestrians and cyclists.

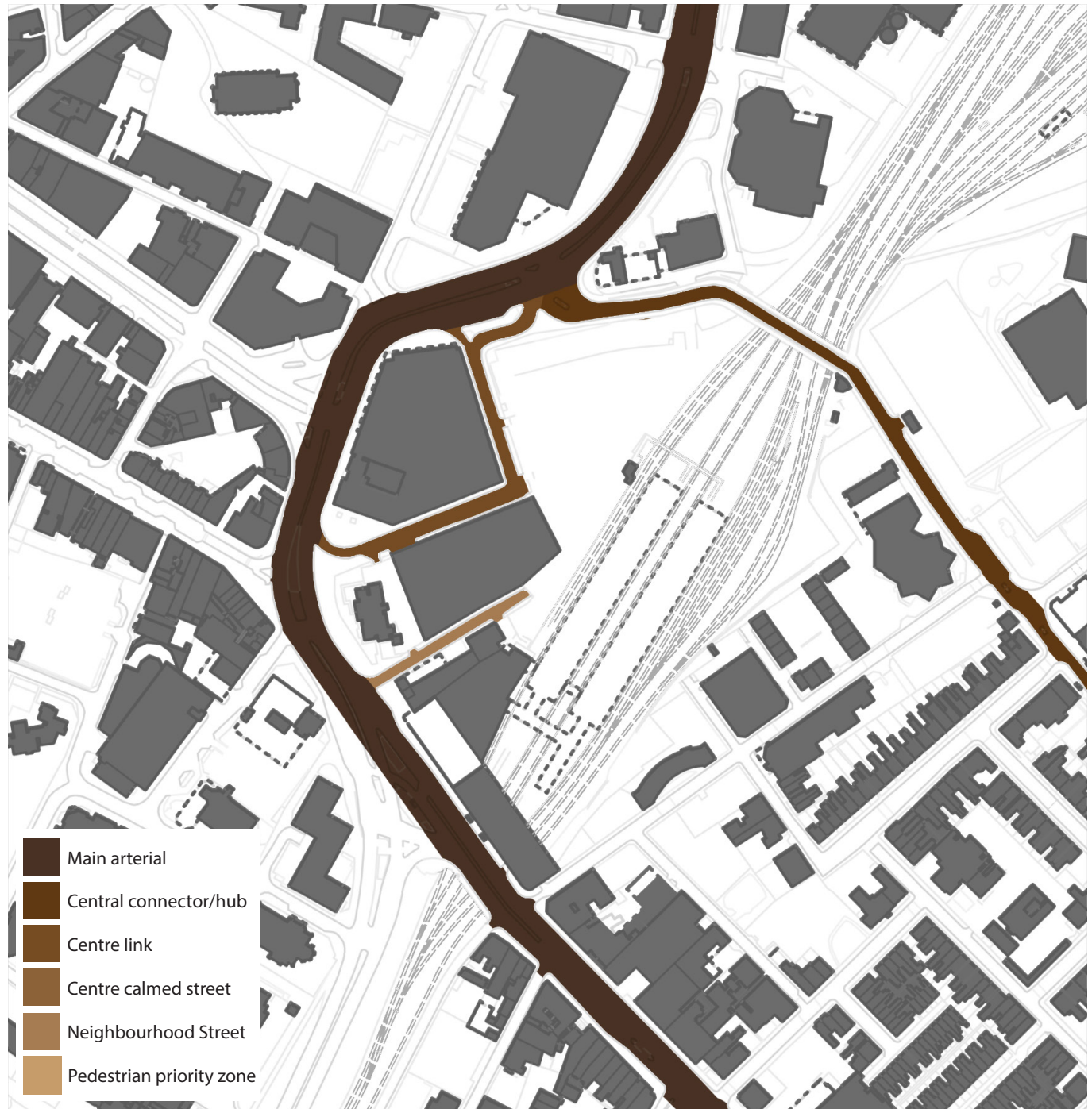


11. Street Hierarchy

The street typologies or street character types are taken from the Leicester Street Design Guide (2019) and are representative of the street types found within the city centre. Although not all street types will fit perfectly into each category it is useful to understand in each character area where priority has been given to vehicle movement, through the higher order roads (ring road, centre connector / hub) and those which are lower order roads (neighbourhood streets, centre calmed streets, pedestrian priority zones) which do and could prioritise their place function and meeting the needs of pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users. As stated in Manual for Streets (DoT 2007) 'streets make up the greatest part of the public realm. Better designed streets therefore contribute significantly to the quality of the built environment and play a key role in the creation of sustainable, inclusive, mixed communities.

Important for place making is the contribution different street character types within a street hierarchy make to enable people to find their way around and easily understand a place. For example, the informality and lower building heights of a lower order neighbourhood street provides a very different townscape and feel to a formal tree lined boulevard (centre connector).

There are few streets within the Railway Station Character Area, St. Georges Way is the main arterial route which represents the western boundary of the character area. This is a wide street with considerable vehicle, pedestrian, and cycle movement. Campbell Street into Fox Street represents a centre link as it carries through traffic and feeds the Campbell Street and station car parks. Station Street sees very little vehicle movement as a neighbourhood street.





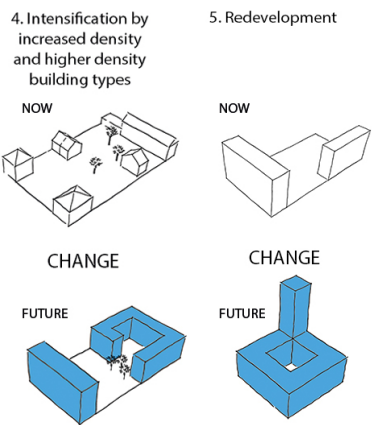
Part B: Guiding Future Development

Part B: Guiding Future Development

Part A Townscape Analysis outlines the comprehensive townscape assessment undertaken for each of the 9 character areas. Part B Guiding Future Development, is based on the findings of this assessment and identifies criteria to guide and manage development across the whole character area to provide a comprehensive and cohesive plan. The guidance is tailored to the circumstances and context of each character area reinforcing and responding to their unique qualities and opportunities, the level of townscape management required and their individual contributions to the Central Development Area (CDA).

Development guidance includes;

- criteria to guide new development shared across all character areas
 - criteria to guide new development specific to each character area
 - areas of focus for criteria
 - opportunities for improvements
 - recommended interventions to be considered in future policy, plans and infrastructure delivery.
- (future supplementary planning guidance will identify these improvements and interventions to be delivered with associated timescales)
- these will be shown on a 'Future Guidance Plan' within each SPD



The Railway Station Character Area falls under number 4. Intensification by increased density and higher density building types, and 5. Redevelopment, of the Townscape Management Options.



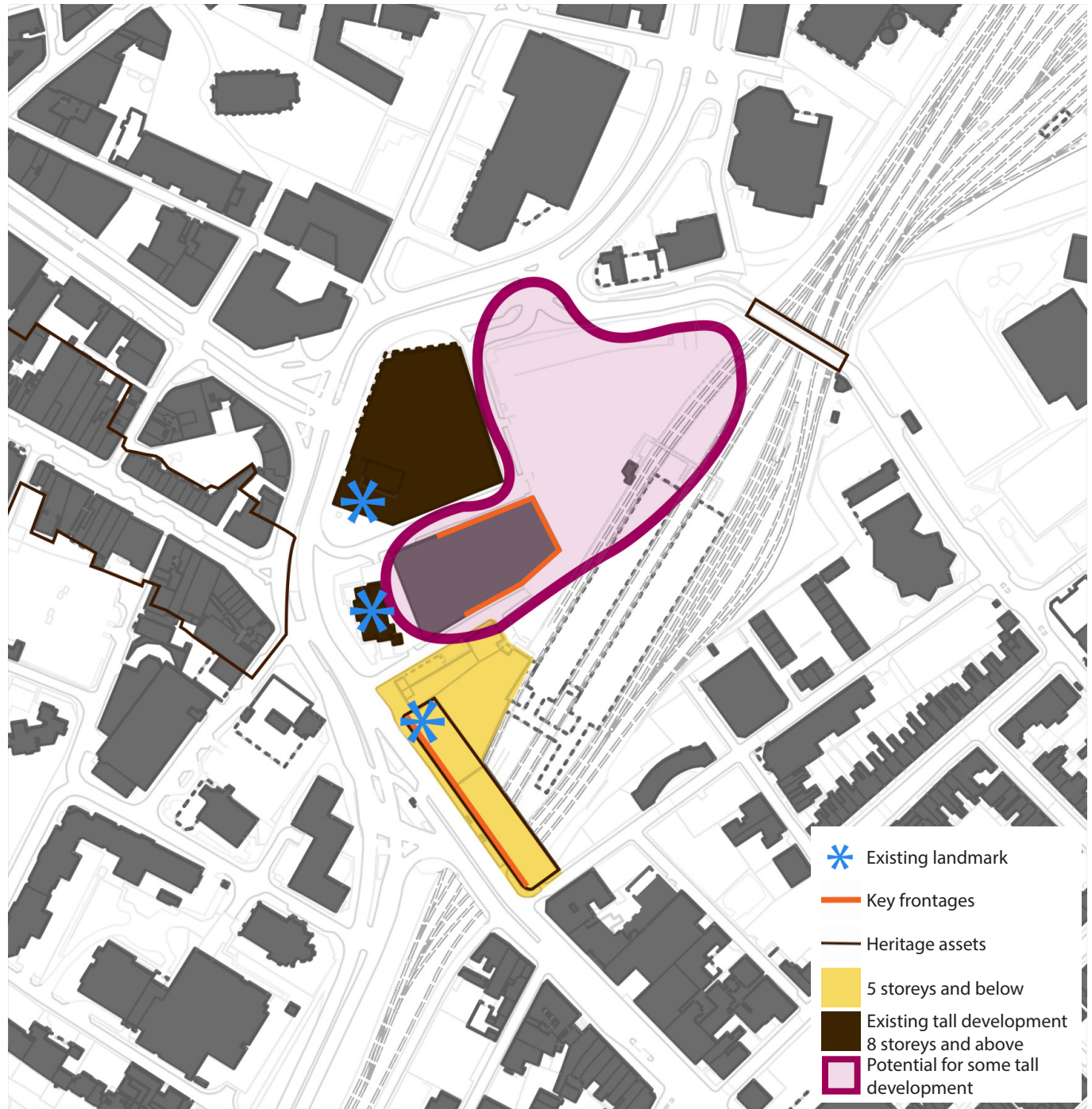
12. Proposed Building Heights

The maximum proposed building heights are based on the townscape analysis undertaken in Part A and where required following more de-tailed site testing, for example, with the city 3D model. The heights shown are based on 1 storey at 3m, as stated in Part A and therefore the parameter to be used should be the overall parameter of height measured in metres and not the storey height. For example, a commercial use requiring an increased floor to ceiling height above 3m within an area identified as 5 storeys (15m) will use the 15m as the guiding height. This may result in a commercial development of 4 storeys. Notwithstanding the proposed heights, each proposal will need to be considered in relation to its context.

Where there is an existing tall building within the Character Area it should not be assumed that a replacement tall building on that site, should it come forward, is acceptable. The proposed building heights reflect the Council's up to date view. Taller buildings will only be permitted where exceptional design quality can be demonstrated including a positive ground floor relationship to the street and the surrounding context, including the setting of heritage assets. They should comply with the Local Plan Tall Development Policy and Tall Development SPD.

The ambient height of the Railway Station Character Area is high compared to other parts of the city centre, there are few buildings and two of the tallest buildings in the city are located here. Given this and the limited heritage constraints, there is potential for tall development here. However, development, including tall development, should give consideration to the setting of the Grade II Listed station and the therefore have to be of the highest quality with regard to design and materials. Long views as outlined in section 4. Views must also be considered.

The listed station building is particularly low within the character area at a height equivalent to around two modern storeys. Development directly adjacent to this building should allow it to remain the most prominent building in the character area and enhance it's setting.



Criteria to Guide New Development:

Building Heights:

Proposed building heights are outlined based on the contextual and townscape analysis undertaken.

Heritage Led Development

All development must enhance the setting of the heritage assets and other buildings which make a positive contribution to the townscape, ensuring that they continue to make a significant contribution to the distinctiveness of the area as it undergoes change. Development must be designed to recognise their importance in contributing to the legibility of that character area, ensuring they remain the dominant 'markers' and frontages in the area.

Improving streetscape, pedestrian and cycle connectivity

New development will be expected to improve connectivity both within the character area and to surrounding areas, by contributing to the opening of new connections and improving the streetscape. This includes improving the quality of existing connections for pedestrians and cyclists.

Areas of focus: see Future Guidance Plan - green arrows
In particular:

A Improve connections between the railway station and the Cultural Quarter (St. Georges character area)

Creation of Active Frontages and the Design of Ground Floors

Proposed development will be expected to present active frontages to the street, to maximise natural surveillance over the public realm. It is expected that particular attention will need to be given to ground floors, where there is a need to balance privacy with surveillance and provide appropriate design solutions. Specific streets and spaces where new active frontages are needed and the reinstatement of active frontages are of vital importance to the character area are identified.

Areas of focus: see Future Guidance Plan - red line

Improving the Character and Appearance of the Character Area

Opportunities for improving the appearance and setting of specific existing buildings and spaces will be encouraged and actively promoted by the Council. The Council will work positively with landowners of identified buildings and spaces.

Buildings and Structures Making a Positive Contribution to the Townscape

Buildings which make a positive contribution, but are not locally listed, are identified in the Future Guidance Plan. There should be a general presumption against their demolition, due to their importance as part of the townscape and appearance of the character area.

Designed to Repair Street Frontages

New development will be expected in design terms, to repair street frontages and fragmented urban grain, to reinstate perimeter blocks and recreate well defined and enclosed streets.

Areas of focus: see Future Guidance Plan - blue dashed line

Creating a place that is easy to find your way around

New development will be expected in design terms, to contribute to an improved townscape by providing distinctive local markers of high design quality to respond to key views.

Green Infrastructure

Provision of new green infrastructure will be expected, which makes a significant contribution to the character of a place and how it feels. This is needed particularly in building dominated urban environments, where the relief of trees, landscaping and planting provision is important.

Areas of focus: In public realm within intervention area.

Recommended Interventions:

Identified in the Future Guidance Plan.

B – Comprehensive Major Office Development

Redevelopment of Campbell Street sorting office, station car park and surrounding public realm to provide new office space, hotel and ancillary retail and a new station entrance. Reconfigured street layout to improve taxi and bus access, car parking and improved pedestrian and cycle connections.