



# City Centre Conservation Area Character Appraisal



January 2021

# City Centre Conservation Area Character Appraisal



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## 1 Introduction

**1.1** The Town and Country Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997, Section 61, describes Conservation Areas as “*areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance*”. Each local authority is required to determine which parts of its area are of special architectural or historic interest and designate these areas as Conservation Areas in order that their character can be protected. Conservation Areas contribute significantly to our local, regional and national heritage and identity. They define a sense of place through that place’s characteristics of planning, materials, landscaping and often quality craftsmanship, which collectively today provides a valued continuity and a context for everyday life. The ability to understand what makes Conservation Areas important and an appreciation of their value translates to our sense of what is valued and our ability to be good custodians. Conservation Areas are special places that require good conservation and quality placemaking skills in order that proposals within them protect and enhance their character for today and for future generations to enjoy.

**1.2** Historic Environment Scotland’s [Interim Guidance on Designation of Conservation Areas and Conservation Area Consent](#), states that ‘*local planning authorities should designate and review existing and potential conservation areas and identify existing and proposed Article 4 Directions. This should be supported by Conservation Area Appraisals and Management*’. The designation of a Conservation Area enables local authorities to identify and promote opportunities for development as well as areas that would benefit from enhancement schemes. Designation also provides an opportunity for public consultation on the various land use issues affecting Conservation Areas and their preparation can assist planning authorities and others in the formulation, monitoring and evaluation of local place policies. The purpose of a Conservation Area Character Appraisal is:

- to justify the designation of the Conservation Area and review the existing boundaries;
- to identify important characteristics of the area in terms of townscape, architecture and history;
- to identify important issues that affect the Conservation Area;
- to identify opportunities for development and enhancement schemes;
- to encourage interest and participation in conservation issues amongst people living and working in Conservation Areas; and,
- to produce a useful tool in Conservation Area management.

**1.3** The City Centre Conservation Area Character Appraisal is a key document to inform decision making regarding future development proposals within the city centre, from small alterations to historic buildings to large new developments. One of the key elements for development within the city centre is assessing the significance of a building, site or area. The City Centre Conservation Area Appraisal is not exhaustive but gives a good overview of the various character areas, key buildings in the city centre and their importance. Being guided by the Appraisal is a key fundamental step to ensuring future development protects and enhances the historic character of the city centre whilst still delivering development that allows Aberdeen to thrive.

## 1.4 Profile

<b>Designation Date:</b>	01 July 1968
<b>Extended:</b> Early 2021 (precise date to be confirmed, and subject to outcome of public consultation exercise)	08 April 1980 24 April 1985 24 November 1987 10 October 1996 21 June 2007
<b>Previous Character Appraisals:</b>	21 June 2007
<b>Size (Hectares):</b>	56.87
<b>Number of Character Areas:</b>	3
<b>Number of listed buildings (as of Oct 2020):</b>	Total – 280 Category A – 24 Category B – 155 Category C – 101
<b>Buildings At Risk:</b>	7
<b>Scheduled Monuments:</b>	None
<b>Adjoining Conservation Areas:</b>	3
<b>Historic Environment Record (HER):</b>	518

## 1.5 Summary of Significance

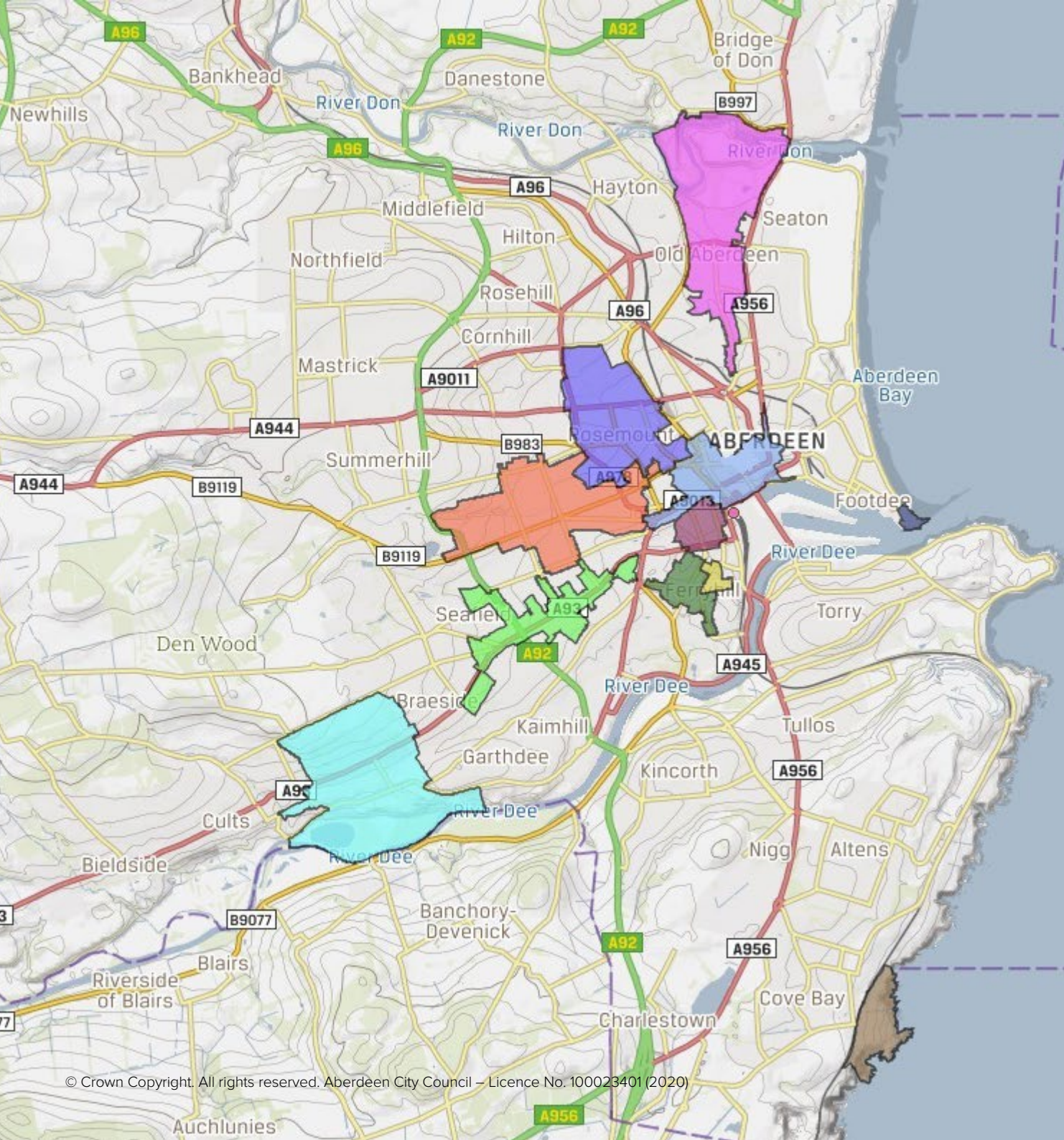
**1.5.1** The 1968 Aberdeen Town Council designated the Union Street Conservation Area in response to the Civic Amenities Act of 1967, which placed greater emphasis on the protection of historic areas. Renamed the Aberdeen City Centre Conservation Area, it is worthy of continued protection because of the historical, physical, cultural, architectural and economic significance of the area. A number of City Centre Masterplan projects are within the boundary of the Conservation Area including the **Union Street Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS)** which would not be possible without Conservation Area status. The Conservation Area continues to face the sustained pressure of balancing the often-competing interests of commercial development and Conservation Area management.



**1.5.2** The Conservation Area comprises the original settlement area of ‘New Aberdeen’ around St Katherine’s Hill and the harbour, sheltered by the banks of the River Dee. It includes Union Bridge and Union Street, a hugely important example of early nineteenth century town planning. Union Street is a product of early nineteenth century technological innovation and is an impressive engineering feat, as well as being the setting for a high proportion of the City’s most important and impressive buildings, many of which are listed. Union Street is Aberdeen’s principal street and functions as the City’s commercial and historic heart, meaning that it faces a wide range of cultural, financial and commercial pressures. This Conservation Area is a palimpsest; it is an example of complementary layers of history, built up over time, and reflects many centuries of urban development in a busy city centre. Both the built fabric of the area and the spaces in between the buildings therefore need to be effectively managed, to protect the special character of the Conservation Area.

*Provost Ross's House, part of Aberdeen Maritime Museum*

# City of Aberdeen Conservation Areas 2021



- Albyn Place/Rubislaw
- Bon Accord Crescent/Crown Street
- City Centre
- Cove Bay
- Ferryhill
- Footdee
- Great Western Road
- Marine Terrace
- Old Aberdeen
- Pitfodells
- Rosemount

## 2. LOCATION, HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT

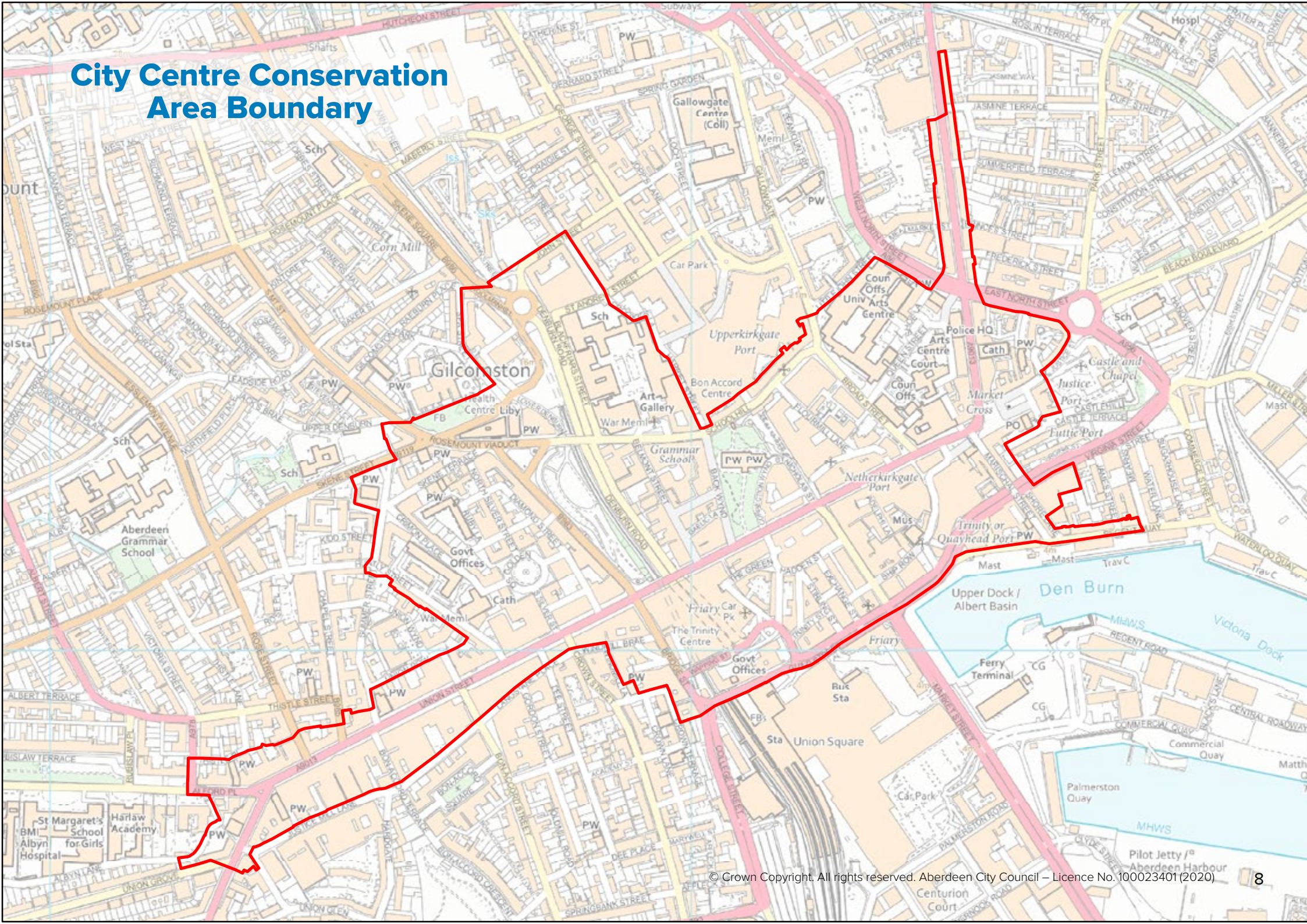


### 2.1 Location

**2.1.1** The City Centre Conservation Area is located in the centre of the City of Aberdeen, encompassing its cultural and economic heart and the principal area of historic settlement. Union Street forms the spine of the Conservation Area, with areas of historic settlement and planned expansion spreading to the north

and south, including the remains of the medieval city. The Conservation Area extends to the edge of the harbour, formed in the mouth of the River Dee. The location of the city was determined by the route of the Den Burn, the coast, the River Dee, the lochs which once occupied the area (Loch of New Aberdeen, Loch of Old Aberdeen), the Spital Burn and the then separate settlement of Old Aberdeen to the north.

# City Centre Conservation Area Boundary





## Geology

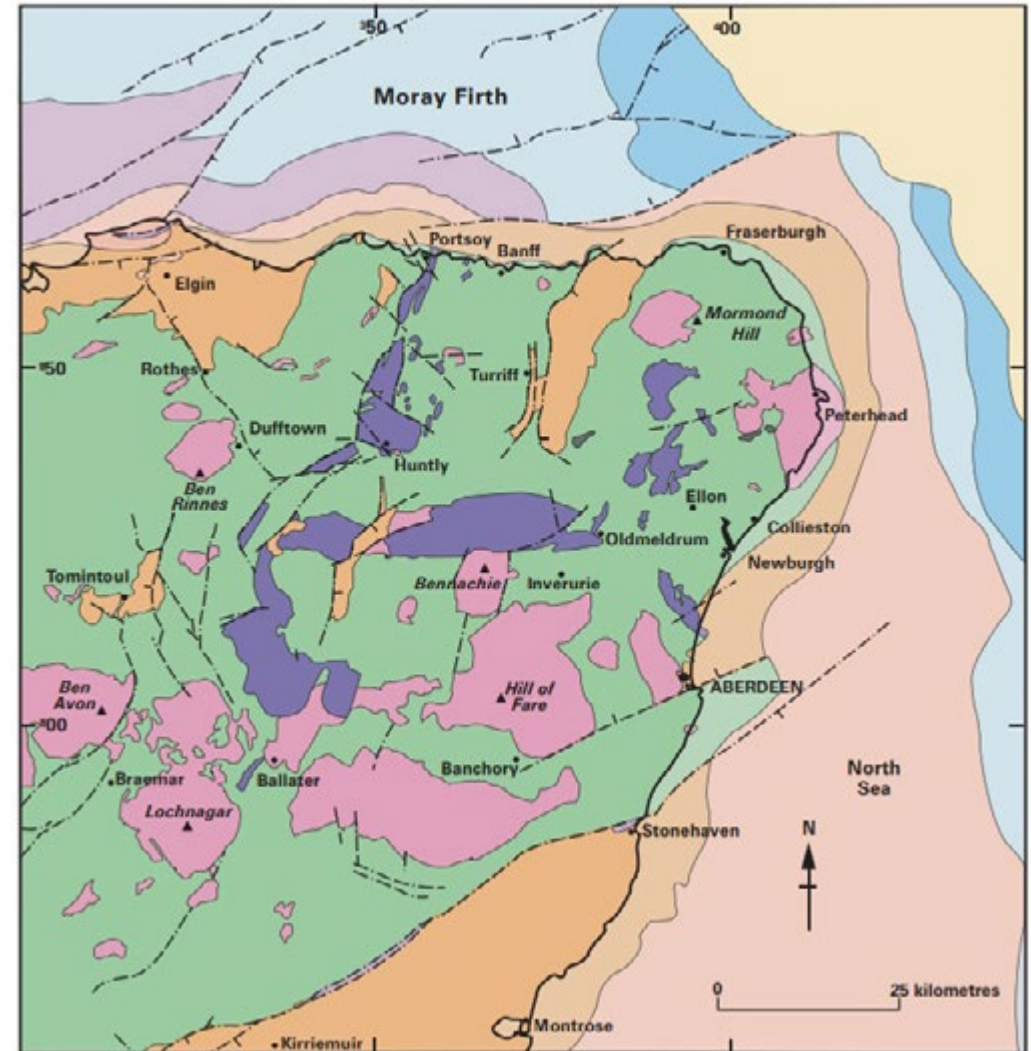
**2.1.2** Aberdeen is constructed in an area where the underlying geology is primarily granites and related rocks, such as granitic gneises. Whilst their hardness makes them difficult to work, these are very durable and make excellent building stones. Consequentially they have been used heavily in Aberdeen's buildings and have had a lasting and very visual legacy, leading to Aberdeen being known as both 'the granite city' and 'the silver city'. The abundance and qualities of the granite placed it as the primary building material from the 17th century until the mid-20th century, the precursor to the locally quarried and finely worked granite were the field rubble stones used both in the formation of walls, dykes and for all building works.

**2.1.3** Another historically important, relatively local, building material was Foundland slate. This slate, along with some other quarries such as the adjacent Tillymorgan Hill and Skares Hill, was used prior to the later imported Welsh slate and had a much rougher, more distinctive, look.

**2.1.4** Clays which are suitable for brick and tile manufacture are located within the environs of Aberdeen, meaning that both these products have also been used in traditional local construction, with bricks having been made in the City from the 18th Century.

## Topography

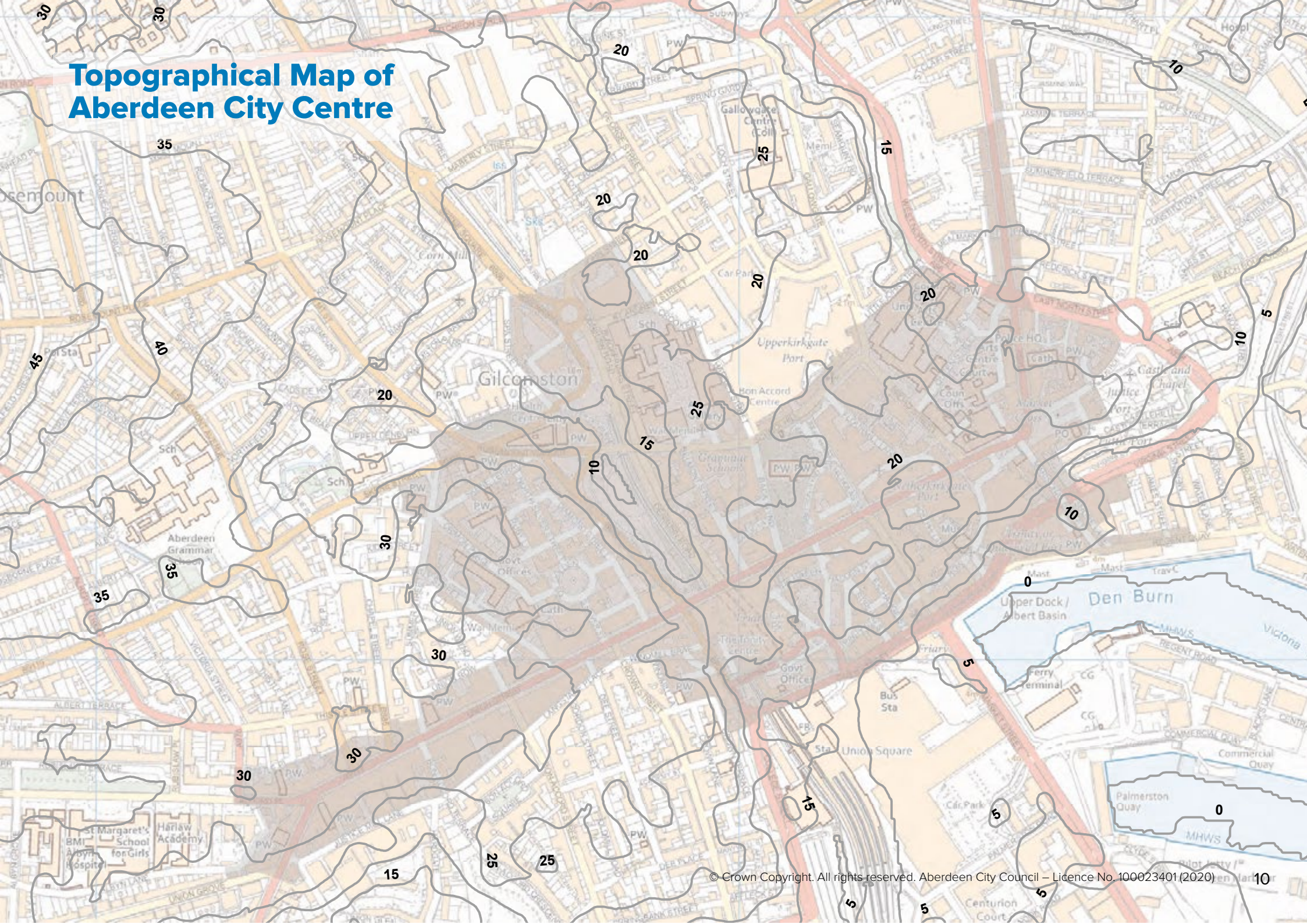
**2.1.5** The City Centre Conservation Area lies on a sloping site which rises to the north and west, away from the sea and the River Dee. There are a number of natural high-points within the Conservation Area, which were used historically for important buildings, such as St Nicholas Kirk and Aberdeen's Castle, as well as the low point at the Den Burn valley, which restricted the City's growth for many years. The topography affords many buildings excellent views to the south and allows attractive views of the City from the south, looking north. Although much of the development in the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries has somewhat ignored or overcome the natural topography, it is of vital importance to the historic development of the City and means that the City still retains its connections with the North Sea, and consequentially its economic prosperity today. The changes in level around Union Street and its elevated position are still evident even though they are not always obvious. It is easy to forget how 'hilly' the Conservation Area is.



- Palaeogene to Neogene – Quartz & flint gravel
- Palaeogene – Sandstone, siltstone & mudstone
- Late Cretaceous – Chalk
- Early Cretaceous – Sandstone & mudstone
- Jurassic – Mudstone with subsidiary sandstone & siltstone
- Permian to Triassic – Sandstone, Siltstone & mudstone
- Devonian – Conglomerate & sandstone with sparse volcanic rocks (The Old Red Sandstone)

- Igneous & Meta-Igneous Rocks**
- Ordovician to devonian mainly – Granite & related rocks
- Ordovician mainly – Gabbro & related rocks
- Ordovician – Volcanic & sedimentary rocks of the Highland Border
- Late Precambrian to Early Cambrian – Metamorphosed Dalradian sedimentary rocks with subsidiary volcanic rocks
- Geological boundary, solid** —————
- Fault** - - - - -

# Topographical Map of Aberdeen City Centre





## 2.2 Development History

### Early Settlement

**2.2.1** Human activity in the area goes back to 6000 BC when it was stimulated by the twin estuaries of the Dee and the Don which provided not only a route inland but also a source of food and shelter. Aberdeen developed around a series of hills; St Katherine's Hill, Castle Hill and the Gallowgate Hill, which have shaped the pattern of development ever since. The first settlement of 'New Aberdeen' probably clustered at the west base of St Katherine's Hill, a defensible position which was aided by natural landforms such as the sea to the east and south, a loch to the north-west and surrounding marshy areas.

**2.2.2** Archaeological excavation of the Green area, close to the base of St Katherine's Hill, has uncovered Mesolithic flints and flint knapping tools. Shell middens and a range of other early archaeological features have also been discovered in and around the area. Evidence was also found of a Neolithic Long Cairn, which indicates a settled existence in the area, as do a number of later Bronze Age cairns.

**2.2.3** During the development of the Marks & Spencer building in the Netherkirkgate in the 1960s, evidence was found of an Iron Age settlement. Little is known about the history of Aberdeen during the early medieval period, but excavation has confirmed the existence of a settlement by the mid to late twelfth century.

### Medieval Street Pattern

**2.2.4** Evidence of the development of Aberdeen around St Katherine's Hill can still be seen today in the street patterns of the Castlegate, Shiprow, Netherkirkgate, Correction Wynd, Back Wynd, Flourmill Lane and Carnegie's Brae.

**2.2.5** The Kirk of St Nicholas was founded sometime before 1151 to the north west of St Katherine's Hill and was known as the Mither Kirk. It was one of the largest medieval burgh Kirks in Scotland. A Trinitarian Friary stood south-west of St Katherine's Hill from as early as 1273 and remained in existence until the mid-sixteenth century. The friary complex of the Carmelites was located to the south of the Green, close to the confluence of the Dee and the Denburn, the



Blackfriars settled to the north of the Mither Kirk at Schoolhill and the Greyfriars were located where Marischal College is now.

**2.2.6** A castle was built to the east of St Katherine's Hill and dominated the town from 1264 until it was destroyed in 1308. During the twelfth century the development of the town moved further north towards Upperkirkgate leaving the Kirk outwith the main settlement area whilst the Castlegate developed as the town's market place. Running north from the Castlegate was Broadgate, leading to Gallowgate and, from there, northwards to Old Aberdeen. To the west of Broadgate and running parallel with it was Guestrow. Westwards from Broadgate and Guestrow ran two streets, Upperkirkgate and Netherkirkgate, giving access to the parish church of St Nicholas. South from the market area, via Exchequer Row and Shiprow, was the route to the harbour. Skirting the south side of St Katherine's Hill, the road led westwards to the Green. Visitors to Aberdeen arriving from the south would travel north east from the Bridge of Dee, through the Hardgate, passing above the Ferryhill Mill Dam, over the New Brig and eventually descending to the hamlet of Windmill Brae and crossing the Denburn over the Bow Brig to the Green.

**2.2.7** Aberdeen existed as an important medieval township before it was given the status of a royal burgh during the reign of David I (1084-1153). With this status came certain legal and economic privileges that helped Aberdeen to prosper. Alexander I (1107-24) gave a Charter that established a Merchant's Guild, an exclusive organisation whose power and influence would govern Aberdeen for

centuries. For administration purposes the town was divided into four quarters: the Green, Even, Crooked and Fuddy. There were six ports, or entrances into the town, where a fee was payable to enter. These were at Justice, Gallowgate, Fuddy, Upperkirkgate, Netherkirkgate and Shiprow. This enabled control over trade within the City boundaries and aided security. It was only in the eighteenth century that all the ports were removed. The founding of Marischal College at Broad Street in 1593 established Aberdeen's reputation as an educational centre, which by this time had two Universities. From the sixteenth century onwards Aberdeen's harbour developed substantially; a harbour overseer was appointed in 1751, and the construction of a pier followed, which allowed Aberdeen to optimise its role in international trade. The harbour and market were the central focus of Aberdeen's wealth during this period.

## Urbanisation

**2.2.8** A new Tolbooth (jail) was constructed at the Castlegate in 1750, a date which marked a new era of street construction in Aberdeen, as the need to expand became critical. Until 1750 Aberdeen maintained its medieval street network, which restricted development; the City was tightly confined to the streets around the base of St Katherine's Hill. During the eighteenth-century Aberdeen experienced rapid urban growth with an increase in the proportion of the region's population living in the town and a rapid increase in the size of the town. Marischal Street was one of the first new streets to be created in 1760 and was a hugely significant pioneering piece of urban planning and engineering, providing a direct route from the town centre to the quayside with a viaduct over Virginia Street. Belmont Street and Schoolhill were also developed at this time. Queen Street was constructed in 1775 to provide access from Broadgate to the flesh market, followed by the development of Carmelite, George, Charlotte, St Andrew, John and Tannery streets during the 1790s to the north of St Katherine's Hill. This period of development signified the first planned urban expansion of Aberdeen.



ROCH LANDS

*Sundry Proprietors*

*Lands Belonging to the  
Marshall College*

College  
Garden

North Street

The  
Heading Hill

Gordons  
Hospital

Castle Hill  
Observatory

Bowling  
Green

AVAIL  
CASTLE STREET

School

Church  
Yard

THE PIER

Dove  
Cott

The Green  
Well

Old  
Pier

Detail from City of Aberdeen map, Alexander Milne 1789 © National Library of Scotland

*The Trinity Inch*

*Sands Flooded at High Water*

*Sands Covered*



## Construction of Union Street

**2.2.9** A decision was taken by the City Fathers in the early nineteenth century to improve the southern approach into the City and to enable the City to expand westwards. Of the various options under consideration, the solution which was eventually acted upon was also the most ambitious. This entailed the removal of the top section of St Katherine's Hill and the creation of a bridge and a series of vaults to allow a gently rising roadway to be formed from the Castlegate across the Denburn Valley to the undeveloped land beyond the west bank of the Denburn. This westerly expansion was pioneering and visionary but also costly and led to the City's bankruptcy in 1817. The debt however was cleared by 1825.

*Detail from City of Aberdeen map John Smith 1810 © National Library of Scotland*

**2.2.10** The decision to provide the city centre with a wide street at a fairly uniform gradient by carrying it on a system of viaducts over the ancient streets in the valleys below was an imaginative one with far reaching effects. The width of the street allowed development of the buildings on each side of a scale and quality that firmly established Union Street as the City's principal street, even to this day, whilst the medieval street pattern around the Green and the St Nicholas Kirk remained largely intact.

**2.2.11** Union Bridge, which crosses the Denburn, was opened in 1805 and was seen as the architectural centrepiece of Union Street. Development followed between the Castlegate and the newly built Union Bridge, and the permitted height for new buildings along this section was three storeys of dressed granite,

plus an attic. When the street was laid out the properties were residential houses, although it was not long before the first shops appeared. The name 'Union Street' was given to commemorate the union between Great Britain and Ireland in 1801. At the same time the construction of King Street commenced, providing a more direct link to Old Aberdeen and the north, and was completed in 1803.

**2.2.12** Development westwards past Union Terrace was slow, apart from the development of Golden Square (1810). Major public buildings such as the Trinity Hall, the screen in front of St Nicholas Kirk and the Music Hall were built during the 1820s. Market Street was laid out after the New Market Company obtained an Act of Parliament in 1839 for the erection of a closed market, connecting Union Street with Guild Street and Trinity Quay. Market Street, Exchange Street and Hadden Street were laid out on a grid pattern between 1840 and 1842. Market Street was designed to line through with the Great Northern Road and connect Union Street to the harbour.

**2.2.13** Bridge Street was developing by the late 1860s. Constructed on another viaduct of arches it forced the removal of low-lying cottages of the Poynerook and Windmill Brae. Bath Street was laid out in 1897 from Windmill Brae to Bridge Street. Although the eastern part of Guild Street was first developed in the 1840s, it was not until 1867 when a new Joint Station and bridge were constructed in the Denburn Valley that it met Bridge Street, completing and improving the new road connections from Union Street to the harbour. The



arrival of the railway over the now culverted Denburn transformed the surrounding industrial area into an urban park (Union Terrace Gardens) and had major implications for trade, as well as having a physical impact on the area, with the creation of the Denburn and Rosemount Viaducts enabling the further development of land at Schoolhill.

## 20th Century to Present Day

**2.2.14** At the end of the 1930s Union Street was recognisable as a gracious Georgian thoroughfare interspersed with Victorian and distinctive art deco styles such as the Capitol Cinema and 73-77 Union Street (Cafe Nero). Most of the properties which had been designed for residential use were by now shop units on the ground floor. Significant buildings constructed at this time were the National Commercial Bank (1936) and 78-80 Union Street (1929) whilst 157-165 Union Street (now a hotel on the upper floors and retail on the ground) was built on the Palace Hotel site, on the south west corner of Union Bridge in 1957. The 'air space' above the south side of Union Bridge between the Old Palace Hotel and Trinity Hall was considered a gap site for development and in the late 1950s planning permission was granted to develop a row of shops across the south side of the bridge. Permission was also sought for the same type of development on the north side of the bridge in the 1960s, but this proposal was never realised.



*Above: Palace Buildings & Union Bridge, George Washington Wilson 1877  
Left: Music Hall, George Washington Wilson 1877*

**2.2.15** Tall buildings were developed in the city centre from the 1960s. While these were not included in the Conservation Area boundaries when it was initially designated (largely as they were not considered as being of historic notable interest at the time), a number of them, for example Virginia and Marischal Courts, are visible from the Conservation Area and therefore impact on its setting. The same is true for what is now Marischal Square on Broad Street, formerly the site of St Nicholas House. A number of the city centre multi-storey tower blocks are currently being considered for listing by Historic Environment Scotland.

**2.2.16** With increased car ownership in the 20th century, motoring infrastructure has developed, including the construction of new roads and substantial alterations to existing ones, such as the Denburn Road and Virginia Street. Multi-storey car parks have been built, for example on Shiprow, Queen Street and Rennie's Wynd. Car parking and items relating to vehicular traffic, for example signs and traffic lights, have also become prevalent on most streets, altering their appearance. The surfacing of many streets has also been altered, from historic granite setts, to hot-rolled asphalt.

**2.2.17** By the mid 20th century Union Street had been laid out as we see it today. The layout was conceived by the eighteenth and nineteenth century improvers and much of their architecture has survived, with the exception of the area impacted by the Trinity Centre covering one side of the bridge, Denburn and the associated highway developments which were carried out in the latter half of the 20th century.

**2.2.18** More recent developments include Marischal Square, Union Square, Triple Kirks, the Bon Accord and St Nicholas shopping centres, which all have a major influence on the urban form as well as the function of the city centre. There have also been recent larger buildings constructed in a cluster at the former Capitol Theatre and the building adjacent (Silver Fin), and these buildings have altered the skyline of this part of the city centre.

**2.2.19** Recently completed works to Aberdeen Art Gallery have involved a substantial internal refurbishment and the installation of a roof extension. These works allow the art gallery to attract larger world class exhibits that have certain space and climate control standards which the art gallery could not accommodate previously. The work also allows the building to be far more







accessible for people with disabilities. The Music Hall has also recently undergone a substantial internal renovation that improved the facilities including improving disabled access. This intervention will also see the long term future of the building secured as a music and arts venue.

**2.2.20** The [City Centre Masterplan](#) outlines a 20 year development strategy for Aberdeen city centre. The masterplan document details the importance of Aberdeen's built heritage to the future development. A number of the key masterplan projects are in the boundary of the Conservation Area. Projects CM02 Queen Street, CM11 Union Street Conservation Area Regeneration

Scheme (CARS), EN08 Union Terrace Gardens, EN07 Castlegate, EN09 Golden Square and CM06: Aberdeen Indoor Market are all within the boundary of this Conservation Area. The City Centre Conservation Area Character Appraisal has and will continue to inform decisions made regarding a great number of the City Centre Masterplan projects.

**2.2.21** Economic and commercial pressures continue to shape Union Street. This was recognised when the Conservation Area was designated in 1968 and these pressures remain a fundamental influence today.

## 3. Strategic Views



**3.1** There are numerous key views both within the city centre and of the City from the outskirts and beyond. These are visible due to the topography, as described in Section 2.1.2, with views from higher areas of land down towards the coast and the River Dee and Don valleys.

**3.2** Historical development in Aberdeen has left the City with a beautiful and interesting set of towers and spires, which contribute hugely to the skyline, make the City distinctive, and these views should be respected. Most of Aberdeen's city centre is however a fairly uniform height, which helps to give the historic character of the area a harmonious feel. In the 21st century a number of new larger buildings have been constructed with varying degrees of impact on the skyline. Future development must consider, assess and be very sensitive to its impact on the City's skyline and historic character, be of an outstanding design and not have a negative impact on important views. Many of the views of the city centre are from outside the City and / or the City Centre Conservation Area and often contain interesting contrasts between suburban or industrial development and City's historic core, as well as giving a sense of the City's evolution. Key views are outlined in the character area sections below (Sections 5-7).



*Belmont Street*



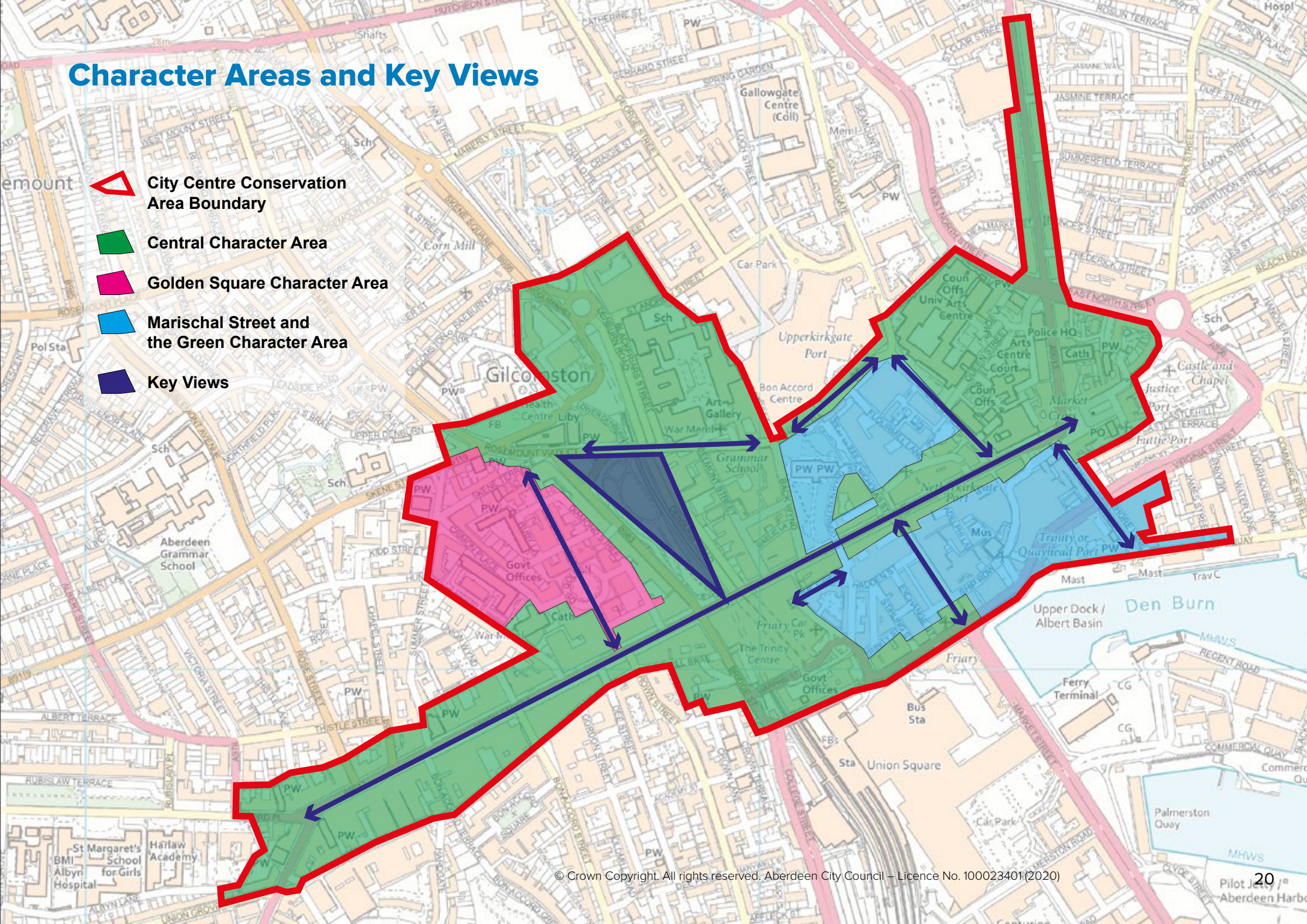
*Golden Square*



*Marischal Street*

# Character Areas and Key Views

-  City Centre Conservation Area Boundary
-  Central Character Area
-  Golden Square Character Area
-  Marischal Street and the Green Character Area
-  Key Views





Shiprow



Upperkirkgate

## 4. Townscape Summary





**4.1** The City Centre Conservation Area includes a range of streets and properties and therefore does not have a single identifiable character, but is made up of several areas each with buildings from different periods and with different functions. These areas are not distinct, but overlap, as would be expected from a city centre that has evolved over many centuries. These areas are strongly linked, both by the unifying effect of the granite masonry, cultural and economic ties and also by the dominating effect that Union Street has over the City. As these character areas are so interlinked it is challenging to define specific character areas, however for the purposes of assessment, 3 character areas have been identified and analysed within this appraisal. These are covered in sections 5-7 of this document.

**4.2** As its name suggests the City Centre Conservation Area incorporates the centre of the City and, as such, the area is surrounded by the development of Aberdeen as it grew out from the central point. Union Street is positioned over the undulating ground of three hills and the Denburn valley, slightly inland from the sea and close to the mouth of the River Dee. The land comprises gently sloping ground from the edge of the coast. There is a drop in height above sea level across the Conservation Area from west to east from 35 metres at Alford Place to 15 meters at the Castlegate and down to 5 metres at the quayside. Union Street is immediately surrounded by relatively high-density development, therefore long-distance views across the site and an awareness of setting are not always apparent, but all the more dramatic where this occurs, particularly the view from Union Bridge over the valley of the Denburn. Important views exist

along King Street and along the length of Union Street from either end with definite but understated visual terminations by the Salvation Army Citadel and the College buildings.

**4.3** The topography of Aberdeen shaped its development significantly and constrained the expansion of the town up until the beginning of the 19th century. The maps on pages 24 and 25 show the development of the street pattern from the late 17th century with St Katherine's Hill and the Castlegate as the central focus, through to the present day where Union Street is the main, central feature of street pattern. Up until the 19th century the street pattern was shaped by topography and the natural environment. This relationship becomes less apparent over time as advances in engineering enable early town planners to break free of topographical constraints.

**4.4** Unusually for historic Scottish towns, no clear high street was formed in the settlement of Aberdeen until the development of Union Street in 1800. The high street function was met by the Castlegate which was a grander version of a market place, which shows that Aberdeen was a place of ambition and wealth at this time. Development encompassed geographical features and Aberdeen developed as a series of important 'areas' such as the Green, Castlegate and St Nicholas Kirk. The development of Union Street had a major effect on street pattern and formed an important spine. New roads quickly followed to the north (King Street), south (Market Street, Bridge Street) and west (Holburn Street, Alford Place) with little change in layout to the present day, only an increase in density of development.

**4.5** A variety of building periods and styles contribute to the character of the Conservation Area ranging from the older historic fabric of St Nicholas Kirk and the sixteenth century Provost Ross and Skene's houses to 20th century shopping centres and civic buildings. There is a clear distinction within the Conservation Area between the bold geometry of Union Street (and the post-Union Street new town west of the Denburn) and the adjacent, intricate and organic, street pattern of the medieval heart of the original town. Notable landmark buildings falling within the City Centre Conservation Area include The Town House, The Salvation Army Citadel and the spires of Marischal College, Robert Gordon College, St Nicholas Kirk, and Triple Kirks as well as the Schoolhill domes of the Cowdray Hall, His Majesty's Theatre, City Library and St Marks. These landmarks afford legibility to the city centre and have the potential to aid pedestrian navigation. They are often seen and used as visual symbols of Aberdeen.



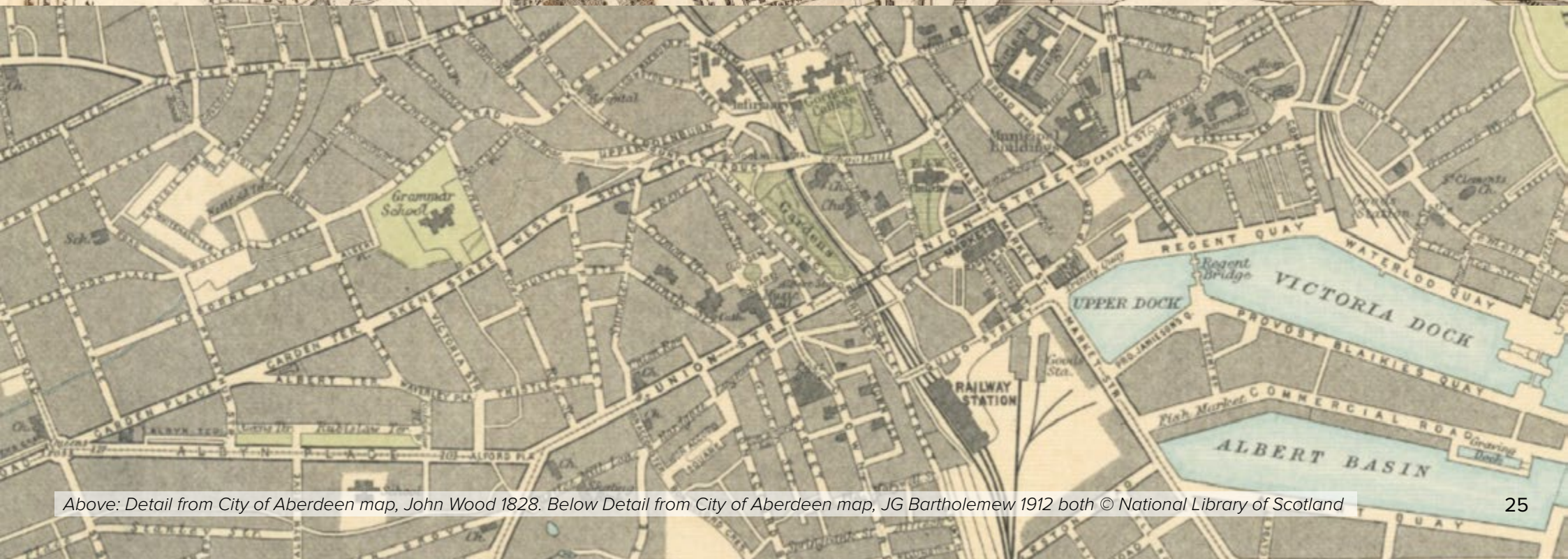
**4.6** The City Centre Conservation Area contains many fine listed buildings and Union Street itself is listed at its vaulted section and at Union Bridge. Listed buildings form a high proportion of buildings in the Conservation Area and there are more category A listed buildings in this Conservation Area than in any other in Aberdeen.

**4.7** An important characteristic of this Conservation Area and the City generally is the use of granite. This material helps to unify the various styles and periods of building. Granite predominates as a building material across the Conservation Area and is used in a variety of finishes from quarry-dressed to polished. There are notable exceptions such as the red-brick spire of Simpson's Triple Kirks on the corner of Belmont Street and Schoolhill. Sandstone was sparingly used for parts of historic buildings such as at the Gilcomston South Church on Union Street, the quoins are a notable curiosity on the 'Auld Hoose' of Robert Gordons College, and the anomaly of St Andrews Cathedral of golden sandstone on King Street. Modern buildings present a variety of materials from concrete through to glass but are very much in the minority. The majority of traditional roofs are covered with Welsh or Scotch slate, although copper and lead are used as cladding for domes and cupolas.

**4.8** The relative hardness of granite has led to some details that are peculiar to granite buildings and distinctive to Aberdeen. Masonry carving work tends to be less elaborate than it might be with softer stones and it is the elegance of line, curve and proportion of many buildings which contribute to their architectural quality. There are subtle variations in the colours of granite from pink through to almost white, but granite is usually described as grey in colour. Variation in the appearance of granite is achieved through polished, rusticated and split faced finishing. Its crystalline structure sparkles and comes to life in sunlight. Granite's unifying effect on the City's architecture tends to add a sense of dignity and sobriety to the already orderly streets of the nineteenth century. The use of granite became more widespread in Aberdeen after 1730 as a result of the opening of Loanhead Quarry and the reopening by the Town Council of Rubislaw Quarry in 1741.

**4.9** The character of Union Street and, in particular, the West End of Union Street changed with the gradual introduction and spread of shop units at ground floor level, a trend also seen along Princes Street in Edinburgh, which was also originally intended as a residential street. The original shopfronts were constructed in timber, with a timber fascia sign and stallriser, often with a





Above: Detail from City of Aberdeen map, John Wood 1828. Below Detail from City of Aberdeen map, JG Bartholemew 1912 both © National Library of Scotland



regard to, the character of the area, be practical, well maintained and should help define the area.

**4.11** The black and white street letter tiles on street names are a particular characteristic of Aberdeen and should be repaired and retained wherever possible.

**4.12** A palette of blacktop and a variety of concrete paving materials have superseded older coverings that included granite. Granite kerbing in most areas remains due to the quality of the granite and the contribution it makes to the character of the conservation area.) Where street surfaces are replaced, consideration should be given to the use of traditional materials to enhance the character of the Conservation Area. A streetscape manual will be produced by the Council's Strategic Place Planning Service to guide the development of the public realm in the City Centre Conservation Area and across the city.

recessed door. Traditional shopfronts generally had vertical proportions and in taller shopfronts where the windows could be particularly high transom lights were often employed. Not many examples of original shopfronts survive on Union Street but more have survived along the southern section of King Street. Within the Conservation Area there are two main public areas of 'green space' at Union Terrace Gardens and St Nicholas Kirk. These areas do not form a large proportion of the Conservation Area, but their function and use contribute immensely to the character and appearance of the area. Apart from these two areas the City Centre Conservation Area is not a particularly 'green' Conservation Area and has little in the way of public green space. Whilst the St Nicholas Kirkyard is well used, Union Terrace Gardens suffers from under-use and is currently being transformed and rejuvenated as part of a multi-million pound scheme to improve access and increase the use of the gardens. Trees within Conservation Areas are afforded statutory protection by The Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997, recognising the valuable contribution that they make to the character of Conservation Areas.

**4.10** Union Street is somewhat cluttered with street furniture including bus stops, bollards, seating, flower tubs, lampposts and barriers for example. Whilst some are attractive additions to the streetscape, others clutter pavements and public spaces. An overhaul of street furniture design and appearance as well as siting would benefit the appearance of the City Centre Conservation Area. Street furniture within the Conservation Area should be sympathetic to, and have



*Right: Shiprow streetscape*

# 5. Character Area 1: Central



*The Castlegate and Aberdeen seafront*



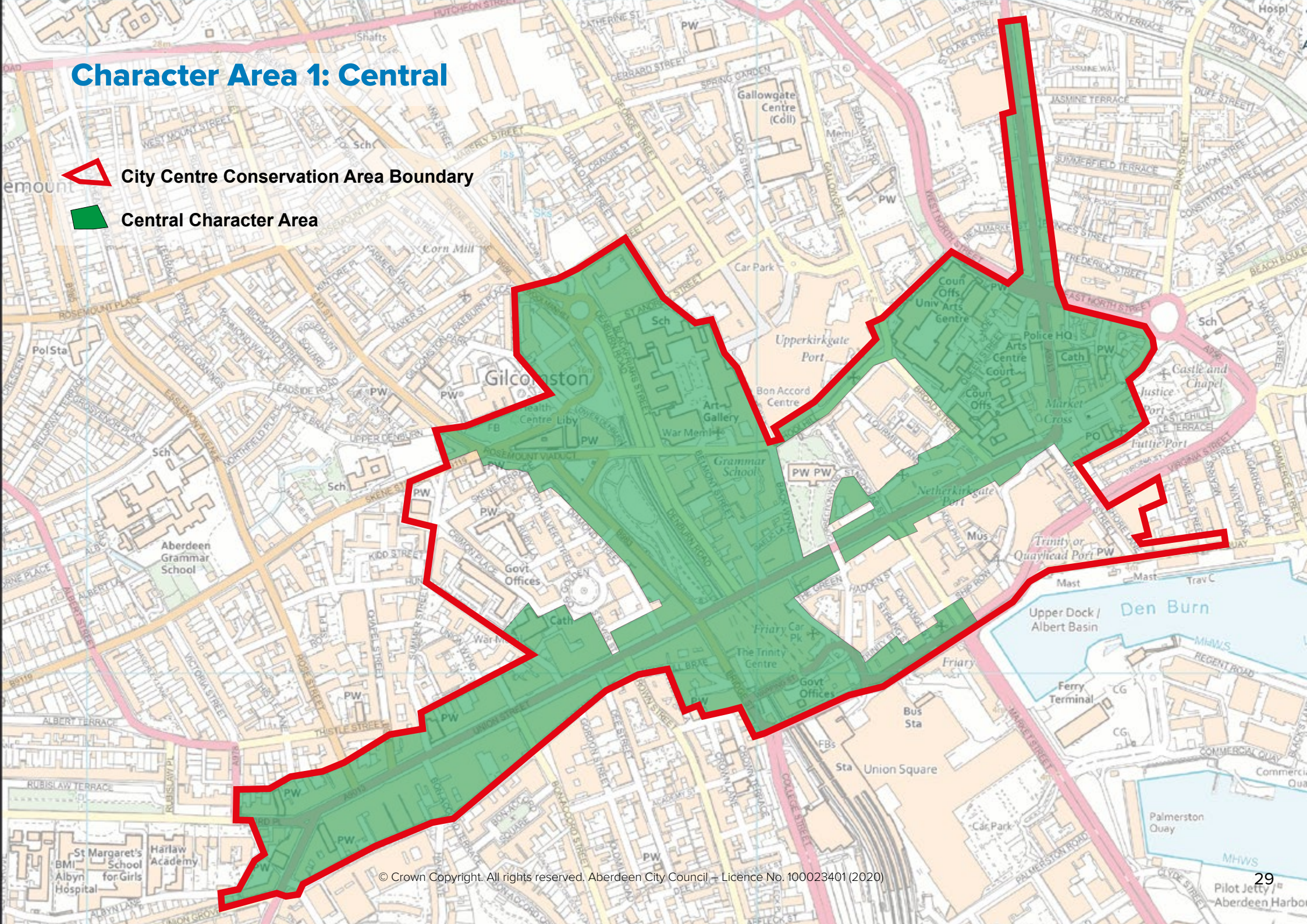
**5.1** Three character areas have been identified and analysed within the City Centre Conservation Area. There will be instances where buildings will contribute to two or even three different character areas. In these instances the relevant sections from each character area appraisal should be used.



*Above: Marischal College. Right: Aberdeen Town House*

# Character Area 1: Central

-  City Centre Conservation Area Boundary
-  Central Character Area





## 5.2 Key Streets

King Street, Union Street, Broad Street, Gallowgate, Little John Street, Flourmill Lane, Queen Street, Schoolhill, Rosemount Viaduct, Black Friars Street, Denburn Road, Castle Terrace, Bridge Street, Union Terrace, Woolman Hill, Rosemount Viaduct

## 5.3 Key Buildings

Marischal College, Marischal Square, Provost Skene's House, Music Hall, Town House, Tolbooth, Mercat Cross, 33 King Street (Aberdeen Arts Centre), 3 Castle Street and 2 Marischal Street (High Court), 146 Union Street and 1-3 Union Terrace (Chaophraya building), 154 Union Street (Lakeland building), His Majesty's Theatre, Art Gallery, Robert Gordon's College, the former Woolmanhill Hospital, the Central Library, Salvation Army Citadel, Marischal Court, 4 Castle Street (Archibald Simpson Public House), 208 Union Street, 78-80 Union Street (RBS), 60-62 Union Street (Clydesdale), St Andrew's Cathedral.



*Rosemount Viaduct with Central Library, St Mark's Church and His Majesty's Theatre*

## 5.4 Key Characteristics

Positive	Negative
Straight, planned streets	Maintenance of buildings
Sense of place and history	Street furniture clutter
Use of granite and slate traditional shopfronts	Loss of historic shopfronts Roller shutters
Detailed corner buildings	Vacant ground floor and upper units
Timber sash and case windows	Clutter on building fronts
Regular building line	On Street Bins (including belly bins)
Arrangement of principal streets and rear lanes	Generic urban realm
Cultural, civic and economic heart of Aberdeen	Lack of Flora
Grand civic buildings	

## 5.5 Setting and Views

**5.5.1** This character area covers the centre of Aberdeen. The setting is consequentially densely urban and commercial. The area is dominated by Union Street, which is the City's main shopping and commercial street although this has been somewhat eroded by the construction of a number of shopping centres in the city taking people away from the traditional shopping destination. Union Street rises gently from east to west and is a linear street measuring 0.8 miles in length from the Castlegate to Holburn Junction. Rosemount Viaduct and Union Street fly over the Denburn Valley, with Schoolhill and Upperkirkgate being on a slight gradient, leading down towards Littlejohn Street, which slopes more steeply down towards West North Street. This valley becomes less pronounced to the north; the ground level flattens by Woolmanhill. Market Street and Bridge Street both slope south towards the harbour with Bridge Street also sitting on a viaduct. Windmill Brae and Bath Street follow the topography of this slope and show the steepness of the land clearly. Windmill Brae and its connection to the Green is a historical route that is clearly evidenced on Woods 1828 Plan of the Cities of Aberdeen. This route, though lost visually with the erection of the Denburn Road and Trinity Centre, still exists through the carpark of the shopping centre.



**5.5.2** The linear nature of the streets and the frame provided by the buildings create the long-distance views down Union Street and King Street, which contribute significantly to the character of the area and are a key part of its setting. The views in both directions down Union Street and King Street are highly important and the streets' straightness reflects the City's nineteenth century aspirations. Key buildings in these views include the Salvation Army Citadel, the Town House and Marischal Court (which juxtaposes well with the neighbouring historic buildings) towards the east end of Union Street / the Castlegate and the Arts Centre on King Street, the tower of which is visible from as far away as the junction of King Street and Pittodrie Place, beyond the boundary of the Conservation Area. These views could be enhanced by improvements to shopfronts, a reduction in motorised traffic and a reduction of street clutter. Views out of the character area, into the Kirkyard and over Correction Wynd and the greenery / historic feel of these areas, give important contrast with Union Street. These views also show the undulating nature of these streets which people often assume are flat.

**5.5.3** Along the length of Union Street is an iconic view with the Citadel building to its eastern end. The residential tower blocks of Marischal and Virginia Court that were completed in 1966 sit behind the Citadel building. These routes emphasise the straight and relatively level nature of the planned road system. Views within, into and out of this character area are extremely important.

**5.5.4** The harbour and River Dee are key to the setting of the Conservation Area, being the *raison d'être* for the City itself. The sloping natural topography of the Conservation Area and its proximity to, and interaction with, the waterfront should be seen as key elements of its setting.

**5.5.5** St Nicholas Kirk and Union Terrace Gardens are key for the setting of this part of the character area providing green lungs in the otherwise hard, granite environment. Similarly, views down streets which run perpendicular to Union Street and King Street are also important, particularly down Market Street and Marischal Street which have views of the harbour visible at the bottom. Both views give a sense of Aberdeen's topography and the slope of the ground downwards, to the south of Union Street.

**5.5.6** Views in the city centre, particularly down Union Street, are enhanced by the number of high quality, grand corner buildings, including 1 Union Terrace (Chaopraya) and 4 Castle Street (Archibald Simpson Public House) and by the towers, domes and spires of buildings such as the Town House, 208 Union



Street and Gilcomston Church and the former Langstane Kirk (Soul Bar) which contribute to the skyline and help to create the City's distinctive silhouette. From the western end of Union Street, the view down Alford Place is important: trees dominate this view and give a clear sense of moving to a different part of the City. Likewise, the views down Holburn Street are important: this street slopes downward and views of the countryside beyond the City can be seen above the roofs in the foreground.

**5.5.7** Many of the side streets off King Street and Union Street are primarily residential and thus have a different character to the principal shopping and business streets. The views glimpsed from and towards these streets, and the contrast between them, is important, giving an understanding of the City's development over the centuries.

**5.5.8** One of the most important views is that over Denburn Valley and Union Terrace Gardens, both from Union Bridge and Rosemount Viaduct. This view gives a welcome break from the dense urban built form of the city centre and allows the vegetation in the gardens to be appreciated, along with the spires, towers and turrets of the Belmont Street area. Long distance views are visible



from Rosemount Viaduct of Broadford Works and the Bastille, which, along with Triple Kirks Spire, are brick structures and therefore create contrast with the granite which predominates in the city centre. These views over the Denburn valley are significant as they illustrate a key historic boundary within the City, which held back development for many years. Contrast between Union Street, with its dense urban development and the spaciousness of the valley add to the character of this area. The Nuart artwork on the side of the Belmont Cinema contributes positively to this view, adding visual interest to a previously blank elevation.

**5.5.9** The long-distance views of this character area are very important. They demonstrate the importance of Union Street within the context of the City and aid navigation.

**5.5.10** Other views in this character area that are shorter in length but still of note include:

- Along Rosemount Viaduct, Upperkirkgate and Schoolhill, with the trees in St Nicholas Kirkyard and Schoolhill adding vital colour to the scene and the towers of Marischal College and the Mitchell Hall creating visual interest to the east. The redevelopment of Union Terrace Gardens will add new complementary planting and building in this area.
- Along Belmont Street to the Art Gallery on Schoolhill, this is a vital link between these two key streets.
- From Bridge Street looking down on Windmill Brae.
- The view along Guild Street, towards the harbour.
- From Rosemount Viaduct over towards Woolmanhill Hospital and the recently redeveloped block of the Sandman Hotel on St Andrews Street.
- From Union Square towards the city centre, as this is the first view of the city centre that visitors get.
- The view over the Green from Union Street, down to the Market.



## 5.6 Built Environment

### Orientation, Building Lines and Heights

**5.6.1** There are a wide variety of buildings within this character area, the majority of which have retail or commercial premises on the ground floor, with office or residential above. There are also a number of significant buildings with civic or religious functions, such as churches, the Town House, His Majesty's Theatre, Marischal College, the Art Gallery, Robert Gordon's College, the former Woolmanhill Hospital and the Central Library. This character area contains some of Aberdeen's most impressive buildings and a substantial number of listed buildings.

**5.6.2** The building line and building heights along most of the street frontages are fairly uniform with the streets densely built up, with only a few gaps between the buildings. The strong line of development contributes to the character of this area and provides a sense of uniformity and formality. The buildings rise straight off the rear of the kerb as would be traditional in a City Centre location. Few front courtyards or gardens are present in this character area. James Dun's House (61 Schoolhill) is a notable exception, as is 27-31 King Street, 333 Union Street and 222-224 Union Street (Molly Malones), all of which have private space to the front, although this is enclosed by railings.



**5.6.3** A network of rear lanes run parallel and a short distance behind Union Street, the most prominent of which is Justice Mill Lane / Langstane Place / Windmill Brae. These lanes allow the buildings which front on to Union Street to have a rear exit straight/service area on to the lane. To the west the distance between the two roads is greater, allowing for separate buildings to front on to Justice Mill Lane and some areas of car parking to be formed to the rear.



**5.6.4** The back lanes to the rear of feus are generally lined with lower height buildings often these were ancillary to the original building to the front. These rear developments have a less regular building line, with the loss of boundary walls and with some areas having been converted to car parking, rather than having a building fronting on to the road. A number of large extensions have been added to these buildings over the years, but the feus and their traditional form are largely still intact. Some of these rear lanes, for example Justice Mill Lane and Windmill Brae, are enlivened by restaurants and artworks such as those that form part of the painted doors project.

*Left: Back lane clutter. Above: Langstane Place*



**5.6.5** The basic layout and building pattern reflects the nineteenth century development of Aberdeen, although some 20th and 21st century buildings, such as 429-443 Union Street (The Capitol), 73-77 Union Street (Café Nero) and the Trinity Centre are also included within the character area. Many of the buildings have been altered over the years, with additions such as dormers or new or altered shop fronts, and extensions built to the rear. The majority of buildings fit within plots of land which reflect the size and proportions of the historic feus which gives streets a rhythm and enhances the historic character.

**5.6.6** Union Street, the Castlegate and Justice Street are orientated. They are crossed at regular intervals by roads running perpendicular, including King Street, Market Street, Bridge Street, Broad Street and Union Terrace. The Denburn Road also runs perpendicular, though located under Union Street, and does not intersect, unlike the others. Rosemount Viaduct, Guild Street, Upperkirkgate and Schoolhill run relatively parallel with Union Street, creating a logical and convenient network of streets. At the south-west end of the Conservation Area, Holburn Street runs to the south from Union Street and Alford Place to the west.

**5.6.7** When Union Street was laid out the Town Council stipulated the height of the buildings should be four storeys to the east, falling to two to three storeys towards the west. A number of buildings have therefore retained their original ground and first floors and have had later upper storeys added, often in a

*Above: Silver Finn and Capitol buildings. Right: Re-used E&M shopfront. Both Union Street.*

different style, for example 214 and 220 Union Street. With the exception of twenty-first century additions, the buildings within this character area largely vary between two to four storey and attic structures.

**5.6.8** Marischal College and the former Greyfriars Kirk are set back from the street slightly allowing a stronger setting for them as key buildings within the character area. To the front of Marischal College and Marischal Square an area of public realm with pedestrian priority has been developed, greatly improving the setting and ability to stop and appreciate Marischal College and its grandeur.

**5.6.9** Marischal Square is a substantial, clearly modern, building completed in 2017. The building's Broad Street and Upperkirkgate facing elevations are not overbearing to the existing surrounding historic buildings. The use of granite cladding and glass ties the new structure in with the surrounding historic buildings whilst reading clearly as a modern building. The glass of Marischal Square also reflects Marischal College and provides another level of interest and a different perspective to the historic building.

**5.6.10** The more recent modern development in this character area such as the Capitol, the Silver Fin and Triple Kirks are considerably higher than the traditional properties. These first two additions are partially visible from Union Street and are all clearly visible from certain viewpoints within the City.





### Typical Building Forms and Features

**5.6.11** There are a significant number of listed buildings within this character area, and particular reference should be made to the Category A listed buildings including The Music Hall, The Art Gallery, St Nicholas Kirk and His Majesty's Theatre. These buildings have a civic purpose and are still used for the original purpose they were built. The Category A listed Council headquarters at Marischal College is a fine example of Gothic architecture and provides a strong civic presence in the City Centre. Most of Union Street is covered by some category of listing and this includes Union Terrace Gardens and the Smith Screen to the front of St Nicholas Kirk. These listed buildings and structures demonstrate how important the street was when it was built and the architectural quality that still remains now.

**5.6.12** The prevalent building type is tenements with retail on the ground floor and offices or residential accommodation above, most commonly accessed by a separate door. This said, over recent years there has been an increase in

*Above: Chaopraya, 1 Union Terrace. Right: The Archibald Simpson, Castle Street*

ground floor uses being changed to restaurants, particularly to the west end of Union Street. This has largely occurred due to the changes in shopping trends and the development of the shopping centres that run north to south. A number of the shop fronts have been altered over time losing the quality that once was present. A number of grant funding opportunities have been available over the years from the local authority including the Green Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI). Grants for repairs and reinstatement of original architectural features in historic buildings are currently available from the Aberdeen City Heritage Trust (ACHT) and the Union Street Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS) (see Section 10).

**5.6.13** Windows to the upper floors are mostly timber sash and case. The facades to the buildings are granite and frequently fairly plain and austere, especially in earlier buildings, with simple detailing, such as string courses or hood moulding over the windows. Later in to the nineteenth century and 20th centuries buildings became more decorated as the technology for cutting granite developed and details such finials, pilasters or balusters became more common, as well as intricate window arrangements, with granite transoms and mullions. Good examples of intricate granite can be seen at 210 Union Street (Starbucks), 1 Union Terrace (Chaopraya) and 154 Union Street (Lakeland.) In





Academy shopping centre. This is mirrored in a smaller scale by many more domestically scaled corner buildings, which have carefully considered corners featuring a curve or a chamfer and sometimes a turret. Examples include 18 Bridge Street, 170 and 176 King Street, on the corners with Summerfield Terrace; 106 Union Street, on the corner with Correcting Wynd; 21-23 Bon-Accord Terrace, on the corner with Langstane Place and 50-54 Guild Street, on the corner with Carmelite Street.

**5.6.16** The grand buildings in the character area, such as Marischal College, the Art Gallery and the Central Library are mostly built in a larger scale than the retail and commercial premises. They feature extra decorative devices, such as towers, domes and columned porticos, which do not feature on most of the other buildings, with the exception of some of the banks. With the exception of Marischal College, which is Gothic, these civic buildings are generally designed in a classical style and all of them contribute considerably to the character of the Conservation Area.

**5.6.17** Union Bridge is worthy of note. It is part of the Union Street viaduct which enabled the city to expand to the east and is a key feature of the character area. It spans the culverted Denburn River and is a substantial and impressive

addition, contrasting shades of granite were sometimes used to highlight features such as is evident on the Denburn Viaduct. At parapet height many buildings are highly decorative such as 62 Union Street (Clydesdale Bank). These more decorated buildings are mainly nineteenth century, although there are a few 20th and 21st century additions.

**5.6.14** Buildings which were designed to impress and reassure their users, such as banks, as exemplified by the North of Scotland Bank building (Archibald Simpson's Public House) or the 1 Union Terrace (Chaopraya) tend to have more ostentations detailing and stonework than many of the properties designed for retail on the ground floor. The western end of Union Street was originally designed as houses, meaning that the older buildings here are plain and almost all have been altered to insert a shopfront at ground floor level.

**5.6.15** A number of buildings have curved or chamfered corners, allowing the appearance of a grand façade to be carried around the corner. Examples include 5 Castle Street (Archibald Simpson's Public House), 1 Union Terrace (Chaopraya), 114-120 Union Street (Espionage), 1-5 Rosemount Viaduct and the

*Above: East end of Union Street. Right: Bridge Street*



structure. It is visible from numerous locations in the character area notably from Union Terrace Gardens and Rosemount Viaduct. A further key feature of the bridge is the cast iron balustrade designed by William Kelly and more specifically the cast iron leopards (Kelly's cat's) which were designed by Sidney Boyes which were added as part of a scheme to widen the bridge in 1908.

**5.6.18** The former Woolmanhill hospital has a level of grandeur and status and a presence within the streetscape and this character area. Designed by Archibald Simpson, its function and importance to the population of the time is clear. The complex contains one Category A and a number of Category B listed buildings.

**5.6.19** Also within this character area is Robert Gordon College and the recently refurbished Sandman Hotel on St Andrews Street. The building on St Andrews Street was built as a training college and takes up the whole block.

**5.6.20** There are some examples of the influence of Scots Baronial architecture within the character area. This is most prominent in the Salvation Army Citadel, the design of which is rumoured to be based on Balmoral Castle, and the style's influence is also visible on buildings such as the Town House, 22-24 Guild Street and 46 Schoolhill.

**5.6.21** Common features on Aberdeen's historic buildings include hidden parapet gutters, nepus gables, decorative stair windows, arched window heads at ground floor level, dormers (both historically styled and poorly designed modern ones) and curved corners on buildings.

**5.6.22** 20th century additions to Union Street include several Art Deco buildings, such as both Burton's shops (one now Café Nero, the other now Schuh and Five Guys) and the Capitol, and more recent additions including 159-163 Union Street (Travelodge), 196-206 Union Street, the Town House extension and 1 Shiprow. The 21st century developed the city centre further, with development on the site of the Capitol, the Silver Fin building, Marischal Square and Triple Kirks adding to the vertical emphasis of the City with taller buildings in this character area. Some of the 20th century additions, such as the Trinity Centre, are considered to have a negative impact on the conservation area while some, such as Unit 10 The Academy (Nandos), have a neutral impact. A number of the more modern buildings use large areas of poor-quality cladding materials which would no longer be considered acceptable, such as grey-brown cement render and reconstituted stone blocks. The variety of buildings, detailing and architectural styles within this character area contribute to the character of this area.



**5.6.23** The vertical emphasis of the spires within this character area are key. These aid orientation and showed the prestige of the church when it was built. There are a number of churches in the city centre and their presence is evident. Due to the reduction in attendance at church services a number of these have been changed to public houses or clubs. 333 Union Street, former Langstane Kirk (Soul Bar) has been converted into a public house and restaurant use, ensuring the buildings' long-term use. 27 Belmont Street (the former Priory Club) has been allowed to fall into a serious state of disrepair and is now on the Buildings at Risk Register.

**5.6.24** Woolmanhill is currently on the Buildings at Risk Register but planning and listed building consent were granted in 2016 for conversion to a hotel, serviced apartments and residential flats. The conversion of these important buildings would make a very positive contribution to the character area and the City as a whole.

*Former Infirmary Buildings, Woolmanhill*

## Materials

**5.6.25** When Union Street and King Street were laid under the Act of 1800 for 'making two new streets in the city of Aberdeen' the Town Council stipulated the use of dressed granite as the principal exterior material. This has resulted in a uniform appearance to Union Street. As granite was local and was historically the best building material available, it has also been used for many of the other buildings within the character area. The front of the buildings are generally finished in smooth ashlar (sometimes Aberdeen Bond) but the sides and rear are often constructed of cheaper granite rubble, laid in courses, or in a random arrangement.

**5.6.26** Most of the buildings have slate roofs; originally these would have been Scottish slate possibly from the local Foudland Quarry. Where this has been replaced a mixture of Welsh slate types has been used. Dormers have been added to many of the buildings over time and while many of these are in a traditional form with a lead roof or a pitched, slated roof and sides, many are inappropriate modern designs. These are usually box dormers with flat roofs, or poorly detailed and proportioned pitched roofed dormer, which are often linked. This detracts from the character of the Conservation Area. Where possible modern box dormers should be replaced with traditional scale and style dormers. Some roofs have traditional timber snow boards, which should be retained along with other traditional details and features.

**5.6.27** Buildings with domes and some of the towers, such as the Town House, Art Gallery and Woolmanhill Hospital make use of metal coverings. These are a mixture of copper, as on the Art Gallery, and lead, as on St Mark's church. Lead is also used extensively in parapet gutters and for flashings on roofs and ridges on dormers, although zinc has sometimes been used as an alternative in recent years.

**5.6.28** Cast iron railings and gates are present in small areas but mainly around the St Nicholas Graveyard and the former Langstane Kirk and the Congregational Church (Belmont Street)

**5.6.29** Window frames are primarily constructed of timber, with some examples of metal on 20th and 21st century buildings, such as 78-80 Union Street (RBS). UPVC has been used in some buildings, although this has a negative impact on the Conservation Area and its use must be avoided, particularly on listed buildings.





**5.6.30** Doors are also primarily timber, those leading to upper floors or domestic properties are usually panelled whereas many of those leading into offices or retail premises often contain glazing. A number of traditional doors have been replaced with modern metal framed doors, particularly in buildings with modern shopfronts. Encouragement should be given to owners to restore historic fabric and remove unsympathetic modern interventions. Some shops have an outer set of storm doors, which are open by day and closed at night, giving security while keeping the attractive appearance of the building. These are most frequently timber, but some are metal. As an alternative, some commercial premises with recessed entrances have metal gates, which allow visibility into the property while restricting access. A small number of properties have roller shutters, which have a negative impact on the Conservation Area.

**5.6.31** There is a limited use of sandstone as a building material within the character area. This is most prominent on the Mercat Cross and St Andrew's Cathedral. It is used for detailing on some properties, such as the armorial carving on the south façade of 8 Upperkirkgate because it was a much easier stone to work with.

**5.6.32** 20th and 21st century buildings use a variety of modern materials, including imported granite or render. The use of modern materials but complementary colours are evident in the Marischal Square development.

**5.6.33** Brick is used within the character area. This is mostly in areas which are not visible, such as internal walls, but it can also be seen in some chimney stacks, rear walls and out buildings. Some of these bricks were made locally at Seaton Brickworks. Triple Kirks is an unusual building within the character area in that brick was used on prominent and very visible facades, as well as for the tower and spire.

**5.6.34** Traditional shopfronts are generally constructed in timber, granite and glass however more recent replacements use a variety of materials, including metals and plastics. This results in a negative impact on the character area, as does poor maintenance. One of the aims of Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme is to improve the shopfronts of Union Street as doing so will make a positive contribution to the area.

**5.6.35** Where rainwater goods are external, these are usually cast iron, although some have been replaced with aluminium or uPVC. Hidden and parapet gutters are usually lead lined. However, poor maintenance of these has resulted in a number of these failing, resulting in dark staining to the facades of buildings.



*Cowdray Hall dome and new entrance steps to Aberdeen Art Gallery*





## 5.7 Public Realm

### Streets, Parking and Pavements

**5.7.1** The main vehicular routes through the city centre fall within this character area. These include Union Street, King Street, Market Street, Bridge Street, Guild Street, Wapping Street and the Denburn Road. These roads have a heavy flow of traffic and relatively wide lanes for traffic (some having been temporarily altered to allow for physical distancing during the COVID-19 emergency). They have a hot-rolled asphalt surface. These routes by their nature put vehicular movement before that of pedestrian or cycle with the Denburn having no pedestrian access at all.

**5.7.2** Many of the roads in the city centre currently suffer an overly-large amount of vehicular traffic; this is particularly an issue on Union Street, King Street, Market Street and Bridge Street. Not only does the traffic lead to pollution, and therefore a poorer environment for both residents and visitors, but it can also create an environment which is unpleasant for pedestrians. Parts of Union Street, Market Street King Street, King Street, Virginia Street, Commerce Street,

*Above: Denburn Road. Right: Union Terrace*

Guild Street, Bridge Street, Holburn Street are included in the **City Centre Air Quality Management Area** (poor air quality) which is of a serious concern of public health and quality of life in the city centre. A **Low Emissions Zone** (LEZ) is proposed for Aberdeen city centre which should address the issue of air quality

**5.7.3** Union Street and King Street both have bus lanes and many of the roads within the character area have bus stops. This makes sustainable travel into the city centre easy and efficient but does add to street clutter.

**5.7.4** The rear lanes and side roads have a mixture of hot rolled asphalt and setts, with some on-street parking. On-street parking is available on some of the more major roads, such as Union Terrace, but not Union Street itself.

**5.7.5** Belmont Street and Broad Street have been designed to improve pedestrian movement and experience through an enhanced environment. The Castlegate is also pedestrianised with the original surface retained with the historic granite setts, that said the current surface in the Castlegate is in poor condition and is in need of repair and maintenance.



**5.7.6** Much of the character area has retained its historic granite kerbs. There are also a number of streets where historic granite setts are still in situ, under modern finishes. Granite setts, slabs and kerbs should be retained and /or be brought back in to use wherever possible.

**5.7.7** There are a number of sets of traffic lights and signalised pedestrian crossings within the character area, the most heavily used are Union Street / Bridge Street / Union Terrace and Union Street/ Market Street junction. These are mostly on a timer rather than being pelican crossings and thereby give vehicular traffic priority.

**5.7.8** There are a variety of street widths within this character area. Union Street as the principal street measures in excess of 15 metres along its length with the perpendicular busy roads of Market and Bridge Street measuring 11 metres and 13 metres respectively. The Denburn Road is around 20 metres wide and does not afford any pedestrian amenity, its purpose is traffic movement and deliveries to the rear of Belmont Street. Belmont Street itself is 5.3 metres in width but the pavements are lowered to make the environment more pedestrian friendly. Justice Mill Lane and Windmill Brae are more historical in nature and measure 8.4 metres and 7.3 metres respectively.

**5.7.9** A number of pavements within the character area have been upgraded with the use of high quality Caithness Stone – this is particularly evident on Union Street and Schoolhill. Elsewhere the materials are concrete slabs which are less attractive. There are also a few areas with hot rolled asphalt pavements, most notably on Union Bridge, where it has been lined out to imitate slabs due to weight restrictions on the bridge. Windmill Lane also has asphalted pavements. A few streets have historic granite slabs as paving surfaces, for example Windmill Brae.

**5.7.10** Belmont Street and Back Wynd have improved pedestrian environment with lower pavements and improved surface. This change in character of the pavements changes the feel of the street, slowing cars and making pedestrians feel safer in the environment. The high quality materials and layout make this area of public realm a positive addition to the Conservation Area and contributes to its special character. Long term maintenance programs should to be identified and appropriate budgets allocated to cover these costs to ensure these elements continue to make a positive contribution to the special character of the Conservation Area.



**5.7.11** The pavements, cluttered with street furniture such as bins, telephone boxes, telecommunications cabinets, planters and bus stops, make it worse. The street clutter is a particular issue on Union Street and Bridge Street where there is heavy footfall. A reduction in street clutter and a considered approach to future public realm projects in this area would go some way to addressing this issue. The rear lanes in the character area are surfaced with a mixture of concrete slabs, setts and hot rolled asphalt. They are cluttered, often with a large number of bins. The pavements are often very narrow.



### Shopfront Signage

**5.7.12** Aberdeen has few complete highly decorative historic shopfronts remaining, although many buildings have retained historic features such as a fascia, pilasters or decorative detailing. Several of those which have retained their historic frontages were historically banks. A number of simple historic shopfronts remain, particularly on King Street, although many of these have had features such as sub-fascias added. Historic shopfronts should be retained and if unsympathetic alterations have been carried out in the past these should be reversed wherever possible.

**5.7.13** Large 'To Let' signs are becoming more prevalent in this area of the city centre. These detract from the special character of the area and should be avoided wherever possible, especially large triangular projecting signs. Sympathetically sized and sited signs would be welcomed and be more appropriate for such an important sensitive area of the city.

**5.7.14** There are a few examples of interesting, historic signage, such as the three-dimensional boots on Upperkirkgate and Union Street and the clocks attached to the facades on Union Street.

*Above: 213 Union Street (The Grill)*

**5.7.15** Many of the buildings within the character area were built as residential premises and have historically been converted to commercial use, necessitating the installation of a shopfront and signage. More recently, some units have been converted from commercial to residential, which has necessitated improving the privacy for the occupiers.

**5.7.16** High quality modern shopfronts in a number of styles have been installed in some properties, some of which have aided by grants from Aberdeen City Heritage Trust, The Green THI and the Union Street Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme. These changes have a very positive benefit to the character of the street.

### Street Signage

**5.7.17** As several of the streets within the character area are major traffic routes, including Wapping Street, Union Street and King Street, these have important strategic directional signage. Many of the roads in the area also have both directional signage relating to local places of interest and other signage for vehicular traffic, for example one way, speed limit and parking signs. Union Street and King Street also have signage relating to the bus lanes. All these are essential for the safe movement of traffic.

**5.7.18** There are a small number of signs relating to local and national cycle networks within this character area.

**5.7.19** Signage for pedestrians includes wayfinding totem signs, which are distributed throughout this character area. These contribute positively to orientation and visitor experience in the city centre.

**5.7.20** Many of Aberdeen's streets have the black and white tiled street name plates. These are distinctive to Aberdeen and add to the historic character of the City. Some even have the directional finger pointing the direction of the street, such as Carnegies Brae.

**5.7.21** Inappropriate or excessive signage should be removed or replaced with more appropriate signage that is sympathetic and complementary to the special character of the Conservation Area.



## Street Furniture

**5.7.22** The streets within this character area contain an excess of street furniture, including bus stops, bins, signs, benches, planters, traffic lights, phone boxes; telecoms cabinets; post boxes; bollards; bike stands etc. The character area would be improved by this being rationalised and the removal of non-essential items.

**5.7.23** There are a few items of street furniture which contribute positively to the Conservation Area, for example the red phone box on Queen Street, which should be retained and could be enhanced with improved upkeep. Similarly, Aberdeen's traditional red post boxes contribute positively to the streetscape, as does the gold post box in the Castlegate, although, again, some would benefit from enhanced upkeep.

**5.7.24** Street lighting in the character area is mostly wall mounted, particularly on the principal streets, however there are some areas which have columns. These are mostly modern, for example the wall mounted lights on Rosemount Viaduct or the columns in the Schoolhill Pocket Park. A few historic luminaires have been retained, for example on Union Bridge and Union Terrace, which contribute to the character of the Conservation Area, helping to make the City distinctive and aid orientation by night. A few streets have modern, 'heritage' columns, for example Castle Street, outside the Sherriff Court and the corner of Bath Street and Bridge Place and some heritage wall lights, for example Bath Street. A small number of buildings are well illuminated, for example the Music Hall, Art Gallery, Marischal College, Sandman Hotel and 1 Union Terrace (Chaopraya), which again aid night-time orientation and encourage a successful night-time economy while providing interest to the buildings.

**5.7.25** A number of buildings have less successful illumination schemes, which have a negative impact, particularly where the illumination is focussed on signage, which is often damaged or where there are roller shutters, which the illumination draws attention to. Poorly planned illumination has a negative impact during the daytime, where wires and luminaires are visible on buildings, adding clutter and obscuring architectural detailing. Redundant lighting should be removed and the any fixings holes and damaged stonework should be made good. Any new lighting fixtures should be of an appropriate style, quality, scale and be sympathetically sited. Any new wiring should be a dark recessive colour (black or dark grey) and routed as discreetly as possible.



**5.7.26** There are a small number of traditional railings within the character area, including outside 333 Union Street (Soul Bar) and 224 Union Street (The Abercrombie) on Union Street, on Belmont Street and outside 27-29 King Street, as well as sections of cast iron railings on Rosemount viaduct and Union Bridge. The railings beside the William Wallace statue relate to the statue itself and are important for its setting. These add to the historic character of the area and should be carefully preserved and enhanced. Some modern railings are also present, for example as a handrail to the ramp outside the Sheriff Court Annex. This character area also contains a number of examples of fine granite balustrades, for example above Union Terrace Gardens and outside St Mark's Church.

**5.7.27** Utilitarian guardrails feature extensively in the Conservation Area and detract from its special character. They are used extensively around the Castlegate, contributing to this area feeling closed off and underused. The Conservation Area would be enhanced by the removal or reduction of utilitarian guardrails. The impact guard rails have on the character of the Conservation Area should be given due consideration when new guard rails are being installed or existing guard rails are being replaced.

**5.7.28** Bollards are also very common within this character area. There are modern examples on Union Bridge and granite examples on St Nicholas Street. The more commonly used Aberdeen Bollards are located on the Castlegate and on the corner of streets such as Huntly Street and Bon-Accord Street. These are used for safety at junctions to avoid vehicles mounting the kerb. At the junction of Alford Place and Holburn Street there are bollards that have in the past not been effective and as a result a heavy bell shaped bollard has now been placed at this junction. This is not an attractive feature but clearly has a function of safety. The impact bollards have on the character of the Conservation Area should be given due consideration when new bollards are being installed or existing bollards are being replaced.

**5.7.29** Within this character area are a number of important statues including William Wallace and Prince Albert near the theatre, Robert Burns situated on Union Terrace as well as Robert the Bruce to the front of Marishal College and the war memorial located on Blackfriars Street.

**5.7.30** Union Street has catenary wires strung over the street. These allow for the easy hanging of the Christmas lights and for festivals and events to be promoted and celebrated. A catenary also hangs over the southern end of



Belmont Street, advertising the Art Gallery. This is an attractive historic sign, which contributes to the character of the Conservation Area and care should be taken not to obstruct it by installing visual clutter behind it. New catenaries must be designed and fitted with care and with consideration of what any installations look like both during the day and night.

**5.7.31** There are a number of cycle stands within this character area, mainly within close proximity of Civic buildings. This is apparent with them located to the front of Marischal College, outside the Art Gallery and the Art Centre. These are quite sensitively sited and sit well within the streetscape. Cycle parking within the public realm is principally standard Sheffield stands. Some bollards have been installed on Union Bridge which have integrated cycle parking in a bid to reduce clutter. There is scope for a greater and more strategic provision of cycle parking in the city centre and for it to be more creatively designed, to integrate it with other street furniture. Long term cycle parking for residents should be considered in the future, as many city centre flats do not have storage available.

**5.7.32** Recently new BT phone totems have been placed within this character area. These are smaller than the previous phone stands and have been well sited within the footway as to cause as little disruption as possible. These allow free emergency calls and include WiFi access and information. Benches are in a number of areas within this character area. There are spaces to stop and rest. On St Nicholas Street there are a number of polished stone seats, but a variety of benches and seats can be seen on Broad Street, Schoolhill (outside the Art Gallery), Castlegate, Marischal Square, Bon Accord Centre roof, Academy courtyard and many more.

**5.7.33** Many of the character area's rear lanes have accumulated an unacceptable level of clutter, such as bins, signs and bollards. Often these are in poor condition. By their nature rear lanes were always used for storage and servicing but some of these are very prominent within the Conservation Area and a balance needs to be struck. The Conservation Area could be improved by the quantity of these being reduced.

**5.7.34** There are a number of on street belly bins which are large and unsightly. The Conservation Area would benefit from the removal of these bins and replacement with bins that are more complementary to the character of the Conservation Area.

**5.7.35** Totems have been added around the city centre to aid orientation and demonstrate how easy it is to walk around the city centre. There are a number within this character area. There are a number within this Character Area. These have a consistent design throughout the City which is welcomed. They are relatively small in size and sensitively sited to avoid obstruction or more clutter on the pavement.

**5.7.36** Bus stops are prevalent in this character area. Particularly on Union Street where there are a number of bus shelters which are often located in clusters and take up large areas of pavement which can be unsightly and detract from the special character of the Conservation Area. These being clustered also reduced the footway and can cause issues for pedestrian movement especially if there are large queues for buses.

## 5.8 City Centre Masterplan Projects

**5.8.1** The **City Centre Masterplan** outlines a 20 year development strategy for Aberdeen city centre. A large number of the key masterplan projects are within the boundary of the central character area, these are listed below.

**5.8.2** CM02 Queen Street: A new residential led mixed use development opportunity created by the relocation of existing public sector land uses (town house extension, police and courts) potentially to the Marischal College eastern annex or elsewhere in the city centre. The redevelopment of these buildings creates the scope for new city centre housing, ground floor commercial uses and a network of public spaces.

**5.8.3** CM11 Union Street Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS): The Union Street Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS) is a six year initiative aimed at the regeneration of Aberdeen's main thoroughfare. This conservation led programme is set up to tackle the problems of rundown historic buildings and streetscape where longstanding economic and structural decline has undermined the character of this historic and architecturally rich street.

**5.8.4** CM05: Woolmanhill: The buildings associated with the former Woolmanhill Hospital present an attractive opportunity for a characterful residential development. This site currently has Listed Building Consent and Planning Permission for a hotel and residential apartments.



Union Terrace Gardens refurbishment

**5.8.5 EN07 Castlegate:** Castlegate will be presented as the ‘central civic space’ for Aberdeen, providing a strong focus and identity for the city centre. This will be a high quality space that responds to the rich architecture and strong urban design structure, forming a desired destination at the end of Union Street. The design approach will be minimalist and defined, adding clarity to the geometry of the space with high quality natural stone materials and lighting.

**5.8.6 EN08 Union Terrace Gardens:** this project which is currently on site will enhance the quality of the gardens as the city centre’s main green space resource and will seek to improve access, visibility and animation of the gardens. Improvements will include a new performance amphitheatre with stepped seating; a new walkway from Union Street to the lower garden level, a focal point building, a playpark, a new plaza at Rosemount Viaduct with building and reuse of the existing arches to provide further space for new attractions in the park. Finally the existing Victorian toilets which are currently on the Buildings at Risk register will be refurbished and the gents reimagined in a new use.



## 5.9 Green and Blue Infrastructure

**5.9.1** The Aberdeen City Council **Open Space Audit**, identifies a number of open spaces within the character area. The largest of these is Union Terrace Gardens, followed by the Castlegate and St Nicholas Street. Smaller areas include an area to the north of Queen Street and Schoolhill Pocket Park. The quality of the open space within the area is deemed to be poor in the Open Space Audit. Open space is important for providing suitable residential amenity for those living in and around the City Centre Conservation Area. Living closer to parks and other areas of green space promotes increased physical activity and reduced levels of obesity. There is a clear link between mental health and physical activity. Having access to high quality green space encourages more people to take exercise. Health inequalities are reduced in areas with greener infrastructure. Social activity is more likely to occur in quality green spaces promoting community cohesion.

**5.9.2** Natural infrastructure, parks, open spaces, community food growing sites, help bring individuals and communities together and are particularly beneficial to individuals and groups, communities, who feel socially isolated/excluded. High quality and easily accessible open spaces and natural features provide people and communities with a sense and pride of place that they feel they belong to.

**5.9.3** There are very few street trees in this character area. The character area could be greatly enhanced by the addition of more, appropriately located, trees. In a number of locations, for example Schoolhill Pocket Park, street trees have not been replaced when they have died, leaving obvious vacant spots in the ground. Further investment in improving green infrastructure, including new tree planting, within the character area will help to promote and increase economic investment attracting businesses and customers to the area. Part/full pedestrianisation of suitable roads would further enable additional green infrastructure.

**5.9.4** Additional trees and other vegetation within the character area in appropriate locations will contribute to a reduction in CO<sub>2</sub>. Trees, shrubs, green roofs/walls, rain gardens and other forms of green infrastructure contribute to a reduction in ambient heat and flooding. Green infrastructure helps to slow the rate at which water reaches the ground and the rate of run off from hard surfaces through infiltration and interception. Additional tree planting and other



green infrastructure within the character area will encourage more active travel (walking and cycling). People are more likely to use active travel if the areas they are walking/cycling through are greener and more attractive.

**5.9.5** A wide range of species make use of green infrastructure. Addition green infrastructure within the character area will make a valuable contribution to habitat networks linking green spaces and supporting biodiversity.

**5.9.6** A number of trees are visible from the street, which are either not in the public realm, for example within the area to the front of 333 Union Street (Soul) or are within areas of open space, for example Union Terrace Gardens, the rooftop of the St Nicholas Centre or St Nicholas Kirkyard. Some of the rear lanes have street trees within privately maintained public realm, for example on Union Row (not in Conservation Area). All trees have an important part to play in the character of the area and any additions in appropriate locations are encouraged. The trees behind the Smith Screen, in St Nicholas Kirkyard, contribute positively to the area as well as those visible from the Schoolhill side. These give a vital view of vegetation on the otherwise very urban Union Street. Unfortunately Dutch Elm disease has developed in some of the trees in this area which has resulted in their removal.

**5.9.7** There is one park in the character area – Union Terrace Gardens, which is currently underused. Formerly the bleaching grounds for laundry being cleaned in the Denburn. A scheme to redevelop the gardens and associated buildings with the inclusion of modern interventions and improved access is underway and is due for completion in 2021.

**5.9.8** Other green space within this character area includes the St Nicholas Graveyard which in the summer is extensively used for sitting in and enjoying green space within the City. It has benches and areas to rest and stop. The trees in this area also make a very positive contribution to the streetscape.

**5.9.9** The Denburn is culverted through this character area so there is limited interaction with the water. A water feature has been introduced within the public realm to the front of Marischal College, this is very well received and has encouraged members of the public to engage with the water and the streetscape as a whole. The harbour is visible from the various locations within the character area but is especially visible from the top of Marischal Street.



## 5.10 Negative Factors

**5.10.1** Unfortunately there are a number of factors that cause a negative impact on the character of this area:

- Replacement of historic buildings with buildings of an inferior design quality, such as at 196-206 Union Street.
- Construction of the Trinity Centre had a negative impact on views from Union Bridge, blocking views to the south.
- Modern, unsympathetic interventions of dormers not designed for their context.
- The incremental loss of historic windows and doors has a negative impact on the character of the Conservation Area.
- Inappropriate modern replacement windows and doors.
- Shop roller shutters have a negative impact on the character of this area. Roller shutters provide a dead frontage at night time.
- Lack of maintenance over the years and resultant decay. (Common issues include: blocked or broken gutters and downpipes, slipped and missing slates, vegetation, defective chimneys and windows which need repairing and repainting).
- Vacant units at ground and upper level resulting in boarded up windows.
- Replacement of historic shopfronts with unsympathetic modern interventions and sub fascias,.
- Shops and businesses with signage which is excessive, poor quality, design, materials and is inappropriate for its context,
- Signage which has become damaged and not been maintained, repaired or replaced.
- Inappropriately sited satellite dishes, aerials, burglar alarm boxes and wiring for electrical equipment. The cumulative effect of these elements provides clutter and damage to the buildings.
- Cracked paving slabs.






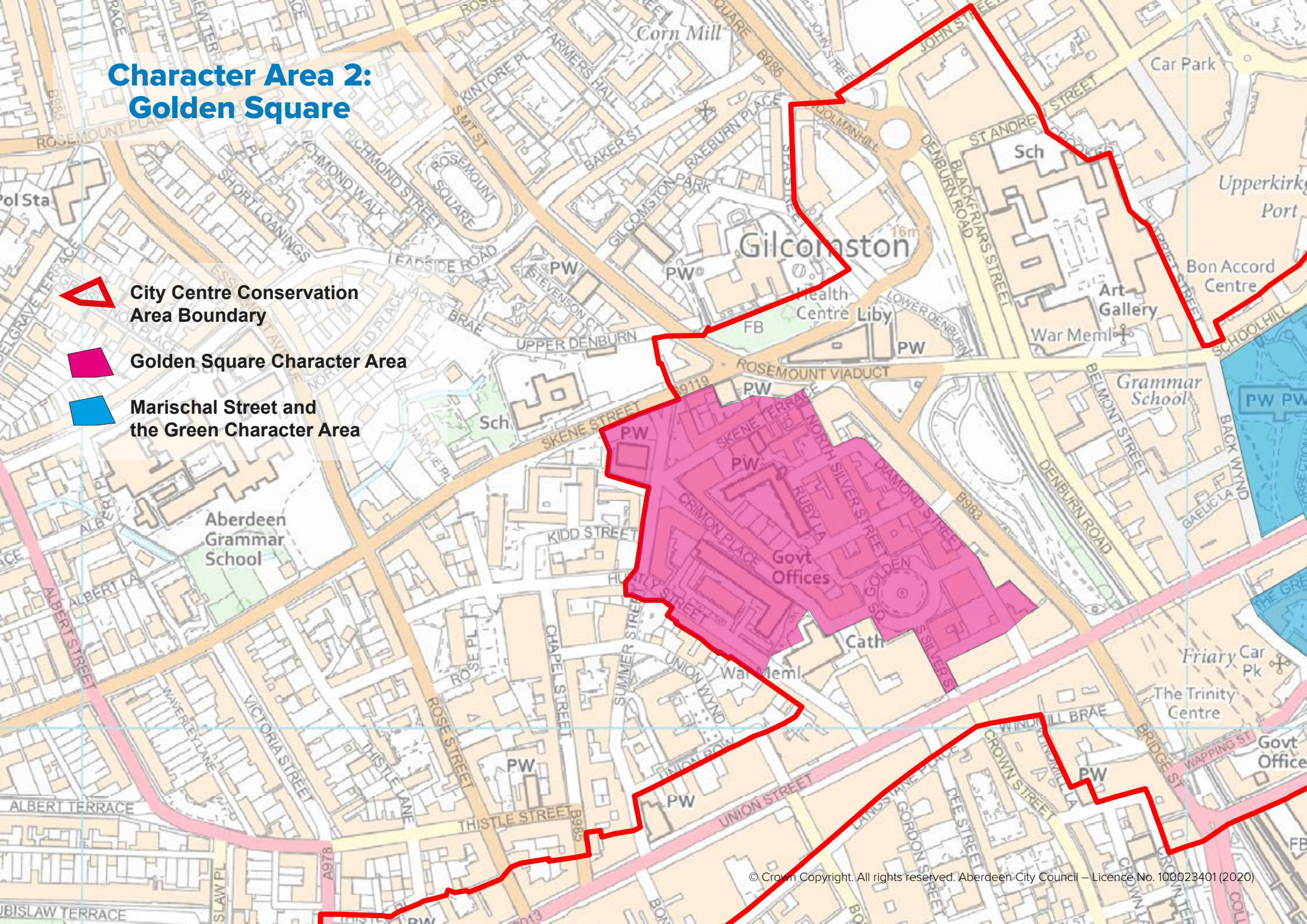
196-206 Union Street

## 6. Character Area 2: Golden Square



# Character Area 2: Golden Square

-  City Centre Conservation Area Boundary
-  Golden Square Character Area
-  Marischal Street and the Green Character Area



## Character Area 2: Golden Square

**6.1** Golden Square is typical of 19th century formal squares with streets on each side running north/south and east west with a circular road around the centre of the square which includes a statue. Huntly Street, Crimon Place and North Silver Street, South Silver Street all run north-south in orientation and Skene Terrace runs east-west.

### 6.2 Streets

Golden Square, Skene Terrace, Summer Street (part), Crimon Place, Huntly Street, Ruby Lane, Ruby Place, North Silver Street, Diamond Street, Diamond Place, Lindsay Street, South Silver Street, Diamond Lane.

### 6.3 Key Buildings

16-20 Huntly Street (St Mary's Roman Catholic Cathedral), 23 North Silver Street (Migvie House), 50-56 Huntly Street (Former Blind Hospital), 1-21 Golden Square, and the Duke of Gordon Statue.

### 6.4 Key Characteristics

Positive	Negative
Formal square	Cracked concrete pavements
Use of granite and slate	Number of cars
Commercial premises on ground floor (traditional shopfronts)	Railings maintenance
Detailed corner buildings	To Let signs
Timber sash and case windows and original doors	Large street bins
Regular building lines	Hanging baskets
Arrangement of principal streets and rear lanes	Number of parking spaces (especially in the centre of the square)
Traditional setts and granite pavements	
Railings	

South Silver Street and Golden Square from Union Street



## 6.5 Setting and Views

**6.5.1** Golden Square sits to the north of Union Street and the west of Union Terrace and was built between 1810 and 1821. All the properties facing onto the square are two storey apart from the rear of the Music Hall which is three storeys. The properties on the square generally consist of 2 storeys with basement and attic and provide a very strong setting for the Square. Golden Square is completed in the south west corner with the rear of the Music Hall which is part of the Central Character Area. The character of Golden Square differs noticeably from Union Street. It is quieter being set back from the main street, the buildings are smaller in scale and the trees surrounding the square give a more peaceful environment.

**6.5.2** This character area also includes North Silver Street, South Silver Street and Diamond Street. These streets were developed at the same time as Golden Square and run at right angles providing symmetry of access to the square. The design of North Silver Street and South Silver Street are linear in nature. South Silver Street runs from Union Street to the square and North Silver Street runs from the square and terminates to the north with a set of steps at its junction with Skene Terrace.

Golden Square, North Silver Street, South Silver Street, Crown Street and Diamond Street were all developed during the same time period (1810-1821). These streets were the first set out to the west of the Denburn after the building of Union Bridge. The land was previously owned by the **Hammermen Incorporated Trades** (craftsmen connected to goldsmiths, silversmiths and other metal work) hence the street names. Golden Square, North Silver Street and Ruby Lane to name but a few.

**6.5.3** When first built, Golden Square had a circular grassed garden to its centre reflecting the round shape of this area. Unfortunately this was given over to car-parking some time ago. The exact date is unknown but it is thought to be around the early 1950s.

**6.5.4** The other streets within this character area differ. Crimon Street is flat with the eastern side being 2 storey properties with basement and attic. The west side of the street however has an office block (rear of 41 Huntly Street) that was constructed in the 1980s. A small part of the office block faces Huntly Street but it is largely screened by 50-56 Huntly Street. St Mary's Cathedral and 50-56

*North Silver Street from Golden Square*

Huntly Street are grand and dominant within the streetscape. The topography is relatively flat apart from Skene Street which slopes down to the Rosemount Viaduct on its east.

**6.5.5** Views through this character area are limited. The most important view is from Union Street up South Silver Street through Golden Square and on to North Silver Street. To the east, along Skene Terrace, views of St Mark's dome on Rosemount Viaduct are evident. This is a positive historic view that has not been eroded by modern development. Glimpses are afforded of St Mary's Cathedral from Crimon Place and Huntly Street itself.





## 6.6 Built Environment

### Orientation, Building Lines and Heights

**6.6.1** The street widths in the character area vary from 3.6 metres on the one-way Skene Terrace, 5.7 metres on Ruby Lane and 7.7 metres on Crimon Place and North Silver Street. The narrower width of the streets adds to a sense of enclosure that is not evident within Golden Square itself which measures around 68 metres across.

**6.6.2** The buildings around Golden Square are set back from the pavement with the addition of both basement and a stepped access to the ground floor. This access arrangement is also evident on Skene Terrace and parts of Crimon Place which is also stepped back from the edge of the footway. North Silver Street's properties face directly onto the street, leading to a greater sense of enclosure. The buildings in this character area are relatively consistent in height and design. The following sets out the prevalent heights and styles:

*Left: St Mary's Cathedral Huntly Street. Above: Skene Terrace*

**6.6.3 Golden Square** – Largely 2 storeys with attic and basement accommodation. Set in a formal square around. Though all the buildings are of similar scale they vary slightly in terms of design and detailing which is indicative of the various stages the buildings were constructed. The buildings on the square are generally uniform in form but differ in detailing. This provides a somewhat uniform streetscape with subtle differences to the individual buildings. The rear of the Music Hall is also located to the south of Golden Square which is quite prominent in the streetscape though the 3 storeys are stepped back slightly from the square itself.

**6.6.4 North Silver Street** – The majority of the buildings on this street are 2 storey with attic accommodation (dormers). Properties of note are the Globe Inn (13- 15 North Silver Street) and former Under the Hammer public house (11 North Silver Street) as well as John Milne’s Auction House (9 North Silver Street) all of which are between 2 and 2 ½ storeys and clustered together in a non-residential group. The southerly end of North Silver Street has a modern 2 storey office building (part of 12 Golden Square) opposite a single storey extension (7 North Silver Street).

**6.6.5 Huntly Street** – Consists of a mixture of properties. Heights vary from 2 ½ to 3 ½ storeys along the west side of this street. 33-41 Huntly Street dates back to around 1821 with the remainder of the street evident on the 1869 first edition Ordnance Survey map. To the east St Mary’s Cathedral and its strong elegant spire is visually prominent from close by and the wider cityscape.



**6.6.6 Crimon Place** – To the north side of the street the properties are residential and are largely 2 storey with basement and attic. A number of the properties at attic level have much later dormers that are not necessarily appropriate for the design of the property. To the south side is the rear of both St Mary’s Cathedral and the modern office building at 48 Huntly Street. The office is largely 3 storeys but is set back from the street edge providing some relief from the large solid façade.

**6.6.7 Skene Terrace** – The tenements to the north of Skene Terrace originate from around the 1800s. Again these are 2 storey with attic and basement levels and an elevated ached staircase that allows access to a communal hall for the flats. To the western end of the street is the YMCA Hall (52 Skene Terrace) and associated carpark. To the south of the street are two low level halls and a Unitarian Church as well as the Boys Brigade Hall which front onto Crimond Place. There is also a single 3 1/3 story tenement in the middle of the street (45 Skene Street).

**6.6.8 Summer Street** – Opposite the entrance to Skene Street is the Evangelical Church which has recently been refurbished. The only other part of this street that is included is the modern office on the corner of Huntly Street (62 Huntly Street), which takes up a large area of the block. The church is a positive and a strong element in the streetscape.





### Typical Building Forms and Features

**6.6.9** There are a large number of listed buildings within this character area. All of the properties on Golden Square and the east side of North Silver Street are Category B listed, including the Duke of Gordon Statue in the centre. These properties are listed in groups of 2 or 3 which relate to their location within the square. The corners of the buildings are formal and square in nature which is unusual in Aberdeen where a history of intricate curved and detailed corners to buildings is evident in buildings of this period. A number of dormers are present in this area in a variety of styles and periods. Railings are also still present, many of which are original. These afford a level of privacy and separation from the street. Large chimneys are evident on the properties demonstrating how many rooms the buildings have and the status of them when they were built.

**6.6.10** On Huntly Street, St Mary's Cathedral (Category B listed) is a mid 19th century granite neo-gothic church with sandstone tracery, tower and spire giving the church a strong vertical emphasis. The church and the spire add considerably to the streetscape and the wider city scape. 50 Huntly Street (Category B listed) is a 2 storey 'U' plan building and former blind hospital designed by John Smith in a neo-classical style. The Category C listed buildings opposite at 33 – 1 Huntly Street have small commercial units to the ground floor and a slightly less grand granite finish. 43 Huntly Street is stepped back from neighbouring 41, resulting in 3 windows being on the visible gable allowing additional light and providing interest within the streetscape.

*Left: St Mary's Cathedral. Above: Diamond Street*

**6.6.11** There are also a number of Category B listed buildings on the north side of Skene Terrace. These are designed with more a rusticated finish and are smaller in scale. Dressed granite is present around the windows and as a string course which demonstrates that these properties were likely rendered in the past. This is also reflected in the lack of ashlar dressed stone on the frontage.

**6.6.12** The rear of the modern office block (48 Huntly Street) on Crimond Place is not of particularly high design quality but it could be argued it has a neutral impact on the area. From Huntly Street it has very little impact given it is largely screened by the listed building at 50 Huntly Street to its front. There are other buildings within this area that make a natural impact such as 62 Huntly Street and St Mary's Court. This said, if any redevelopment of these were to ever take place there is benefit in having them within the Conservation Area to ensure the highest quality replacement or refurbishment.

**6.6.13** A key component of this character area are the back lanes. These are characterised by narrower streets lesser quality material and detailing, though still largely granite and timber. Brick is also used for rear extension and boundary walls again delineating the lesser quality of development on the rear lanes. Diamond Lane is a good example of these characteristics. Ruby Lane also has a number of more industrial looking brick warehouse buildings.

**6.6.14** Low granite boundary walls are a very common feature with some fine examples of historic cast iron railings remaining on top of them within this character area. In particular on Golden Square and, to a lesser extent Skene Terrace, railings are evident.

**6.6.15** To the north east corner of Golden Square number 9 has a metal balcony at first floor and at number 10 has a Bon Accord Crest on the railings, again in cast iron. Furthermore at number 19 there is a metal arch to the front of the property on the stairs. The use of metal in these detailed elements is a positive characteristic of the square and provides interest and decoration lacking elsewhere within this character area.

**6.6.16** Within the Council's Historic Environment Record there are a small number of entries, but these largely relate to listed buildings and the Duke of Gordon statue. The lack of records may relate to the lack of recent development in this area meaning that no archaeological work has been carried out.

*Duke of Gordon Statue, Golden Square*



## Materials

**6.6.17** The buildings in this character area are constructed of largely granite walls with slate roofs (Scottish and Welsh) though different finishes to the granite face are apparent. On the formal Golden Square and North Silver Street, the visible front and street elevations to the side tend to be ashlar granite. There are limited views of the rear of these buildings but where they are visible they are more rustic cut stones. Crimon Place and Skene Terrace demonstrate lesser grandeur than Golden Square and this is evident in the more rustic random nature of the elevational treatment and the finish to the granite. This said, the Skene Terrace properties in particular appear to originally have had some form of lime based surface finish.

**6.6.18** Brick is prevalent on a number of the rear lanes in this character area including boundary walls extensions and some former industrial buildings such as the warehouses on Ruby Lane that are now used for car parking.

**6.6.19** Traditional timber doors and windows are still present in this character area, some of which are original or historic. These should be repaired and retained wherever possible. It is unclear what the window fenestrations would originally have comprised of given the variety from 1 over 1, 6 over 6 and in some cases 6 over 9 within Golden Square alone. Unfortunately, some windows have been altered to UPVc which is no longer supported to the principal elevation of properties in a Conservation Area, but in general this is in limited areas and the windows are largely timber of traditional proportions.

**6.6.20** Where they are visible, most of the properties in this character area have cast iron gutters and downpipes. Within Golden Square the gutters are hidden behind a parapet and are not visible but will be formed in lead.

**6.6.21** There are a number of modern buildings within the character area and these are generally finished in more modern materials such as concrete and dry dash render. Though not of such a high quality as the traditional materials, the colours still largely reflect the granite and slate and do blend in relatively well.

**6.6.22** An important feature of the roofline of the historic buildings in this character area are the chimney stacks. These provide variety and break up the horizontal emphasis of the roofs. Some original chimney pots are still present on a number thus enhancing this element further. On the more salubrious properties these stacks are made of granite.





## 6.7 Public Realm

### Streets, Parking and Pavements

**6.7.1** The formal square is the main feature of this character area but unfortunately today it is heavily dominated by road surface and hardstanding. The square has also been given over to large areas of car parking which has a detrimental effect on the square, the setting of the surrounding listed buildings and the character area as a whole. This said the current parking arrangement is an improvement of that of the past. The streets circling Golden Square are one way but it is still very busy particularly during the day and early evening when events are on at the Music Hall. On-street parking is present in these areas with the width and directional requirements of the streets ensure that this can only take place on one side, such as Huntly Street and Skene Terrace. To the front of 50-56 Huntly Street the parking has been discretely provided to the sides of the property with only four spaces at the front helping to retain the setting of this important building with the streetscape.

**6.7.2** North Silver Street measures 7.7 metres, Crimon Place at 6.2 metres where it leaves Golden Square and up to 7.7 metres as it moves past the modern building at Langlands House (rear of 48 Huntly Street), where the street width has been altered by the development. Skene Terrace is a very busy one way street cut through from Rosemount Viaduct. It is heavily trafficked but does have traffic calming measures to reduce speed. It also narrows half way along, down to 3.2 metres from an already narrow 4.8 metres highlighting the age of the street. Huntly Street is another older street with the original street pattern, setts and measures at 5.4 metres in width.

**6.7.3** Historic granite setts are present on Diamond Street and Lane, South Silver Street, Huntly Street and at the entrance to Skene Terrace. The retention of these features, though costly and harder to maintain, are important for the character of the Conservation Area.

**6.7.4** The pavements in this character area vary in quality, materials and width. Skene Terrace has a very narrow pavement, particularly on its south side, which is exacerbated by a large wall running adjacent. The pavements around Golden Square are high quality granite and granite kerbs reflecting the status of this square when it was built. Widths of pavements vary from 2.3 metres on Huntly Street, 1.4 metres on Lindsay Street to under a metre at circa 70 centimetres on Diamond Street. Ruby Lane, half of Crimon Place and Diamond Lane have no pavements at all given their subservient nature.

**6.7.5** There are small areas where granite paving is used including the rear of St Mary's Cathedral. Concrete paving is fairly widespread in the character area except in key areas as described above. Granite kerbing is used more commonly which provides a higher quality finish to a concrete pavement. The concrete pavement slabs in a number of areas are in poor condition. This is likely as a result of vehicles illegally parking and stopping on them. Some have been replaced and in other areas, such as Huntly Street, an attempt to stop vehicles mounting the kerb has been made with the introduction of bollards. Granite paving and granite kerb stones should be retained in situ wherever possible. Any future public realm scheme should be of the highest quality (design and materials) and respect the special character of the area.



## Shopfronts and Signage

**6.7.6** Commercial signage is designed in a sensitive and appropriate way for the scale and design of the buildings on which these are present. The former Under the Hammer (11 North Silver Street), John Milne's Auction House (9 North Silver Street) and the Globe (13-15 North Silver Street) all utilise traditional signs with timber fascias. Within Golden Square the signage of businesses is again very sensitively designed, kept to a minimum and often located within the windows thereby ensuring minimal visual clutter. The positive minimal street signage and sensitive business signs are welcomed and are a positive element of this character area.

**6.7.7** Large 'To Let' signs are becoming more prevalent in this area of the city centre. These detract from the special character of the area and should be avoided wherever possible, especially large triangular projecting signs. Sympathetically sized and sited 'To Let' signs would be welcomed and be more appropriate for such an important and sensitive area of the city.

*Above: The Globe Inn. Right: Large projecting 'To Let' sign Golden Square*

## Street Signage

**6.7.8** The traditional Aberdeen 'black finger' signs are used within this character area. These are located at a high level and in Golden Square are carefully lined along the string course which adds to the character. Generally they are in good condition except on North Silver Street where they are located at a lower height on the building and a number of letters are missing.

**6.7.9** Signage in this area appears to be kept to a minimum with only statutory directional signage being present. This is welcomed as it reduces visual and physical clutter within the street. The vacant properties in this area, and in particular Golden Square, often have large "To Let" signs which detract from the character of the area. It is hoped that the City Centre Masterplans aspirations to encourage people to move back into the City Centre will result in the conversion of some of these vacant properties back to their former residential uses.





## Street Furniture

**6.710** Street furniture in this area is relatively limited and is largely focussed around Golden Square where there is space to accommodate it. Within Golden Square there are a few planters and hanging baskets which hang from the light fittings. There would be scope to have pleasant seating areas particularly if there was less vehicle priority within the square itself. Within Golden Square there is also a gold postbox celebrating the gold medal win of Neil Fachie in the 2012 Paralympics, this is well sited and makes a positive contribution to the Square.

**6.711** On Huntly Street there are a few planters, but again these have been sited on wide parts of the pavement so as to not cause obstructions to pedestrians. Aberdeen Inspired have recently installed a pocket park / parklet on Huntly Street. Also on Huntly Street a number of bollards have been placed particularly at the wider part of the pavements to ensure no parking however these do cause a barrier for pedestrian movement and provide clutter but it is noted that the condition of the pavements necessitates their requirement.

**6.712** A number of the properties have traditional railings still present which add to the formality of Golden Square while also making the properties on Skene Terrace more contained. These railings are generally painted black in colour but unfortunately in a number of instances their maintenance is poor resulting in rust and broken elements. Original and historic railings should be repaired and retained wherever possible. Any replacement railings should replicate the style and dimensions of the original railings as closely as possible.

**6.713** Within this character area (in all streets except Crimon Place) heritage street lighting has been successfully installed. These are shorter than modern street lights, made of metal and are of a more traditional design. There are limited areas within Aberdeen where this type of lighting is present. The presence of this type of lights shows the historic importance of these streets and should be retained.

*Above: Directional sign. Right: Gold post box in Golden Square*





## 6.8 City Centre Masterplan Projects

**6.8.1** The City Centre Masterplan outlines a 20 year development strategy for Aberdeen city centre. A key masterplan project is in the boundary of the Golden Square character area and is detailed below.

**6.8.2** EN09: Golden Square: Re-engineering of this space from a vehicle dominated car park towards to a public square and events space associated with the Music Hall.

## 6.9 Green and Blue Infrastructure

**6.9.1** There are a number of trees within this character area but no street trees as such. There are two trees on Huntly Street to the front of the St Mary's Court which complement the mature trees on the other site of the road in the grounds of 50 Huntly Street which are visible from a distance and soften the street. The closest to street trees are those within Golden Square which contribute positively to the character of the square and are very important within the streetscape. There have always been trees within Golden Square. These trees are mature but appear to be in a good condition of health so their retention is essential. There are also small areas of grass around the edge of the central part of Golden Square which on a sunny day are pleasant to sit out in. This small area of open space is very positive within the area.

*Above: Traditional style lamp post. Right: Parking in Golden Square.*

**6.9.2** There are a number of smaller trees within the pocket of open space to the north west of St Mary's Cathedral. These trees and spaces are important within this otherwise rather hard landscape as they soften the streetscape and provide an area to pause. The Aberdeen City Council Open Space Audit, identifies 4 open spaces within the character area. These are all part of the Jack's Brae site.

## 6.10 Negative Factors

- Overdominance of parking in the square especially in the central element.
- Large street bins are present on Huntly Street. The area around them is poorly maintained and the bins by their nature are unattractive and do not make a positive contribution to the character area
- Modern, unsympathetic interventions of dormers not designed for their context.
- The incremental loss of historic windows and doors has a negative impact on the character of the Conservation Area.
- Inappropriate modern replacement windows and doors.
- Lack of maintenance over the years and resultant decay. (Common issues include: blocked or broken gutters and downpipes, slipped and missing slates, vegetation, failing leadwork, defective chimneys and windows which need repairing and repainting).
- Vacant units at ground and upper level.
- Large 'To Let' signs
- Cracked paving slabs.



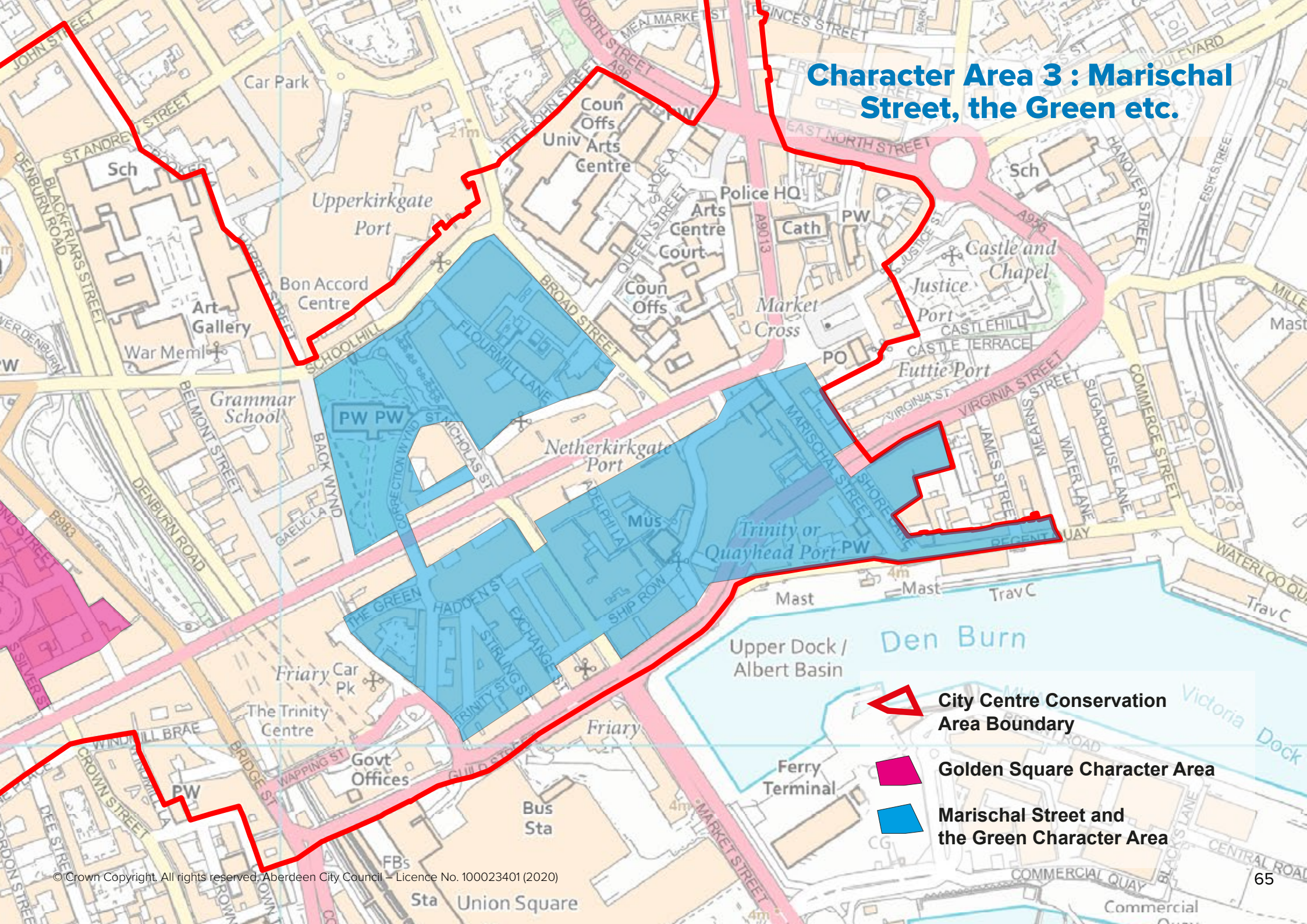
## 7. Character Area 3: Marishal Street, the Green etc.






*Nuart mural on Aberdeen Market*



# Character Area 3 : Marischal Street, the Green etc.



-  City Centre Conservation Area Boundary
-  Golden Square Character Area
-  Marischal Street and the Green Character Area

### Character Area 3 : Marischal Street, the Green etc

**7.1** This character area encompasses a number of key components of the early development of Aberdeen. This character area generally covers 16th century to the early 20th century but there are some exceptions to this. The layout of the character area reflects the somewhat unusual way the earlier elements intersect with the elements of the City built from the mid 19th century onwards. It is important to highlight the earlier developments within the city centre, as some of these are the most important and interesting areas of the City.

### 7.2 Streets

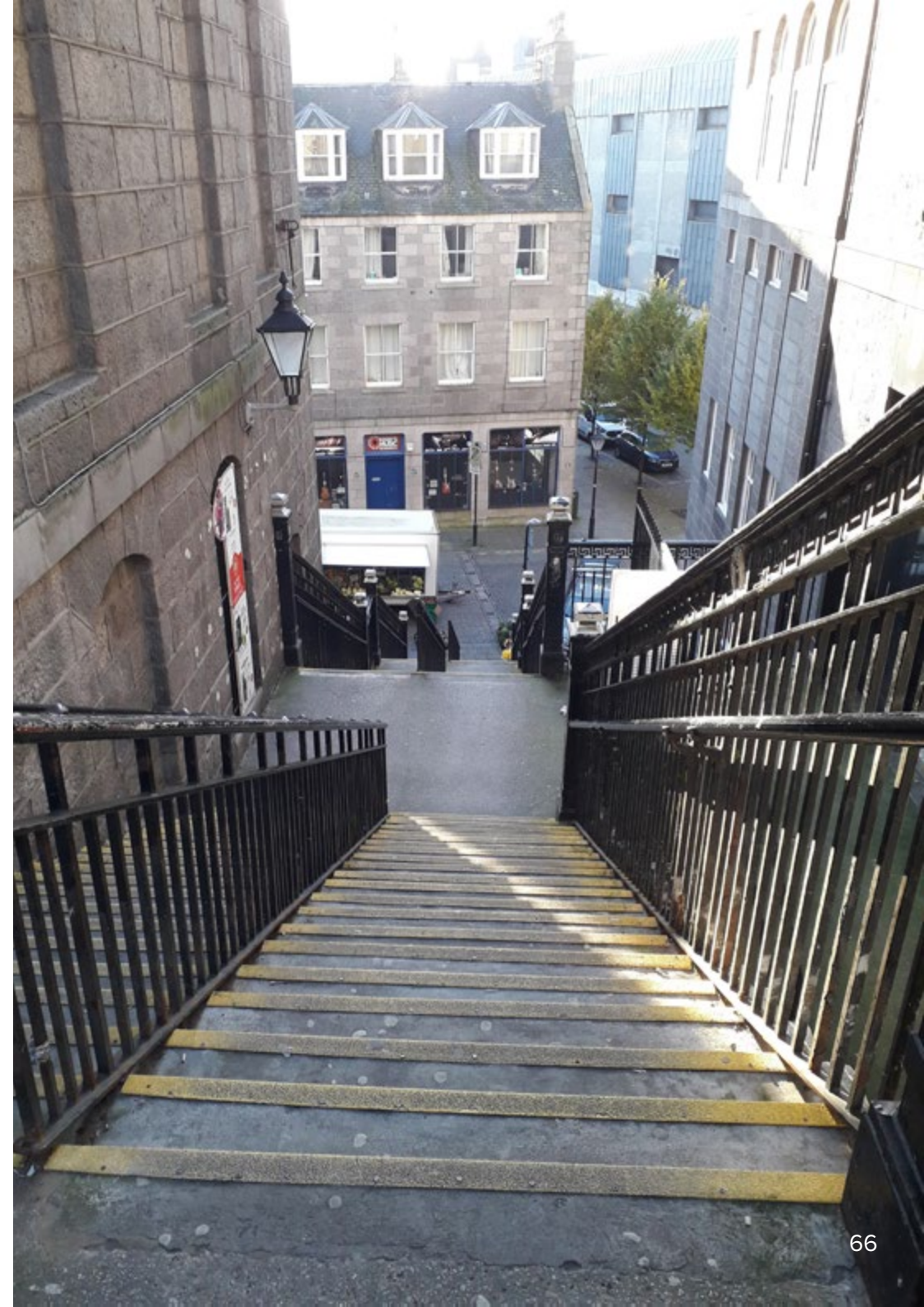
Marischal Street, Ship Row, Adelphi, Hadden Street, Exchange Street, Exchange Lane, Trinity Street Stirling Street, Carmelite Street (part), the Green. Correction Wynd, St Nicholas Lane, Weigh-House Square, Theatre Lane and Shore Lane (part). Remainder of Shore Lane, 22-24 Virginia Street, 39-40 Regent Quay and curtilage, Regent House and curtilage of 36a.

### 7.3 Key Buildings

53 Castle Street, the Tivoli Theatre, 48-50 Shiprow (Provost Watt’s House), 14-16 Regent Quay, 6-10 Virginia Street and 5-7 Weigh-House Square. 10-14 Marischal Street, 11-15 Marischal Street, 28-32 Marischal Street, 42,42a Marischal Street, 41-45 Marischal Street, 60 and 62 Marischal Street, Carmelite Hotel (Stirling Street), Provost Skene’s House, Provost Ross’s House, 33 Regent Quay.

### 7.4 Key Characteristics

Positive	Negative
Streetscape	Maintenance of buildings
Uses and activity	Street bins
Signage – street and shop	Vacant units at ground and upper level.
High quality materials in key areas	Gap site adjacent Back Wynd steps



*Back Wynd Steps from Union Street looking down to the Green*



*The Green streetscape*



*The Green looking ahead towards Correction Wynd with Union Street above.*



To the west, the area is bounded by the Denburn Valley. Historically the Denburn Valley was a topographical feature which limited the expansion of the City although the route from the Green, across the Denburn to Windmill Brae and thence the Hardgate, the Bridge of Dee and beyond was an important route in and out of the City. This route, though the context has changed, is still there in a form through the Trinity Centre Carpark.

**7.5.3** The Green is one of four administrative medieval quarters recorded by 1399 and was an important point of entry to the City. Religious and mercantile activity has underpinned the life and economics of the area over a 750 year period. The Green remains an important architectural and historic focus reminding us of Aberdeen's medieval urban origins through to its nineteenth century expansion. Although the surrounding buildings date from the early to mid 19th century the Green retains an older character and to an extent the existing historic buildings are a set piece which adds considerably to the special character of the Conservation Area. The Green now connects under Union Street to Correction Wynd along the edge of St Nicholas Kirk cemetery where the topography and level difference are also apparent. The buildings and public realm in and surrounding the Green benefitted from a Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) from 2008 -2013 which successfully improved the condition of the historic buildings and public realm in the area.

## 7.5 Setting and Views

**7.5.1** The setting of the character area is less grand but no less interesting than the other two character areas. The smaller more enclosed streets like Shiprow, Flourmill Lane and Correction Wynd are reflective of the earlier (medieval) time period they date back to. Although these medieval streets have had a number of modern buildings constructed along them, they still retain a distinctive historic character which should be retained as some of the last remaining streets of this type.

**7.5.2** This area reflects the historic topography of Aberdeen, (i.e. before the construction of Union Street). Shiprow curves around the remains of the historic St Katherine's Hill and Union Street flies over Correction Wynd, emphasising the difference in topography. The Green and its surrounding streets further demonstrate the effects of the different levels. The height of the buildings to the north of the Green are noticeably higher than those to the south. This is largely due to the buildings to the north fronting the higher Union Street.

*Above: Aberdeen Market. Right: Marischal Street*





**7.5.4** The large former modern indoor market building at the east end of the Green dates back to the 1970s. Although it respects the scale of its surroundings and mimics the curved end onto the Green of the original Archibald Simpson designed market building that was previously on the site, the materials and design of the market building are of minimal architectural value and the building detracts from the character of the Green and the wider Conservation Area. Any replacement building will need to respect the scale and special character of the area.

**7.5.5** Marischal Street was designed by William Law in 1766 and was the first formally planned street in Aberdeen. It is an important early example of a bridge street and flyover in Scotland demonstrating the engineering prowess in Aberdeen even at this early time (the bridge was replaced as a result of the widening of Virginia Street). The properties at the north end (north of the bridge) are the oldest. The buildings at the south end (south of the bridge) of the street are thought to be designed by William Smith (the father of James Smith). The buildings are generally smaller in height (2-3 storeys) and a lot simpler in style. Simple cornicing and raised margins are the prevailing detailing in the majority of buildings in the street. The raised margins are indicative of some sort of lime based surface finish.

*Above: Provost Skene's House. Right: Smith Screen St Nicholas Kirk.*

**7.5.6** Provost Skene's House dates from the 16th century and is the only surviving example of a grand town house from this period. The oldest record of the house dates back to either 1545 or 1571 and it was recorded belonging to the Knollis family. The building was purchased in 1669 by Provost George Skene and its present appearance is attributed largely to him. It was restored as a museum in the 1950 and has been altered quite considerably internally but there are still numerous examples of historic interior features. The original setting of the house was compromised by slum clearance in the 1930s. More recently it was dwarfed by St Nicholas House until it was demolished in 2014. The current setting created by the Marischal Square development although not historic is far more complementary to the house than the previous building on the site. The building is currently being restored, upgraded and brought back into use as a museum with displays exploring the life and achievements of inspirational people from Aberdeen and North East of Scotland.

**7.5.7** St Nicholas Kirk was one of the largest medieval parish churches built in Scotland. There are parts of the building that date back to the 12th century. The earliest record of the church dates back to 1157. The West Church was designed by James Gibb (1755), The East Church is designed by Archibald Simpson (1835-7) and the Steeple was designed by William Smith (1875-7). This forms the church that sits on the site today. Given the history of the building it is only fitting that it is in this character area but also contributes significantly to the special character of Union Street as well as the remaining small medieval core of the City. It is very much one of the, if not the, most historically important building in Aberdeen.





There are a number views in this character area that are worthy of note:

- Views from Union Street to Along Correction Wynd with St Nicholas Kirk.
- Views of the Green from Hadden Street
- Views of the green from the top of the Back Wynd Steps
- Views down Marischal Street from Castle Street
- Views up Marischal Street from Regent Quay.
- Views of St Nicholas Kirk and the smith screen.
- Views of Aberdeen harbour from within the area are vital to its character, for example down Marischal Street and from the other streets to the north of the harbour. The harbour and River Dee are key to the setting of the Conservation Area, being the *raison d'être* for the City. The sloping natural topography of the Conservation Area and its proximity to, and interaction with, the waterfront should be seen as key elements of its setting.



*Above: St Nicholas Kirkyard. Right: Correction Wynd view from Union Street.*



4.6 metres and Marischal Street 7.8 metres. The Green itself is wide at 12.5 metres at its narrowest which is reflective of its use as the market area and its original entrance point to the City.

**7.6.3** Across this character area the buildings vary greatly in height. On the north side of the Green, to the rear of Union Street, the properties go up to a maximum of 5 storeys with attic accommodation. This drops down on the south side of the Green to 3 storeys with attic in the traditional properties and 4 storeys with attic in the more modern developments. Off the Green, Stirling Street is 3 storeys with attic level, and Exchange Street varies between 2 and 3 storeys with attic.

**7.6.4** Marischal Street descends steeply down from Union Street with the majority of buildings on the street being 3 storeys with attic accommodation until one travels over Virginia Street, where the properties on the east side of the street reduce in scale to 2 storey with attic. The topography allows for properties on this street to descend gradually which provides an interesting detail in the character area. Shore Lane to the rear of Marischal are 3- 4 storey with attic and basement levels. On the opposite side of Shore Lane is the Shore Porters warehouse which is 5 storeys and attic in height. The scale of the properties on this Lane, coupled with the narrow street and pavements can make this a very

## 7.6 Built Environment

### Orientation, Building Lines and Heights.

**7.6.1** The building line and building heights along most of the street frontages are fairly uniform and the streets are densely built up, with few gaps between the buildings, providing a sense of uniformity and enclosure. The back lanes are generally lined with lower buildings and have a less regular building line, with some rear areas having been converted to car parking, rather than having a building fronting on to the road. Some of these rear lanes, for example Justice Mill Lane and Windmill Brae are enlivened by artworks such as those that form part of the painted doors project. A number of Nuart pieces are located within this character area. The Green shows the heights of the buildings and the different levels of the City with the north side being the rear of Union Street demonstrating the levels very well.

**7.6.2** There is a huge variety of street widths in this character area with the narrower streets largely relating to their historic layout. Exchange Street measures 5.6 metres, Stirling Street 7.6 metres, Ship Row 5.5 metres, Shore Lane

*Above: Marischal Street. Right: Nuart mural Shiprow.*





enclosed space. Theatre Lane to the rear of the western side of Marischal Street is more enclosed with a number of pends formed along its length. The surface of Theatre Lane is undulating due to its poor quality and this makes the lane feel enclosed and unsafe. Along Virginia Street the warehouses are a very important feature of the character area. They provide a strong frontage to this area and a recognition of the industrial past and the harbour beyond. These buildings vary between 4 and 5 storeys and are of simple design with large loading bay doors on the ground floor level.

**7.6.5** Like a number of the other character and Conservation Areas within Aberdeen, building maintenance is a big issue. This is particularly challenging where there are buildings in multiple ownership. Gutters, downpipes, roofs, and windows are common areas where poor maintenance results in issues and causes potential health and safety issues with falling debris. If a building is vacant this further results in poor maintenance and disrepair. This is particularly evident on some of the buildings on Marischal Street.

**7.6.6** Within this character area there are a number of buildings on Historic Environment Scotland's Buildings At Risk Register. 62-64, 76-78, 82-84 Shiprow, Prince of Wales Public House 7,9 and 11 St Nicholas Lane and 28-32 Marischal Street have all been included in the Register, highlighting that their maintenance and condition is of a standard that may result in further decay putting them at risk. Small pockets of this character area have a detrimental effect on the character. Within this gap site a number of bins have been placed and a large amount of

*Above: Bins and vegetation in Back Wynd gap site. Right: Shiprow.*

vegetation has been allowed to grow out of the setts. This is highly visible and detracts from the character of the area. By their nature the rear lanes have bins and are of poorer quality, but this is expected in such areas. This said, maintenance should also be carried out in these areas as there is evidence of rusty windows, bars and satellite dishes that are no longer used.

**7.6.7** This area does not allow particularly long distance views but one key view is down Marischal Street and Shore Lane to the harbour. Marischal Street provides a longer distance view from Union Street and is one of the only points where one can appreciate the proximity of Aberdeen harbour to the city centre.

**7.6.8** Given the historic nature of this area there are a number of entries in the Sites and Monuments record. These include evidence of the Carmelite Friary Graveyard, the Friary itself, early medieval ploughing and the site of a former wool mill – to name only a few. This demonstrates how significant this area was historically and for the development of Aberdeen.







## Typical Building Forms and Features

**7.6.9** Marischal Street is made up for the most part by 2-3 storey buildings. At the bottom of Marischal Street the grand building of 33 Regent Quay provides a strong end to the street. 60-62 Marischal Street is also an important termination to the street with its large curved corner bay and drum tower. These at the time of their construction would have been highly visible from the harbour and are a fitting end to the development of Marischal Street. Unfortunately 60-62 Marischal Street has been in a state of disrepair for a number of years. The Category A listed 53 Castle Street (Sheriff Court Annex and High Court of Justiciary) at the top of Marischal Street again provides a very strong end point reflecting the importance of this relatively unassuming street.

**7.6.10** The Carmelite Hotel is Category B listed, while numbers 10 through to 23 Stirling Street are all Category C listed. Within the Green itself, the corner buildings of 39 Green and 41-43 Green are all Category C listed. The Carmelite Hotel is a very interesting building and an example of a gothic style hotel making dramatic use of its corner site. Shiprow is built on a curve and the buildings at the lower level of the street are built on the same curve. To the top of the street the older buildings themselves do not curve but sit within the street and address it well.

**7.6.11** Provost Ross's House at number 48-50 Shiprow is the only Category A listed building on Shiprow. The Maritime Museum with its modern subservient glass extension sits well within the streetscape, the extension set back from the building line. Shiprow at its lower section has both rear and fronts of buildings facing it. Trinity Lane, a popular cut through, has the appearance of a service lane with side doors and rear entrances to buildings. This said, the street surface is attractive with traditional setts.

**7.6.12** Correction Wynd again is enclosed as space from both the St Nicholas graveyard wall and the flats opposite. The solid, high graveyard wall is a very strong feature within this part of the character area.

*Carmelite Hotel*



**7.6.13** Interesting detailing is present on a number of the buildings in this character area including:

- curved windows and corner turrets on Exchange Street;
- oriel window and crenelated round turret on the Carmelite Hotel;
- numerous windows types and nebus gables throughout the whole character area;
- Painted glass windows;
- Columns and pediment details; and,
- String course at varying heights on the buildings.

**7.6.14** There are also a number of curved corners which Aberdeen use very well. These include the bottom of Marischal Street, around the Green and the Carmelite Hotel. There are a mix of uses within this area that provide variety in this city centre location. The uses range from public houses and cafes to small independent shop units as well as a cinema and a bowling alley. This mix of uses ensures that the area is in use beyond the hours of 9am-5pm, encouraging evening activity as set out in the City Centre Masterplan.

**7.6.15** An important feature on these buildings, and this area as a whole, is the artwork that was created for the Nuart festival over the last 3 years. Heavily focussed around the Green and its surrounds, this street art festival has brought life and colour back into the building's and activity back into the area and to encourage visitors to venture beyond the main streets. The main pieces of art from the 2017-2019 festivals are located within this character area.

## Materials

**7.6.16** The traditional buildings within this character area are largely granite with slate roofs. Scottish slate roofs are still evident on Marischal Street. The granite is finished in different ways, largely reflecting the status of the building. Around the historic Green, the granite, though laid in courses, is more rustic in look, with pick fronted granite being commonly used on the upper floors. To the ground floor, where commercial units are present, the stone has a smoother finish. The Carmelite Hotel has very interesting stone finishing across the building with smooth ashlar to the ground floor and the window surrounds on the north east elevation. There is a tooled face granite covering the remainder of the building. Aberdeen pinning stones are also evident in this character area such as along the St Nicholas Graveyard wall on Correction Wynd.

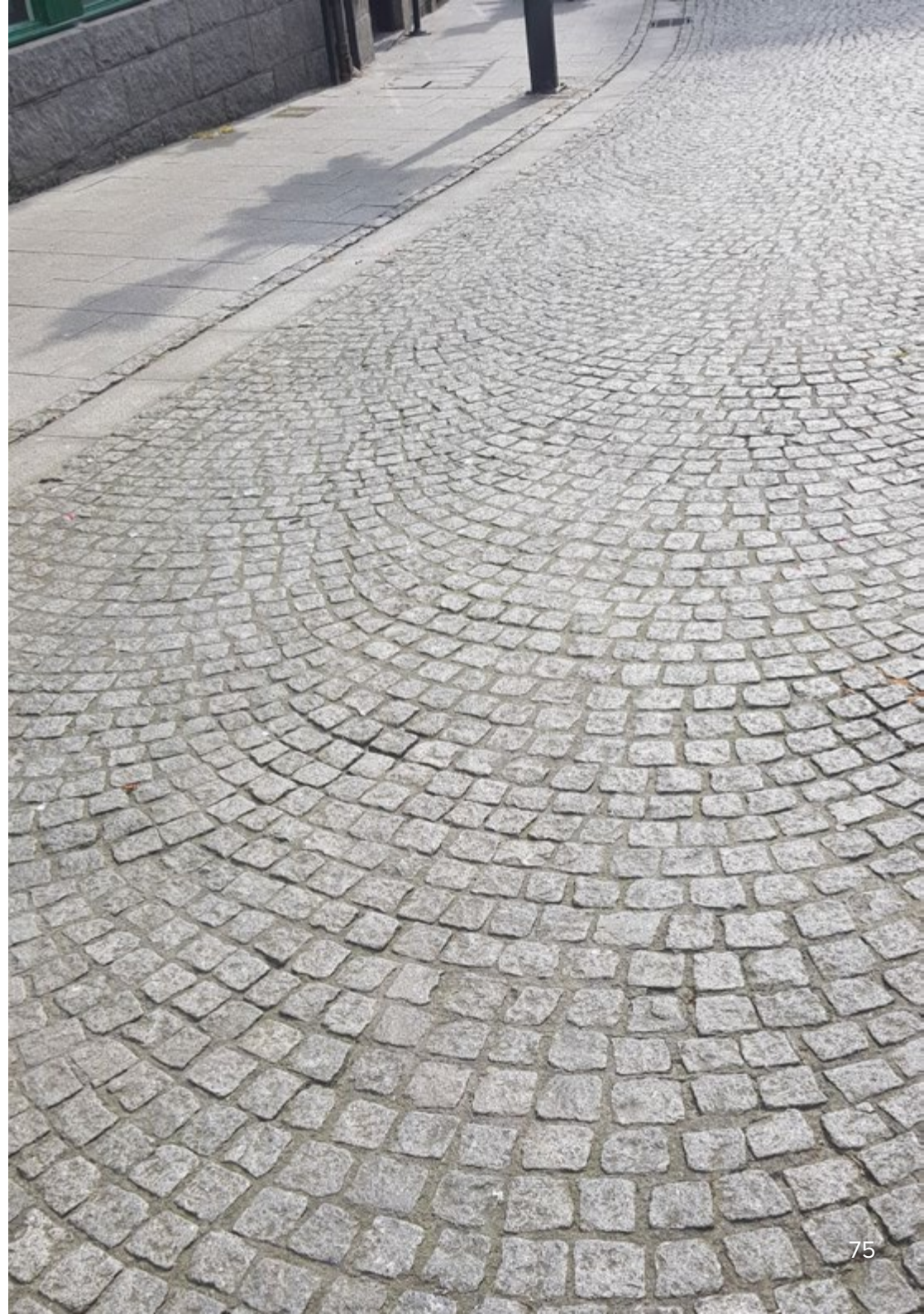
**7.6.17** There is evidence on some of the buildings and down the walls of the lanes of traditional lime based surface finish applied to the buildings. This is evident on window ingos and in small areas on the stonework, this would have provided a very different look to the City. Down some lanes there is evidence of layers of lime wash on the walls. The reinstatement of these traditional lime based surface finishes would be welcome.

**7.6.18** Dormers have been added to a number of the buildings and, while many of these are in a traditional form with a pitched, slated roof, many are inappropriate modern additions with flat roofs, usually covered by roofing felt. Some roofs have traditional snow boards, which should be retained. Lead is also used extensively in parapet gutters and for flashings on roofs and ridges on dormers, although zinc has sometimes been used as an alternative in recent years. The replacement of modern box dormers with traditionally sized and detailed dormers would be a welcome improvement to the individual buildings, the streetscape and the wider Conservation Area.

**7.6.19** The building materials used in the lanes and wynds in this character area are clearly reflective of their historic use for deliveries and access. The granite is finished in a more random rubble manner with a more natural finish to the stone. This said, the granite still in most locations tends to be coursed.

**7.6.20** The warehouses adjacent to the harbour use granite in courses, rather than randomly, this demonstrates the importance of these structures when they were built.

*Granite sets at the Green*





**7.6.21** There are a large number of original and traditional style windows and doors still remaining within this character area. Window frames are primarily constructed of timber. uPVC has been used in some buildings, although this has a negative impact on the Conservation Area and its' use should be avoided. Doors are also primarily timber, those leading to upper floors or domestic properties are usually panelled, whereas many of those leading into offices or retail premises are less tradition and contain glazing. A number of traditional doors have been replaced with modern metal framed doors, particularly in buildings with modern shopfronts.

**7.6.22** Some shops have an outer set of storm doors, which are open by day and closed at night, giving security while keeping the attractive appearance of the building. These are most frequently timber, but some are metal or uPVC. As an alternative, some commercial premises with recessed entrances have metal gates, which allow visibility into the property while restricting access. A small number of properties have roller shutters, which have a negative impact on the Conservation Area.

*Above: Aberdeen Maritime Museum. Right: Granite detailing*

**7.6.23** 20th and 21st century buildings use a variety of modern building materials, including reconstituted granite and render, as at 2-32 Rennie's Wynd, the Market and properties on Martin's Lane and Carmelite Street and Lane. Glass has been used on the Maritime Museum extensions.

**7.6.24** Brick is used within the character area, though mostly in areas which are not visible, such as internal walls, but it can also be seen in some chimney stacks, rear walls and out buildings. Some of these bricks are likely to have been made locally at Seaton or Torry Brickworks.





## 7.7 Public Realm

### Streets, Parking and Pavements

**7.7.1** Virginia Street dual carriageway is a heavily trafficked distributor road that separates part of this Conservation Area from the rest. The road detracts from the special character of the Conservation Area. Realistically the road is unlikely to be rerouted or removed in the foreseeable future. Its primary function is traffic movement north to south through the City. Around the Green this character area is very much pedestrian priority with traditional setts, and in some places bollards to stop traffic moving through the space. Shiprow and Correction Wynd are again largely pedestrian focussed. There are a number of large enclosed carparks within this character area. Beyond the carparks there is very limited parking in the area with the main on-street parking being located on one side of Marischal Street. Parking bays within the Green former Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) area are delineated with a course of setts and sympathetic white paint removing the visual intrusion of yellow painted lines.

**7.7.2** Setts are used extensively in the streets in this character area and play an important part in its character. Original setts are still in situ on Shiprow, Correction Wynd, Theatre Lane and the Adelphi. Sensitive painting of parking bays around the Green has removed the visual intrusion of yellow lines which has a very positive affect on the character area.

**7.7.3** The area surrounding the Green benefitted from a THI from 2008 -2013 which served to improve the public realm in the area. This included streetscape improvements as well as new planters and landscaping. The surface of the majority of this area is setts, both traditional and replacement. Setts are also located within the Regent Quay area on the lanes, a number of these clearly original. Both the historic and newer setts should be retained wherever possible.

**7.7.4** The pavements in this character area vary greatly but granite kerbs are used often. The Green and surrounding area use high quality sympathetic materials. Pavements in this area are also lower than traditional pavements, thus allowing the pedestrian to feel they have more ownership over the space. The high quality streetscape in the Green is largely as a result of the THI scheme. The good quality pavements and kerb stones should be retained and replicated in other parts of the character area where appropriate and possible. Shiprow pavements are dual use cycle and pedestrian. They are of a width around 4.4 metres with a change in materials from granite slabs to modern pink granite setts which provide contrast with the street surface of traditional setts. Marischal Street and the pavements along Regent Quay are of much lesser quality with a number of cracked concrete paving stones. This said, on Marischal Street the kerb stones are high quality granite but the pavements themselves are concrete slabs. The cracked slabs are a result of inconsiderate parking of vehicles on the pavements. On the lanes, small pavements are present and are largely tarmac. On Weigh-House Square though the road surface is tarmac, the pavement is finished in setts to its east side.

**7.7.5** Widths of pavements vary from 1.83 metres on the north of Marischal Street, 2.3 metres on Virginia Street, 2.9 metres on Exchange Street and 1.1 metres on Trinity Lane (reflective of its status and former use).



### Shopfront Signage

**7.7.6** Shop signage in this area varies in quality. The Green and Correction Wynd are particularly high-quality fascia signs made of timber, with console brackets and of appropriate proportions. Other signs are of lesser quality and do not fully consider their context or surroundings. These signs detract from the character of this area and should be replaced with more sympathetic signage.

**7.7.7** Large 'To Let' signs are becoming more prevalent in this area of the city centre. These detract from the special character of the area and should be avoided wherever possible, especially large triangular projecting signs. Sympathetically sized and sited 'To Let' signs would be welcomed and be more appropriate for such an important and sensitive area of the city.

### Street Signage

**7.7.8** Signage in the Green former THI area has been kept to a minimum, limiting it to statutory directional signage and as such reducing clutter. There are also

some small information signs about parking times and meters. Where the streets become busier, and have increased use by service vehicles, the signage use increases, though still sensitively sited and not particularly intrusive. The Green area is also known locally as the Merchant Quarter and a number of the signs in this area providing advice on access and speed limits.

**7.7.9** The traditional Aberdeen black tile street signs are used within this Character Area, largely located above the string course or above shop front level. They are in relatively good condition which is a positive feature and their retention is key.

### Street Furniture

**7.7.10** Within and surrounding the Green there have been new planters and trees planted as part of the THI scheme. These are evident on Carmelite Street where the addition of these complement the grey colour of the granite. Hanging baskets are also prevalent in this area located on the street lights and along the St Nicholas Graveyard wall. Hanging baskets are fairly prevalent in this area. The Baskets on the lamp posts add colour and character to the area. Due consideration needs to be given to the location and number of hanging baskets that are being attached to historic buildings so as not to detract from their special character.



Above: The Green. Right: Street furniture on Carmelite Street.

**7.7.11** Given the high density of residential properties in this character area there are a number of large street bins which are very unsightly. Their design and condition are not in keeping with the historical nature or high quality of this area. The household food bins are smaller and more sympathetic to the streetscape but still quite alien in nature.

**7.7.12** Within this character area a number of the electricity boxes at street level have been part of the Nuart festival, where small tower block houses have been designed on them. The gap site adjacent to the Back Wynd stairs also has a Lego installation adding to the visual interest of the space and improving the overall aesthetic of the gap site. This small and quirky change in their look has a very positive effect on the character area and the street as a whole by making something fun out of something typically unattractive and functional. Furthermore, a number of the doors have been painted with interesting new designs, providing interest and reasons to stop and appreciate the area.

**7.7.13** Within this area the lighting is largely ornate, heritage style street lights and in some locations these are wall mounted further reducing street clutter. This type of lighting is in keeping with the surrounding buildings and contributes to the special character of the area.

**7.7.14** There are areas to stop and sit within this character area. This is largely within the Green where there is space and room to pause and appreciate the surroundings. Also within the Green, Café 52 has an outdoor seating area and benches to again encourage sitting and appreciating the surroundings. The Green is also the venue for an open market and Inspired Nights on The Green which is a city centre street food market organised by Aberdeen Inspired.

**7.7.15** Bollards have been used in this character area to restrict traffic movements, such as through the Green, and prevent parking on pavements elsewhere. The bollards are the same as those located elsewhere within the city centre ensuring a consistent design ethos.

**7.7.16** There is very little street furniture beyond bins within the area adjacent to the harbour. This relates to the fact that this area is more industrial even now with the working harbour and warehouses still being present and the lack of visitors. Virginia Street by its distributor nature has guard rails, bollards and is clearly made for traffic movement over people movement but there is little reason to cross most of this road and it serves its purpose for traffic movement.



## 7.8 City Centre Masterplan Projects

**7.8.1** The **City Centre Masterplan** outlines a 20 year development strategy for Aberdeen city centre. Two key masterplan projects in the boundary of the Green character area are detailed below.

**7.8.2** CM06 Aberdeen Indoor Market: The design of the market building is not particularly in keeping with the historic Merchant Quarter and this building is becoming increasingly tired through lack of investment. The site presents a significant opportunity to introduce a mix of uses including retail that better addresses The Green and enhances the overall vibrancy and attractiveness of this area including other uses such as residential.

**7.8.3** C09: Mither Kirk Project: The Open Space Trust has aspirations to reutilise the eastern wing of the St. Nicholas Kirk as a flexible public space. The trust are now progressing a business plan, which will include plans to create a new structure within the existing shell that could incorporate a range of uses (e.g. galleries, a small concert hall and / or heritage centre).

## 7.9 Green and Blue Infrastructure

**7.9.1** The Green has a number of trees and planters which provide interest and colour in the area. There is no park or grassed area but the Character Area is very close to Union Terrace Gardens and the St Nicholas Graveyard which provide relief from the hard granite of the other areas. This is a high-density city centre location and there is very little space for planting.

**7.9.2** Street trees are present on Rennie's Wynd, Martin's Lane and Hadden Street. A number of these were planted as part of the THI scheme with varying successes. Unfortunately, some in the past have been vandalised.

**7.9.3** In the Regent Quay area there is no area of open space except the small triangle at the junction with Virginia Street. Again this largely relates to the working nature of this part of the character area.

**7.9.4** The Denburn exits into the harbour in this area, but is culverted under the properties and streets. The major blue infrastructure on the edge of this character area is Aberdeen Harbour, the closest part being Victoria Dock. The harbour itself as well as the views of the harbour have a positive impact on this character



area, but there is no physical interaction with the harbour itself due to its working nature but is potentially a goal for the future. The Aberdeen City Council Open Space Audit, identifies 1 open space within the character area. This is the St Nicholas Kirkyard.

## 7.10 Negative Factors

- Gap site adjacent Back Wynd steps.
- Modern, unsympathetic interventions of dormers not designed for their context.
- The incremental loss of historic windows and doors has a negative impact on the character of the Conservation Area.
- Inappropriate modern replacement windows and doors.
- Lack of maintenance over the years and resultant decay. (Common issues include: blocked or broken gutters and downpipes, slipped and missing slates, vegetation, failing leadwork, defective chimneys and windows which need repairing and repainting).
- Vacant units at ground and upper level.



# 8: Buildings At Risk

**8.1** There are currently 7 buildings on the Buildings at Risk Register in the City Centre Conservation Area:

- 2-4 Upperkirkgate and Gallowgate, Aberdeen University Students' Union (Former) (B listed).
- 32-52, Bridge Street & 1-25 Crown Terrace, Victoria Buildings (B listed).
- 26 -30 Union Street (C listed).
- Union Terrace Public Toilets, Union Terrace (B listed).
- Greyfriars John Knox Church (Former), Broad Street (A listed).
- The Triple Kirks, Schoolhill (A listed).
- 27 Belmont Street (the former Priory Club).

**8.2** The redevelopment of the Triple Kirks site is nearing completion. The East Free Church and steeple are all that remain of the original buildings. The long term vacant site surrounding the steeple has been transformed into a 342 bed residential development called The Point. The former Grayfriars John Knox Church is currently in the process of being restored and brought back into use as a bar and restaurant. The Union Terrace Public Toilets are currently in the process of being restored and adapted for reuse as a café. This is part of the wider Union Terrace Gardens enhancement work. 26-30 Union Street is a priority project for the Union Street Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme and it is hoped a grant application for restoration works will be made.

**8.3** Known as the Victoria Buildings 32-52 Bridge Street & 1-25 Crown Terrace is a four storey 15 bay monumental neo-classical building with extensive fine Greek and Egyptian motifs. The future of the Victoria Buildings is the most uncertain, but the buildings would lend themselves to retail and residential development.

The Category A-listed Tivoli Theatre was on the Buildings at Risk Register for a number of years but has been restored and brought back into use as a theatre by the Tivoli Theatre Company Ltd and has been open since 2013. The restoration work was part funded by The Green Townscape Heritage Initiative.



## 9: Preservation and Enhancement



**9.1** The following opportunities have been identified for development and enhancement within the Conservation Area:

**9.2 Pedestrianisation:** Pedestrianisation of a section of Union Street would be an opportunity to enhance its character and appearance of the street between Market Street and Bridge Street. Whilst pedestrianisation of this section of Union Street can improve the physical ambience safety and air quality for pedestrians, particular care will be required to be given to ensuring that pedestrianisation does not result in the diminution of the character of Union Street as a single and generally unified entity.

**9.3 Vacant Upper Floors:** National and local planning policy supports the re-use of vacant upper floors within the City Centre. The underuse of buildings particularly of upper floors is evident all along Union Street, but especially in the West End. Applications for alternative uses will therefore be encouraged if these can help regenerate badly effected areas of the Conservation Area.

**9.4 Golden Square:** The central area of Golden Square was used for car parking as early as the 1950s, which has impacted negatively upon the original character of the square. There are a number of car parks within and on the edge of the Conservation Area that are currently underused and the loss of Golden Square as a car park would not cause a significant loss to the overall parking provision in the city centre. The opportunity exists to return Golden Square to its intended use and to improve pedestrian links from Rosemount through to Union Street. Proposals have been previously discussed to move the car parking provision underground and to restore the square to a landscaped area which would improve the appearance of the area and create a more pedestrian friendly environment.

**9.5 Castlegate:** Despite its visual strengths, the Castlegate has not attracted the public in the numbers that had been hoped for. The City Centre Masterplan proposes *'Castlegate will be presented as the 'central civic space' for Aberdeen, providing a strong focus and identity for the city centre. This will be a*



*high quality space that responds to the rich architecture and strong urban design structure, forming a desired destination at the end of Union Street. The design approach will be minimalist and defined, adding clarity to the geometry of the space with high quality natural stone materials and lighting'. Development of the space along these parameters would be welcome. The existing granite flag stones could be recut and reused to form part or all of a new flatter more user friendly surface.*

**9.6 The Green:** The Green area has enormous historical significance to the City and was the original market place for Aberdeen before this function moved to the Castlegate. The potential for regeneration of this area, more or less at the heart of the City Centre yet clearly neglected and underused. In addition to its strategic location, the quality of the townscape, the streetscape and certain key individual buildings make this a high priority for conservation and enhancement especially the indoor market building.

*Left: Castlegate. Above: Aberdeen Market*

# 10: Grants

## Union Street Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme

**10.1** The **Union Street Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS)** is a six year initiative aimed at the regeneration of Aberdeen's main thoroughfare. This conservation led programme is set up to tackle the problems of run down historic buildings and streetscape where longstanding economic and structural decline has undermined the character of this historic and architecturally rich street.

**10.2** CARS provides financial help for Conservation Area based regeneration and conservation initiatives. Aberdeen City Council in partnership with Historic Environment Scotland (HES), Aberdeen City Heritage Trust and Aberdeen Inspired, has established this CARS scheme which aims to encourage the repair and enhancement of the physical fabric of properties within a defined area of the City Centre Conservation Area.

**10.3** If you would like further information on the scheme, or would like to discuss a potential application, please contact the CARS Project Officer 01224 523 958/ 07769 932 034 or [UnionStreetCARS@aberdeencity.gov.uk](mailto:UnionStreetCARS@aberdeencity.gov.uk)

## Aberdeen City Heritage Trust

**10.4** Aberdeen City Heritage Trust's vision is that Aberdeen's historic environment will be better understood, conserved, used and celebrated. It does this by supporting training and education events and making available discretionary grants for the interpretation of the historic environment. The Trust currently operates Building Repair and Shopfront Grants and Community Heritage Grants. These support property owners and communities explore, interpret and look after their heritage. The Trust Project Officer can be contacted Aberdeen City Heritage Trust 01224 522755/07827 233195 or Aberdeen City Heritage Trust, PO Box 10450, Aberdeen.

## Other Sources of Funding

**10.5** Funds can sometimes be applied for from other funders depending on the scale and nature of the work. Historic Environment Scotland and the National Lottery Heritage Fund both provide funding for built heritage projects.