

## ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

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COMMITTEE	Development Management Sub-Committee		
DATE	19 April 2012		
LEAD HEAD OF SERVICE Margaret Bochel	DIRECTOR Gordon McIntosh		
TITLE OF REPORT	Robert Gordon University City Centre Campus, Planning Brief		
REPORT NUMBER	EPI/12/102		

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### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval of a planning brief for the redevelopment of Robert Gordon Universities (RGU) City Centre Campus properties at Schoolhill and St Andrews Street. These properties will become surplus to requirement and redundant for academic purposes as part of Robert Gordon University commitment to a strategy of consolidating all academic activities at its Garthdee Campus.
- 1.2 A planning brief for both the Schoolhill and St Andrew Street properties has been produced by DTZ on behalf of Robert Gordon University. The Robert Gordon City Centre Campus Planning Brief (March 2012) can be viewed by accessing the following link:  
  
[www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/masterplanning](http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/masterplanning)
- 1.3 A hard copy of the Planning Brief is available in the Member's Library and within the Planning and Sustainable Development Service at Ground Floor North, Marischal College.

### **2. RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Committee:
- 2.2 (a) Adopt the Robert Gordon University City Centre Campus Planning Brief as interim planning advice, subject to two minor textual changes,  
  
(b) Agree for officers to implement the process to ratify the Planning Brief as Supplementary Guidance to the Aberdeen Local Development Plan by the Scottish Government.

### **3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 3.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report outwith normal officer time to evaluate the Planning Brief. The developers have met the cost of preparation of the Planning Brief, including all consultation and engagement.

### **4. OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 There are no known property, legal or equipment implications arising from this report.
- 4.2 The Planning Brief reduces the risk of piecemeal and inappropriate development within the site, by setting out the policies, opportunities and constraints up front.
- 4.3 Approving the Planning Brief will contribute to efficiencies in determining future planning applications by giving clear guidance on planning matters up front.
- 4.4 In accordance with the Aberdeen Local Development Plan, Appendix 4, the Proposed Action Programme and the Infrastructure and Developer Contributions Manual, the Planning Brief references the need for contributions to be made to these and the requirement for early discussions with the planning authority.

### **5. BACKGROUND/MAIN ISSUES**

- 5.1 A Development Framework was produced in 2009 by Robert Gordon University to help meet their aspirations for the University to consolidate all the academic and administrative activities within the Garthdee Campus site. This Framework was approved by the Planning Committee on 18 June 2009 as Supplementary Guidance. This will also be taken forward as Supplementary Guidance to the Aberdeen Local Development Plan (2012).
- 5.2 This planning brief aims to assist in setting the planning context and provide guidance on the future redevelopment and re-use proposals affecting the Schoolhill and St Andrew Street buildings. The brief aims to ensure the highest standard and quality of development is achieved at these prominent locations.
- 5.3 The Robert Gordon University City Centre Campus consists of the St Andrew Street building and four buildings on Schoolhill – Clarke Building, Administration Building, Student Association and 54-58 Schoolhill.
- 5.4 The brief, in accordance with Local Development Plan policy, highlights the potential for the conversion of these buildings to a number of uses. Appropriate uses for both sites could be residential, office or hotel, or a mixture of uses. The brief also highlights the potential for the Clarke Building on Harriet Street to be altered and converted into student accommodation.
- 5.5 A public consultation exercise took place at the Student Union on Schoolhill from 12 – 16 December 2011. The exhibition ran for the week, with the team on hand to answer questions on the Wednesday. George Street Community Council and Rosemount and Mile End Community Councils were also consulted, and George

Street accepted the offer of a presentation of the plans from the Robert Gordon University team. The same presentation was also sent to the Rosemount and Mile End Community Council for their information. The local Councillors were also contacted by the University to make them aware of the work being undertaken and the brief being produced.

## **6. IMPACT**

- 6.1 Both sites are located in the city centre and are well serviced by public transport and within easy walking and cycling access of amenities.
- 6.2 The Planning Brief contributes to the following Single Outcome Priorities: 1 – We live in a Scotland that is the most attractive place for doing business in Europe; 10. We live in well-designed, sustainable places where we are able to access the amenities and services we need; 12 – We value and enjoy our built and natural environment and protect and enhance it for future generations.
- 6.3 The proposal contributes to the 5 year Business Plan in terms of working with our partners to attract visitors, workers and investment to protect the economic future of the city, encouraging the growth of local businesses through support of existing business sectors and development of new sectors and facilitating new development projects to improve Aberdeen's living and working environment.
- 6.4 The proposal is consistent with the Council's Corporate Plan, in particular delivering high levels of design from all development, maintaining an up-to-date planning framework, sustainable development and open space provision.
- 6.5 The proposal is consistent with the Planning and Sustainable Development Service Plan, in particular engaging the community in the planning process.

## **7. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 7.1 Aberdeen Local Development Plan (Feb 2012)  
[http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/Planning/ldp/pla\\_local\\_development\\_plan.asp](http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/Planning/ldp/pla_local_development_plan.asp)
- 7.2 Aberdeen Masterplanning Process (July 2010)  
<http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/masterplanning/>
- 7.3 Robert Gordon University Development Framework (2009)  
[http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/planning\\_environment/planning/planning\\_sustainable\\_development/pla\\_masterplan\\_rgu\\_garthdee.asp](http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/planning_environment/planning/planning_sustainable_development/pla_masterplan_rgu_garthdee.asp)

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# Planning Brief

**Robert Gordon University,  
City Centre Campus, Aberdeen**

**April 2012**

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# 1 Introduction

This planning brief has been prepared by DTZ on behalf of Robert Gordon University.

RGU has committed to a strategy of consolidating all academic activities at its Garthdee Campus. This relocation will result in its City Centre Campus properties at Schoolhill and St Andrew Street becoming surplus to requirements and redundant for academic purposes. The process of decanting to Garthdee will commence in 2013.

It is intended that this brief will assist in setting the planning context and provide guidance on the future redevelopment or adaptive re-use proposals affecting the Schoolhill and St Andrew Street buildings. Its objective is to ensure the highest standard and quality of development is achieved at these prominent locations

This brief has been prepared in order to set the planning parameters for any future redevelopment or adaptive re-use proposals affecting Robert Gordon University's City Centre campus and ensure the highest quality and standard of development is achieved.



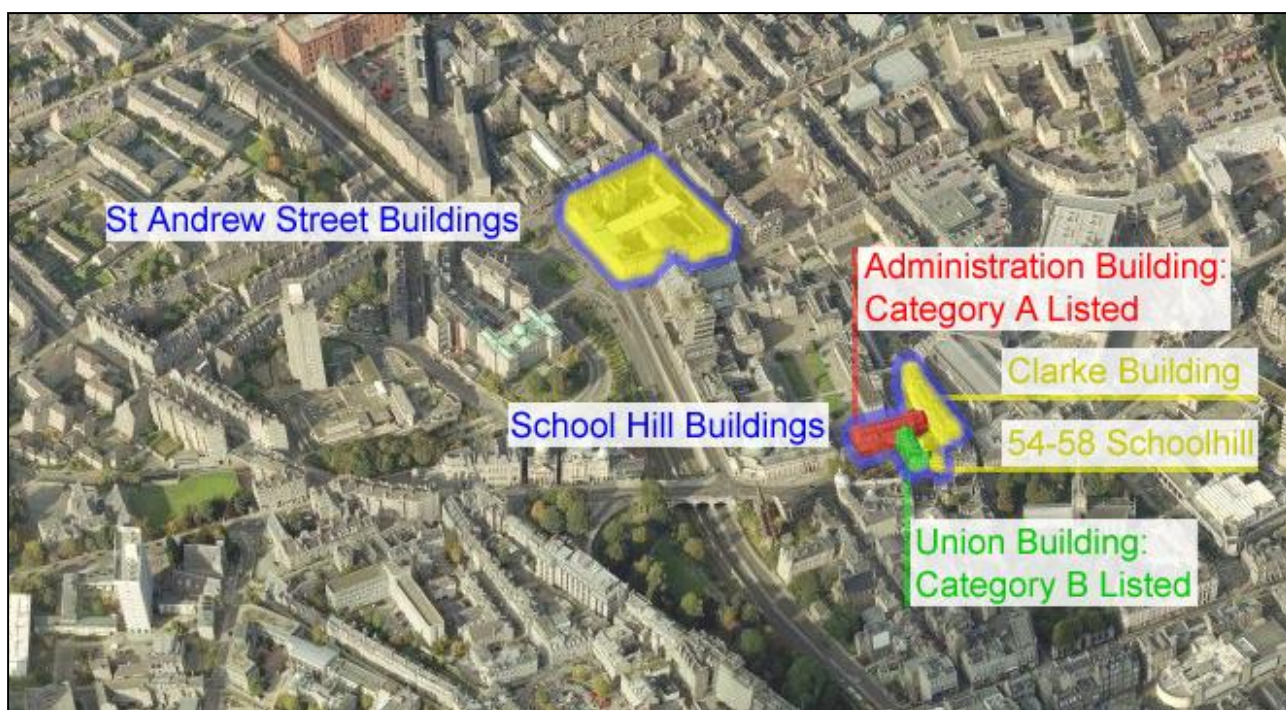


## 2 Site and Surroundings

The City Centre Campus is split between two distinct sites – Schoolhill and St Andrew Street – and comprises the following buildings:

- Administration Building, Schoolhill
- Student Union, Schoolhill
- Clarke Building, Schoolhill
- 54-58 Schoolhill
- St Andrew Street Building

The relevant site locations and individual buildings are highlighted on the plan below:



### 2.1 Schoolhill

The site occupies a highly prominent position within Aberdeen City Centre and is located within the Union Street Conservation Area.

The site and buildings immediately to the north are occupied by Robert Gordon's College. To the south, on the opposite side of Schoolhill lies the Academy Shopping Centre. The site is bound to the east by Harriet Street and beyond by Harriet Street Multi-Storey Car Park and the Bon Accord Shopping Centre. Immediately to the west lie Robert Gordon's College, Aberdeen Art Gallery and the Cowdray Hall.

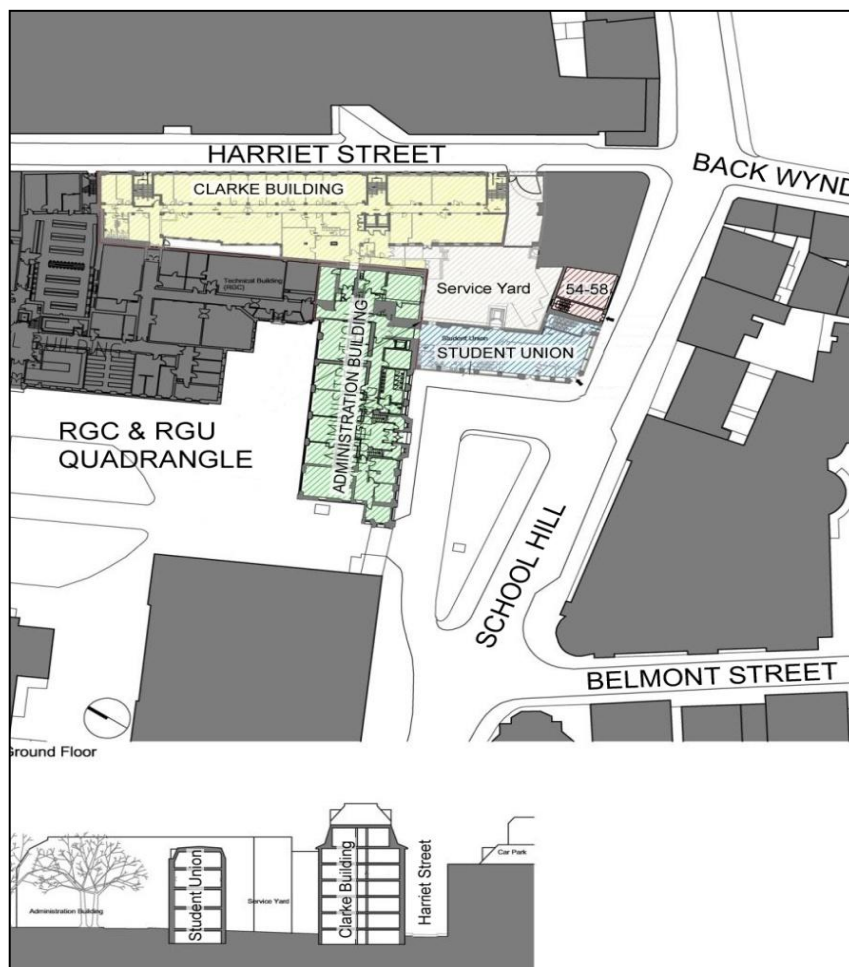
Given the site's central location it provides a highly accessible location within close proximity to all major bus routes in the City, easy walking distance of the railway and bus stations and immediately adjacent to a major public car park at Harriet Street. It is also extremely well situated with respect to all city centre amenities – shops, offices, leisure, entertainment, cultural, green spaces etc.

The Schoolhill site encompasses the Administration Building, Clarke Building, Student Association and 58 Schoolhill. In total the buildings extend to 10,870 sq m and are split as follows:

- Clarke Building - 6,800 sq m.
- Administration Building - 2,500 sq m.
- Student Association - 1,400 sq m.
- 54-58 Schoolhill - 170 sq m.

54-58 Schoolhill is a residential/retail property which fronts directly on to Schoolhill. At ground floor level sits the Student Union shop with traditional tenement flats above. For the purposes of this brief, given this property's restricted alternative use potential, 58 Schoolhill is not considered in detail.

The remaining three properties i.e. Clarke, Administration and Student Association form a conjoined cluster of buildings which share an internal service courtyard (as demonstrated by plan below). Vehicular access to the service courtyard is achieved via Harriet Street.





The Administration Building is Category A listed and, along with The Cowdray Hall, Aberdeen Art Gallery and Robert Gordons College Archway, forms part of a continuous run of Category A listed renaissance-style granite buildings which front onto Schoolhill. The buildings date from c 1885. Historic Scotland's listing description makes reference to the building's construction in distinctive polished grey granite with pink Correnie granite dressing and detailing. Historic Scotland specifically notes the full-height Corinthian columns which flank the main entrance to the building and balustraded staircase at the main entrance hall.

Accommodation is spread over three floors and the building is used solely for education and education related purposes. Having historically been home to Gray's School of Art the building has always been within educational use and the internal design and form of the building reflect this purpose.



Student Union and Administration Building from School Hill

The Student Association Building is Category B listed. It is spread over three floors plus attic. The building occupies a highly prominent location at the top of Schoolhill and benefits from a primary street frontage. It is currently home to the Robert Gordon University Student Union and Student Association, as well as providing additional educational and associated administrative facilities.

As with the Administration Building it dates from c 1885-86 and was designed by local architect Alexander Marshall Mackenzie in the renaissance-style. The building is constructed in grey granite ashlar with red Correnie granite dressings. Historic Scotland's listing description notes the "unusual use" of contrasting red granite dressings used as a means of easing the transition from the more formal Administration and Art Gallery buildings which are immediately adjacent.

The Clarke Building is a more recent addition to the Schoolhill cluster. It possesses no quality street frontage and at present can only be accessed via the Administration Building. As a building it is of significantly less architectural quality than the Administration and Student Association Buildings.

Accommodation is spread over seven floors plus plant room at roof level. The building has a façade on to Harriet Street which provides low amenity levels. At present the building is solely in use for education purposes.



Clarke Building and Administration Building from Quad



Clarke Building from Harriet Street

## 2.2 St Andrew Street

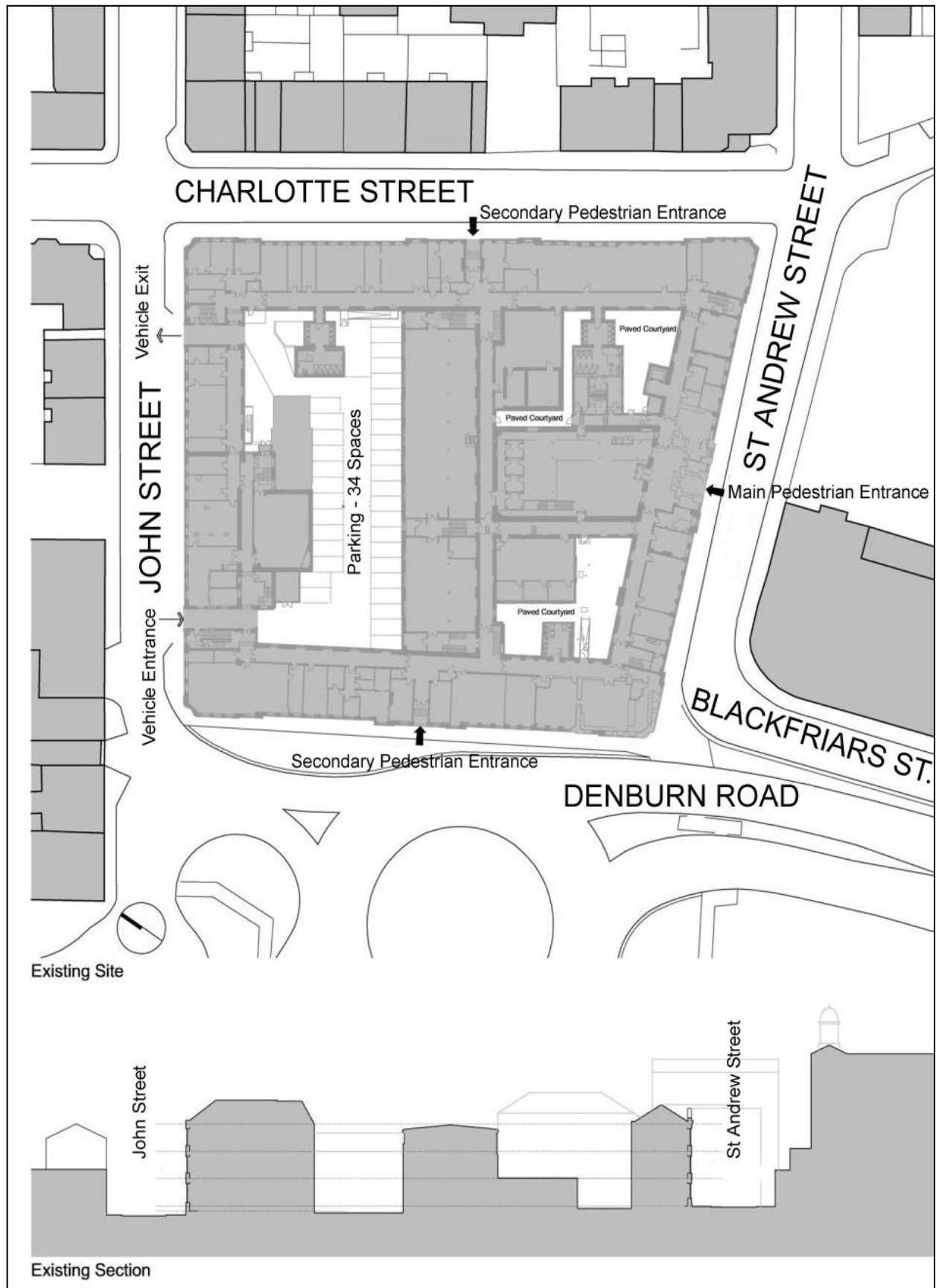
The site is a major academic building comprising a single city block located within the Union Street Conservation Area. At present it is entirely in academic use, and has recently been altered internally to provide a new university library facility. In total the buildings extend to 11,770 sq m



The building fronts onto St Andrew Street, with additional facades to Charlotte Street, John Street and Denburn Road. The site's immediate surroundings are characterised by Robert Gordon's College which is located immediately to the south and the Denburn Road dual carriageway immediately to the west with Woolmanhill Hospital situated beyond. To the north and east John Street and Charlotte Street are of traditional character and generally comprise tenement flats with some commercial properties at ground floor level.

The current St Andrew Street Building varies between two, three and four storeys. The main entrance to the building is taken from St Andrew Street with secondary pedestrian entrances on Charlotte Street, Denburn Road and John Street. Vehicular access and egress is achieved via pends taken from John Street and which open into a courtyard.

The building itself is a period granite building of generally high quality albeit the architectural merit of the building facades vary from high value on St Andrew Street to lesser value on John Street and the internal courtyards. The building's internal configuration is specific to its current use. The building has previously been significantly adapted to include additional floors and modern extensions within the internal courtyard.





### 3 Planning Policy Review

There is a range of national, strategic and local policy guidance of relevance to the future development of the City Centre Campus.

Any future planning application will be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless other material considerations indicate otherwise. In this instance the Development Plan consists of:

- Aberdeen City and Shire Structure Plan (2009)
- Aberdeen Local Development Plan (2012)

The key policies are summarised below however these should not be considered exhaustive.

#### 3.1 Aberdeen City and Shire Structure Plan (2009)

The Structure Plan identifies high level objectives for the City of Aberdeen. Key objectives include:

- Providing opportunities that encourage economic development and create new employment.
- Increasing the population of the city region.
- Ensuring new development maintains and improves the regions built, natural and cultural assets.
- Ensuring new development meets the needs of the whole community and makes the area a more attractive place for residents and businesses to move to.
- Ensuring all new developments contribute towards reducing the need to travel and encourage people to walk, cycle or use public transport.

The plan identifies three Strategic Growth Areas which will be the main focus for development to 2030. The primary growth area is Aberdeen City where half of all new development is envisaged and where a strong policy preference for the development of brownfield sites is adopted.

#### 3.2 Aberdeen Local Development Plan (2012)

Both the Schoolhill and St Andrew Street sites are located within the identified City Centre boundary. As the “regional centre” Aberdeen City Centre is the preferred location for all development that serves a city wide or regional market and that contributes to economic growth including retail, commercial, leisure and residential uses (Policy C1).

Each site falls within an area identified for “mixed use” purposes. Local Development Plan policy stipulates that applications for development or change of use must take the existing uses and character of the area into account and avoid conflict with adjacent land uses and amenity. Where new business or commercial uses are proposed, development should not adversely affect the amenity of people living and working in the area. Where new housing is proposed, a satisfactory residential environment should be created and should not impinge upon the viability of operation of existing business/commercial uses in the vicinity (Policy H2).



## The Aberdeen Local Development Plan

City Wide Proposals Map : City Centre Detail  
Scale 1:6,000

### Natural Environment

Greenbelt (NE2)  
Green Space Network (NE1)  
Urban Green Space (NE3)

### Housing

Residential Areas (H1)  
Mixed Use Areas (H2)  
Land Release Policy (LR1)

### Community Facilities

Existing Community Sites and Facilities (CF1)  
New Community Sites and Facilities (CF2)

### Economic Development

Business and Industry (BI1)  
Specialist Employment Areas (BI2)  
West End Office Area (BI3)  
Aberdeen Airport and Harbour (BI4)

### Transport

Land for Transport (T1)  
Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route  
Aberdeen Harbour Port Boundary  
Aberdeen Airport Public Safety Zone

### Retailing

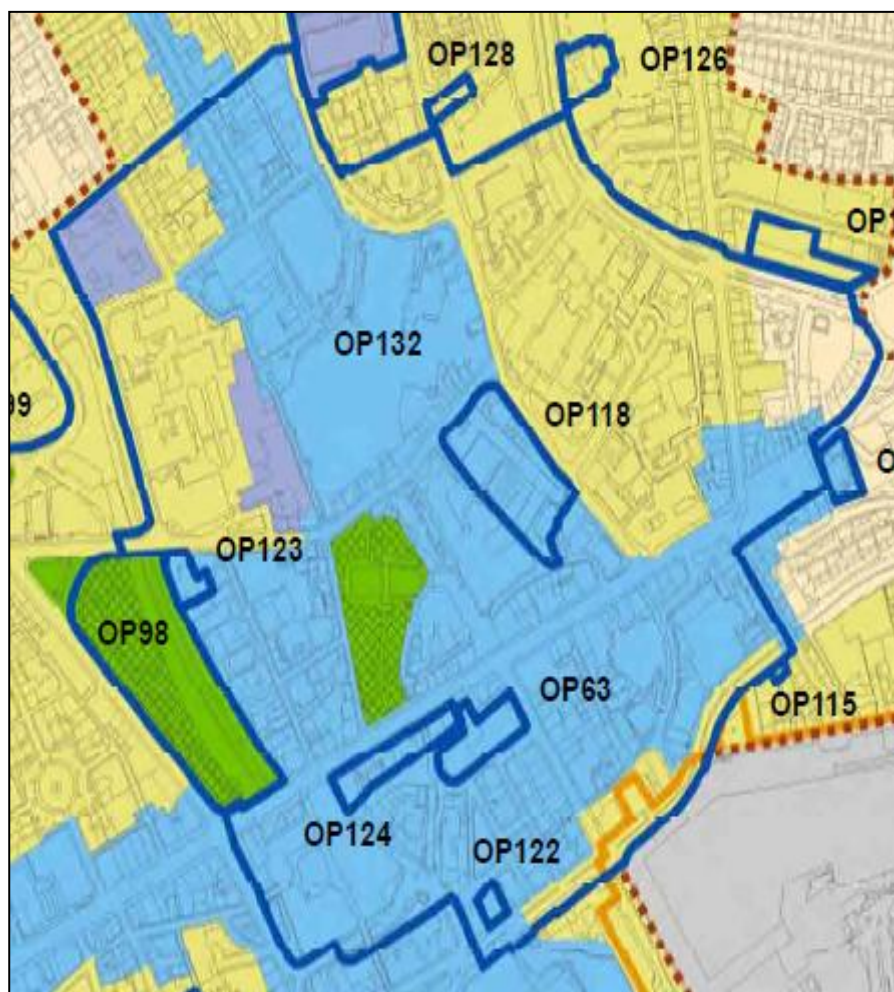
Town, District and Neighbourhood Centres (RT3)  
Retail Parks (RP)

### City Centre

City Centre Business Zone (C2)

### Others

Opportunity Sites (OP number)  
City Centre Boundary



In terms of site specific allocations each site is identified as an “Existing Community Site and Facility” where associated policy supports proposals for new or extended community use. Policy makes provision for instances where land or buildings become surplus to current or future requirements. In such cases alternative uses deemed compatible with adjoining uses and a surrounding area will be permitted in principle (Policy CF1).

As previously noted both sites are located within the Union Street Conservation Area. In line with national guidance, policy stipulates that any development must preserve or enhance the special architectural or historic interest of the conservation area (Policy D5).

In addition, the Administration and Student Association Buildings on Schoolhill are listed Category A and B respectively. Policy supports new uses for listed buildings that become vacant or redundant and permits their reuse on the basis that any physical alterations required to accommodate a new use do not undermine the special character or setting of the listed building in question (Policy D5).

More general Local Development Plan policy provisions of note include the strong encouragement given to retention of granite buildings throughout the city, even if not listed or in a conservation area, and the favouring of conversion/adaption of redundant granite buildings – as opposed to demolition (Policy D4).



The Local Development Plan also places strong emphasis on the need for new development to demonstrate that sufficient measures have been taken to minimise traffic generated (Policy T2) and that developments are designed to minimise travel by private car by prioritising transport modes in the following order – walking, cycling, public transport, car, other motorised vehicles (Policy D3).

### 3.3 Other Relevant Policies

#### **Aberdeen City Centre Development Framework (2011)**

The City Centre Development Framework is a key document which aims to set out the key principles that will guide and co-ordinate development and infrastructure development in Aberdeen City Centre. The stated purpose of the Development Framework is to ensure that Aberdeen City Centre becomes a successful place that encourages liveliness, diversity and activity and leaves a positive legacy of the first half of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

The Development Framework seeks to:

- Complement and enhance Aberdeen's unique identity
- Develop clearly defined character areas
- Ensure future development understands the existing context
- Complement the wealth of urban design
- Celebrate the architectural quality present in the City Centre; and
- Ensure a co-ordinated and integrated approach to future development

The quality of the City Centre's 'Public Realm' is a key issue within the Development Framework and a number of specific opportunities for its enhancement are identified. One such opportunity is the Robert Gordon Quadrangle, which is shared by Robert Gordon University, the Art Gallery and Robert Gordon College and of direct relevance to this Brief.

The Development Framework notes that the integrity of the quad is compromised by parking areas and carriageway, the architectural setting is not appreciated, that the Quadrangle is inaccessible, impermeable and does not connect well to its surroundings.

The Development Framework suggests that additional means of access to the Quadrangle, possibly through to Crooked Lane and St Andrew Street, should be considered if any buildings come forward for redevelopment. It also promotes the Quadrangle's development into a space which promotes the architecture of the buildings surrounding the square, allows for seating and informal gathering/use for exhibitions etc.

A further public realm improvement is suggested for the triangle 'pocket park' to the front of the Art Gallery and entrance to quadrangle which could offer better pedestrian space if associated with future development of the Robert Gordon University building.

#### **Supplementary Guidance: Transport and Accessibility**

Supplementary guidance contains a range of parking standards and guidelines applicable to all types of development and uses.

A range of maximum parking standards for non-residential uses is set. These stipulate the maximum number of spaces that can be created per sq m of development created.

In terms of residential uses, including student housing, a range of guidelines (as opposed to maximum standards) are provided. These detail the recommended number of parking spaces per

residential dwelling or flatted unit. In the case of student housing guidance is provided regarding the number of parking spaces per staff member / per 10 students.

All development proposals must take cognisance of the above standards however the overall level of parking provision requires to be agreed with Aberdeen City Council Roads and Transportation Officers.

The guidance also contains details regarding the need for Transport Assessments, a requirement for all developments over a certain threshold. The scope of a Transport Assessment generally includes:

- Detail of the development.
- Existing transport conditions.
- Trip generation and distribution of new development trips
- Access
- Traffic Impact Assessment
- Walking, Cycling and Public Transport Assessment.
- Identification and analysis of proposed mitigations
- A travel plan.

#### **Supplementary Guidance: Strategic Transport Fund**

The purpose of this guidance is to secure contributions from development to fund the delivery of a package of transport projects, defined by the Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Cumulative Transport Appraisal (CTA). The package of transport projects include road and public transport interventions in a variety of locations across Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire which are deemed necessary to deliver the regions long-term development potential.

All housing, business, industrial, retail and commercial leisure development (subject to criteria) will be expected to make a contribution towards strategic transport projects.

The guidance contains a range of contribution levels – with Developer Contribution calculated on a proportionate basis relative to the size and type of use proposed.

#### **Supplementary Guidance: Affordable Housing**

Housing developments of 5 units or more are required to contribute not less than 25% of the total number of units as affordable housing. For development of less than 20 units the provision of affordable housing may be on site, off site or via commuted payments. Developments of 20 units or more are expected to provide the affordable housing contribution on site.

The Council recognises that there is a need to provide or make financial contribution towards major new infrastructure such as schools, drainage, water and roads as part of any development. The Supplementary Guidance states that where a developer can demonstrate that there are exceptional costs which contribute to making a development unviable the requirement for affordable housing contributions may be reduced to ensure the cumulative burden on the overall development does not make the site unviable.

**Developer Contributions**

Any Developer Contributions required as a result of future development of the sites would be secured via agreements made under Section 75 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997). In this respect it is recommended that early discussions with Aberdeen City Council's Planning Gain Officer are held.

**Supplementary Guidance: Harmony of Uses**

This Supplementary Guidance covers many licensing and mixed-use issues within the City Centre and provides guidance on the circumstances where development proposals for specific uses may be permitted, as well as the issues that might need to be addressed where a proposal has the potential to conflict with neighbouring land uses.

Various types of use are covered by the Supplementary Guidance including:

- Hot Food Takeaways
- Liquor Licensed Premises (exceptions to hotels, restaurants, cafes and off-licenses)
- Street Cafes
- Amusement Centres and Arcades
- Living/Working Above or Below a Business
- Residential Developments in the City Centre

## 4 Development Principles

### Objectives

Given the highly prominent location of each site, their location within the Conservation Area, the listed status of the Administration and Student Union Buildings on Schoolhill and the architectural quality of the St Andrew Street Building, the overall objective is to facilitate their redevelopment/adaptive re-use in a manner that responds to the character of the surrounding area, respects and retains existing building fabric (where appropriate) whilst ensuring that the future re-use of these key buildings remain a viable prospect in commercial terms.

A range of key development principles are outlined below. These consider the possible form of development, likely access arrangements (pedestrian and vehicular) and associated transport impact and provision.

All such details would ultimately be subject to detailed planning permission and (where applicable) listed building consent, and would need to be justified by appropriate Design and Access Statements (prepared in accordance with the requirements of PAN 68: Design Statements).

At this stage the principles outlined below should be considered as a guide.

### 4.1 Schoolhill

#### Form of Development

The Category A listed status of the Administration Building dictates that any development would require to work within the existing building envelope.

Any proposal to alter the external appearance or increase the height and massing of the building would be unacceptable.

As statutory listing also applies to the interior of buildings, detailed discussions with Aberdeen City Council and Historic Scotland will be required including a full and detailed listed building analysis aimed at establishing development parameters i.e. which features are of value, which must be retained, which can be removed etc.

Subject to the retention of key features the building is considered capable of conversion. This would involve physical alterations to the existing internal layout aimed at accommodating any acceptable alternative uses. Clearly any such alterations must ensure the special character of the listed building is not undermined.

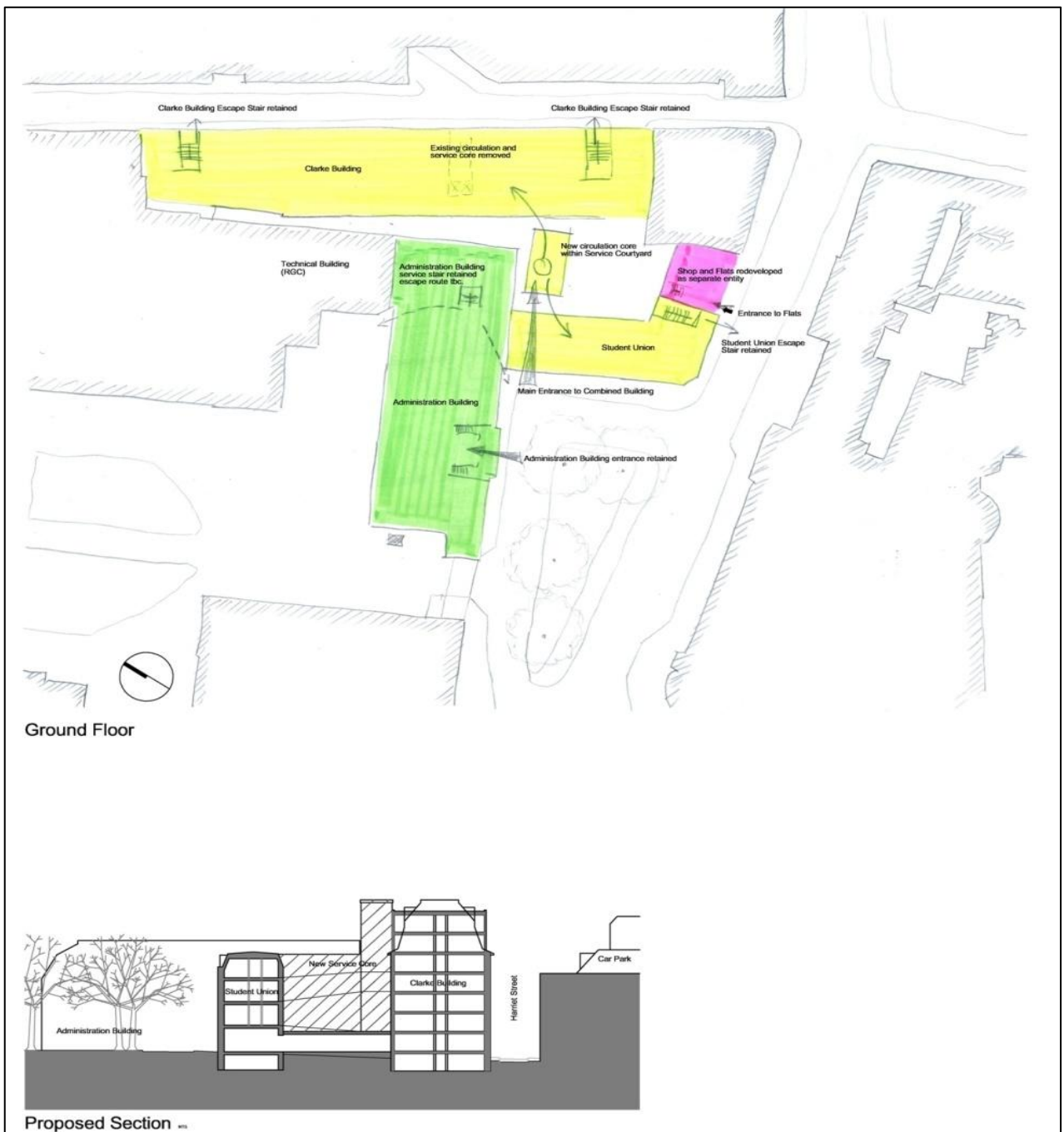
The B listed status of the Student Union Building also requires any future development to respect the existing fabric (internal and external) of the building. The interior of the building has previously been subject to extensive physical alteration, including the installation of mezzanine floors, and may offer a more straightforward opportunity for conversion/adaption.

Again, any proposal to alter the exterior of the building or to increase its height and massing would not be supported. As above, detailed discussions with Aberdeen City Council and Historic Scotland and associated listed building analysis will be required in order to establish development parameters and ensure the special character of the listed building is taken account of.

The Clarke Building is of limited architectural quality/merit and offers opportunity for a more significant development response. At present the Clarke Building is constrained in that it can only be accessed on foot via the Administration Building. To allow possible separation of these buildings, or

to fully integrate the Clarke Building into any wider development proposal, consideration should be given to a new link building within the current courtyard/car park area, as demonstrated by the sketch below:

The Clarke Building currently provides accommodation over seven floors. Opportunity to maximise development of the upper floors by reconstructing the sixth (attic) and seventh (plant area) floors to provide full and usable floor areas may exist. While this would increase the massing of the Clarke Building the height would remain the same and would not unduly impact upon surrounding cityscape. This is highlighted on the proposed section drawing below. Any such proposal must ensure that the setting of the adjacent listed buildings is not compromised.





## Access

Access for vehicles to the Schoolhill site is currently achieved via the Robert Gordon Quadrangle where 21 car parking spaces are provided. It is not expected that any future development is capable of increasing this within existing title, in any event this may not be desired by the Planning Authority. Additional service access to the existing courtyard is taken from Harriet Street.

The site's city centre location affords it exceptional accessibility by more sustainable modes of travel, namely pedestrian, and public transport. In line with planning policy any future development therefore provides an opportunity to minimise travel by private car.

In terms of pedestrian access, the Schoolhill buildings are already highly accessible given their central location, proximity to public transport infrastructure etc. Nevertheless, any opportunities to enhance pedestrian linkages to the surrounding area, possibly via the Robert Gordon Quadrangle, should be considered as part of any redevelopment. Potential may also exist to improve the pedestrian environment for example by upgrading the 'pocket park' to the front of the Administration Building. Such aspirations are identified and supported by the City Centre Development Framework.

## Transport Provision

The site is extremely well served by public transport and this should be taken into account in developing proposals that provide good pedestrian linkages to these routes and in developing travel plans.

## 4.2 St Andrew Street

### Form of Development

Although not listed the building represents a highly prominent granite block that makes an important contribution to local cityscape and to the wider Conservation Area. Detailed building analysis aimed at establishing development parameters (i.e. which features are of value, which must be retained, which can be removed) should be undertaken at the outset.

While of generally high external architectural quality, the architectural merit of the buildings four façades vary. The highest value facade is on St Andrews Street with the rear facade (to John Street) and the internal courtyard offering lesser value.

In line with Local Development Plan policy D4 any redevelopment proposal will be encouraged to retain existing granite facades. However in support of the conversion/re-use of this prominent granite building scope exists to investigate more innovative and exciting design solutions utilising the internal courtyard and John Street façade.

Innovative design interventions could result in the creation of high quality modern additions to the building at those locations currently offering lesser architectural merit.

The existing low amenity buildings and plant situated within the internal courtyard area and the poor internal elevations of the main building could be removed to increase developable or usable area. The courtyard area may also offer opportunity to meet any open space requirements.

The building may offer potential to increase height and massing. Existing building height varies between two, three and four storeys however the creation of a four storey development throughout, possibly including penthouse accommodation at fifth floor level, could be acceptable. Any increase

in height and massing should take into account the context of adjacent building heights, notably Robert Gordon's College.



St Andrew Street and Charlotte Street Elevations

The detail of any extension should reflect the character of the existing building, taking into account the vertical emphasis of the existing windows. High standards of design and use of appropriate materials that are sensitive to the character of the Conservation Area will ensure the creation of an urban block of high quality.

An artist's impression of a possible design intervention is provided above. These are concepts only with the acceptability of any such proposal subject to Planning Authority agreement during pre-application and planning application discussions.

## Access

Vehicular access and egress is achieved via pends taken from John Street which open into a courtyard. The courtyard currently contains 39 dedicated car parking spaces. The John Street facade may represent an opportunity to enhance existing levels of vehicular access.

The existing plant areas within the courtyard could be removed as a means of facilitating construction of a basement car park. Such an option would also require significant works to be undertaken to the John Street facade. Detailed investigations would be required to verify the feasibility and need of such an option, prior to seeking formal agreement with the Planning Authority.

In terms of pedestrian access and amenity, the main pedestrian entrance to the building is taken from St Andrew Street with secondary pedestrian entrances on Charlotte Street, Denburn Road and John Street. These should be retained and enhanced as part of any future development proposal.

The removal of the existing low amenity buildings and plant within the internal courtyard area could facilitate the creation of a high quality public amenity space to serve any future development e.g. a landscaped courtyard / area of usable open space.

## Transport Provision

The site is extremely well served by public transport and this should be taken into account in developing proposals that provide good pedestrian linkages to these routes and in developing travel plans.

## Summary

In respect of both the Schoolhill and St Andrew Street sites, any development proposals should adhere to the key principles outlined above and the policies in the Local Development Plan.

In setting out these key principles the objective is to highlight the range of potential opportunities that exist for the sites, as well as the possibilities for innovative design interventions – notably at the Clarke Building and at the St Andrew Street building - which will support their adaptive re-use and enhancement.

In exploring the range of opportunities identified within this section early contact and engagement with Aberdeen City Council's Planning, Transportation/Roads and Conservation Departments as well as Historic Scotland will be required.

The following chapter considers the range of potential uses that might form part of any redevelopment scheme and presents various indicative development options for the sites.

## 5 Appropriate Alternative Uses / Development Concepts

Both the Schoolhill and St Andrew Street sites occupy prominent City Centre locations and offer significant opportunity for redevelopment and reuse following the University's decant to the Garthdee Campus.

The policy background, scale and location of the sites dictate that they would be suitable for a range of individual or mixed uses as part of any development scheme.

Below we consider the range of possible uses for each site and present various indicative development options that may be appropriate. A range of conceptual development options for each site reflective the possible uses outlined below have been provided at Appendices 1 and 2 for information purposes only.

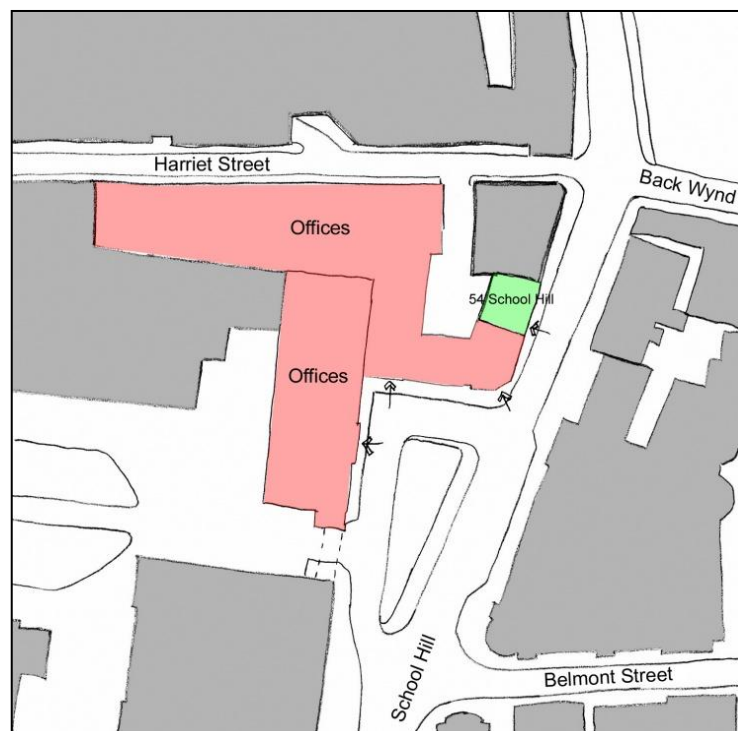
### 5.1 Schoolhill

#### Business Use

Business use (Class 4 of the Use Classes Order 1997) would be an appropriate and acceptable use for the site, in accordance with the Aberdeen Local Development Plan.

Subject to any listed building issues, the Administration Building provides a specific opportunity for refurbishment as offices. The Clarke and Student Union Buildings also offer conversion potential to office use.

As stated at 4.1 The Clarke Building is currently constrained by the fact it is only accessible via the Administration Building. The development of a new service core to link the Clarke and Student Union Buildings would allow them to function as office buildings in their own right (separate from any proposal for the Administration Building).



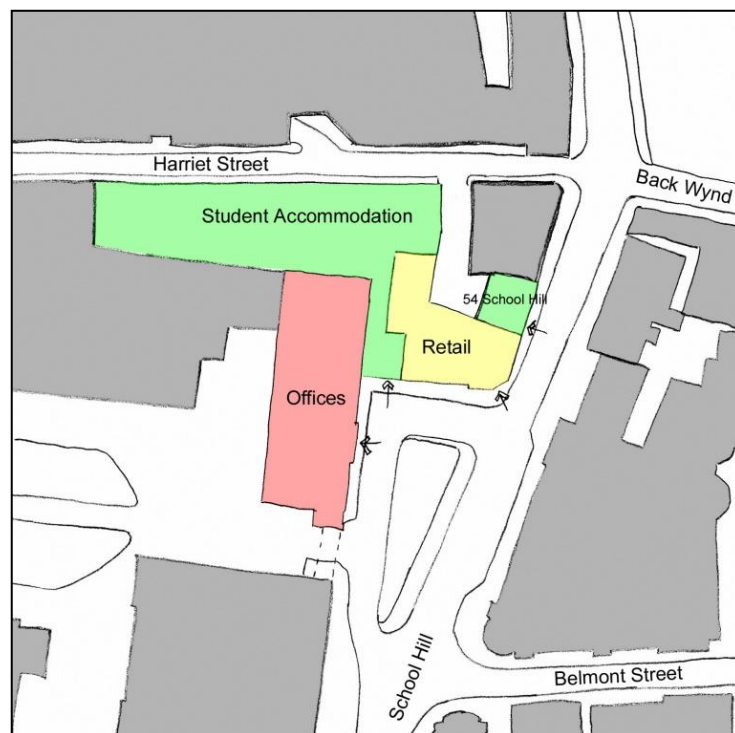
Office development is considered appropriate in the context of the surrounding area, adjacent uses and given the site's highly accessible location within the city centre.

Aberdeen City Centre is experiencing strong market demand for new office accommodation set against a shortage in the availability of quality City Centre office floor space. As such there is likely to be significant demand for this type of use at Schoolhill (DTZ Research).

## Student Residential

Student accommodation (Sui Generis within the Use Class Order 1997) is considered to be a suitable use for the Clarke and Student Union Buildings and in accordance with Aberdeen Local Development Plan policy.

Initial feasibility studies indicate that the Clarke and Student Union Buildings are capable of refurbishment. Such a scheme would be reliant on reconstructing the attic and plant area floors to create full useable floor areas, the feasibility of which would be subject to assessment by a structural engineer.



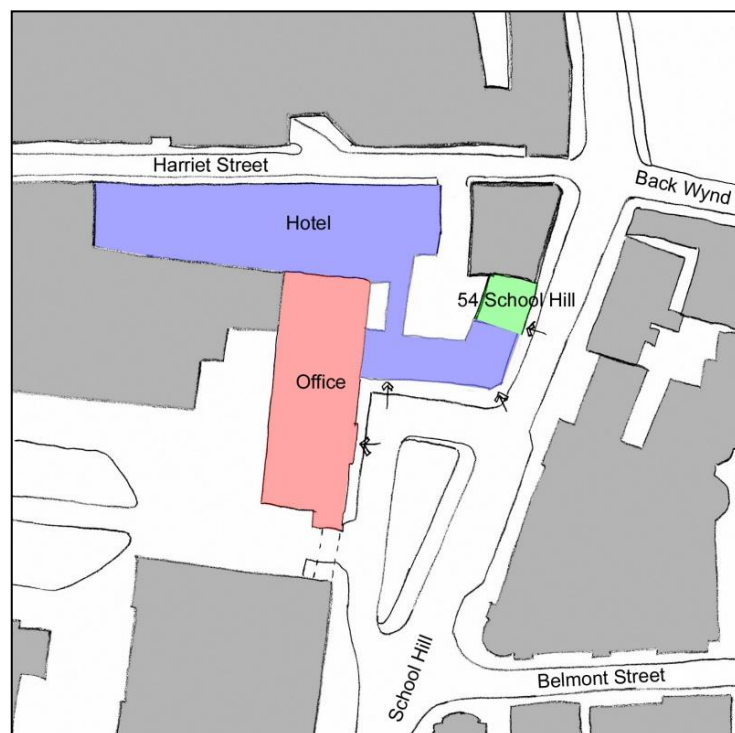
The City Centre is considered extremely attractive as a location for student housing given its proximity to amenities and the excellent public transport links to the city's University Campuses. Demand for purpose built accommodation in the City currently exceeds supply and there is a desire from both students and universities for better quality, better located accommodation. In this respect the Schoolhill site is considered highly desirable.



## Hotel

Hotel use (Class 7 of the Use Classes Order 1997) is considered to be suitable at this location and in accordance with Aberdeen Local Development Plan policy. The Clarke and Student Union Buildings offer clear conversion potential to such a use, the Administration Building could also be incorporated.

Initial feasibility studies indicate that the upper floors of these buildings could be redeveloped to form a hotel with associated meeting/function facilities on the ground floor of the Clarke Building and a hotel bar/restaurant area on the ground floor of the Student Union Building.



Aberdeen has witnessed significant investment in hotel development in recent years however there is still considered to be a lack of supply within the City (DTZ Research). It is the budget hotel market that continues to offer the best opportunities and it is anticipated that Schoolhill will prove attractive to operators within this sector.

## Retail/Commercial/Food & Drink

Retail/Commercial/Food & Drink uses (Classes 1, 2 and 3 of the Use Classes Order 1997) at this location are strongly supported by Aberdeen Local Development Plan policy. Any Class 1, 2 or 3 element within the Schoolhill building cluster is likely to be limited due to physical constraints however the ground floor of the Student Union Building benefits from a primary street frontage and offers clear potential for such uses – either as part of a wider mixed use development or as standalone uses.

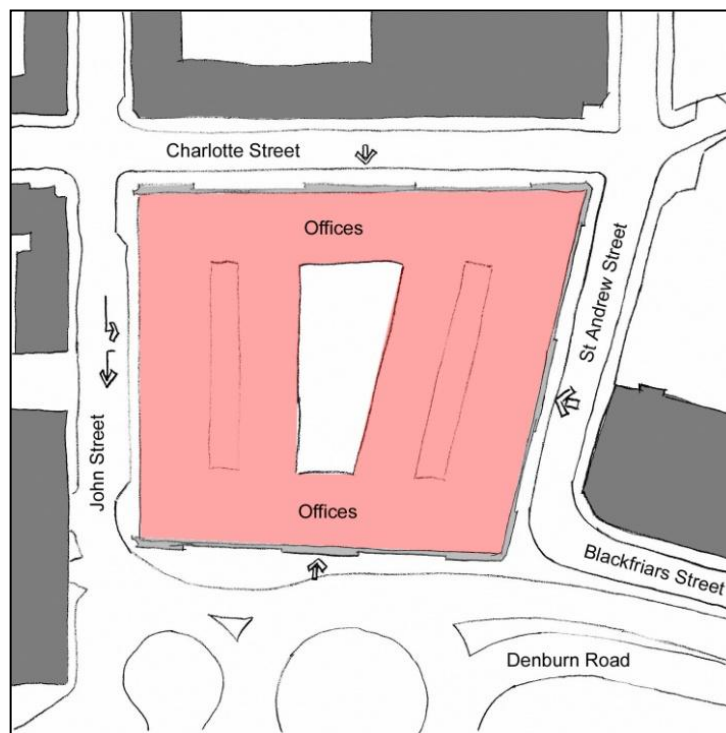
## 5.2 St Andrew Street

### Business Use

Business use (Class 4 of the Use Classes Order 1997) would be an appropriate and acceptable use for the site and is fully supported by Local Development Plan policy.

Recent office development proposals, notably Triple Kirks, have effectively stretched the Central Business District towards St Andrew Street, and the building offers a rare opportunity to control an entire City Centre block and develop a major City Centre office scheme.

Initial feasibility studies aimed at designing a scheme capable of offering “Category A” office space (as defined within the British Council for Offices Guide to Specification 2009) have been undertaken and demonstrate that an office only development offering potential for subdivision into highly marketable individual office suites (either three or four to a floor) could be achievable.

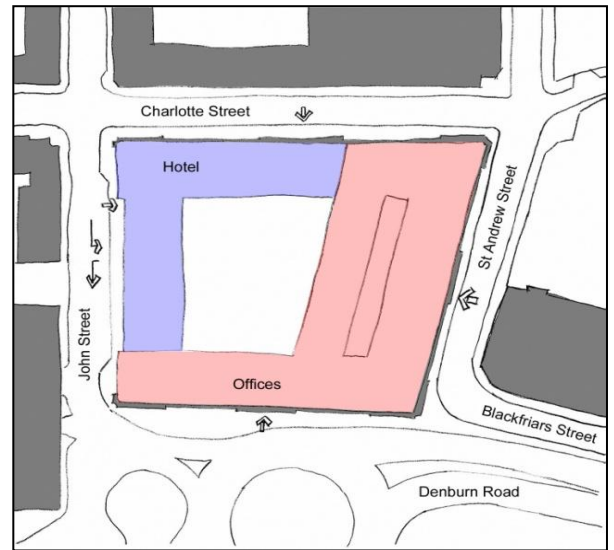


Equally, a smaller scale “Category A” office development could be achieved as part of a wider mixed use scheme incorporating other uses such as hotel or residential (considered below).

### Hotel

Hotel use (Class 7 of the Use Classes Order 1997) would be suitable at this location and supported by Local Development Plan policy.

The building offers potential either for a hotel only scheme, or provision of a hotel element as part of a mixed office/hotel or residential/hotel development scheme.



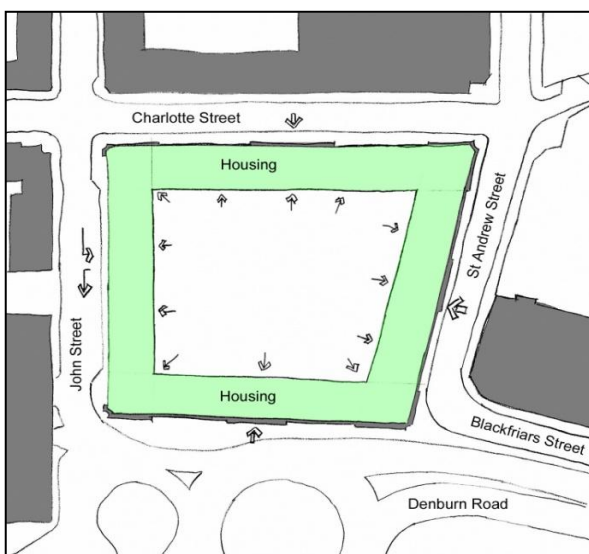
The success of the Hilton Garden Inn on St Andrew Street, which opened in 2010, has demonstrated the location's viability for hotel use.

Initial feasibility investigations have demonstrated that, as a key element of a mixed-use development, a budget hotel which meets the occupation specification of key sector brands, and offers appropriate servicing capacity/vehicular set-down areas, could be achievable following significant physical alteration to the existing building.

## Residential

Residential use (Class 8 of the Use Classes Order 1997) would be acceptable at this location in terms of Local Development Plan policy and appropriate in respect of the surrounding area and adjacent uses.

Feasibility assessments have shown that a residential only scheme of circa 200 residential units – a mix of 1, 2 and 3 bed apartments and penthouses may be achievable. Alternatively a mixed hotel/residential development may also be viable in physical terms.



Residential development brings with it a requirement for affordable housing provision (as outlined previously). At the scale of development envisaged by initial feasibility assessments the affordable housing requirement would be 25%.

As outlined as Section 3.3 the final details of any contribution must be agreed following negotiation between Aberdeen City Council's Planning Gain Officer and the developer. In the event that the cost of adapting the St Andrew Street building undermines development viability Supplementary Guidance provides for the negotiation of a reduced contribution where it can be demonstrated that exceptional costs contribute to making a development unviable.

## 6 Public Consultation

A public consultation exercise was undertaken before preparing this brief.

Having been appropriately advertised in the Press & Journal, on Aberdeen City Council's website and in the windows of the Student Union building an exhibition of the indicative development proposals and options was held in the Student Union between 12<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> December 2011.

The public exhibition was manned by Robert Gordon University representatives on the 14<sup>th</sup> December. Visitors to the exhibition were provided with questionnaires which posed a number of key questions relating to the plans, namely:

- Are you supportive of the proposed development of the buildings?
- Do you feel the alternative uses are appropriate?
- What (if any) changes would you make to the proposals?
- Do you have any additional comments/suggestions?

Eighteen interested parties visited the exhibition on the day it was manned – a combination of members of the public, RGU staff, and Local Property Agents. Three completed questionnaires were received following the exhibition. These raised the following matters:

- General support for alternative uses for the buildings proposed;
- Concern regarding the loss of the central student association/student union facility;
- Support for converting Clarke Building into Student Accommodation;
- Questions regarding the need for further hotel development;
- Existing traffic problems on roads surrounding St Andrew Street will be exacerbated;
- Preference for using St Andrew Street for residential use as opposed to office use.

The key planning issue raised related to the traffic impact of any proposal to redevelop the St Andrew Street building. At this stage the 'impact' of any proposal has not been assessed however any such concerns would be considered by a detailed Transport Assessment at Planning Application stage.

Visitors to the exhibition were made aware that any future planning application on either site will fall into the 'major' development category. It was made clear that planning applications for 'major' developments include a statutory requirement for public consultation which will provide interested parties with a formal opportunity to comment upon the detail of specific proposals.

In addition to the Public Exhibition specific consultation was undertaken with both Rosemount/Mile-End and George Street Community Councils. Representatives from Robert Gordon University presented the plans to George Street Community Council at their meeting in January. Feedback received was positive and no concerns were raised. The same presentation was sent to Rosemount/Mile-End Community Council for circulation to the relevant members.

Robert Gordon University also made direct contact with Councillors Hunter, May and Stewart to make them aware of the work being undertaken. Councillor May attended the George Street Community Council presentation. No formal feedback was received from the Councillors.



## 7 Conclusion

This brief has been prepared in order to set the planning parameters for any future redevelopment or adaptive re-use proposals affecting Robert Gordon University's City Centre campus and ensure the highest quality and standard of development is achieved.

It is intended that the brief will provide Supplementary Guidance to the Development Plan and will be a material consideration for Aberdeen City Council when making future planning decisions relating to the buildings.

Each site offers clear potential for redevelopment/re-use as a means of ensuring their continued contribution to the vitality and viability of Aberdeen City Centre following Robert Gordon University's relocation to the Garthdee Campus.

All future redevelopment options outlined within this Brief will be subject to planning permission and possibly listed building consent. It is strongly advised that early engagement with both Aberdeen City Council and Historic Scotland is undertaken to assist the development feasibility process.

Any future development proposals should adhere to the following key principles:

### **Schoolhill**

The special character of the listed Administration and Student Union buildings must be retained, however both buildings offer conversion potential to alternative uses. Any proposals to alter the exterior of these buildings would not be supported.

The Clarke Building provides potential for a more significant development intervention, including increased massing and physical separation from the Administration Building via the creation of a new link building within the existing courtyard area. Any such proposals must respect the setting of the adjacent listed buildings and ensure that a positive contribution to the wider conservation area is made.

### **St Andrew Street**

The building offers clear conversion potential to a variety of alternative uses. The existing granite facades to St Andrew Street, Charlotte Street and Denburn Road must be retained however there is scope to investigate more exciting and innovative development solutions involving the internal courtyard area and the John Street facade. As well as offering opportunity to increase developable area the internal courtyard area may also offer opportunity to meet open space requirements.

A specific opportunity may exist to increase height and massing, involving the creation of a four storey development throughout with possible penthouse accommodation at fifth floor level. Any such proposals must take conservation area character and surrounding context into account.