

Character Area Eleven: Central Shopping Area



Overview

This area has been the commercial heart of the city for over 1000 years. Although the street pattern was established by the Scandinavian settlers, the wide streets and formal spaces are a result of 18th and 19th century civic improvements. Perhaps more than any other area, the central shopping area has responded to the pressure for change with a huge variety of building designs. Red brick Victorian department stores are juxtaposed with contemporary glass and steel buildings.

The core of this area is designated as part of the footstreet network, allowing pedestrians to roam freely for most of the day. The pleasure of this experience is abruptly halted by major traffic routes skirting the edges, heavily used by buses and cars.

Boundaries

Building age and street width distinguishes this area from the medieval shopping streets (character area 10). The northern boundary reflects this winding its way through the backs of plots along Davygate, St Sampson's Square and Newgate Market. The north western boundary runs along Museum Street, the edge of Museum Gardens.

The south western boundary of Low Ousegate, Coppergate and Pavement is complex since it was one of the main historic routes through the city and used as a market place. Today, it is still a key transport route and is considered under this character area although the traffic issues also span a neighbouring area, King's Staith and Coppergate Centre (character area 12) and Micklegate (character area 21)

Historical development

The northern corner of the shopping area is sited within the Roman legionary fortress. The Via Praetoria was one of the main streets and followed the present line of Stonegate, once aligned with the ancient bridge over the River Ouse near the Guildhall. A Roman bath house has been excavated in the corner of St Sampson's Square ①.

The street pattern was well established before the Norman Conquest in 1066 judging from the streets' Scandinavian names. At this time, the population was concentrated in the Roman fortress area and the land between it and the two rivers. Two churches All Saints, Pavement and St Michael, Spurriergate are of pre-Conquest foundation although the current buildings are medieval.

Coney Street is a corruption of King Street which probably indicates that the route led to the palace of the tenth century Northumbrian rulers, on the site of the present Museum Gardens. Until 1200, Coney Street was home to most of the city's Jews who had established a synagogue there. In the early 14th century, it was considered the city's principal street no doubt due to its proximity to the River Ouse. The deep plots and surviving water lanes reveal the long-standing and profitable river trade once conducted from the warehouses along the banks. Coney Street's important status was confirmed by the re-building of the Guildhall there in 1449-59.

St Sampson's Square was the main market place, known as Thursday Market, where butchers sold their meat and dairy produce. Pavement was also used for a market selling grain and herbs. By 1705 these two specialised markets had become general.

As well as its markets, people came to York as it was a key transport hub. London stage coaches set off from the York Tavern, St Helen's Square or the Black Swan, Coney St. Eastern journeys began at the White Swan, Pavement and northern journeys at Blake Street.

In 1694 a fire in High Ousegate devastated the southern part of the area. An earlier Corporation Order directing the "building upright from the ground in brick" instead of timber and the increasing fashionability of brick meant that the appearance of the area began to change.

From the 18th century there was a move towards the 'civic improvement' of the city centre which had become very densely built up. Most of the streets were widened either through building demolition or by the incorporation of churchyards. There are three examples of the latter ②:

- 1745 - St Helen's Square was created from churchyard of St Helen's Church.
- 1782 - All Saints Pavement had its chancel, aisles and churchyard removed for road widening;
- 1841 - Spurriergate was widened taking some of St Michael's church and churchyard.

A key phase of redevelopment occurred in 1835-40 when Parliament Street was created as a new market place linking St Sampson's Square and Pavement. About 50 buildings in St Sampson's Square, Pavement and Jubbergate were demolished. At this time the southern end of Church Street was widened and linked to St Sampson's Square ③.



The Parliament Street market in 1889

This was followed by the widening of Museum Street (previously known as Back Lendal) from a narrow lane alongside St Leonard's Hospital in Museum Gardens. It linked up with the new crossing over the Ouse, Lendal Bridge, built 1861-3.

More recently, Newgate Market was created in 1955 as a new home for stalls from St Sampson's Square so it could be used as a car park ④.

A major change to the character of the central shopping area occurred with the designation of pedestrianised 'footstreets' in 1987. Despite initial opposition from traders who thought they would lose business, the scheme cemented York's position as a regional shopping hub. Of course, prior to this York had long been known for its retail outlets. Back in 1733 the Tuke family began to sell coffee and chocolate from premises on the corner of Castlegate and High Ousegate. This business was later to become the basis of Rowntrees. Terry's was also established nearby in St Helen's Square.

Until the redevelopment of the Evening Press building, its paper was delivered to the Yorkshire Herald print works by boat on the Ouse. In the last few years, the access to the riverside has increased with the redevelopment of the former print works off Coney Street ⑤. A new cantilevered deck provides al fresco eating and drinking.



Coney Street in 1980, prior to its designation as a 'footstreet'



Coney Street today as a 'footstreet', where the road is raised and paved to allow pedestrians to share the street space with vehicles

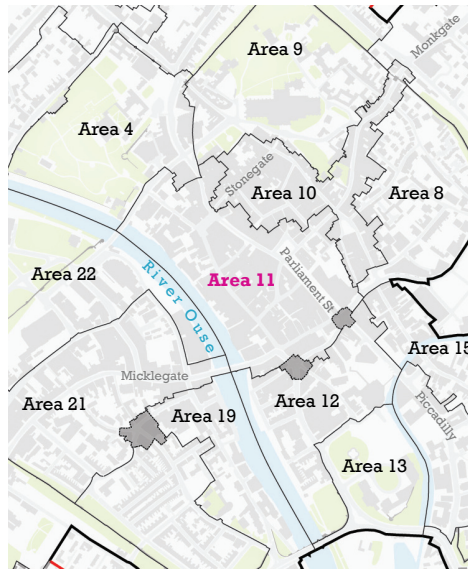
Ambience and use

This uses in this area are almost exclusively retail or other commercial activities, including pubs and restaurants. The early mornings are dominated by delivery vans and there are few pedestrians. This changes towards lunchtime when the shopping activity gets going. As shops and offices close around six o'clock, the streets quickly empty and there is a lull until customers head out to restaurants and pubs for the evening.

Part One: Understanding the City > Character Areas > Eleven: Central Shopping Area

- 1 Excavated Roman bath house
- 2 18th century civic improvements creating widened streets and squares from former church land
- 3 19th century civic improvements including the creation of Parliament Street
- 4 Creation of Newgate Market in the 20th century
- 5 20th century Yorkshire Herald development which allows access to the riverside
-  Landmark
-  Line of former Roman fortress wall
-  Churches
-  Character area boundary
-  Area of overlap

Area 11 location plan



Introductory Plan

Designations

This area has long been the civic heart of the city, hence the presence of the 15th century Guildhall and 18th century Mansion House, both Grade I listed. Two churches also fall into this category, All Saints, Pavement and St Michael, Spurriergate.

Grade II* buildings include St Helen's Church, dating from the 12th century and Nos. 36, 38 and 40 Coney Street, a row of the late 18th century. The large number of Grade II buildings date from the 18th and early 19th centuries.

A handful of buildings of merit have been identified including No. 19 Coney Street (currently Next), an Art Deco department store, and Nos. 6-14 Davygate (currently Debenhams), a good example of a 20th century department store in a Georgian style.

There are a number of buildings from the post-war years which illustrate the austerity of the era and restrictions on building materials. They suffer from low quality materials (machine made bricks and concrete) and a lack of interest or depth to their elevations. The most sophisticated is No. 44 Coney Street (currently BHS) which has three different entrances. The poorer examples which detract are No. 20 Market Street (currently Costa Coffee) and Nos. 8-10 Market Street (currently T K Maxx). In the case of the latter's facade, the large amount of blank brick walling and the floor heights jar with the predominant floor heights and regular and generous glazing of most neighbouring buildings.

There are also several detractors facing Newgate Market. These seem to have been built onto the rear of listed buildings facing Parliament Street and therefore, the redevelopment of these would need to be handled carefully.

The public toilet block in Parliament Street detracts from this major shopping street.

Down by Ouse Bridge, No. 2 Low Ousegate is currently vacant and detracts from the riverside. It is in a very prominent position which requires a much more sensitive approach to design.











Given its location on a prominent corner No. 20 Market Street is a particularly poor modern intrusion, contributing little to the central shopping area's rich townscape



Some of the buildings facing Newgate Market are of poor quality and detract from the space

Part One: Understanding the City > Character Areas > Eleven: Central Shopping Area






-  Schedulded Ancient Monument
-  Grade I Listed Building
-  Grade II* Listed Building
-  Grade II Listed Building
-  Building of merit
-  Detractor
-  Character Area boundary
-  Area of overlap



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Streets & Spaces

This area is large and complex enough to have a natural 'order' of streets and spaces based on level of activity, uses and building scale.

-  Major routes
-  Connecting streets
-  Alleyways/ snickets/ ginnels
-  Open spaces
-  Landmark



Street types

Major routes

Spurriergate/ Coney Street/ Lendal and Parliament Street/ Davygate/ Blake Street are the two main routes running north west to south east. These tend to have the major retail outlets and the highest numbers of pedestrians.

At either end of these routes are two further major routes, Museum Street and Low Ousegate/ Coppergate/ Pavement. These have fewer pedestrians due to fewer retail outlets but high volumes of buses and cars.

The major routes tend to have larger scale buildings, combining several historic plots and up to four storeys high.



Lined with well known branded shops, Davygate is very popular with shoppers

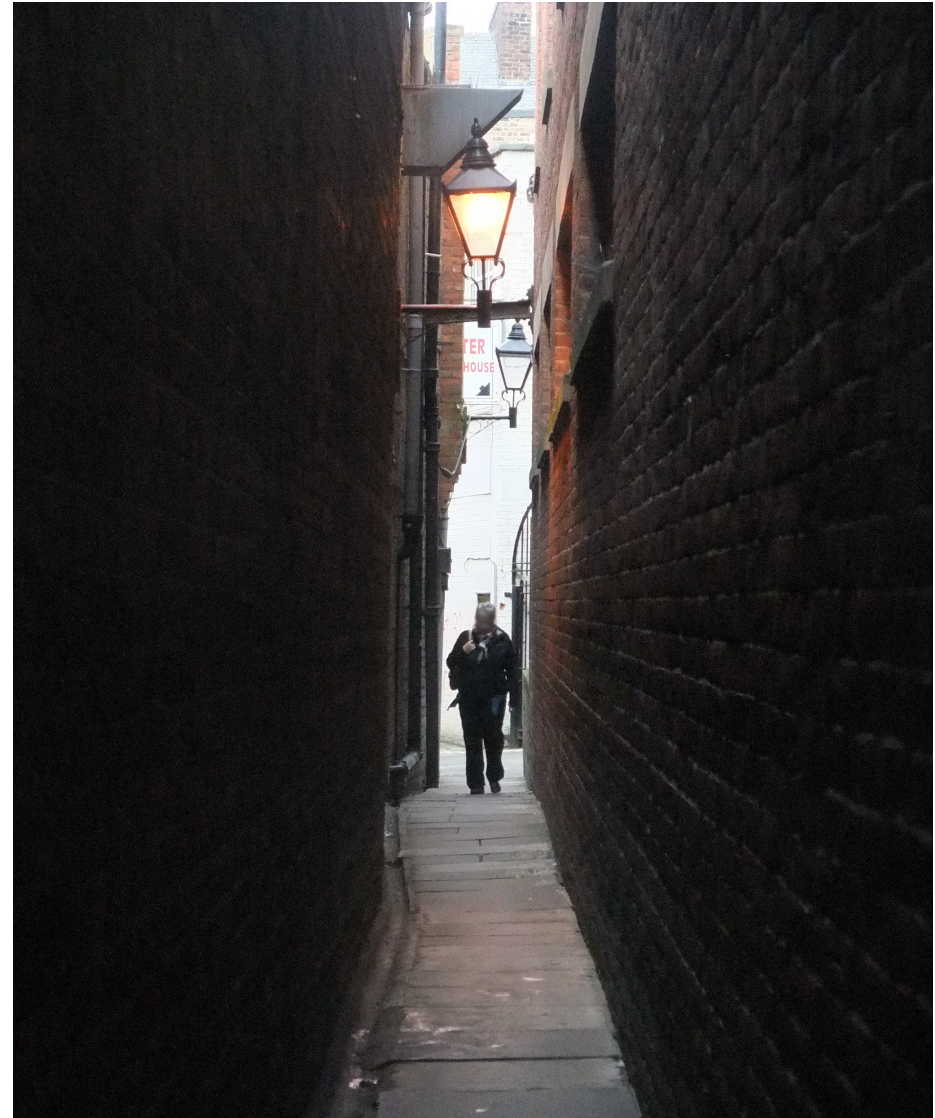
Connecting streets

Market Street, Feasegate, New Street and Church Street connect the major routes. These streets are secondary in terms of retail outlets and often have the sides of buildings facing them rather than main entrances. Newgate Market is connected through a smaller network of Silver Street, Jubbergate and Patrick Pool.

Buildings on connecting streets tend to be smaller in scale, many retaining historic plots widths and up to three storeys high.

Alleyways/ Snickets/ Ginnels/ Courtyards

These squeeze through the back of plots and between blocks to connect streets together. Some, such as Peter Lane off High Ousegate, are not more than a metre wide. Some alleyways lead to small courtyards, such as Judge's Court off Coney Street, and others lead down to the river.



Many alleys, including Peter's Lane (shown left) are used only by locals

Open spaces

Where major routes intersect, there are the open spaces of St Samson's Square and St Helen's Square. There are also two other purposely created market spaces in the area, Parliament Street and Newgate Market.

The Squares are well maintained and attractive, with some ornamental planting and benches. Occasionally they appeared cluttered where bicycles have been chained to railings instead of the racks provided. As part of the footstreet network, traffic may not enter the Squares between 11am and 4pm which means for most of the day there is little distinction between how pavement and roads are used by pedestrians. Surfaces are generally well integrated to reflect this, for example, low or no kerbs.

Parliament Street is a very wide street and like the Squares, surfaces indicate it is a 'footstreet', although there is a carriageway on one side. A design competition in 1989 led to its present appearance. Mature trees and benches in the centre make it a pleasant space to rest from a weary day's shopping. However, two redundant buildings (toilets and pay phone booths) take up valuable space. Also, temporary market stalls make the space look untidy some of the time and there is much street clutter at the southern junction with Piccadilly. Railings, bollards, traffic lights and improperly chained bicycles blight the junction's appearance.

Newgate Market holds stands selling a variety of low value goods such as fruit and vegetables. It can be entered at many points around the edge, making it a permeable space. However, it does not have a clear design concept and could be greatly enhanced.

There are virtually no private open spaces belonging to individual buildings due to the historic pressure to build upon back yards and gardens. Occasionally small courtyards can be found off alleyways.



St Helen's Square is well maintained and decorated with street furniture in keeping with the area's character



Groceries on sale at Newgate Market

Riverside

The riverside is generally under private ownership. Buildings along the Coney Street and Spurriergate stretch of the Ouse are mostly orientated towards the street rather than the water. Due to the deep plan of the buildings right up to the river wall, there is no riverside path, but rather a series of intermittent access points from lanes leading down from Coney Street. This reflects the historic riverside condition and provides a series of glimpsed views of the riverside. One of the oldest of these water lanes (Common Hall Lane) is beneath the Guildhall and it could be opened to the public in future.

The only purposely designed riverside space is in front of the former Yorkshire Herald building and reached via a small courtyard next to the church of St Martin-le-Grand. The creation of the courtyard revealed a view across the river to All Saints Church, North Street. The suspended deck provides tables for various bars and restaurants - it is a space to dwell rather than a through route. The orientation of buildings towards the water and location on the sunny side of the river contributes to the space's success.



Access to the river is provided by a cantilevered deck, suitable for al fresco dining

Buildings

Medieval landmarks

The Guildhall stands on the riverside behind the Mansion House and is only visible from St Helen's Square through an arched gateway. However, it is very visible from the opposite bank of the Ouse. A guildhall is known to have been on the site since 1256 but it was rebuilt in 1449 in the form of the building seen today. It is an aisled hall with walls of Magnesian Limestone and timber columns supporting the roof. Common Hall Lane runs from a river landing underneath the hall to the cellars which were filled up in the 17th century. In 1942 the Guildhall was seriously damaged following a bombing raid and not fully restored until 1960.

There are five churches in this area all built from Magnesian Limestone in various gothic styles. It is difficult to fully observe the churches' architectural form because in many cases buildings have been constructed so close to their walls.

All Saints, Pavement is a particularly prominent landmark in the area due to its position and the height of its open lantern tower. It was mentioned in the Domesday Book but the present building dates from about 1400. It was originally larger but the chancel was lost to the enlargement of Pavement market in 1782.

St Martin-le-Grand is somewhat hidden from view as only one side is exposed to Coney Street. The remainder can be seen only by entering the courtyard behind. It was founded in the 12th century but the earliest parts date from the 15th century. It was damaged by a bomb in 1942 and rebuilt 1961-8 although the part onto the street was left open as a memorial garden.

The Guildhall is only visible through an archway



All Saints, Pavement remains a prominent landmark



St Helen's is adjacent to St Helen's Square, its former churchyard, and sandwiched between buildings on three sides. It is first mentioned in the 12th century but was declared redundant in the mid 16th century and partially demolished. An octagonal lantern tower had already replaced the spire in the early 19th century and major restoration followed in 1857. It is still in use as a church.

St Michael's, Spurriergate, was founded before the Norman Conquest. The earliest material dates from the 12th century although the majority is 15th century. In 1821 the building was shortened for the widening of Spurriergate and only two sides are visible. In 1989 it was converted for community use.

St Sampson's, Church Street, is first mentioned in the mid-12th century but has been rebuilt twice, first in the mid-15th and then the mid 19th centuries. Unlike some of the other churches, buildings have not been built against its walls and it is still visible from three sides. The church was closed in 1968 and in 1974 was converted to a community centre; the churchyard was retained as a public space.



St Helen's Church, facing on to St Helen's Square

Commerical architecture in 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries

The central shopping area has a huge variety of building styles due to the pressure for development in the commercial heart of the city. Most buildings were purpose built with shops on the ground floor; in the 18th century there would have been small individual shops but by the late 19th and early 20th century, larger department stores were popular. Some individual shops were also combined but the complexity of internal arrangements does not make them suitable for some larger retailers today.

Nos. 36, 38 and 40 Coney Street are a row of shops built in 1790. They are Grade II listed and have some attractive later shop fronts*



Nos. 1, 2 and 3 Parliament Street is a red brick Gothic building built about 1901 as a bank (current Barclays Bank). The style is an interesting departure from the favoured classical style of many banks, using terracotta and ceramic panels instead of stone. The building is Grade II listed



Commonly, the buildings are of load-bearing masonry, of three to four storeys and follow the same building line. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries a wider selection of materials was used on facades such as stone ashlar. This was often applied to buildings such as banks which wanted to show their wealth and inspire confidence in their customers. Individual chain retailers also had distinctive building designs to increase recognition of their brand; for example, the timber cladding applied to Liberty's in Davygate.



No. 19 Coney Street (currently Next and River Island) is an Art Deco department store with stone facade. It is considered a building of merit despite a poor additional upper storey which spoils the roofline. It is not as good an example of the style as No. 52 Coney Street which is listed Grade II



Nos. 6-14 Davygate (currently Northern Rock and Debenhams) is an example of a Neo-Georgian department store. The style was popular in the 1920s and 30s and considered more 'polite' and less controversial than modern styles like Art Deco

Recent development

This area has a tradition of contemporary rather than pastiche design. Today, new designs must be of high quality and 'of their time', whilst referencing their historic surroundings. Consequently, the best contemporary designs in the Conservation Area can be found here, including Nos. 3-5 Davygate (formerly Borders) and the City Screen Cinema off Coney Street. Both these buildings have steel frame construction with large expanses of glass and stone clad facades. They are of a suitable scale for their setting and follow the historic plot or street line.

Less successful is the large building on the corner of Spurriergate and High Ousegate (currently H&M, Phones4U, Game). The long flat façade has no interest or depth and the rounded corner treatment is overly dramatic; the proportion of glass windows to solid wall is out of step with surrounding buildings. In addition, the blank side wall of No. 5 High Ousegate is left exposed.



Finished to a high standard, the City Screen Cinema off Coney Street contrasts well with the Yorkshire Herald Printworks by maintaining historic building heights and plot widths



The corner of Spurriergate and High Ousegate is overly complex



Nos. 3-5 Davygate; the building's subtle curve reveals a view of St Helen's Church. Traditionally, limestone was reserved for public buildings – here the smooth limestone facade contrasts well with the aged stone of the church wall behind. The slight projections of each storey reference the jettied buildings of Stonegate around the corner

Traffic & Movement

Footstreets

Since its inception, the footstreets scheme has enhanced the visitor experience and no doubt helped to increase its attractiveness to shoppers. The designation is indicated by signage and street surfaces. However, lack of consistent timings across the whole area can be confusing for out of town drivers. There is also some abuse of the system, for example Green Badge parking spaces, and lack of enforcement. These issues were identified in a 2010 review of the system and a framework has been drawn up for improvements. These include standardising the hours and publicising the restrictions.

Museum Street

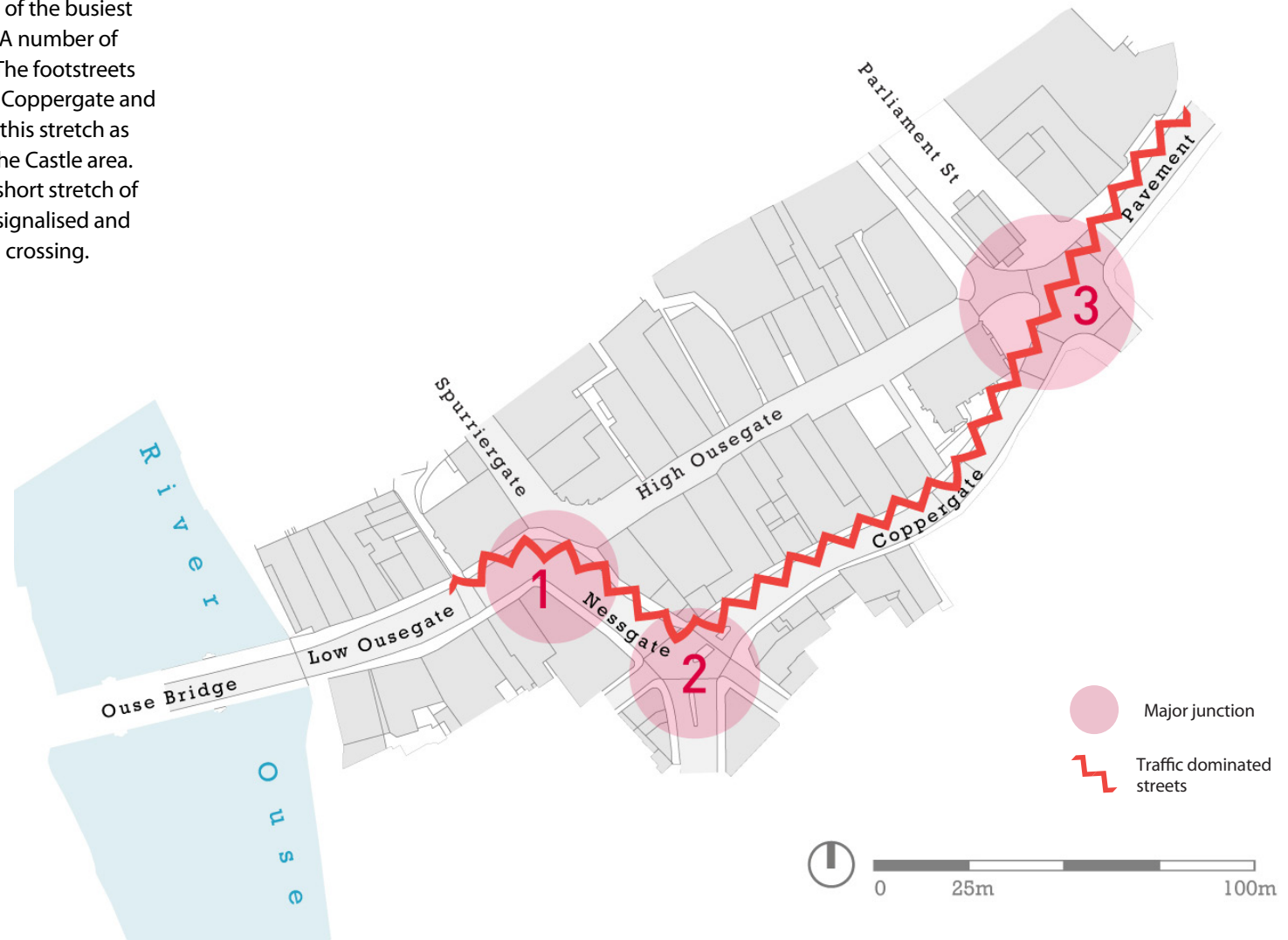
This major route forms the northern boundary of the area and is part of the inner ring road. Not only is it on several bus routes but large numbers of pedestrians use the street as it links the railway station area with the Minster. Many tourists struggle to wheel their suitcases along the narrow pavements and through the crowded bus stop outside St Leonard's Hospital. A programme of pavement widening is being undertaken in conjunction with the re-paving of Library Square (see character area 4).



Museum Street accommodates a large number of buses, private vehicles and pedestrians traveling to and from the Railway Station

Ouse Bridge to Pavement

This major route forms the southern boundary of the character area and is arguably one of the busiest stretches of road within the city walls. A number of bus and coach routes converge here. The footstreets terminate north of Low Ousegate and Coppergate and pedestrian activity decreases south of this stretch as the route blocks movement towards the Castle area. Nessgate in particular is busy as it is a short stretch of road between two key junctions, one signalised and the other with a frequently used zebra crossing.



Ouse Bridge to Pavement

1. Spurriergate/ Low Ousegate/ High Ousegate/ Nessgate junction

This is a very busy crossroads where pavements are extremely narrow. As High Ousegate and Spurriergate are closed to traffic, cars often travel through Low Ousegate – a very wide stretch of carriageway - at high speeds. The high volume of pedestrians walking to or from Ouse Bridge are impeded by others waiting to cross at the diagonal crossing. This creates a dangerous situation whereby pedestrians may be forced to step into the road. The road appears to be unnecessarily wide and there may be some potential for pavement widening.



Dangerously narrow pavements at busy junction

2. Nessgate/ King Street/ Clifford Street/ Castlegate/ Coppergate

These five streets intersect at a single point. Nessgate, Clifford Street and Coppergate are the main routes with high volumes of buses and cars. Here there are also narrow pavements and pedestrians must negotiate traffic islands or zebra crossings to cross the road. This is preferable to signalised crossings since there are lower levels of pedestrians than at the previous junction.



Zebra crossings create pedestrian priority

3. Piccadilly/ Parliament Street/ Pavement/ Coppergate/High Ousegate junction

The main issue at this junction is not traffic but unnecessary street clutter. Poorly maintained railings, bollards and advertising boards blight the junction's appearance and the setting of All Saints Church. In addition, bicycles chained to the railings make the space look chaotic. More bicycle racks should be provided and removal of abandoned bicycles should be a priority in conjunction with the redesign of the junction to simplify and declutter.



Street furniture is in extremely poor condition at Pavement



This photo highlights the extent of street furniture, bicycles, lighting and general detritus that has been allowed to build up at just one junction, compromising the quality of the street

Issues & Opportunities

Strengths

- The central area is popular with residents and visiting shoppers generating a positive atmosphere for the city and contributing to its economic success
- The footstreet network promotes free pedestrian movement and creates a pleasant shopping experience
- Well laid out formal spaces such as St Helen's Square provide a breathing space from the intensity and enclosure of surrounding streets. Stone paving and other high quality materials enhance their character.
- There is a Key View of the Minster from Museum Street. Regular maintenance of peripheral trees helps preserve this.
- The best examples of contemporary architecture can be found in this area, for example, the City Screen Cinema.



View towards the Minster from Museum Street

Weaknesses and opportunities

- Parliament Street and St Sampson's Square are a focal point for local and visiting shoppers. They contain an array of trees, bollards and street furniture, as well as a carriageway. When the market is operating the space is difficult to navigate and pedestrian flow to the permanent shops is compromised. There is an opportunity through a more detailed design study to simplify the design of the space, remove unnecessary clutter and ensure the square functions well for both the market /civic events and the permanent shops. Ideas which could be considered include:
 - a) Building permanent market stalls which can fold away when not required and which are arranged to enhance pedestrian flows to both stalls and shops;
 - b) Removing the unused toilet block from the junction with Piccadilly and the telephone booth from St Sampson's Square;
 - c) Auditing all street furniture, planting and other structures and relocating those that impede the functioning of the square;
 - d) Assessing how St Sampson's Square could be brought into more active use;
 - e) Providing Newgate Market with high quality landscaping and furniture.

Redeveloping the White Swan Hotel, which sits vacant on a prominent corner to the south would draw pedestrian activity beyond Coppergate.

- Intermittent access to the riverside is part of the historic character of the area. However, there are certain places where intervention could create more riverside public spaces similar to that by the City Screen Cinema. This would require co-operation from a number of private owners but the benefits are potentially great.
- Since the Council own the Guildhall, opening up the water lane beneath it should be possible. This could lead down to a floating pontoon with seating and refreshments.
- The southern route Low Ousegate/ Coppergate/ Pavement has a number of traffic related issues which need to be considered on a strategic city-wide level. However, key junctions could be improved by low level intervention such as widening of pavements, removal of railings and management of bicycle parking.
- Some poor quality 20th century buildings detract from the appearance of the area. If these sites come up for redevelopment, high quality contemporary designs must be proposed. The appropriate height of replacement buildings will vary from site to site but should not exceed that of neighbouring buildings. For example, Church Street could accommodate three storey buildings while Coney Street could take a four storey building.



Alleyways leading to the river are currently treated as service areas and occupied by bins



Small scale changes should be introduced to Parliament Street to improve its appearance and function

Part One: Understanding the City > Character Areas > Eleven: Central Shopping Area










Existing

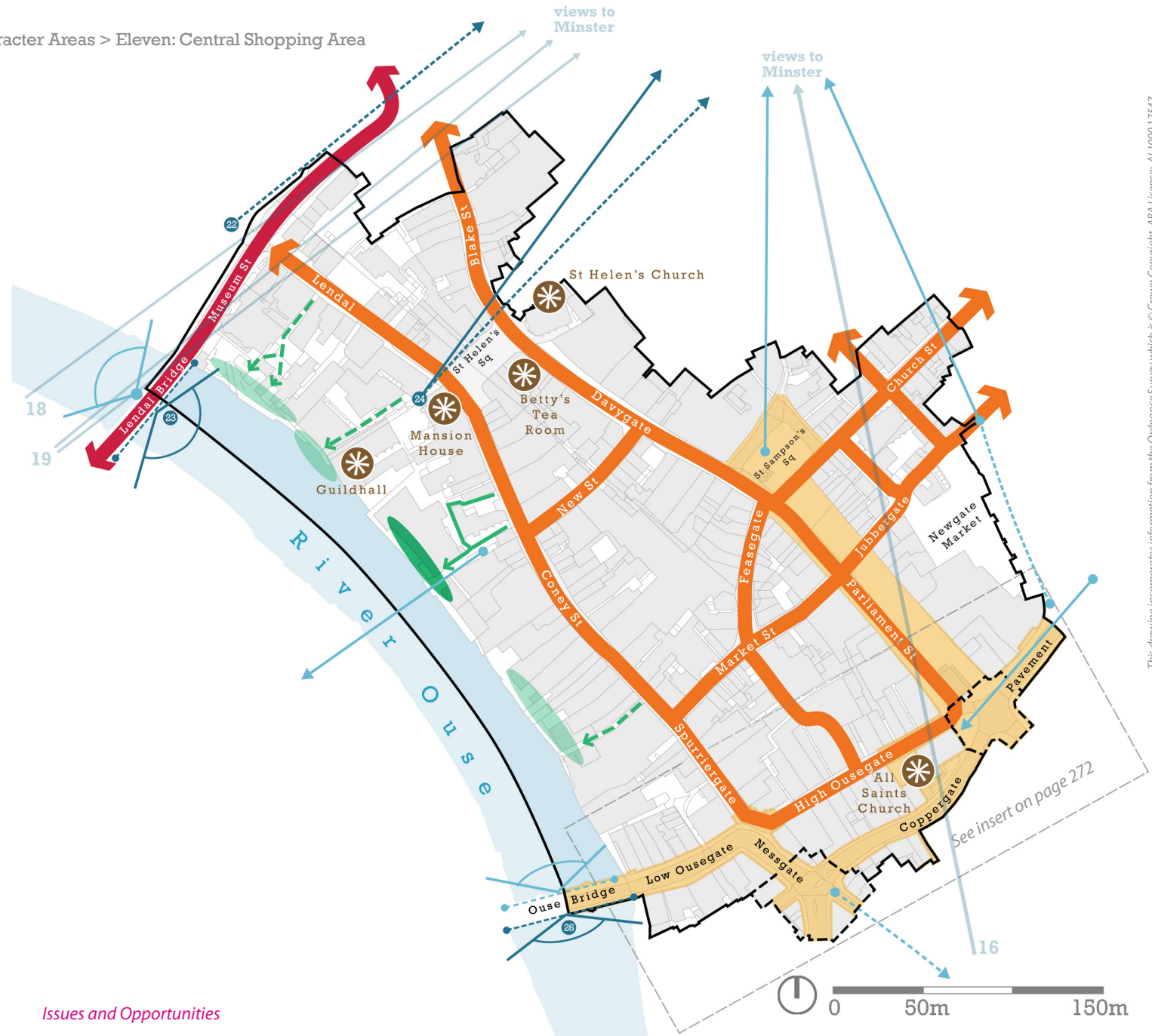
-  Footstreets
-  High volumes of traffic along Museum Street
-  Pedestrian access leading to attractive riverside space
-  Landmark

Opportunities

-  Public space improvements from Ouse Bridge to Pavement and along Parliament Street
-  Potential to create other attractive riverside spaces accessed through existing alleyways

Views

-  Strategic fixed with focal point
-  Strategic dynamic
-  Strategic dynamic panoramic
-  Local fixed with focal point
-  Local dynamic
-  Local dynamic with focal point
-  Local panoramic
-  Local dynamic panoramic
-  Key view from outside the character area - refer to section 3.5



Issues and Opportunities

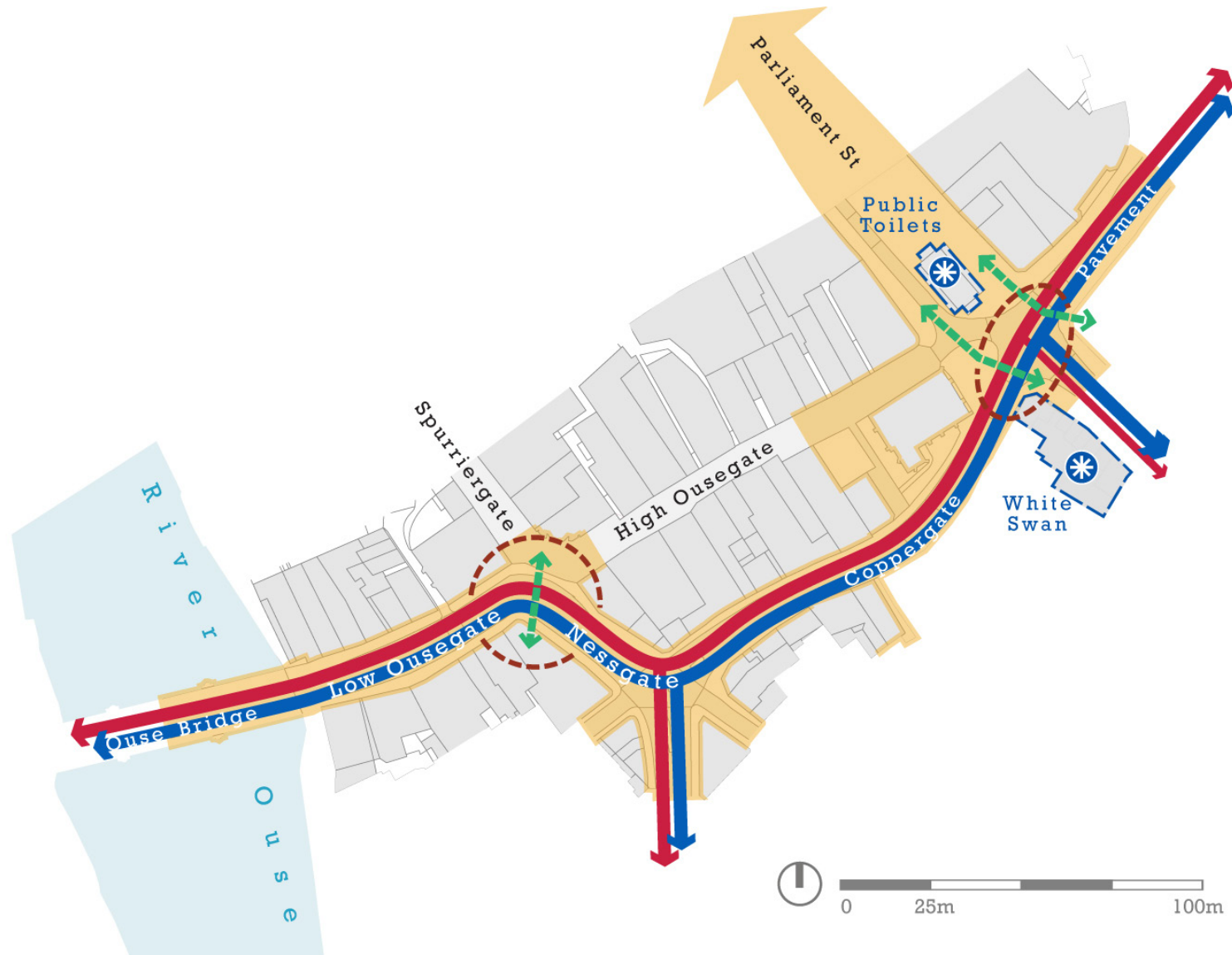
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Existing

- High volumes of traffic
- Major public transport route

Opportunities

- Public space improvements
- Improved pedestrian crossing points
- * Development/enhancement opportunity
- Junction improvements



Issues and Opportunities - Ouse Bridge to Pavement