

Character Area Twelve: King's Staith & Coppergate Centre



Overview

Four main phases of development have shaped the character of this area. The Anglo-Scandinavian settlement of Jorvik established the street pattern and was built upon in the medieval period when the area was home to an important friary and the city's main river landing stage, King's Staith. Five hundred years later, Victorian civic improvement swept away slums in the Water Lanes and created Clifford Street, followed by the Edwardian Piccadilly. In the mid-1980s, the Coppergate Centre was created on a former industrial and cinema site next to the Foss.

As a result of these phases and changing uses, this area is hugely varied in its architecture. Most streets are off the main tourist trail and its location on the fringes of the retail core make it a relatively quiet area, aside from the Coppergate Centre. The main pedestrian route from the Castle car park passes through the Centre towards the Central Shopping Area (character area 11). The area's main strength is undoubtedly the long stretch of riverside which is very popular in the summer.

Boundaries

This area is sandwiched between the Castle to the south and the historic shopping area to the north. The south western boundary is naturally formed by the River Ouse and the south eastern boundary by Tower Street, the line of the demolished Victorian prison wall. The north eastern boundary runs through the back of plots along Piccadilly, separating it from the older and more compact Fossgate. The north western edge is within an 'overlap' area of complex junctions shared with the Central Shopping Area (character area 11).

Historical development

After the Romans left Britain shortly after 400AD, there was no occupation in the Coppergate area until the mid-9th century, after which Scandinavian settlers repopulated it. Their main crossing over the Ouse was where the present Ouse Bridge is, downstream of the Romans' at the Guildhall. Thus the growth of 'Jorvik' south-

east of the Roman fortress was probably due to the convergence of two important cross-city routes - the older Roman route Petergate/ Colliergate/ Fossgate and the newer one over the Bridge along Pavement to Hungate.

A regular street pattern of dense occupation was established in the 10th and 11th centuries; the preserved timber remains of Jorvik can be seen beneath the Coppergate Centre. Many churches were set up at this time by wealthy citizens including St Mary's, Castlegate. Evidence for its pre-conquest date includes a foundation stone and carved Anglo-Saxon stones.

In about 1230, a Franciscan friary was founded in the area. The precinct extended to the River Ouse on the west side, the city wall on the south side and Castlegate on the east side. The site may have been part of the Castle's outer bailey, or an area kept open for military purposes.

At the beginning of the 14th century, the King often stayed at the friary to conduct administrative business. Next to the friary King's Staith was constructed in 1366 and used for the landing of products such as corn, wheat, flour, salt, lime and coal. It remained the city's main landing stage until the early 20th century.

Cumberland House is the earliest surviving riverside commercial building, retaining its storage cellars accessible from the staith. It was built in the first decade of the eighteenth century by Alderman William Cornwall, a tanner and brewer, as premises from which to carry on his businesses.

In the 19th century huge improvements took place in the riverside area. The 'Water Lanes' (King Street, Cumberland Street, Lower Friargate) ① which led from King's Staith up to Castlegate were cleared of terrible slums to create Clifford Street in 1881. Clifford Street is a Victorian set-piece of civic architecture; buildings include magistrates' court, fire station, police station and technical institute.

The street was built in conjunction with Skeldergate Bridge, a new crossing over the Ouse, to relieve horse-drawn tram congestion in Castlegate.

Part of the Coppergate area had been flooded when the King's Fishpond was created in 1068 to protect the Castle built by William the Conqueror. Canalisation of the Foss in the 1790s revealed land beneath the present Coppergate Centre, shown on an 1851 map as fields. It was later used for industrial development such as Craven's confectionary works and a school.

In 1912 Piccadilly was widened and lengthened to link up with Parliament Street. The Coppergate Centre was built in the mid-1980s and fundamentally changed the area by drawing shoppers in from the historic shopping streets to the north ③.

Ambience and use

This area has different zones of activity. Down by King's Staith and the 'Water Lanes' are public houses, a theatre and opera house generating a significant amount of night life. In the summer the riverside is a popular leisure space.

The Coppergate Centre is a busy hub of pedestrian activity but its inward looking arrangement means this does not really spill out onto surrounding streets.


Clifford Street still contains many of the civic functions for which it was built. Some buildings have been converted to office use. As a traffic route to the city centre, it is noisier than Castlegate, which is now a quiet back street.





The Magistrates' Court with Trinity Chapel in the foreground. The chapel was replaced with a fire station in 1937

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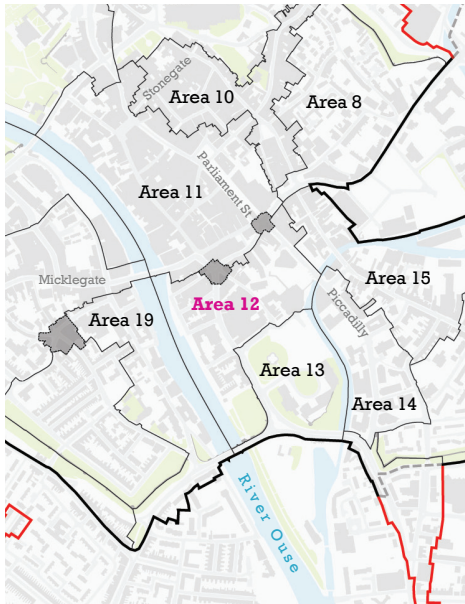
Part One: Understanding the City > Character Areas > Twelve: King's Staith & Coppergate Centre

- 1 19th century Water Lanes slum clearance and creation of Clifford Street
- 2 Early 19th century housing and shops surrounding Tower Gardens
- 3 1980s Coppergate Centre development containing shops and Jorvik Viking Centre
-  Landmark

 Character Area boundary

 Area of overlap

Area 12 location plan



Introductory Plan








Designations

There are five Grade I listed buildings including, Fairfax House (possibly 1740s) and Castlegate House (1762-3), two very fine mansions in Castlegate designed by John Carr. St Mary's Church is also Grade I and is now used as an exhibition centre for temporary installations. Cumberland House is the last building in this category and the earliest commercial riverside building in the city.

There are a significant number of Grade II listed 19th century buildings such as the Magistrates' Court in Clifford Street. Interspersed with these are some buildings of merit clustered between Lower Friargate and Cumberland Street.



Grade I listed Castlegate House (1762-3)

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



Designations

Streets & Spaces

King's Staith and the riverside

The Staith has existed since the 14th century although was rebuilt alongside Ouse Bridge in 1810-20. Once used for trade, it now is the main riverside leisure space in the city since it is the 'sunny side' of the river. Activity varies depending on the season. In the summer wooden tables encourage people to congregate outside the public houses and ice cream vans park nearby. Pleasure boats also moor here to offer their services. In winter the cold weather and risk of flooding limits this activity.

The Staith retains its historic appearance with attractive stone setts and lack of modern clutter. Further to the south, South Esplanade is a more modern space with tarmac and parked cars. There is a stretch of the medieval friary river wall with flood heights marked on it.

Some of the Water Lanes have also retained the historic setts. These steep streets lead down to the river and provide good views of Queen's Staith on the opposite bank framed by historic warehouses.

This section of the riverside terminates at Tower Gardens, a small but very attractive oasis sunken below the busy inner ring road. It was created as an outwork of Skeldergate Bridge in 1879 and now contains a large number of mature trees and a small stretch of the city wall at the northern end. There is a good view of the former Female Prison, now part of York Castle Museum.

At present, King's Staith, South Esplanade and Tower Gardens are considered part of the 'functional floodplain' and this is likely to remain the case for the foreseeable future.



Attractive stone setts ensure the riverside retains its historic character

Castlegate and Clifford Street

Historically the southern end of Castlegate led into the Castle bailey. Until the building of Clifford Street in 1881, Castlegate was a main route into the central area via Nessgate. The lack of traffic and its 18th century buildings mean the street has retained most of its genteel character. Castlegate is not as well enclosed as the Water Lanes since there is an inconsistent building line. Towards and at the end of Castlegate there are excellent dynamic and panoramic views of the Castle precinct.

The curve of Clifford Street provides a good view of a series of grand Victorian buildings. As it was a planned street, the plots are much wider than those of Castlegate in order to accommodate large civic buildings. All the buildings follow the same line onto the street and are generally three to four storeys; interest is added by varied roof line treatment of cupolas, turrets and a clock tower, which can be glimpsed from the other side of the river.

Coppergate Centre

The Coppergate Centre was built in the mid-1980s and occupies a large site between Coppergate and the Foss. The Centre is laid out around a paved courtyard with three main street entrances – Coppergate, Castlegate and Castle car park. This well enclosed route through the Centre mimics the intimate scale of the streets around it and was a conscious effort to make the site more permeable than other indoor shopping centres.

However, the inward orientation of the Centre means that shop entrances on Piccadilly are under-used. Also its external facades by Piccadilly Bridge and the Foss are blank contributing to the lack of atmosphere at that end of the street. The large scale of the building dominates its neighbours on Piccadilly and the sunken Merchant Adventurers' Hall. Fortunately, the design preserves views to St Mary's, Castlegate and All Saints, Pavement.

Good views along Clifford Street of ornate Victorian buildings



The central courtyard in the Coppergate Centre is lined by shop entrances; the space has a high level of activity as it contains a kiosk and ample seating



Buildings

Due to the different phases of development in this area, the buildings are very varied although all made from rich red brick.

The oldest can be found on Castlegate, predominantly of 18th century character. Small scale 19th century residential development between Tower Gardens and Peckitt Street resulted in an attractive group of three storey terraces. Further west, some warehouses were built up in the Water Lanes following slum clearance in the late 19th century.

19th civic buildings

Clifford Street contains the best 19th century civic architecture in the city. All the buildings display various interpretations of Gothic or Tudor style. The consistent use of manufactured red brick brings the buildings together as a group.

The most majestic is the Magistrates' Court, built 1890-2 by Huon A. Matear of Liverpool. It is a mixture of different architectural elements which together are representative of the 'Eclectic' style popular at the time. The main entrance is set within an elaborate porch above which is a high clock tower. A lantern at either corner completes the dramatic roofline.

Adjacent to the Court is the Fire Station - the front dates from 1938 but incorporates the side of the demolished Trinity Chapel built in 1856 by J. B. & W. Atkinson. It is in a European Gothic style; different coloured bricks are used for decorative effect (known as polychromy) and a series of arched windows are divided by columns with foliage at the top.

On the corner of Clifford Street and Friargate is the Friends' Meeting House built in 1884 by W.H. Thorpe. It is less extravagant than other buildings on the street but has an attractive main entrance and turns the corner nicely with a small turret.



The Magistrates' Court, built 1890-2 by Huon A. Matear

20th century shopping centre

The Coppergate Centre was designed by Chapman Taylor Partners. It comprises a series of large red brick blocks, the highest being six storeys. On the inside facade metal grills cover openings on the upper floors which contains car parking. A glass canopy runs around the courtyard on the ground floor, reducing the perception of scale. In the centre of the courtyard is a large horse chestnut tree surrounded by benches and stone paving. On the outside of the Centre facing Piccadilly is the bland brick facade of the car park, the only interesting feature being the lunette windows on the top floor.



The Coppergate Centre includes a street of two storey buildings leading into a courtyard

Traffic & Movement

The majority of private traffic in this area is destined for the car parks at the Coppergate Centre or Castle car park and moves fairly freely along Clifford Street, Tower Street and Piccadilly. However, there are key congestion points at their northern junctions with Coppergate. This is discussed in more detail in Central Shopping Area (character area 11).

Most pedestrian activity is concentrated within and around the Coppergate Centre. On the Piccadilly side, the bus stops outside the

Merchant Adventurers' Hall make this section of pavement especially crowded. On the other side of the Coppergate Centre, the pavements along Clifford Street are rather narrow and can also become crowded due to the bus stops. There is potential to widen the pavements here to relieve congestion.

King's Staith is empty during the winter but comes alive as the weather warms up when people congregate for outside drinking and ice cream.



King's Staith during the summer

Issues & Opportunities

Strengths

- King's Staith is an attractive riverside space with historic surfaces and little modern clutter. In conjunction with South Esplanade and Tower Gardens, the Staith provides a focus for summer leisure activities. There are also good views across to Skeldergate. Finally, the grand and formally planned Victorian buildings along Clifford Street also create pleasant dynamic views.

Weaknesses and opportunities

- There are a number of vacant buildings in this area. A former dispensary opposite the Magistrates' Court is in receivership. The partially completed works were not completed according to approved scheme. It is considered at risk. Another, the White Swan Hotel, has been vacant for many years. This has led to deterioration in its condition and it is also deemed at risk.
- The northern half of Piccadilly lacks the buzz of the shopping areas around it and is rather under-used. Its isolation is caused by three main factors:

- The busy traffic junction with Pavement creates a physical and perceptual barrier between Parliament Street and Piccadilly.
- The partially vacant ground floor of the White Swan means shoppers and retailers are not drawn beyond the junction. This building is at risk and needs to find a viable use.
- The inward orientation of the Coppergate Centre and absence of retailers beyond Piccadilly Bridge mean there is a lack of activity along the rest of the street.





Solving these issues requires public investment in the problematic road junction as discussed in character area 11. Development of a retail area east of the Foss could draw people through the northern half of Piccadilly, increasing footfall and encouraging retailers to invest there.

- King's Staith, South Esplanade and Tower Gardens are considered part of the 'functional floodplain'. Although this is likely to remain the case for the foreseeable future, there are various flood prevention measures which are applicable to historic properties. This issue is discussed further in the Management Strategy.







23 Clifford Street is a vacant building opposite the Magistrates' Court. The developer went into receivership.








Existing

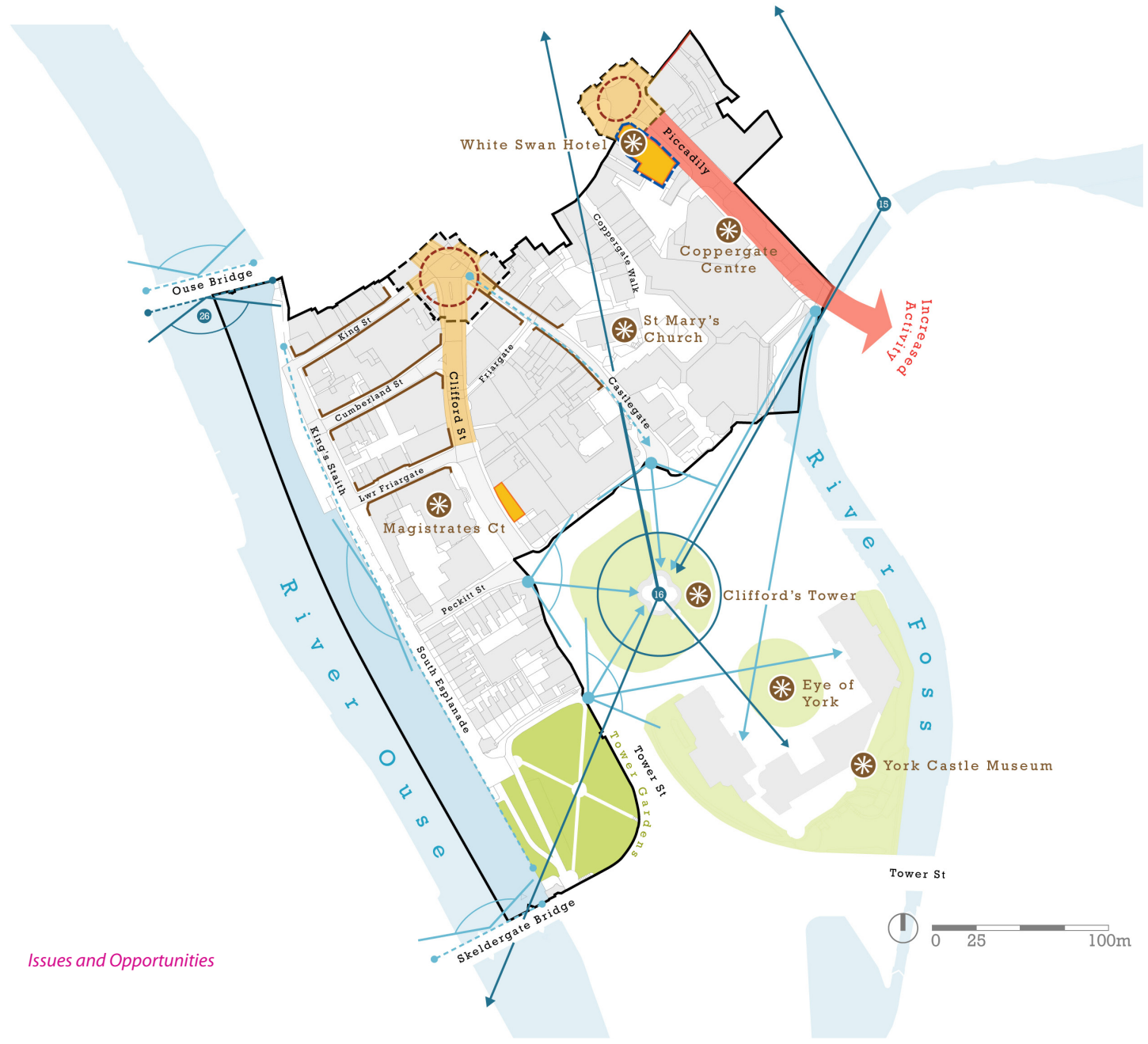
-  Building at risk
-  Well maintained gardens
-  Landmark
-  Well enclosed street

Opportunities

-  Public space improvements to major junctions
-  Increased pedestrian activity south towards Piccadilly
-  Junction Improvements
-  Enhancement opportunity at White Swan

Views

-  Strategic fixed with focal point
-  Strategic panoramic with focal point
-  Strategic dynamic panoramic
-  Local fixed with focal point
-  Local dynamic
-  Local panoramic with focal point
-  Local dynamic panoramic



Issues and Opportunities



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