

Character Area Sixteen: Outer Walmgate



Overview

Although Walmgate has been within the city walls since the 14th century, today it appears as an entirely modern suburb. The post-war municipal residential blocks which replaced 19th century slums, can be found nowhere else in the city in such volume. Their varied arrangement contrasts with the traditional narrow and enclosed streets found throughout the rest of the city. This is also an especially green place with large amounts of Council controlled landscape.

Boundaries

Although Outer Walmgate does not have the obvious architectural interest of other parts of the Conservation Area, historically the area was within the city's defences. Therefore, its inclusion is justified as part of the historic core.

This area consists of the section of Walmgate south from Hurst's Yard to Walmgate Bar and the long streets fanning out on either side. The eastern and southern boundaries are defined by very long stretch of city wall. The western boundary is determined by a distinction in building age and a change between commercial and residential use. The northern boundary is naturally formed by the River Foss.

The barbican of Walmgate Bar is included in character area 17, Walmgate Bar. This is because it extends into the road junction, resulting in traffic issues that need to be managed together with adjacent roads.

Historical development

Walmgate is thought to have been part of the main Roman route which approached the city from the east, however, limited evidence of Roman or Anglo-Saxon occupation of Walmgate has actually been found.

In contrast, during the Middle Ages, there was extensive built settlement along Walmgate itself, with fields stretching out on either side. This included some guildhalls and a large number of churches which attest to the importance of the street at this time. Only two

buildings survive from this period:

- Bowes Morrell House (No. 111 Walmgate) is a timber-framed house built around 1400. It is the only survivor of four houses built in the churchyard of St Peter-in-the-Willow (demolished in the 16th century). The house has a jettied front and was extended with a new brick wing added to the rear in the 17th century. It was restored in 1966 and belongs to the York Conservation Trust.
- St Margaret's Church was first mentioned about 1180. The present building is largely 14th century but was partially rebuilt 1851-2. Its most impressive feature is the late Norman porch which was relocated from St Nicholas's Hospital outside Walmgate Bar. The church also has an interesting and rare brick tower of 1685-5. After becoming redundant the church was converted and extended in 2000 into the National Centre for Early Music.

Walmgate was the last area to be enclosed by the city walls - sometime after 1345. Before this time, a Norman earthwork had surrounded it on the eastern side with a stone bar where the present one is. At either end the walls terminated at the flooded River Foss which provided a natural defence. It was not until the late 15th century that the Red Tower was built on the edge of the King's Fishpond.

A major event in Walmgate's history of the area was the Civil War siege of 1644. Parliamentarians set up batteries on Lamel Hill and in St Lawrence's churchyard. They bombarded the Walmgate area and even reached the city centre. This forced the Royalist defenders to withdraw inside the walls and set fire to the suburbs to the east to create a barrier. This explains why the Walmgate area suffered more destruction than other areas in the city.

At the beginning of 19th century, the area changed dramatically with a huge population increase leading to changes in street plan and many more houses. There is a huge difference between 1822 and 1851 maps. The first map shows development still confined to Walmgate itself. The latter map shows the area between the city walls and Margaret Street densely packed with terraces, occupied by those working in York's confectionary industry, at the nearby flax mill off Lawrence Street and on the railway. The area was notorious for overcrowding and slum conditions.

St George's Catholic Church was built in 1850 to replace the previous derelict church on the site and served the needs of the poor.

There were originally twenty public houses spread throughout the area to serve drovers bringing their cattle to market. Only three of these are left, The Spread Eagle on Walmgate, The Brown Cow on Hope Street and The Phoenix Inn on George Street.

The 1930s saw significant clearance of the slums off Walmgate and post-war, new municipal housing estates were erected. The first of these was on Navigation Road in 1951 and was followed by many phases of development throughout the 60s, 70s and 80s.

Ambience and use

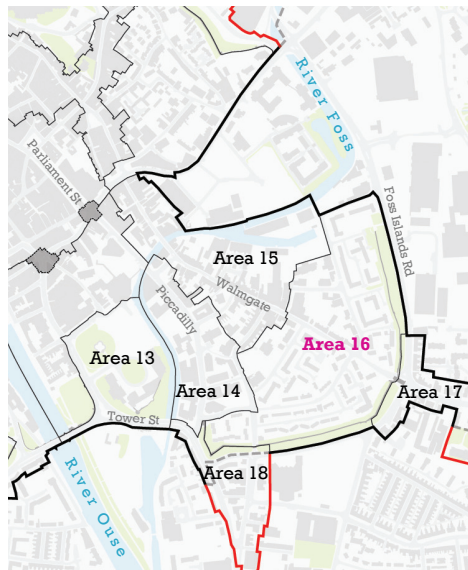
This is predominantly a residential area with a strip of commercial activity along Walmgate and some office blocks along Percy's Lane. The main road itself often has standing traffic which can cause noise and pollution. The residential streets off Walmgate are generally quiet.



Dense terrace houses on Margaret Street in the early 20th century

- 1 1960's - 70s residential development
- 2 1950's residential development
- 3 1960's - 70s mixed use development
- 4 Late 1970's - 80s residential development
-  Landmark
-  City Wall
-  Conservation Area boundary
-  Character area boundary

Area 16 location plan



Introductory Plan



Designations

Due to the extensive 19th century development and subsequent clearance of this area, there are very few listed buildings. The most important are the Grade I listed medieval church of St Margaret's and the Grade II* listed timber-framed Bowes Morrell House.








There are only two buildings of merit as the majority of the remaining unlisted buildings are not historically or architecturally significant. Since the area contains so few historic buildings the modern domestic architecture of the housing estates does not detract from its appearance. However, careful management is required to ensure that a positive setting for the Bar and Walls is maintained.



Grade I listed medieval church of St Margaret's on Navigation Road



Grade I listed medieval church of St Margaret's on Navigation Road

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



Designations



Streets & Spaces

Walmgate is the greenest of the suburbs within the Conservation Area. Although some gardens are private, most are communal and managed by the Council. In particular developments, these gardens directly adjoin the ramparts of the city wall. Walmgate itself has a good number of trees, either side of the Bar and outside a row of shops set back from the pavement. The most significant green space is St Margaret's churchyard which contains a sculpture garden and is used as a short-cut when open.

Within the city, this area has a particularly unusual collection of streets and spaces as a result of post-war approaches to street layout. Due to piece-meal development, some of the arrangements of streets and spaces are not harmonious and there are a number of off-street pedestrian routes between blocks. There are five basic street arrangements:

1. Terraced houses in line with the street– e.g. Hope Street

This is a traditional street layout with 'garden suburb' inspired front gardens bounded by hedge borders. Pedestrian access to the rear gardens is via a shared central archway; several of these gardens have been made into driveways.

2. Large blocks around courtyards– e.g. Navigation Road

The courtyards are generally well maintained and contain various communal facilities such as washing lines and children's play area. Small trees and shrubs are planted alongside lawns, the largest concentration being at the northern end of the complex. Cars are parked on street.

The Bretgate Development, off Navigation Road and Walmgate, is of similar layout with private courtyards to the rear and terraces cut out of the roof.



Terrace houses on Hope Street



Blocks of flats on Navigation Road

3. Small blocks diagonal to the street – e.g. in front of Walmgate Bar

The arrangement of these 1960s blocks would have been quite radical at the time since they replaced a traditional arrangement of terraces on either side of the road tightly enclosing a view of the Bar. The new layout provides the only wide view of a Bar in the city.

The treatment of the left over space between blocks and the road is not particularly successful – bland tarmac on one side with a surfeit of bollards and grass on the other. Car parking for these blocks is hidden behind them.



Blocks of flats on Walmgate are arranged at a diagonal from the street, creating pockets of open space

4. Small blocks in a zig-zag along the street – e.g. Long Close Lane

This arrangement is a variant on the traditional arrangement (1) but introduces wider green spaces in front of the blocks and views of several facades at once. The front gardens have small trees and are bounded by low walls and railings. Car parking is on street since back gardens directly abut the ramparts of the city wall.



Blocks arranged in a 'zig-zag' along the street on Long Close Lane

5. Cul-de-sacs – e.g. off Margaret Street

There are a number of these streets formed by the fronts and backs of blocks which were built at different times. In general, the layout is confusing and results in left over spaces which are accessible to pedestrians only. A series of garages and parking courts are integrated between blocks.



Cul-de-sacs off Margaret Street

Buildings

There are very few historic buildings in this area as a result of the slum clearances and post-war development. Several phases produced blocks and houses of varying design and material; continued use of brick and pitched roofs alludes to the architectural context of the city.

The Navigation Road estate were built in 1951. The layout comprises L-shaped and rectangular blocks of two and three storeys, surrounding open courtyards. The red brick blocks are in the Neo-Georgian style. The influence of Modernism is clear as surface details have been stripped back and there is little embellishment apart from the stone door surrounds. There are no original windows left as all have been replaced in plastic. Overall, the estate is a good representation of architecture of the period and provides a pleasant setting for the city wall.

The development in front of Walmgate Bar, was built in two phases during the 1960s. Blocks on the north side (Huby Court) have a partially open arcade on the ground floor filled with small shops and flats above. On the south side (Willow Court), the blocks are wholly residential.



Neo-Georgian blocks on Navigation Road

Traffic & Movement

This area does experience some through traffic along Walmgate, the main issue being the number of buses rather than private cars. Residents say tour buses are a particular problem because of the noise from their loud speakers. Since the central arch of the Bar was closed, the flow of cars and buses has slowed; the standing traffic results in increased pollution and reduction in air quality.

Some of the buses could be re-routed along Piccadilly to reduce the impact on residents.

Like other areas of the city, parking can be a problem here since there are insufficient spaces on-street or in garages. There is one large surface car park on George Street for local workers and visitors.



The number of buses along Walmgate can cause congestion, noise and pollution

Issues & Opportunities

Strengths

- Walmgate is a successful place with a strong identity and sense of community. Most of the houses and blocks are under Council control which enables strategic management of property maintenance and landscaping.
- The area is generally quiet as the city walls provide shelter from the noisy inner ring road outside. Furthermore, the spacious arrangement of blocks provides an attractive setting for the city walls
- The arrangement of residential blocks in front of the Bar enables an unusually wide view of it
- There is a large amount of green space around houses and blocks which is generally well maintained - Navigation Road is a particularly good example. Key landscape features such as the hedges on Hope Lane should be retained.



Internal courtyards are well maintained on Navigation Road



Spacious residential layouts create an attractive setting for the city walls

Weaknesses and opportunities

There are a number of areas where management of Council owned blocks is especially important:

- In front of Walmgate Bar, the design of large expanse of tarmac and grassed amenity areas could be improved to create a better setting for the bar. In addition, the bus stops on Walmgate could be relocated to a less sensitive location.
- Whilst the open space around blocks on Navigation Road is well maintained, other areas – notably those south of Walmgate – are not. Here, the unorthodox layout of apartment blocks has created pockets of ‘left over’ space, currently run-down and occupied by car parking, which requires attention.
- Individual additions and alterations to blocks should be controlled. For example, the number of satellite dishes could be reduced by installation of communal block aerials, and guidance provided in exterior paint colours.

The local and tour bus companies really need to understand the impact on residents in this area. The potential to spread the routing of buses between Walmgate and Piccadilly should be explored. The Council could facilitate this process.





The space in front of Walmgate Bar could be enhanced through improved landscaping





Alterations to apartment blocks need to be carefully considered to ensure they do not compromise the overall character of the area






Existing

-  High volumes of traffic
-  City Walls define movement patterns
-  Landmark
-  City Wall

Opportunities

-  Landscape improvements along Walmgate and within internal courtyards and streets
-  Careful management of Council estates to positively enhance setting of the Bar and control inappropriate building alterations

Views

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



Issues and Opportunities

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