

# Character Area Nineteen: Queen's Staith & Skeldergate



## Overview

Historically, Skeldergate was York's main dockside street, bustling with activity. 20th century decline of international and domestic river-borne trade led to extensive warehouse demolition and today it is a quiet residential area with modern warehouse-style apartment buildings. The limited number of surviving historic buildings means that this aspect of its character is less apparent than King's Staith but nevertheless significant. The historic street pattern remains and new buildings reflect a number of characteristics of their predecessors.

### Boundaries

The River Ouse provides a natural boundary to the east. The western boundary is defined by a change of building type to 19th century terraces of the Bishophill area. The southern edge is beyond the walls but includes some terraces ④ which provide its setting. The northern edge includes Fetter Lane, a historic back street to Micklegate which now contains modern development.

The junction of five streets where Bishophill Junior and Senior meet is an 'overlap' area because it has a relationship with several character areas ①.

### Historical development

The Skeldergate area was within the Roman civilian settlement and as the west bank of the River Ouse it was always important for trade and industry.

Skeldergate was the principal dockside street of medieval York and this stretch of the river continued to be the main port for sea-going vessels until the 19th century. The riverside was lined with warehouses which stored produce for export, before it was loaded onto boats at Queen's Staith (constructed 1660). One of these products was butter, a major international and lucrative export for York. A butter market was conducted nearby in St Martin's churchyard, on the southern side of Micklegate.



*The Old Warehouse, a 17th century building demolished in 1970*

© Imagine York

Wharves stretched from the river's edge up to Cromwell Road and Bishophill Senior. At Emperor's Wharf timber from Northern Europe and the Scottish forests was landed before being sold to builders, joiners, carpenters and undertakers.

The status of Skeldergate was sufficiently high to attract prosperous residents; the architect John Carr built himself a house on Skeldergate in 1765 (demolished). Merchants traditionally lived close to their warehouses, mostly on the western side of Skeldergate. Only a couple of their houses survive there and on Bishophill Senior.

At the end of the 19th century, businesses included an ale and porter merchant, a plaster of Paris manufactory, builder's merchant yard and wine merchants. However, river-borne trade declined due to goods increasingly transported by rail and later road, which led to a gradual shift in the character of the area. Many of the warehouses on the riverside and the triangular area between Skeldergate, Cromwell Road and Fetter Lane were demolished during the second half of the 20th century and replaced with residential blocks ②.

#### **Ambience and use**

Skeldergate is a largely residential area and lacks active uses on ground floors, such as restaurants and shops, due to flooding risk. As a result, it is quiet and frequented by locals rather than tourists, although there are two hotels. The end nearest Micklegate is slightly livelier and there is a large office block. The low level of traffic inside the walls contrasts with the high volume on the inner ring road outside ④.



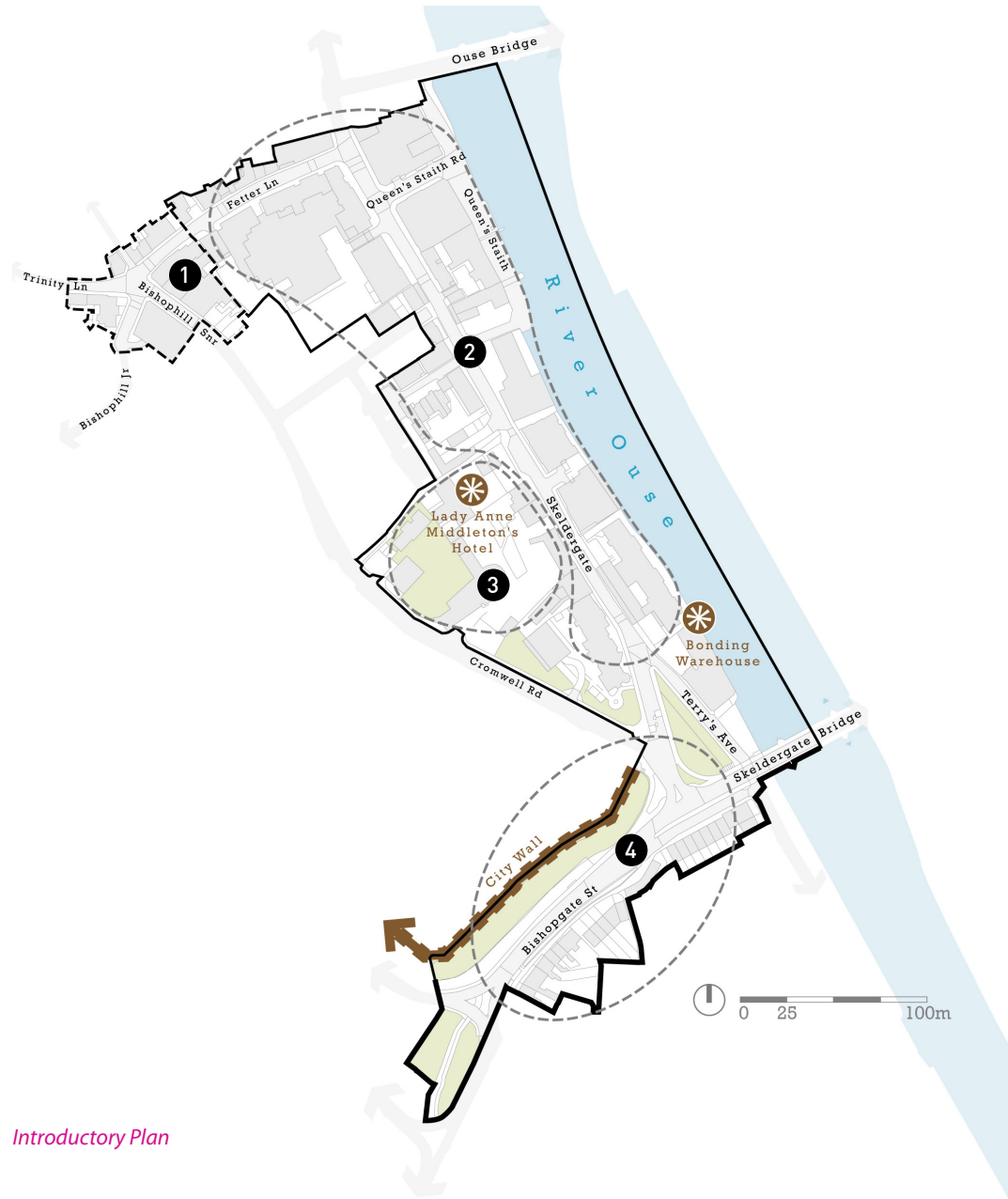
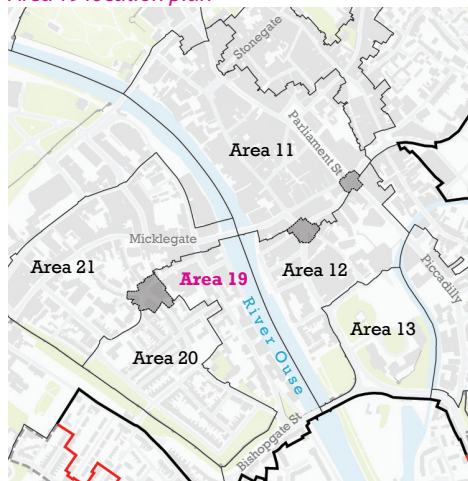
© Imagine York

*Skeldergate in 1911, looking towards the north west*

Part One: Understanding the City > Character Areas > Nineteen: Queen's Staith & Skeldergate

- ① Area of overlap with Bishophill and Micklegate character areas
- ② Historic port, now a mix of modern apartment blocks and converted warehouses
- ③ Group of 18th to 20th century buildings now part of Lady Anne Middleton's Hotel
- ④ Tree lined street fronted by mixed housing types and the ramparts
- ☼ Landmark
- 🏰 City wall
- Existing Conservation Area boundary
- Character area boundary
- - Area of Overlap

Area 19 location plan



Introductory Plan

## Designations



There are two clusters of listed buildings, one around Lady Anne Middleton's Hospital (which is now a hotel) and the other at the top of Bishophill Senior. All are Grade II listed apart from the Hospital and No. 56 Skeldergate which are Grade II\*. The relatively low number of listed buildings is due to the high volume of warehouse demolitions which took place in the 1960s and 70s.

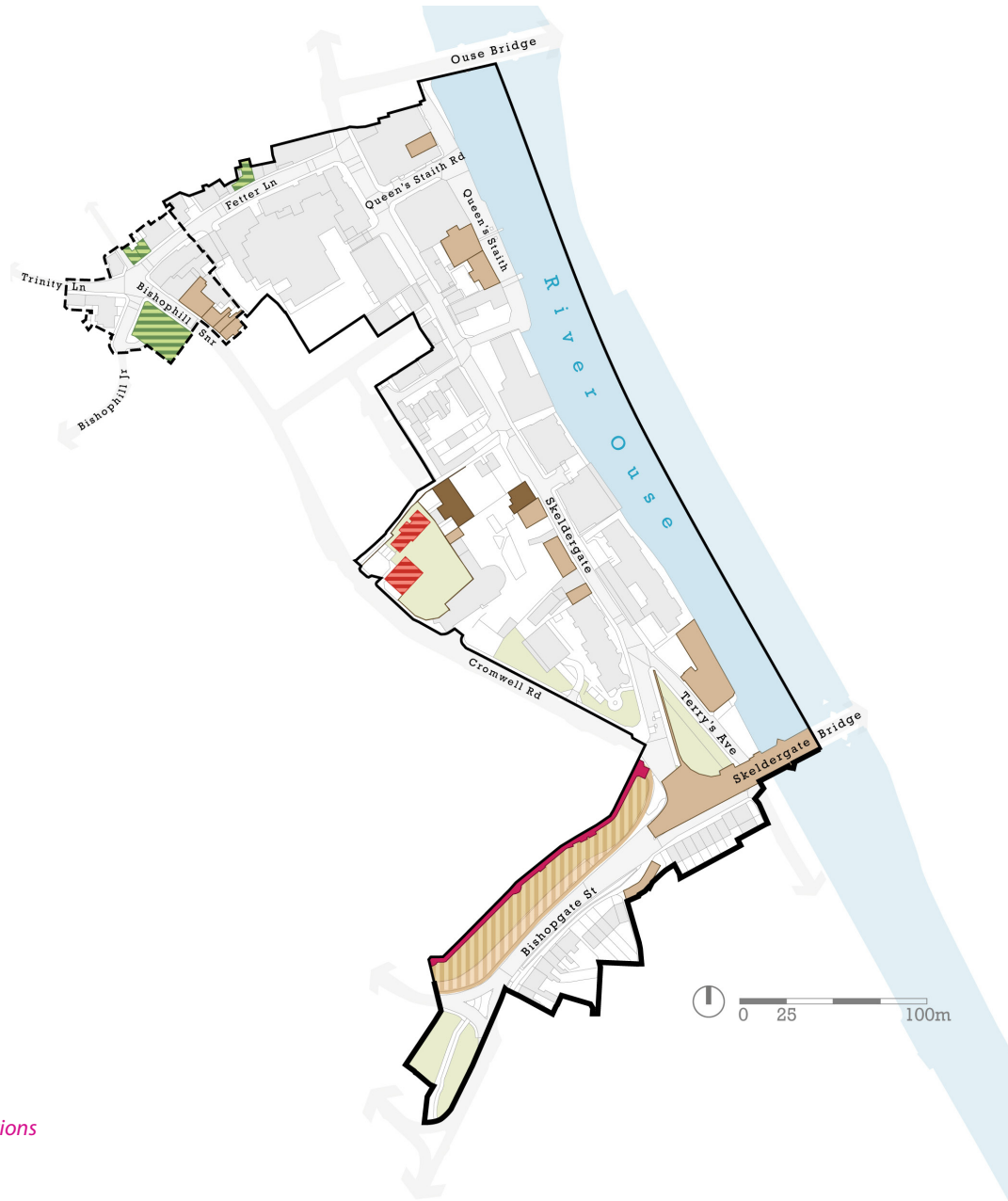
Several Buildings of Merit have been identified including the former Capaldi's ice cream factory in Fetter Lane.

The only detracting buildings are two housing blocks (Tuke House) on the corner of Carr's Lane and Cromwell Road. Their design does not show an understanding of surrounding buildings in plan or material.



*Lady Anne Middleton's Hospital is set back behind an attractive garden. Built 1827-9 by Peter Atkinson junior. Grade II\* listed and now a hotel*

-  Scheduled Ancient Monument
-  Grade I Listed Building
-  Grade II Listed Building
-  Building of merit
-  Detractor
-  Conservation Area boundary
-  Character area boundary
-  Area of Overlap



*Designations*

## Streets & Spaces

Historically the Skeldergate area has flooded many times but unlike other riverside areas there is no barrier wall, therefore making 'active' ground floor uses unfeasible. To mitigate against the impacts of flooding, new apartment buildings have been designed with parking at ground floor level instead.

### Skeldergate and the riverside

Today Skeldergate is a generally well enclosed street with three to four storey residential blocks. Where newer apartments have been built, there is limited public access to the riverfront. In some cases, this is due to gated entry points and in others due to the building edges rising directly from the water.

Public access to the river is possible at Queen's Staith and the Bonding Warehouse by Skeldergate Bridge where there is a wide quayside. The appearance of these areas has changed little from the time they were in active use; Queen's Staith is cobbled and retains two picturesque old gantries.

The western side of the Ouse is much less sunny than the eastern side. This means it is not well suited for activities such as outside eating and drinking, which can be found on King's Staith opposite.



*Three and four storey blocks on Skeldergate enclose the quiet residential street*



*Historic elements along Queen's Staith have been retained, including gantry and cobbled surfaces*

### **Cromwell Road**

Off the northern end of Cromwell Road is a rather hidden space - a small walled garden owned by the York Area Quaker Meeting and once used as a burial ground. Next to it runs Carr's Lane, a narrow cobbled lane with ancient walls, possibly containing Roman material.

At the southern end of Cromwell Road is a triangular area of space between Skeldergate and Terry Avenue. Historic photos show it was once beautifully landscaped with topiary and good views to the opposite bank. This was created in association with the new Skeldergate Bridge built 1878-80. Today, overgrown shrubs and trees block views to the river.



*Contrasting views of the triangular green space in 1900 (above) when it was well maintained and today (right) when it has become overgrown and unkempt. The Castle is no longer visible*

### Outside the walls

On Bishopgate Street the houses are set behind shallow front gardens upon a grassy bank which elevates them from the traffic rushing along the inner ring road.

On the other side of the road, a good number of semi-mature trees grow on the steep ramparts and provide an attractive entrance for the Skeldergate area.



*Due to the elevated pedestrian walkway, large street width and sheer volume of traffic, the character along Bishopgate Hill markedly differs from that of Skeldergate and the riverside area*

### Junction of five streets

Five streets converge at a historic junction - the narrow, Trinity Lane and St Martins Lane; the wider, Bishophill Junior, Bishophill Senior and Fetter Lane. The junction is enclosed by both listed and modern buildings of different types which create an interesting juxtaposition of age, design and height. These include 18th century merchants' houses and an early 20th century factory, Buckingham Works. All buildings are set at the back of the pavement and have cramped plots due to the nature of the junction.



*The junction of five streets is an overlap area between several character areas*

## Buildings

The historic architectural character of this area is less apparent today due to the scale of modern development that replaced a large number of warehouses. Whilst there are a few gems remaining from the 18th and 19th centuries, there is not a coherent group of buildings. The common denominators are that of material (red clamp brick) and typically four to five storeys in height.

### 19th century warehouses and industrial buildings

Only three historic warehouses remain in this area, Varvill's Warehouse (1849), Woods Mill (c1875) and the Bonding Warehouse (1872-5). Each warehouse is unique in its design but all incorporate a raised ground floor to take account of the slope of the river bank and the flooding level. All have been converted into new uses.

Varvill's is the narrowest and has been enclosed within a new residential building. It is red brick with stone bands and a stone basement. Large openings in the centre were designed for loading access.

Two industrial buildings remain from Emperor's Wharf sawmill of 1839, one of which (no. 52 Skeldergate) has been converted into a gym and health club.

In 1856, a factory was established on the corner of Bishophill Junior and Bishophill Senior for Cooke, Troughton & Simms, maker of sundials, telescopes and microscopes. The current building dates from 1916 and has been converted to residential use.

The other notable factory is the late 19th century organ works next to Lady Anne Middleton's Hotel. It was still in use by the master organ builder Walter Hopkins until 1921 when he retired. Hopkins built some of the finest organs for the churches of York and beyond. It was extended and converted in the early 1990s into a first floor conference room for the hotel.

Capaldi's ice cream factory on Fetter Lane is also of note.



*The Bonding Warehouse, 1872-5. Built of red-blue mottled brick with stone cornice and pediment. It was operated by York Corporation for the storage of imported goods liable to Excise duty until it closed in 1958. It is currently vacant and at risk*



*Former factory of Cooke, Troughton & Simms, Bishophill Senior, 1916 by W. H. Brierley*

### 19th century houses

A number of two storey terraced houses on Bishopgate Street are within the character area since they provide an attractive setting for the walls. These houses represent the early 19th century expansion of the city outside its constraining walls and as such, their character is distinct and separate from other parts of the Skeldergate area.

They do not appear to have been built by one builder and vary slightly in design. All are red brick with simple sash windows and little decorative detail.

### 20th and 21st century residential blocks

The modern warehouse inspired buildings are mostly four to five storeys and date from the 1980s onwards. Those on the riverside use the ground floor as a car park. The main materials are red brick, slate for roofs and metal for balconies; some blocks have arcades which spread over the pavement. Windows tend to be large and surface detailing is sparse.



*A modern residential block on Skeldergate*

## Traffic & Movement

Whilst there is heavy traffic on Bishopgate Street, Skeldergate itself remains relatively quiet. Calming measures such as humps help reduce vehicle speed. This means it is a popular cycle route into the city although safety could be compromised by the park and ride buses along this route.

The visual impact of on-street parking is avoided in this area due to the provision of resident car parking within the apartment blocks at ground floor level. This makes the street feel relatively clutter free.

Residents of the Lady Anne Middleton's Hotel use a car park behind the former Emperor's Wharf sawmill.



*Parking is accommodated on ground floor in modern apartment blocks on Skeldergate*

## Issues & Opportunities

### Strengths

- Some of the historic warehouses have been successfully converted to new uses. This re-use has preserved some of the distinctive character of the area
- There are excellent river views from Queen's Staith and Skeldergate Bridge
- The ramparts and trees along Bishopgate Street provide an attractive setting for the city walls

### Weaknesses and opportunities

- Queen's Staith and the Bonding Warehouse staith are the only publicly accessible stretches of riverside. These could be enhanced to become part of an open space network across the riverside areas of the city. For example, the quality of the landscape around the Bonding Warehouse could be improved and linked to adjacent triangular green space by promoting Terry Avenue as a 'shared surface', giving pedestrians and vehicles equal priority.
- Access to the riverside from Skeldergate is limited in places. Historically many buildings rose directly from the water and new building design has echoed this. A continuous riverside walk is not a necessity in this area and would offer limited benefits since there is already one on the opposite bank. However, the route along Terry Avenue/ Skeldergate/ Queen's Staith could be enhanced through changes in street surfacing and signage to emphasise pedestrian priority.
- The Bonding Warehouse is a Grade II listed building 'at risk'. It is vacant and in poor condition. Following the failure to implement a previous office scheme, a mixed-use office and residential scheme has been approved and funding is being sought. It will require external alterations to provide escape in case of flooding.



*Varvill's Warehouse, 1849, J. B. and W. Atkinson. An example of incorporating an historic listed warehouse within new apartments*




*The Bonding Warehouse needs a new use and the space around it could be improved.*



**Existing**

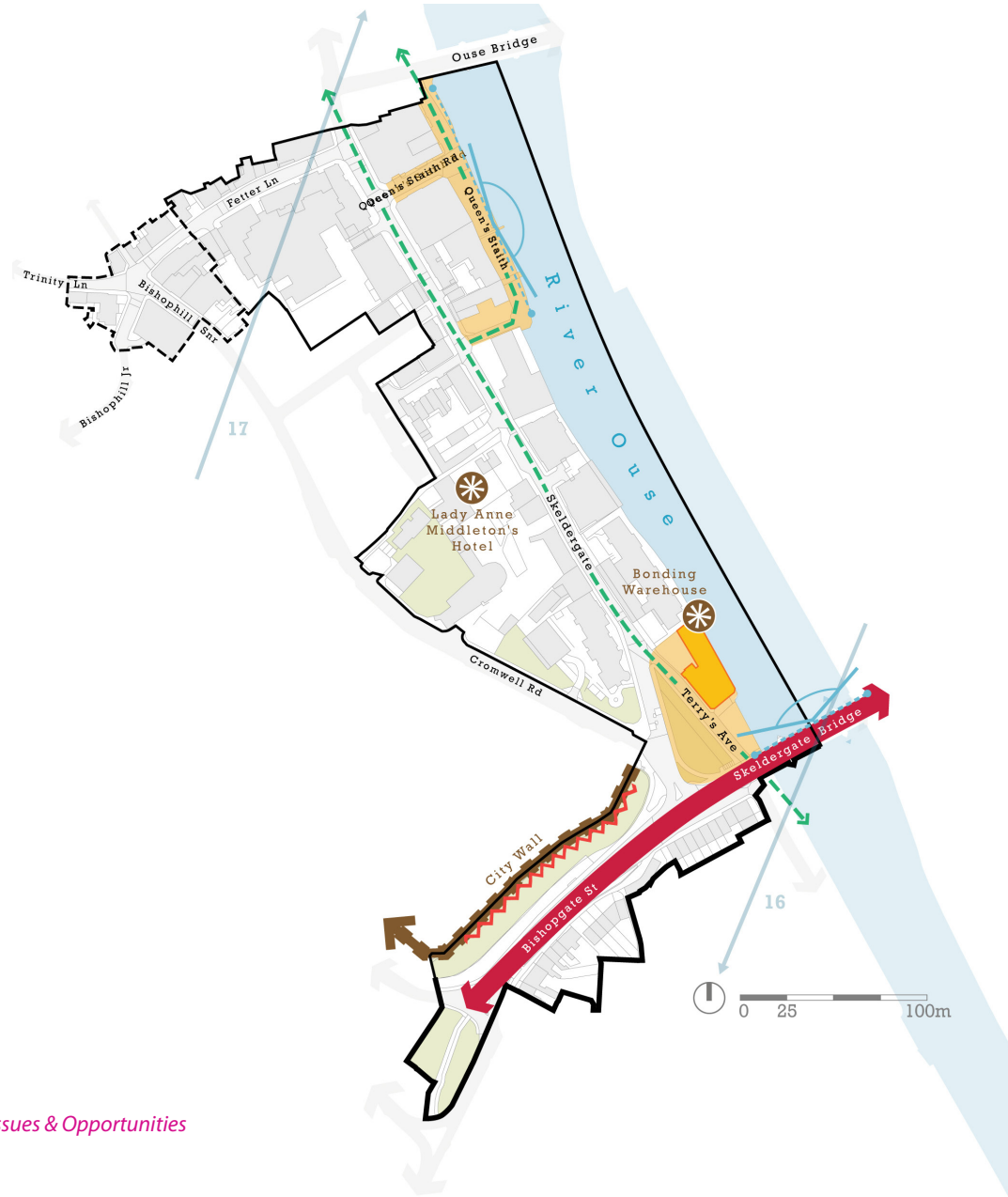
-  City wall defines movement
-  Building at risk
-  High volumes of traffic
-  Landmark
-  City Wall

**Opportunities**

-  Opportunity for shared surfaces to increase pedestrian priority
-  Area of public space improvement

**Views**

-  Local dynamic panoramic
-  Key view from outside the character area - refer to section 3.5



*Issues & Opportunities*