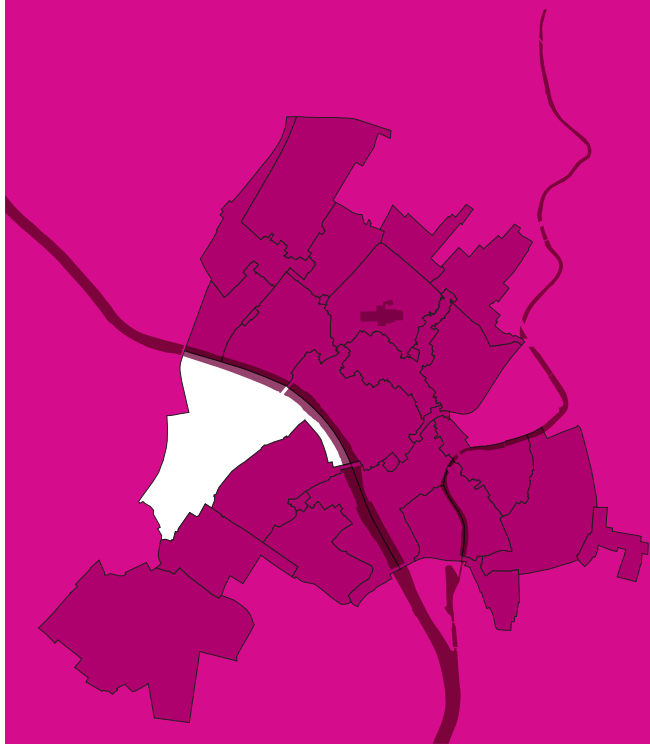


Character Area Twenty Two: Railway Area



Overview

The railway has had a major impact on the character of the area and has little historic relationship with the rest of the city. Planning of the railway was defined by engineering needs rather than historic plot boundaries. These needs influenced not just design of the two stations but also the road network around them. Large isolated buildings, initially built by the railway companies in the 19th century, set the template for 1960s development on Toft Green.

Uniquely, a section of city wall runs through the centre of the area rather than defining its edges. The highly permeable nature of this section means character transcends the historic barrier.

Boundaries

This area incorporates much of York's railway history and former areas of industrial riverside. Because of the way in which it developed, the area is cut in two by the city wall. Land east of the city wall up to railings along Toft Green and Tanner Row represents the site of the original railway station. Land west of the city wall covers the present station, other railway buildings off Queen Street and the line of the



An historic view towards the Minster with railway sidings in the foreground; these were removed in 1965

tracks over Leeman Road and Scarborough Bridge. The northern edge of the area is bounded by the riverside walk and North Street, included as part of this area because their historic activities and form differentiate them from Micklegate and Bridge Street (character area 21).

Historical Development

Although land within the city walls had been part of the Roman civilian settlement, this area was still largely open until the 1830's and consequently was developed as railway land. Recent excavations at the West Office's site have found the remains of a Roman bath house.

In the middle-ages, Toft Green was divided into two. The south-western end was open ground used for militia meetings and a cattle market; the north-eastern end was given by Henry III to Dominicans in 1227 to found a friary. After the reformation in the 16th century, this land became one of the most important nursery gardens in the north. Beyond the city wall there were only ever fields, labelled as 'Bishop's fields' on a 17th century map.





In contrast to this landscape, North Street was lined with 'staiths' for the loading and unloading of boats with produce from the mills and warehouses on the riverside. These landing stages can still be seen today.

In 1839 the nursery garden and a House of Correction, which had been built in 1814 on the site of the cattle market, was sold to George Hudson's York & North Midland Railway Company.

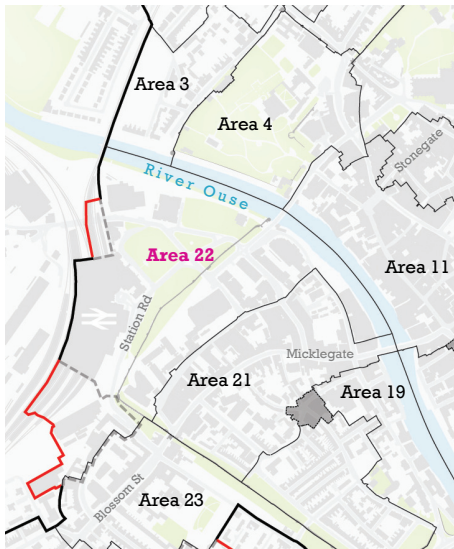
Significant levelling of the land next to the city wall removed some of its archeology. The celebrated Railway King's handsome station was opened in 1841, followed by a locomotive works on Queen Street a year later ^{1,2}. Two arches were cut out of the city walls to lay tracks into the station, one in 1839 and another six years later. But as the railways rapidly expanded, building a terminus station within the walls soon proved short-sighted. Therefore, a newer, much longer

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Part One: Understanding the City > Character Areas > Twenty Two: Railway Area

- ① Old station building and NER offices, now offices and hotel
 - ② Former locomotive works and sheds, now car park and gym
 - ③ Current station
 - ④ Standalone modern office buildings and hotel (6-9 storeys) on the southern bank of the river
 - ⑤ 20th century office development adjacent to the City walls (4-6 storeys)
-  Monument
 -  Landmark
 -  City Wall
 -  Punctuation in City Wall

Area 22 location plan



Introductory Plan

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through station opened in 1877 outside the walls to simplify operations and ease congestion ③.

This new station required a network of new roads, including a route into the city centre through new arches in the city wall and over a new river crossing, Lendal Bridge.

North Street continued to be used for manufacturing and industry. Around 1862 Henry & Joseph Rowntree opened a factory to grind cocoa beans in an old building on Tanners Moat. The company grew quickly and expanded into a flour mill on North Street. By the 1890s, production had increased further and a few years later the company moved to Haxby Road, donating Riverside Gardens for public use.

The 1960's were a defining era for the area. The removal of railway sidings from the old station in 1965 and the demolition of buildings along North Street enabled the erection of large office blocks and the landmark Viking Hotel (now Park Inn) (4). Further large-scale development continues to the present day.

Ambience and use

The ambience around the station forecourt is generally noisy due to the volume of buses, cars and pedestrians. There is purposeful movement of pedestrians from the station towards the city and visa-versa.

Rougier Street is busy with workers and polluted throughout the day due to a large group of bus stands. Tanner Row is generally quiet during working hours. These streets, along with George Hudson Street, become lively at night as bars and clubs open up.

The river itself is well used, particularly in summer. The City Rowing Club operates from next to Lendal Bridge, the York Boat Company are based by the landing next to Guildhall and house boats moor alongside Riverside Gardens.

In winter, there is limited pedestrian activity along the riverside walk of North Street. The blandness of the walk and lack of active frontages means this area lacks vitality at this time.



Historic view of old station, NER offices and warehouses along North Street; the station trainshed in the foreground was largely demolished in 1965 although small sections were retained for posterity

Designation

The listed buildings in this area are mainly associated with the railway. There are also three railway buildings adjacent to the area which are significant; two parts of the locomotive works, the Railway Institute and a terrace on Queen Street. Discussion of their inclusion within the Conservation Area is in the next section.

As a consequence of the relatively high level of 20th century development, there are a large number of buildings which detract from the area for reasons of design, mass, material or position. For example:

- the height of George Stephenson House means it appears above the city wall and detracts from its appearance
- the height of the Park Inn detracts from views of the river and its setting
- the design and quality of the Royal Mail Delivery Office detracts from river views across the river and the approach to the National Railway Museum
- Northern House on Rougier Street is rather bleak. Its design is not orientated to take into account the visitor approach from the station.



The rooftop points of George Stephenson House are higher than the walls

The Park Inn, 1965-7, is one of the highest buildings in York and considered a detractor



Boundary changes

The present boundary excludes a large cluster of historic structures which were all a part of, or directly related to, the two stations: The former locomotive works (1850, 1884 and 1879), Railway Institute (1889), the station platforms and canopies (around 1900) and western platform (1938). Therefore, for their group contribution to the historic character and significance of the area, it is recommended that the boundary is extended to include them.











A series of terraced cottages on Queen Street (around 1835) should also be included as they are attractive and form part of the setting to the walls and other listed buildings.

Locomotive works, 1842



Cottages on Queen Street



-  Scheduled Ancient Monument
-  Grade I Listed Building
-  Grade II* Listed Building
-  Grade II Listed Building
-  Building of merit
-  Detractor
-  Existing Conservation Area boundary
-  Character area boundary
-  Proposed Conservation Area boundary
-  Superseded Conservation Area boundary



Designations

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Streets & Spaces

Arrangement of buildings and streets

Due to the lack of medieval development and the legacy of the railway, this area contrasts starkly with the dense historic streets typical of York. Instead there are large secluded buildings - on Toft Green they are at a significantly lower level than the street.

In many instances, the buildings have a poor relationship with the street and there is no consistent building line onto the pavement. Their haphazard arrangement creates large amounts of left over space used for servicing and parking. This makes the blocks stand isolated and the street seem fragmented.



Green spaces

This is one of the only three significant areas of green space in the city centre and therefore the presentation and function of these spaces is very important. The area contains the public spaces of the memorial gardens, ramparts and cholera burial ground, for victims of the 1832 epidemic. The garden in front of the Royal Hotel, York, is privatised. All these spaces appear attractive and well maintained, with a large number of mature trees.

The prominence of these spaces is however undermined by the inner ring road, which divides and segregates the green areas. Furthermore the noise and pollution associated with fast moving traffic compromises the atmosphere.

Within the walls, Riverside Gardens is a valuable space alongside the Ouse and is protected by a covenant.



Roads divide up the green spaces

Riverside

This area has the longest walk-able stretch of riverside of any character area. Historically, risk of flooding has greatly influenced the nature of development and associated landscaping along the banks.

The general quality of surface materials and detailing of the section of riverside walkway beneath the buildings is poor. The northern aspect makes it less appealing than the opposite bank since it does not get the sun. The section changes level several times as it approaches Ouse Bridge limiting accessibility. On the section south of Lendal Bridge, the walk is fairly light and open. The only unattractive intrusion is the rowing club building.

Beneath the Park Inn it becomes more dark and enclosed by the overhanging building. This area could seem threatening at night due to its seclusion and lack of activity along North Street.

*The riverside walk
beneath the Park Inn*



City walls

The wall is the dominant visual feature of the landscape. The poor design of the station forecourt, combined with the position of the wall behind it, means that it is not immediately obvious to visitors how they can get to the city centre. This can be simply overcome with better signage so that it is clear how to get inside the wall.

Although the wall is a physical barrier, there is a sense that both sides of it are linked. This is partly to do with the similar building mass and age on each side but also the number of arches in the wall allowing movement through it.

Views

There are a number of Key Views, primarily of the Minster from the station approach and the walls (see Issues and Opportunities plan). These are affected when trees are in leaf.

There are also three superb views from Lendal Bridge - across the river to Museum Gardens and St Olave's tower in the distance, west along the city walls and south down the river.

Fine local views evolve along the riverside walk south of Lendal Bridge. From here the Guildhall in particular can be appreciated.



View of the Guildhall from Lendal Bridge (Key View)

Key View 18, from the City Walls; one of the most famous in the city



Buildings

This area has a variety of building ages, architectural styles and materials. The commonality is that they are generally large blocks of four storeys or more. The office building is in what is called the 'Queen Anne' style and has a lively roofline of gables, dormers and chimneys. Architectural features are picked out in stone to contrast with the red brick.

19th century railway buildings

This is the most obvious functional theme running through the area. The material for these buildings is brick, both red and buff. The purely functional style of the locomotive works contrasts with the more elaborate Italianate (classical) style of the stations, designed to make a lasting impression on visitors. However, large internal spaces and iron-frame roofs are a characteristic of both.

The grandest buildings are undoubtedly the Station and Royal Hotel (1877) and the former North Eastern Railway (NER) offices (1900). Their quality and scale expresses the wealth and confidence of the railway company at this time.

There are few remaining service buildings associated with the early 19th century railway era. The arched facade of Botterill's horse repository on Tanners Moat is one of the most interesting remnants from the later 19th century. The horses transported goods from the station to different parts of the city.



Former North Eastern Railway Offices, 1900-6, by William Bell and Horace Field

Post-war buildings

The NER offices established a precedent for building height that was taken up after the war. These office blocks vary in material and style, some standing the test of time more successful than others. They range in height from four to eight storeys and are generally in a modernist style, with steel frames. The facing materials tend to be combinations of buff brick, limestone ashlar, concrete and glass.

The highest building in the character area is the nine-storey Park Inn dating from 1965-7. The building does not bear any relation to its neighbours and dominates river views in the city centre.

Hudson House, built as railway offices on part of the site of the old railway station in the mid-1960s, is a characteristic building of its era which is also of interest and integrity because of its powerful sculptural form and thoughtful detailing, and the 'pin-wheel' plan around a courtyard. However, it is also flawed because it relates poorly to the streets and ramparts around it, from which it is isolated by awkward left-over spaces used for car parking and servicing (which are mostly below street level because they are at the level of the old railway).

The Aviva building on Tanners Moat is an example of the more recent 'Neo-Vernacular' tradition in the city, executed here on a gigantic scale. It uses traditional facing materials (including Magnesian Limestone) - a complex roofline and historically derived details (e.g. the mullion and transom window surrounds) in an attempt to reconcile the demands of the modern corporate office with its sensitive setting. Although six storeys on the corner, it steps down to three storeys meet smaller buildings on Tanner Row.

Monuments

This area is notable for the best group of public monuments in the city including two war memorials by Sir Edwin Lutyens, one for NER employees and the other for Citizens of York. Others include the statue of George Leeman, Deputy Chairman of the NER, and the headstones in the cholera burial ground.

Aviva, Tanners Moat, 1992-3, by Hurd Roland Partnership



Memorial to employees of the North Eastern Railway, 1922-4. Made from Portland stone it is situated at a focal point where land begins to rise



Traffic & Movement

This area is the primary public transport interchange in York and wider region. The railway plays a vital role in transporting residents, commuters and visitors to and from the city. As such, the main route into the city for many people starts at the station.

The area also contains part of the inner ring road, and as such, traffic dominates its character. It is scarred by a large amount of street clutter, signage and safety railings. Visitors' arrival experience is adversely affected by the chaotic appearance of the railway station forecourt.

The route to and from the city centre includes signalised junctions, several stretches of narrow pavement and staggered crossings which impede pedestrian movement, prioritising vehicles. This is not a pleasant or easy way for visitors to approach the city.

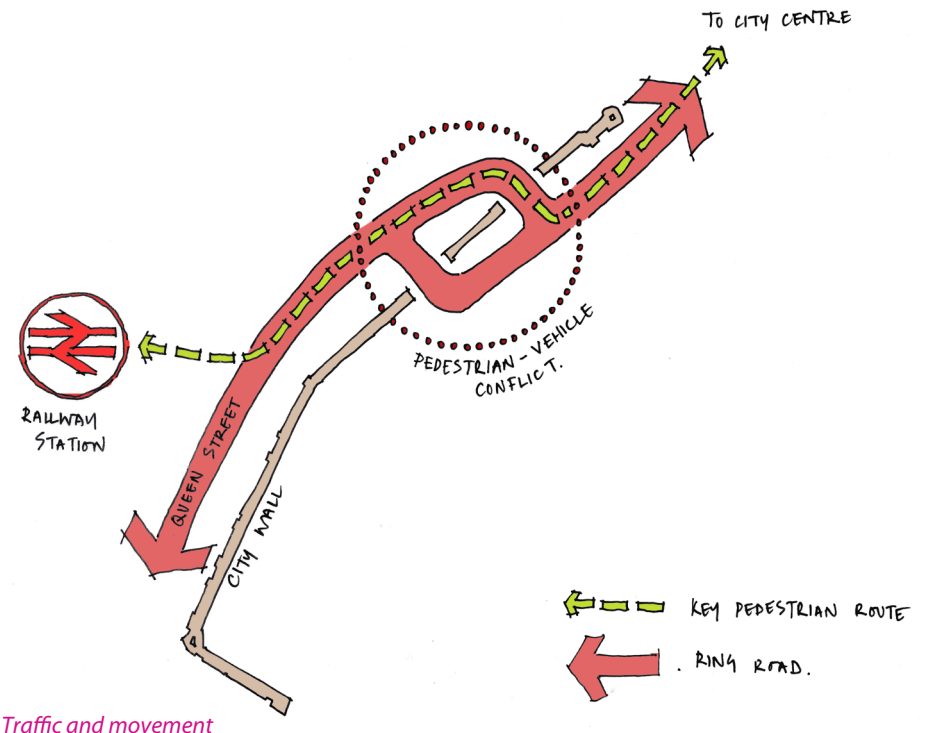
Due to the busy nature of the roads, there is little on-street parking. Vehicles are confined to a number of surface car parks. Most are hidden between or behind buildings, but that at Tanners Moat spoils the setting of the riverside and Lendal Bridge. Similarly, the large number of vans outside the Royal Mail Delivery Office on Leeman Road detracts from the gateway to the National Railway Museum.



The station approach is full of street clutter and is not an appropriate gateway into the city



Space along the riverside walk can be better utilised. At present the area along Tanners Moat is used for a surface level car park



Traffic and movement

Issues & Opportunities

Strengths

- Superb views of the Minster, especially from the walls and Station Road. Also, of the river and walls from Lendal Bridge.
- Dynamic local views from the riverside walk along North Street.
- One of the few large green areas in the city centre between the station and the river, including the Memorial Gardens and rampsarts.



The ring road carries large volumes of traffic, as pedestrians move along stretches of narrow pavement – Lendal Bridge is particularly busy

Weaknesses and opportunities

Large buildings

Large buildings can be accommodated in this area as it is at a lower level than the commercial centre. They are already part of the existing character and relatively rare in the city. The main issues are the height, design and relationship to the street of buildings in sensitive locations (e.g. next to the wall or river) and the impact on views. Consideration should be given to producing some development guidance on this subject.

City gateway

This area provides a disappointing arrival experience which could be greatly improved.

- The station forecourt is dominated by buses and taxis and cluttered with street furniture and signage. The space should be re-configured to enhance the experience for visitors entering the city by rail.
- The route from the station to Lendal Bridge, Rougier Street and Station Rise should be improved to give pedestrians priority and allow free movement. There is a significant number of unnecessary obstacles which pedestrians must negotiate such as railings and traffic islands.
- The Queen Street road bridge is now obsolete. It is detrimental to the setting of the city walls and nearby listed buildings. Removal of the bridge could be considered and the opportunity taken to improve pedestrian routes to the station.
- The green spaces are fragmented and are not fulfilling their potential. They could be better integrated to encourage higher usage and link into the riverside.

Toft Green and the old railway station

It is proposed to convert the old station into the new offices of the City Council, this is the opportunity to address many of the current problems surrounding it. The whole setting of the building needs to be improved. The three priorities are:

- The landscape around the NER war memorial - this should be improved to enhance its setting, not only for the memorial itself but also the very good views which can be seen from it. A scheme for re-surfacing in natural materials has been agreed as part of the Council's new West Offices within the former railway station.
- The green space which once fronted the first station should be restored to enhance the setting of the building. A second line of plane trees will be re-planted.
- The poor modern extensions to the rear of the old station detract from its appearance and should be removed. The adjacent service areas should also be tidied up since they detract from wall views.
- Due to a change of level, buildings on Toft Green are orientated to face the wall side rather than the street. Any further development on these sites should aim to have a relationship with both the street and the wall.

Riverside

The riverside has great potential but it is far from fully explored at the moment - it is not fully presented as a walkway or a garden. It should be treated as a single space but some difficulties need to be overcome:

- The high wall required for flood defence limits the design options;
- Tanners Moat is an unattractive but popular car park. If kept, the space should be better designed with high quality materials;
- Although there is a long stretch of riverside walk in this area, there are limited points of entry. The section along North Street is bland and pedestrians are segregated from the river by a flood defence wall. The section under the Park Inn is dark, unattractive and could be perceived as unsafe. Improving the access and appearance of the walk should be a key part the redevelopment of sites adjacent to the river.







Rear view of station from the City Wall walk, before building works to create the new Council offices began




Wellington Row and North Street: the riverside could be an attractive and vibrant destination







Existing

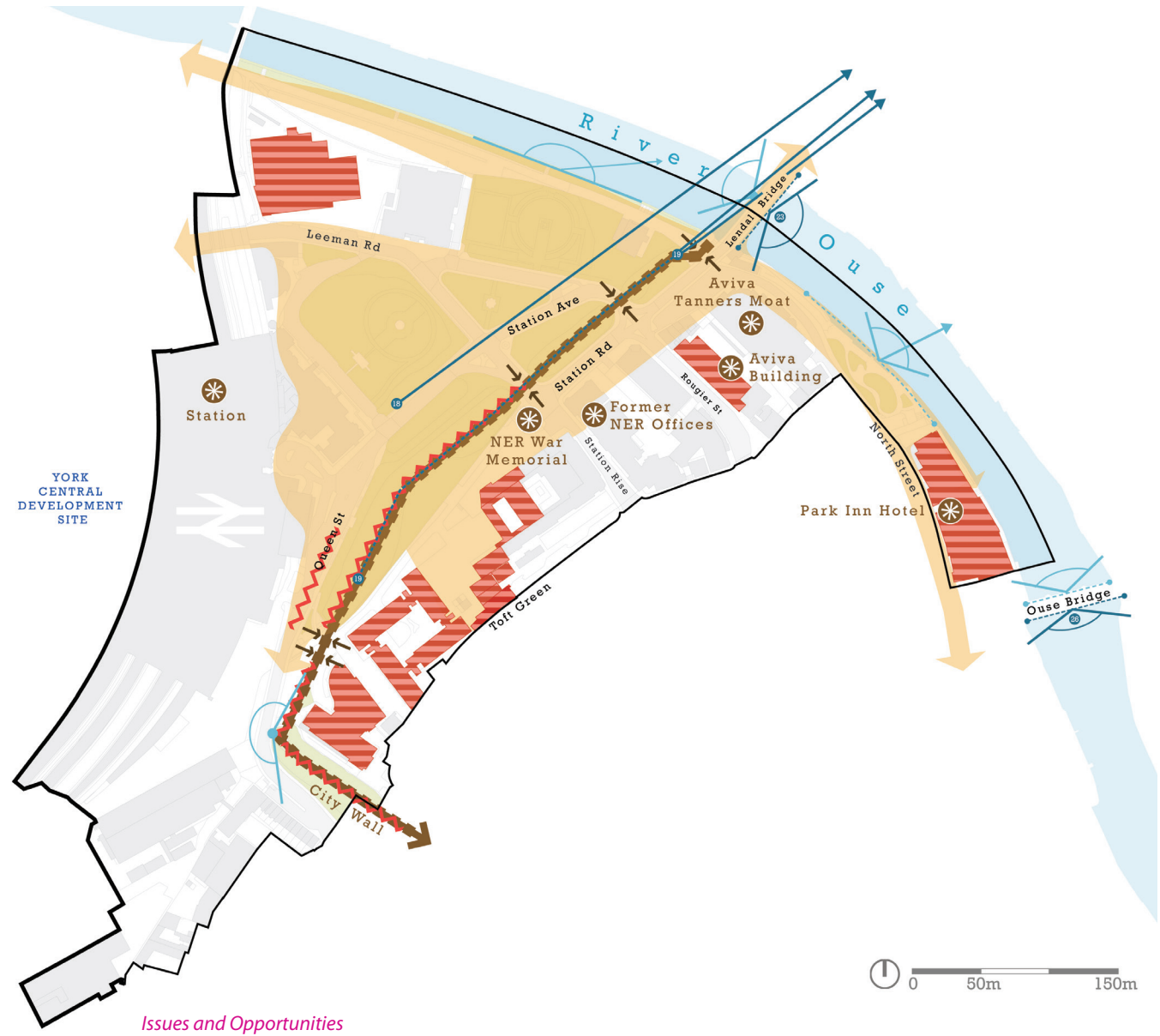
-  Detractor
-  City wall defines movement
-  Landmark
-  City Wall

Opportunities

-  Area for public realm and landscape enhancement

Views

-  Key View with fixed focal point
-  Key View: dynamic with fixed focal point
-  Key View: dynamic panoramic
-  Local panoramic
-  Local panoramic with fixed point
-  Local dynamic panoramic



Issues and Opportunities

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