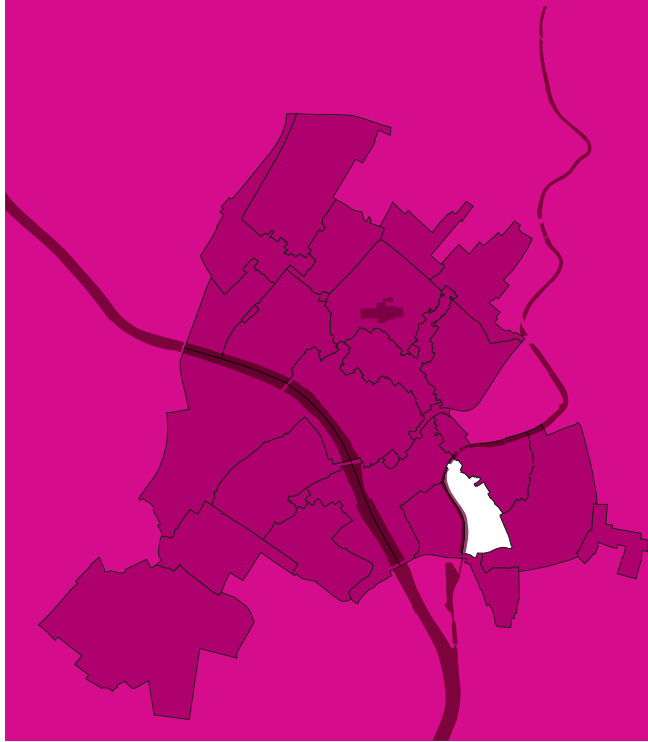


# Character Area Fourteen: Piccadilly



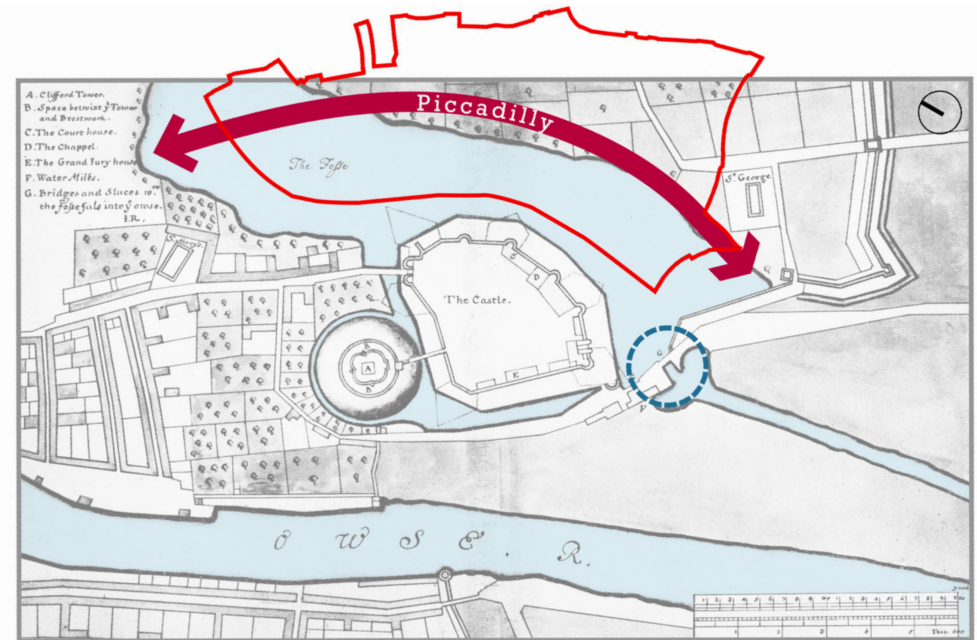
Overview

Piccadilly was developed much later than the rest of the medieval city centre and has larger scale building plots, reflecting its industrial past. The lack of high quality retailers and historic buildings means it is not a destination for visitors, and locals mainly use it for car parking. At the southern end, the street's character is dominated by large modern office blocks which obscure the view to the Castle beyond. A number of buildings are in poor condition suggesting neglect and lack of investment over many years. Although the Foss runs through the area, it is almost completely hidden and unused.

**Boundaries**

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

The character area consists of the section of Piccadilly south of the Foss and the lanes running to George Street. The boundary is defined by the River Foss on the western and northern edges. The eastern boundary is defined by a distinction between the large blocks on Piccadilly and the smaller houses of Walmgate and Fossgate.



*Jacob Richard's map of 1685 clearly shows the flooded Foss in the area now occupied by Piccadilly*

- Piccadilly Character Area boundary
- █ Approximate alignment of Piccadilly today
- █ Water
- Dam and Mill

### Historical development

The Piccadilly area was always affected by flooding of the River Foss. The area was purposely submerged underwater from the late 11th century when a dam was built across the mouth of the Foss. This flooded the area around the new Norman Castle making an artificial lake from what is now Castle Mills Bridge to Foss Islands Road. This not only protected the Castle but also provided fish for local markets, hence the lake's name, the King's Fishpond.

In 1792-3 the Foss was canalised and Baines' map of 1822 shows that the land which would become Piccadilly had been drained. This led to the development of new streets in three phases:

Firstly, in the 1840s a medieval lane which had run alongside the King's Fishpond was widened and re-named Piccadilly but only extended as far as Dixon Lane. Secondly, from 1911 to 1912 a new section of Piccadilly was built, linked to Parliament Street at the northern end; this was the tail end of a city wide civic improvement programme. Lastly, Merchantgate was formed to link Piccadilly to Foss Bridge, leaving the Red Lion public house to be marooned on an open corner.

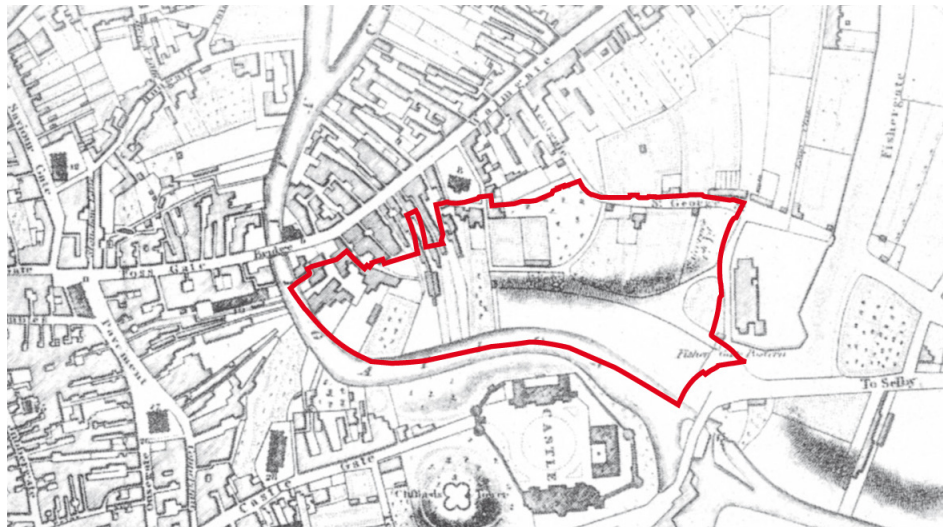
Piccadilly was named after its grand London counterpart but never lived up to the reputation of its forebear, in terms of ambience or of the quality of its buildings. The area has always seemed isolated. Its position on the River Foss meant it did not attract the

boutique retailers and department stores of Coney Street. Instead it proved a convenient location for uses more often found at the edges of cities. At the start of the 20th century, timber, builders' and coal merchants could be found there, along with a sawmill and brewery. In the interwar period, businesses that established themselves included car show rooms, garages and a small airplane workshop ❶.

From the mid-20th century, many of these buildings were demolished and new office blocks such as Ryedale House were erected ❷. More recently, residential apartment blocks have been built between Dixon Lane and Mill Street, along with two new hotels at the southern end of Piccadilly ❸.

### Ambience and use

Although it contains offices, apartments and hotels, Piccadilly is not a popular destination since it has little to offer in the way of retail or visitor attractions. The street is primarily used to access the ground floor car parks along it and the multi-storey parking in the Coppergate Centre. The lack of retailers means there are few pedestrians during the day and the area is deserted at night. Many of Piccadilly's older buildings appear shabby and decayed, adding to the sense that the area has been forgotten and neglected. Ryedale House in particular dominates views from the Castle.

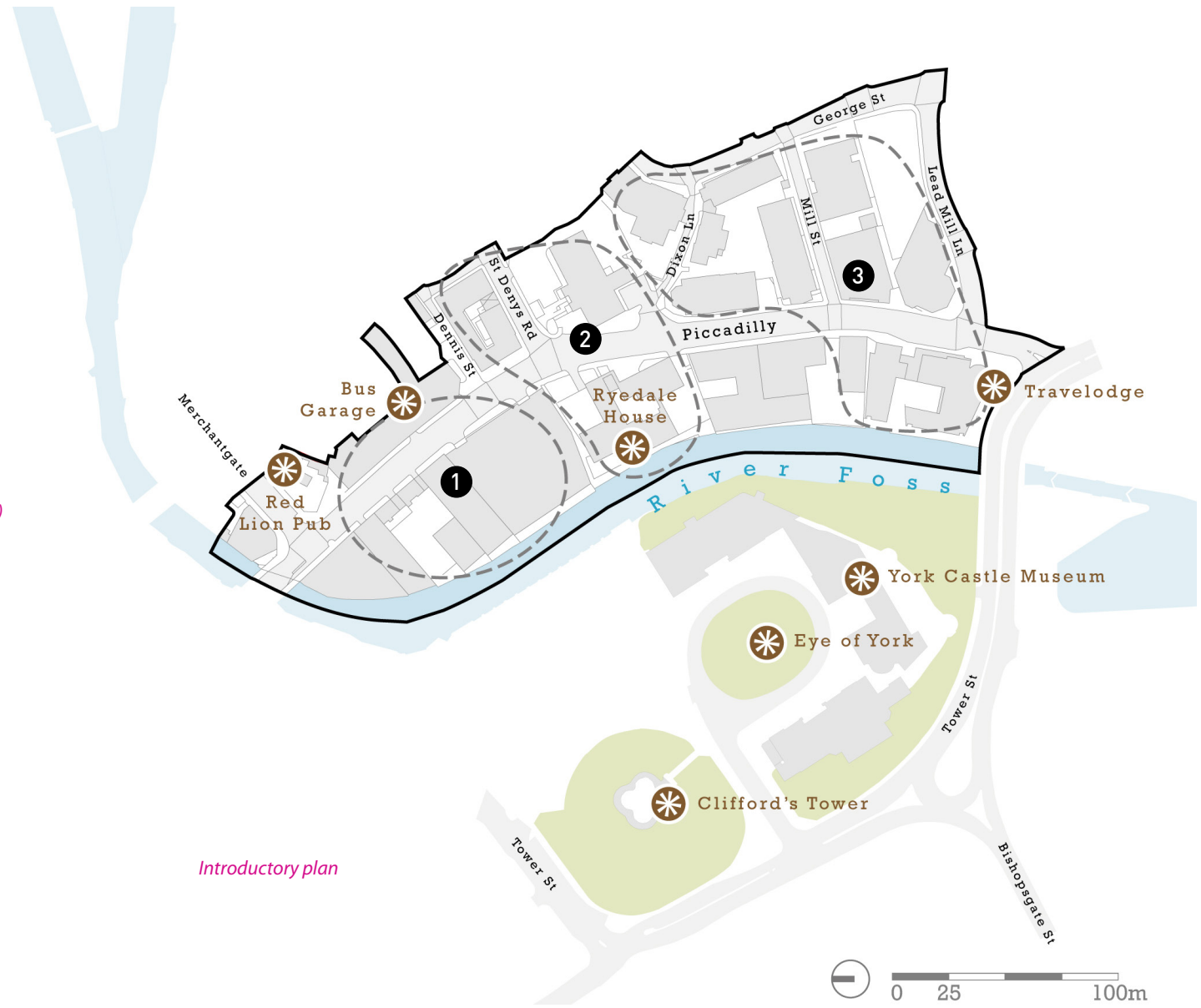
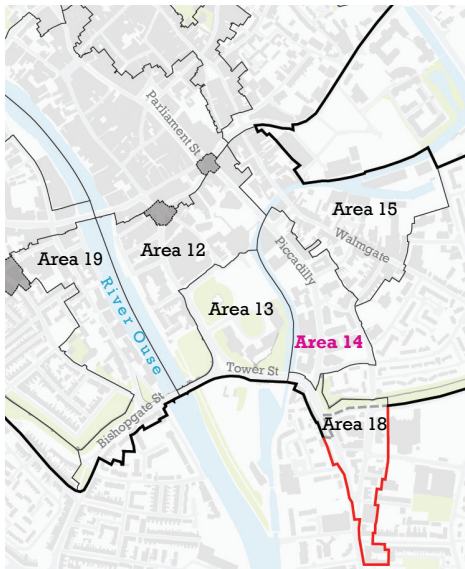


Map of York, 1822 by Baines, showing CharacterArea boundary in red

Part One: Understanding the City > Character Areas > Fourteen: Piccadilly

- 1 Interwar commercial development
- 2 Post war commercial development
- 3 Late 20th century commercial development
- \* Landmark
- Character area boundary

Area 14 location plan  
(Analysis plans for this area have been reorientated)



Introductory plan

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## Designations

There are no listed buildings in this area apart from the Red Lion. The two reasons for this are that firstly, flooding prevented the area's development until the late 18th century and secondly, many 19th and 20th century buildings have been demolished.

The Banana Warehouse and York Trolleybus Garage (more recently known as Reynard's Garage) are the only buildings of merit since they are of historic interest and the best representatives of interwar architecture in the area.

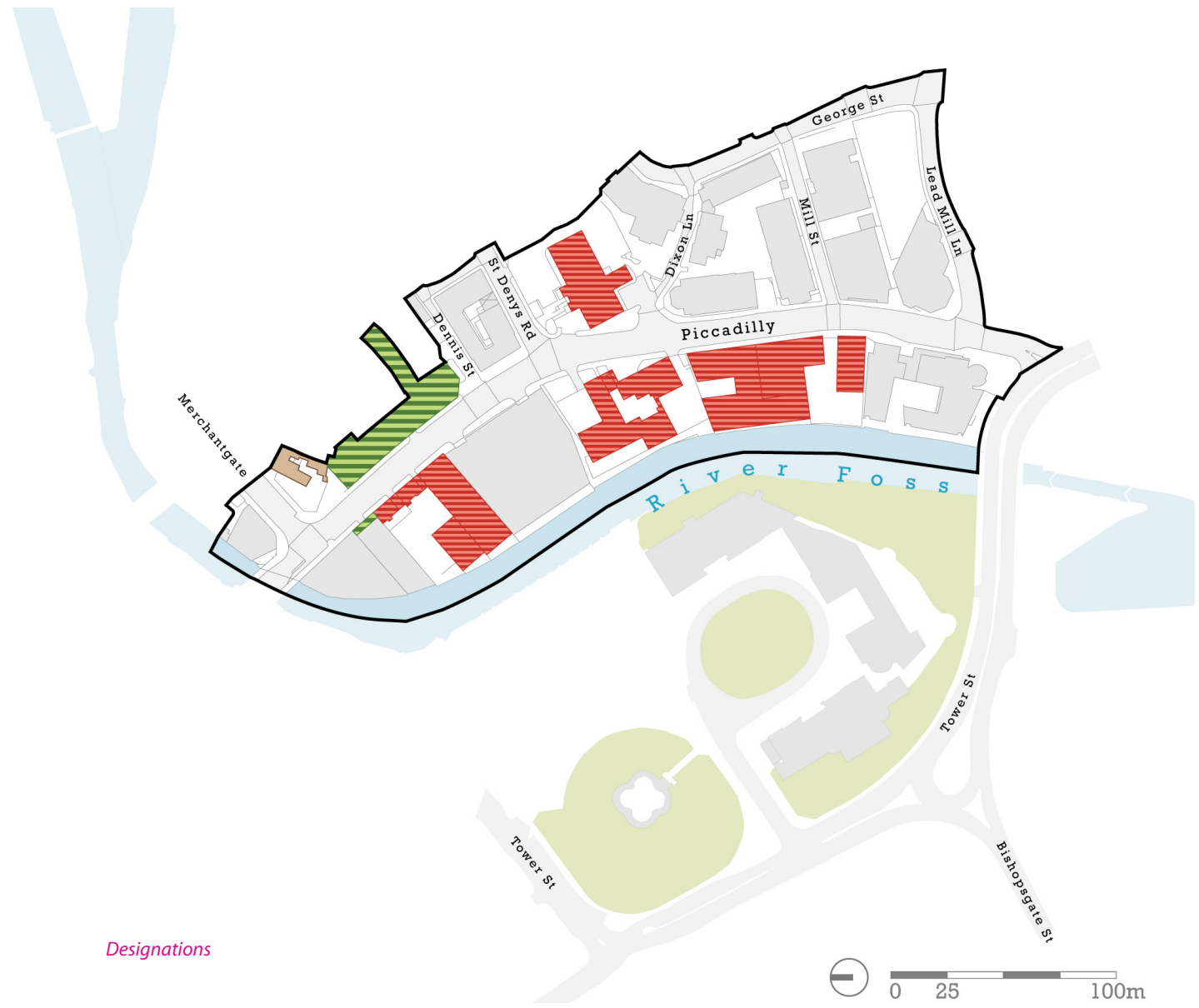
The buildings along the bank of the River Foss are designated as detractors for a number of reasons. Firstly, the industrial uses for which they were designed have moved to other parts of the city and the condition of several buildings has deteriorated. The future opportunities to enhance this area are likely to be predominantly retail, rather than resurrection of industry. Therefore, these building types are unsuitable and not of any particular architectural merit.

In addition, the location of these buildings is particularly sensitive since it is directly opposite the Castle precinct. At present, these buildings restrict public access to the river, block views to the Castle and have poor relationship with the street with a lack of active ground floor uses. Therefore, development of these sites could greatly enhance public appreciation of the Castle and River Foss.



*The Red Lion pub is the only listed building in the character area*

- Grade II Listed Building
- Building of merit
- Detractor
- Character area boundary



Designations

## Streets & Spaces

Piccadilly is a relatively broad street because it was part of a planned development rather than a medieval street that evolved over time. The pavement is punctuated by several entrances to car parks which interrupt pedestrian movement. From Piccadilly Bridge to St Denys Road there is a fairly consistent building and roofline line and long stretches of adjoined facades. From St Denys Road southwards, large stand alone buildings of 1-8 storeys are set back from the pavement or angled to the street resulting in a significant amount of left over space between the blocks. As a result the street lacks formality and has a poor sense of enclosure.

Piccadilly is rather a barren street, lacking trees or visible greenery and dominated by large buildings. The Foss is very much hidden behind buildings which back directly onto it, a legacy from its industrial past. This means there is almost no public access to the river; the exception is the Travelodge by Castle Mills Bridge. The large buildings and their positioning also block views to the Castle, only a glimpse of which is possible from Piccadilly Bridge.



*Piccadilly is wide and lacks 'active' ground floor uses*

## Buildings

Flooding from the 11th to the 18th century and successive demolitions have left little remaining from before the early 20th century. Buildings from the 1960s onwards retained the large footprints of their industrial predecessors but are higher.

### Medieval

The most significant historic building in the area is the timber-framed Red Lion public house (Grade II listed). It contains fabric from the 15th century to the present, although the majority is late 16th and early 17th century. Unfortunately, the pub's setting has been compromised by the hard landscaping and parking behind it.

### Early to mid 20th century

The northern part of Piccadilly has a group of interwar buildings, most of them not particularly special. Those of historical interest are The Banana Warehouse, now a second hand furniture shop, and the former York Trolleybus Garage, now standing derelict and empty.

The Banana Warehouse (No.36, Piccadilly) was the business of FT Burley & Son, wholesale fruit merchants and "banana specialists", and boasted a ripening room. The 2 storey building is now just a painted/ rendered brick facade with large metal frame windows. It is a fairly plain interpretation of the Art Deco style but nevertheless clearly evokes the era.

The York Trolleybus Garage (Nos.17-21 Piccadilly) is a single storey building built in 1921. From early 1931 it was rented by Airspeed which manufactured aircraft. The company was founded by Nevil Shute, famous aeronautical engineer and novelist. More recently the building has been used as a garage and a laser games venue but is now vacant and derelict. It is a rendered brick building with a steel roof structure. Two large entrances angled to the street at either end hint at its transport history. Like the Banana Warehouse, it is a utilitarian incarnation of the Art Deco style.



*Banana Warehouse on Piccadilly, built in the interwar period in an Art Deco style*



### Late 20th century

Several buildings of this period bear no relationship to the historic characteristics of York, nor to each other.

Ryedale House was built in 1972 and designed by Diamond Redfern & Partners. It is an eight storey brick and glass office block with crisp lines, transparent fully glazed corners with cantilevered strips of brickwork between and a pin-wheel plan, which gives sculptural interest. However, its scale dominates the street and impinges upon views along the Foss and to and from the Castle.



*View of Ryedale House from Piccadilly, with run-down single storey warehouses in the foreground*

## Traffic & Movement

Piccadilly has limited on-street parking but contains several on-plot car parks and is one of the entry points to the Coppergate Centre multi-storey car park. As a result the street attracts quite a lot of local car traffic as does Merchantgate. Buses drop off shoppers at various points along Piccadilly but the street never seems crowded or congested, due to its width.

Pavements are interrupted by car park entrances.



*On plot parking on Piccadilly*

## Issues & Opportunities

### Strengths

None

### Weaknesses and opportunities

Piccadilly has great development potential and proposals should be informed by its relationship with the Foss and the Castle. This relationship is weak at present but could be greatly enhanced, a matter considered in the 2006 Castle Piccadilly Development Brief. It describes how land between Piccadilly and the Foss could be redeveloped to replace unusable and detracting buildings and extend the city central shopping area. This transition is of strategic importance to the entire city centre.

Particular consideration should be given to:

- the sensitivity of views to the Castle buildings. Building heights and layouts must respond to this. Breaking up blocks into a series of smaller elements and controlling building heights would help to achieve this
- increasing access to the river. An aspiration of the *Foss Walkway Project (2000)* was to have continuous walkways along the river. However, the character of the Foss is defined by its enclosure by historic buildings. It would not be appropriate to have a continuous walkway on the Piccadilly bank since this would diminish its historic character. Another reason is the need to offer reasonable protection for wildlife. However, access to the river could be moderately increased from its current level by providing gaps between buildings and setting some of them back from the edge. There is also



*Ryedale House blocks potential views to the Castle from Dixon Lane and Piccadilly*

potential to increase access from Castle Mills Bridge. Flood prevention measures may need to be taken into account in the design process

- connections between Piccadilly and the Castle area (character area 13). A new footbridge over the Foss on an alignment with St Denys Road would help to achieve this. It would also enable new views along the river.
- Piccadilly's present landscape is barren and should be re-designed to make it more attractive. Widening pavement and introducing trees would make it more pleasant for pedestrians
- The former York Trolleybus Garage (Nos. 17-21 Piccadilly, also known as Reynard's Garage) is currently vacant and at risk. A planning statement has already been prepared for it. The building is only one storey and open span, making it challenging to find a new use. Whilst it is of historic interest, it is not of outstanding architectural merit. Therefore, it would be appropriate to consider whether radical physical adaptations such as extra storeys would be an option. This would need to be done more sensitively than some other developments of historic buildings in the city; Clifford Street has a particularly poor example. If the building were restored as it is, then perhaps it could be used as a park and ride bus terminus depending on route configuration.
- Next to the Garage, the corner of Piccadilly and Merchant Gate needs to be enhanced. At present, concrete bollards, an over-wide roadway and informal pavement parking detract from the setting of the timber-framed Red Lion public house.



*Former York Trolleybus Garage is vacant and at risk*



*There is a significant opportunity to use the redevelopment of the Piccadilly area to enhance the riverside, and create new links to the Castle*

Existing

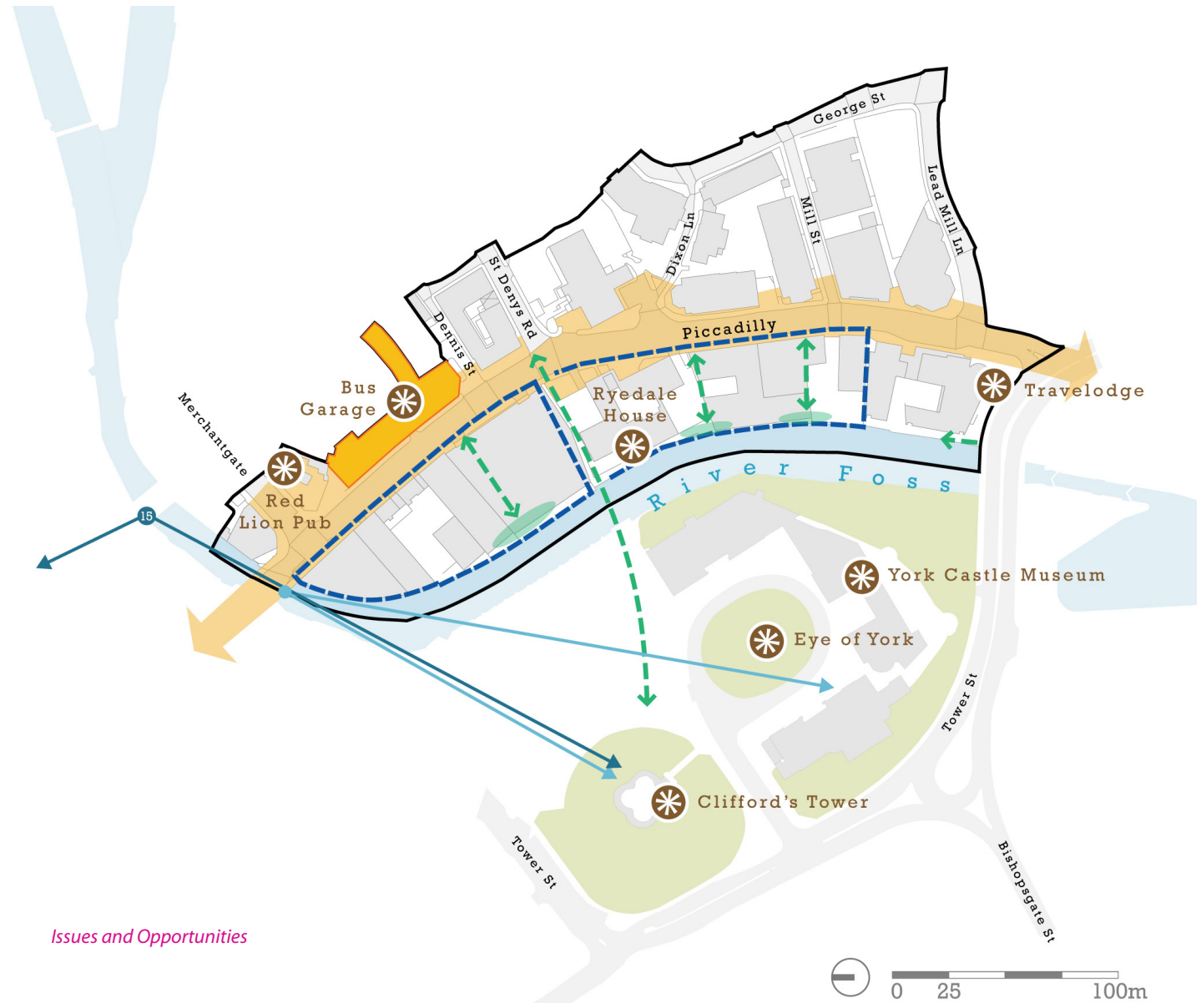
- Building at risk
- ✳ Landmark

Opportunities

- Opportunity for improvements to environment along Piccadilly
- Potential for pedestrian access to river and Castle
- Potential for public space along riverfront
- Significant redevelopment opportunity

Views

- Strategic fixed with focal point
- Local fixed with focal point



Issues and Opportunities

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